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*A Companion to Chinese History*

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# A COMPANION TO CHINESE HISTORY

*Edited by*

Michael Szonyi

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## CHAPTER ONE

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# Introduction

MICHAEL SZONYI

Everyone should know something about China's history. One could justify this statement purely on the banal grounds of China's considerable and rising importance in the contemporary world. But this approach ignores the many other more interesting reasons why the study of Chinese history is important and relevant today. New research on China's past is challenging broadly held ideas about the norms of development of human societies and contributing to the emergence of whole new fields of historical knowledge. It is offering new ways of thinking about and new tools for addressing present-day concerns such as the status of women, climate change, and rule of law. An understanding of Chinese history is essential moreover to making sense of critical political debates in China today. This *Companion* aims to provide a wide range of readers with an understanding of the state of the field of Chinese history, of some exciting recent developments, and of promising future directions. We hope the chapters will appeal not only to scholars of Chinese history but also to China specialists in other disciplines; to scholars who work on other parts of the world or with other disciplinary approaches that can be enriched by the new approaches presented here; to teachers, present and future, and to a general interested readership.

The *Companion* is timely because Chinese history—in the sense of the scholarly effort to understand China's historical experience—is changing rapidly. Everyone knows about the dramatic changes that have taken place in China in the four decades since the death of Mao Zedong. But the remarkable transformation in the study of China's past is less well known. Each of the chapters in this volume conveys this transformation from a different point of view. Together they convey the diversity and ferment of the field as a whole.

How is China's history changing? First, core assumptions of the field have been shaken. These assumptions include some of the most high-level generalizations—such as the idea that China's history in the centuries before the arrival of the west was one of stasis and isolation—as well more specific arguments. Lu shows in her chapter for example

that the history of women in China can no longer be told as a simple tale of unending suffering and victimization; Alford and Schluessel show in theirs that China, far from being an exemplar of imperial tyranny and rule by fiat, actually has a long tradition of law and legal culture. Some of these assumptions and generalizations about Chinese history, while largely abandoned by scholarly historians, linger in the general public, and the chapters of the *Companion* should also help teachers encourage their students to question what they think they know about China.

The ways historians work is changing. Among the most obvious of the changes is the explosion of source materials for the study of the Chinese past. Wilkinson's chapter demonstrates that this is true for virtually any period and theme of Chinese history. For some periods and issues, new sources have been literally unearthed. For others, historians can now access sources that were previously unavailable. For still others the prevailing views of what constitutes a historical source have expanded. Tackett's study of the changing character of Chinese elites about a thousand years ago offers an example of how new digital tools make possible new analyses, even using sources that have long been part of the historian's toolkit.

The methodological approaches of previous generations of historians have been undermined. Rather than looking at China as a whole as the only meaningful unit of analysis, historians are proposing new geographical units—local society within China, the Eurasian landmass, even the entire world—to frame their analysis. Rather than accepting conventional approaches to periodization, meaning the way in which historians divide their subject of study into different periods, scholars are suggesting new ones.

The kinds of questions that historians are asking are also changing. In the light of the changes since the Deng Xiaoping era, questions that previously animated the field—Why did China fail to make the transition to rapid economic growth? How has Maoism reshaped the lives of the Chinese people?—today seem irrelevant, trivial, and even misguided.

New networks are developing among scholars working in different parts of the world, among historians of other parts of the world, and even among scholars in different disciplines. Chapters in this volume by Shiba, Ching, and von Glahn illustrate the fruitful interaction of Chinese historians in Japan, China, and the United States in the field of economic history. Perdue proposes even wider forms of collaboration, suggesting that the future of China's environmental history lies in networks encompassing historians, natural scientists, and activists.

The field's sense of its own significance and relevance is changing. For most of the twentieth century knowledge of China's past seemed utterly irrelevant to China's present and future. But a number of developments today, including the revival of popular religion described by ter Haar, and the revitalization of informal networks of Chinese Overseas described by Yu, challenge this assumption. New interest in global history (on which see Blue's chapter) has generated new historical subfields in which China's role cannot be ignored: environmental history (Perdue) and comparative legal history (Alford and Schluessel) are examples.

Historians are also exploring how China fits into the larger task of historical theorizing. Whereas previous generations of historians typically sought to show either how China stood outside the patterns of world history or fit squarely into theories of historical development derived from the western experience, Blue's chapter shows younger scholars increasingly seeking to use China to challenge and ultimately to contribute to and revise broader theory. There is a growing sense that China's historiographical significance lies not simply in confirming or refuting historical theories but in generating them.

Finally historical narratives and historical claims also figure in contemporary politics in interesting and distinctive ways, as Barmé and Szonyi show in their chapter. (This itself is nothing new; Chinese history has always been political, as several authors show.)

We have deliberately conceived of this *Companion* as speaking to a wide and diverse audience, even at the risk that not all of its parts are equally accessible or equally of interest to everyone. Among the goals of this work is to address the lag—mentioned above—between recent scholarly developments on one hand and the conventional wisdom and the picture to which students are typically exposed on the other. Popular understandings of China often confuse and conflate normative and empirical dimensions of China's past. For example, the tribute system—a normative model for the conduct of foreign relations—is often equated with the actual conduct of foreign policy, an error that Wills's chapter serves to correct.

The conventional wisdom and the picture given to college students converge in journalist Fareed Zakaria's extraordinary account, cited in Blue's chapter, of a meeting with Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. Lee handed Zakaria some photocopied pages from an old college textbook as a way to convey his ideas about Chinese distinctiveness. Specialist scholars might use these same pages to convey everything that was wrong with previous perspectives that oversimplified and essentialized Chinese culture and history.

The authors treat their subjects from a variety of approaches: chronological, historiographical, and at times even personal. The chapters are organized into three sections. Part I consists of overviews of the field from different perspectives: the changing sources for the study of the past (Wilkinson); China's changing position in global and world history (Blue); the role of history in contemporary Chinese politics (Barmé and Szonyi); and three geographically defined chapters on the state of the field in Europe, China, and Japan (Zurndorfer, Ching, and Shiba). Why these three and only these three? Since North America is the default perspective for many of the contributors (and much of the expected audience) it did not seem helpful to give further representation to this already much over-represented set of scholars. The absence of chapters on other continents is obviously a product of the unequal distribution of educational resources around the world; no comment is intended on the value of scholarship produced by scholars working in areas not represented in this Part.

The general conclusion that emerges from these chapters is that while scholarship is increasingly globalized, the world of Chinese history is far from flat. The trajectory of historical studies in different places has been profoundly different. To give one example from Zurndorfer's chapter, unlike in the United States, where a 'regional studies' approach that was driven by Cold War funding priorities is the norm, in many European universities the philological tradition with which China studies began remains central. Important differences persist to the present day, rooted in different professional and intellectual constraints and institutional traditions.

Differences in approach mean different research outcomes, as becomes evident in the historiographical sections of later chapters. For example, PRC scholarship aimed at identifying the 'sprouts of capitalism' was intended to contribute to a vision of Chinese history consistent with Marxism and the agenda of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). But this scholarship generated new knowledge of economic prosperity and dynamism in the last five centuries. This in turn helped fuel some exciting debates in Japan and the west about Chinese economic development and in turn new studies of social and economic organizations and practices.

Of all the geographic areas discussed, the growth of the historical profession in China both quantitatively and qualitatively has been most striking. As Ching's chapter shows, new freedoms to move beyond narrow politically shaped scholarly agendas have had a huge impact on the field. That being said, there are still limits. As in most other countries, national history is the dominant form of history in China. Scholars in the PRC must still be cautious when writing and teaching about many topics, including the history of the Chinese Communist Party (and especially its leaders), religion, minorities, and border regions (and, needless to say, specific topics such as Taiwan, Tibet, and the Tiananmen movement of 1989).

Part II consists of nine chapters on the chronology of Chinese history. Individual authors have decided the appropriate balance between narrative, historiography, and their own interpretations. The organization of the section as a whole reflects the diversity of current opinion about how best to periodize Chinese history. Had the *Companion* been published some decades ago, this section might have been organized in terms of dynasties, with one chapter for every dynasty. Biran and Guy explore why the imperial dynasty is no longer seen as the natural unit for historical analysis. Or it might have been organized, according to a periodization scheme derived from the European experience, into subsections labeled Ancient, Medieval, and Modern. But Holcombe shows that China cannot easily be assimilated into such models. Instead, the boundaries between the chapters of this section are defined by a multitude of overlapping, cross-cutting, occasionally contradictory periodization schemes. Indeed, virtually every chapter situates itself in relation to one or more different schemes. There are chapters defined in terms of a meaningful phase in the history of Eurasia as a whole (Puett on "Early China in Eurasian History"); in terms of a period derived from the European experience (Holcombe on "Was Medieval China Medieval?"); in terms of a specific historical shift (Tackett on "A Tang-Song Turning Point"); in terms of the ethnicity of the imperial ruling house (Biran on "Periods of Non-Han Rule"); and even in terms of the policy priorities of a single regime (Cheek on "The Reform Era as History"). Paul Cohen's chapter on the nineteenth century seems almost a relieving break, with its chronological limits specified in a way that is clear and familiar. But even Cohen, like his co-authors, asks tough questions about the meaningfulness of the temporal limits of his chapter. This is part of the larger challenge of placing Chinese history in a truly comparative framework rather than, as has been done so often in the past, simply assuming that Chinese history is derivative of the universal western experience, passing through a series of stages dictated by the course of European history.

In their attention to periodization the chapters in this section address the tension between the impulse to cross temporal divides and resistance to the old notion of an unchanging China, in which chronology becomes virtually irrelevant, or other simplistic approaches to chronology. One such simplistic approach in contemporary China is the Great Revival of the Chinese People, a central motif of the current leadership. The idea rests on a three-part schema of past glory, decline in the face of imperialism, and recovery that harkens back to modes of understanding chronology that seem ludicrously simple today.

The resolution of this tension lies in more precise attention to what is changing and when. Broadly speaking, the chapters challenge two conventional understandings about the periodization of Chinese history. While the period of imperial rule all the way from the Qin unification to the 1911 revolution was once seen as basically of a piece, today scholars identify a fundamental shift in politics, society, the economy, culture, and

thought at about the midpoint of this period. This shift is mentioned by Holcombe, Guy, and Shiba and is the main focus of Tackett's chapter. The other dramatic rethinking of continuity and change concerns the question of 1949 as a dividing line. Current scholarship discussed in Chen's chapter on the Republic and Smith's on the Maoist period shows that despite the revolutionary break there were many ways in which life under the new regime resembled life under the regime it replaced or even under its predecessors. This historiographical change is more than just about finding change where once there was thought to be continuity and vice versa. It also means reevaluating the historical register in which events are situated. The reform movement of 1898 used to be seen as an aberration in the dying years of the Qing; today scholars see it more as part of a long upswell of reformism that culminated in 1911 (which in turn set off a new chain of reformist and revolutionary impulses).

Part III turns from chronology to thematic approaches. These chapters do a different type of work, and generally focus more on new historiographical questions. Several of the chapters in this section—Alford and Schluessel on law, Lu on gender, Mullaney on ethnicity, and Perdue on the environment among others—bear directly on contemporary debates in China. They are shaped by, derive much of their energy from, and in turn contribute to pressing concerns facing the Chinese people today, and thus show another way in which knowledge of history is relevant. Turning the issue around, Rigger's chapter on Taiwan shows how seemingly academic historical questions can become wrapped up in contemporary politics. Among other things, the modern historical experience of Taiwan provides an important empirical challenge to claims from the PRC about the appropriate mode of political organization for Chinese societies.

Part III is where editorial decisions were heaviest and gaps in coverage most obvious. Certainly a volume of this kind cannot aim to be comprehensive, and there are many topics missing that I would have liked to have included. Some important topics, like the history of Confucianism, of ideologies in general, or of the political system, did not lend themselves easily to the format of the *Companion* chapters. Other did not seem to have the critical mass of interesting recent work that would justify a chapter. Topics such as demography or the history of print culture could easily have been the subject of their own chapter but are instead touched on in other chapters. Several topics that could have been in this book are covered instead in the recently published *Companion to Chinese Religions* and *Companion to Chinese Art*. The decision to include two chapters on Chinese literature was in part a gesture to a sinological tradition that is important in the history of the field, that is, of efforts to understand China *in toto* rather than as simply the particular object of study to be studied within a specific discipline. But this is not the only reason. As Sanders's chapter illustrates, sources which are broadly literary are among the most relevant for historical study, especially for the premodern period, and the very division between history and literature is artificial. Wang's chapter likewise shows that the rise of Chinese literature is inseparable from the story of Chinese nationalism.

While the format of the *Companion* means that there are inevitably gaps in the coverage, it also allows for interesting juxtapositions. Both Puett and Guy, writing of the early and late imperial periods respectively, discuss the notion of Sinicization, the idea that conquest dynasties established by non-Han rulers typically adopt many of the attributes of the people they have conquered, won over by the superiority of Chinese civilization. In her chapter Biran shows how the assumption that Sinicization is inevitable has profoundly colored the historiography of non-Han dynasties. Perdue adds an environmental dimension in his chapter, suggesting that the relationship with the natural world was part

of how the boundaries between Han and barbarians was constructed. This in turn sheds light on Mullaney's discussion of the creation of ethnic categories in the twentieth century.

Many of the chapters point to the importance of attending to the complexity of key terms, both Chinese-language terms like *Zhongguo* and *Han*, and English-language terms like China and Chineseness. None of these terms has meanings that are self-evident or unchanging. There are inconsistencies and internal contradictions to their common usage, and long histories of debates over their meaning within China. A single term may serve, in different contexts, as a geographic, cultural, linguistic, ethnic or historical descriptor, and as both autonym and exonym. At times key terms are used as political designations; at others as deliberately non-political terms. Each of these different meanings and valences needs to be disentangled. Even the seemingly straightforward term "China" has often been and continues to be used as an expression of nationalist propaganda, asserting historical continuity and unity, rather than a neutral description. This assertion can be linked to deliberate programs of identity construction with political implications. More broadly, many chapters seek to question categories and binaries that to previous generations of historians seemed self-evident or universal. The divisions between civil and criminal in law or between sex and gender turn out both to be historically contingent and to operate very differently if at all in the Chinese context.

Just as the chronological chapters challenge traditional schemes of periodization, several contributors ask questions about the most appropriate geographic and political units for historical analysis. The *Companion* points to numerous contemporary shifts in the registers in which historians situate China. Some shift the register up to the global or continental level—as Puett does when he interprets the Qin unification in terms of a Eurasia-wide phenomenon. Others shift it down to the regional level, as Ching does when she points to the significance of local history in leading developments in social history in China. Regional divisions and identities can be straightforwardly geographic or more abstract; that they endure even after centuries of political unity raises many interesting questions.

Several chapters speak to the contemporary relevance of history and historical understanding. Some debates, for example on the significance of the Chinese institutional matrix for economic development, rule of law, and political stability, hinge on particular historical interpretations that need to be assessed critically. Historical narratives of community matter to identity. This is particularly evident in Rigger's chapter on Taiwan and Mullaney's on nationalism. In other areas, such as women's history or the history of the environment, a knowledge of history can be a useful tool in identifying resources for better policies in the future. The Chinese state also deploys historical arguments explicitly and implicitly in support of current policy. Thus history is relevant as a tool to understand, engage, and perhaps critique the dominant political power, the subject of Barmé and Szonyi's chapter.

There are many reasons why everyone should know something about China's history. It should now be clear that by this I mean more than that everyone should know something about what happened in China in the past. I also mean that everyone should know something about how the past in China has been studied and written about, and how historical narratives are implicated in contemporary China. Scholars in the field today are engaged in complicating monolithic and oversimplistic accounts, overturning cherished assumptions, and generally seeking to convey the complexity of China in times past. Its practitioners are studying China's interaction with other places, exploring comparisons

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between China in different times and between China and other places, and seeking to use China to refine existing theories and even to develop new ones. The chapters in this *Companion*, whether read individually or as a whole, convey some of the exciting changes in the field. They show how history matters in China, and how China matters to history.

### Conventions

Two essential sources for China's history are the *Cambridge History of China* and the Harvard *History of Imperial China* series. For material that can easily be found in either of these series, no citations are provided. The suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter are also highly abbreviated. The first place to turn for sources is contributor Endymion Wilkinson's *Chinese History: A New Manual*. For secondary scholarship, consult also the *Oxford Bibliographies Online* in Chinese studies.

PART I

**States of the Field**

## CHAPTER TWO

# How Do We Know What We Know about Chinese History?

ENDYMION WILKINSON

### Introduction

(1) *Pre-1250 BCE (pre-writing)*. The data for prehistory is provided by specialists, including paleontologists, evolutionary geneticists, archaeologists, and archaeoastronomers.

(2) *1250 to third century BCE*. Texts (both transmitted and excavated) and archaeology constitute the main evidence. Royal records were kept, archives maintained, and annals written by court scribes. But most of their output has long since been lost. Therefore, inscriptions (on oracle bone and on bronze) provide the fullest written sources on the Shang and Western Zhou. Transmitted works, including the Confucian classics and some 50 other philosophical, ritual, legal, military, and medicinal works, are extant from the Eastern Zhou. Newly excavated texts on bamboo and wood (the earliest dating from the late fourth century BCE) in some cases provide variant readings of transmitted texts and a considerable number of hitherto unknown works (see Section IV of this chapter).

(3) *Third century BCE to tenth century CE*. During the first 1,200 years of the empire Chinese governments gradually established an increasingly specialized bureaucracy to keep records, publish laws, and write narrative histories of each reign (and private individuals also wrote histories). These are far more detailed and elaborate than the court chronicles of early China and include institutional as well as political history. Most have been lost but at least one history of each major dynasty has survived. In the eighteenth century they were formed into the canon of *24 Standard Histories* (*24 zhengshi*). In addition, the development of new genres of literature, both devotional and imaginative, during period 3 (concomitant with the replacement of bamboo and silk with paper as the medium for writing) provide important supplementary sources especially useful for tracing belief systems and practices, the life of the mind, and the lives of individuals.

(4) *Tenth to nineteenth centuries.* The range of written sources that survive increases greatly thanks to the introduction of block printing and by the end of the period, the proximity in time (more written and more archival sources survive from the late Qing by far than from all of the rest of previous Chinese history put together).

For all four of these periods, archaeology provides details of material life—settlement patterns, major cities, palace life, funerary practices of the elite, production and technological processes, and much else besides, including the material remains of hitherto unknown Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures. Specialized branches of the subject, for example, underwater archaeology, reveal much about Chinese ships, overseas trade, and naval warfare.

(5) *Late nineteenth century to the present.* Changes introduced in Chinese society, economy, and government are recorded in new genres and on new media in far greater quantities than ever before thanks to the printing press and camera, film, and sound recordings. Historians also changed their horizons in the twentieth century. From a concentration on the political history of dynasties and the public lives of the literate elite they turned to the “new history” of the nation and of the economy and society. In the process the old written sources were reinterpreted and many new types of evidence (manuscript, excavated, and archival) were brought into play.

Because of the length of Chinese history, the number and variety of sources, and changes in the Chinese language itself historians of China tend to specialize in either premodern or in modern history. Those who do premodern usually focus on the pre-Qin or on a single dynasty of imperial China and on a type of history (political, religious, economic, social, etc.) and to use one or more disciplines. Modern historians also specialize by period (Republic, the People’s Republic, Taiwan) and by type of history and discipline.

Faced with 3,200 years of recorded history and confined by their special fields academic historians who write general histories of China tend to do so in teams. The few who try it alone of necessity rely largely on previous narrative histories, both ancient and modern.

It is often said that that the quantity of Chinese historical sources exceeds by far those of other cultures. This is a misleading simplification. The moment that we divide Chinese history into the five periods above, we find that while it is true that the Chinese archaeological record for the millennia before writing is a magnificent one and is constantly being expanded by new discoveries and at a pace not found to the same extent in other ancient civilizations, nevertheless, when we come to period 2 we find that the transmitted sources for ancient Greece and Rome are comparable to, if not more numerous than, those in China. However, as with the archaeological record, this balance is currently being altered by the discovery of newly excavated texts in China. While Chinese sources for the early empire (to the end of the Tang) are probably more plentiful than those for the early middle ages in Europe, the quantity of sources for European history in the late medieval period starts to catch up with those in China for the same centuries and from about 1400 it surpasses them. Finally, Chinese sources for modern history until very recently have not been as available or in such quantities as those for other nations such as Japan, Germany, or the United States where the publication of historical materials and the opening of archives started earlier and has been more thorough than in China.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into seven short sections: (I) Paleontology and archaeology; (II) The writing of history; (III) Transmitted texts; (IV) New sources; (V) Digitization; (VI) Republic of China (to 1949); (VII) Post-1978 Chinese historical writing.

## I. Paleontology and archaeology

### *Origins of humans in China*

While it is generally accepted that *Homo erectus* migrated from Africa to Eurasia, including the China area, between 1.3 and 1.8 million years ago, there are at least three models as to how the transition to *Homo sapiens* took place: (1) as the result of a second radiation from Africa (the out-of-Africa or replacement thesis); (2) as the descendants of *Homo erectus* from the original migration (the multiregional evolution or regional continuity model); (3) as the result of *Homo sapiens* migrants from Africa interbreeding with local hominids (out-of-Africa with admixture model) (Shelach-Lavi 2015). Those who favor model 2 have Chinese nationalist sentiment on their side, but there are crucial gaps in the evidence for continuity. Moreover, recent studies based on human genome diversity research, especially the analysis of Y-chromosome and mitochondrial DNA variation, confirm the fundamental distinctions between the populations of North and South China. Those in the North are more closely related to their northern neighbors outside the present borders of China than they are to the peoples in South China. These are in turn more closely related to their neighbors in Southeast Asia than they are to the northerners. This suggests that these two major groups arrived by different migration routes and very likely at different times.

### *Archaeology*

The selection of archaeological sites to excavate in China (as in other countries) has come about in three main ways:

1. The exploration of sites accidentally discovered by people who are not archaeologists (including research stimulated by damage to sites by looters).
2. Explorations carried out in a planned way, usually as part of a major construction or civil engineering project (“rescue archaeology”); recent large-scale examples include the Three Gorges Project and the South–North Waterway Project.
3. As the result of a scholarly decision among archaeologists, often based on a desire to supplement or prove the veracity of the historical record (e.g., searching for Xia, Shang, and Zhou capitals). As one critic put it with some justification, “To an extent unparalleled in capitalist countries, research over the last forty years has focused almost exclusively on the remains of the social elites, the very groups that are also documented in the textual sources. Archaeologists’ obsession with spectacular objects, preferably inscribed, has led to a veritable treasure hunting mentality. Even though the scholarly world might learn more from the excavation of a Bronze Age village than from the tomb of yet another royal figure, most archaeologists find it more prestigious to double-track the known course of history by unearthing the archaeological remains of those already famous” (Falkenhausen 1993).

Of the 100 major archaeological discoveries in China in the twentieth century (as selected by a poll of the top archaeological institutes and university departments in 2001), 31 percent were accidental discoveries, 10 percent were rescue archaeology, and 51 percent were found as the result of academic initiative. Because the dominant view in Chinese archaeology until the 1980s was that Chinese civilization originated in the central Yellow River region, that is where efforts were concentrated. Not surprisingly,

just over half of academic archaeological discoveries were made there (equal to one-third of the 100 major discoveries of the century). Conversely (and hence their value) two-thirds of accidental discoveries (typically churned up in the course of rapid economic development) were outside the Yellow River region. And this trend has continued up to the present time.

Many dozens of Neolithic (10,000–2000 BCE) cultures have been excavated. The best known belong to the late Neolithic (5000–2000 BCE). By convention individual cultures are named after the current name of the type site (often the place of discovery or first identification). The definition and dating of individual Neolithic cultures frequently change as the result of new evidence and different interpretations of it. There are museums at most major sites.

The excavation of Neolithic burials has thrown new light on the population profile, life expectancy, diseases, and early religious beliefs of the tribes who inhabited the area of what was later to become Chinese civilization. Enough has been unearthed to form the basis of studies as diverse as early state formation, prehistoric rock art, pottery and pottery marks and symbols, masks, divination, cooking, and the arts. Settlements protected with stamped-earth walls were built at the end of the Neolithic. About 50 have been excavated to date, the largest of which covers 740 acres (Mojaoshan, Liangzhu culture).

Since the discovery of hitherto unknown cultures from many parts of the China area it is no longer possible to maintain the Yellow River region as the unique origin of Chinese civilization. Thus the traditional Confucian master narrative (a single descent line starting from the Golden Age of the legendary sage rulers and the Three Dynasties, Xia, Shang, and Zhou) is no longer tenable. Indeed, by the 1970s more than enough evidence had accumulated from the rest of China to ensure that monogenesis was now on its way out and polygenesis (multiple origins), the new paradigm, was on its way in. The new regional systems and variants theory as it was called (*quxi leixing lilun*) was proposed in lectures in the mid-1970s by one of the leading archaeologists of the day, Su Bingqi (1909–97).

The current consensus in China sees the birth of Chinese civilization as emerging from a late Neolithic “Chinese interaction sphere.” Views differ as to the number of regional cultures and the process of their diffusion and coalescence into large-scale cultural horizons, but many would agree that by the end of the Neolithic six to eight regional cultures had coalesced into three main culture systems situated in the Central Plain, the Middle and Lower Yangzi region, and the Northeast by the Liao River valley (*san xitong shuo*). Out of their interaction it is hypothesized grew the first dynastic state on the Central Plain, the Xia. According to this view, the late Neolithic interaction sphere may properly be called China, which makes its culture (if not its recorded history) at least 5,000 years old.

In a sense, therefore, modern Chinese archaeologists have gone back two generations to the Doubting Antiquity School in that they reject many of the old accounts of the origins of the Chinese people and Chinese civilization. But instead of foreshortening Chinese antiquity, they have lengthened it, changed its definition, and put it on an archaeological foundation. The progression has therefore been from believing in antiquity (*xingtu*; belief in the historicity of the Golden Age), to doubting or explaining antiquity (*yigu* or *shigu*), the movement in the early Republic to question the historicity of the Confucian master narrative, and back to *xingtu* based on archaeology (*kaogu*) today (Wilkinson 2015, 664).

Despite the recognition of diversity, despite the huge increase in the inventory of excavated sites and artifacts, and despite the ready acceptance of outside influences in the

Han and the Tang (well documented in contemporary sources), when it comes to the centuries during which Chinese civilization and culture are first thought to have begun to emerge, Chinese archaeology from the 1950s through to the 1980s rejected all outside influences and maintained a teleological approach by which everything that took place within the China area was interpreted as a factor leading to the birth of Chinese civilization. This tied in nicely with worldwide archaeological trends, which saw the nineteenth-century concept of diffusion (culture carried outward from civilizations, often by migrants) replaced in the 1950s by a new theoretical framework that gave priority to internally generated change and discovery. This also dovetailed with Chinese nationalism.

Direct diffusion from “outside” the borders of what is in effect the area of modern China projected back into the remote past is rejected. On the other hand, paradoxically, diffusion inside the China area itself was taken for granted in accounts of the role of the Xia and later dynasties, which were depicted as extending their superior culture to the “national minorities.” Since anything which happened outside the borders was regarded as largely irrelevant, external influences were downplayed. Today such views are under siege. Stimulus diffusion is now the default hypothesis; Morgan-Engels development stages have been largely discarded as the framework; and monogenesis has been replaced by polygenesis.

Behind all of the questions raised by the new discoveries lies the larger one as to the origins of Chinese civilization. This is a question (as it is in most other countries) that is fraught with implications for identity politics, because it concerns nothing less than the long process by which a group of people and their descendants became what are today called “Chinese.”

Future progress in the field will no doubt see approaches that are not confined to the borders of the nation state and not limited to double-tracking the written record.

## II. The writing of history

Historical writing in ancient China was as well developed as it was in the ancient Mediterranean. Historians in both places had much in common. They were members of an elite writing for an elite (usually in the form of an annalistic narrative) with the focus on the activities of the ruler and his officials (the lower classes are virtually absent from their works). History was regarded as a mirror for the present from which the ruler could learn what to avoid and whom to emulate. A key part of the historian’s job was to apportion praise and blame and to write with style. Foreign peoples were typically essentialized, not placed in a historical narrative. However, history writing in China differed in at least three major respects from that in Greece and Rome: (1) It was produced not by retired generals and politicians but by government officials working to detailed regulations (and informally by scholars); (2) it went beyond annalistic narratives and developed new historical genres (see below); (3) official (and unofficial) history writing in China did not end with the fall of the Han empire. On the contrary, it intensified in the subsequent period of disunion and its production was further routinized under the Tang. It continued under all later dynasties and in the Republic and it has recently been renewed in a revised form in our own day with a new history of the Qing dynasty financed by the state (official history in Europe and America begins only in the early twentieth century when governments began to commission histories of military campaigns and wars). In China a history office was established in 629 CE whose main purpose was to compile the

veritable records (*shilu*) and the histories of the reigns of the current dynasty (*guoshi*). In addition, Chinese governments charged their officials to prepare provincial and local histories and on occasion commissioned histories of an entire previous dynasty or dynasties. The genealogy of the ruling house was produced by the court throughout Chinese history and for a while in the Tang the state regulated the genealogies of the aristocracy (it was only in the later empire that genealogies were kept by wealthy commoner families and kin groups). Biography has been practiced in China continuously for more than 2,000 years, both by the state and by private individuals.

The involvement of officials in all forms of historical production in China is unique. It ensured that a great deal of history writing was a political act intended to legitimize the current regime by providing a “correct” view of the past. In the later empire, the didactic and ethical function of history was given even greater emphasis. The trend was set by Zhu Xi’s (1130–1200) *Outline of the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* (*Zizhi tongjian gangmu*) and given popular expression in grade-school primers such as the *Three-Character Classic* (*Sanzi jing*). In no other country, ancient or modern, was history, both elite and popular, valued as highly as it was in China.

### *Historiography*

Scribal accounts are an accurate record of the emperor, a warning for the future, the means by which the present views the past and the future knows the present. Therefore the emperor’s every word and deed, every act, and every move must all be fully recorded. And that is why the ruler acts with prudence. (*Weishu* 48, 1071)

The court chronicler in early (pre-Qin) China was far more influential than any historian today. For a start he was a senior court official with astronomical as well as archival functions and played a key part in the arrangement, timing, conduct, and recording of ancestral remembrance rituals and sacrificial rites and other ceremonies. He may also have had remonstrance functions, in light of his duties of keeping records of models, both worthy of emulation and to be avoided, and of portents heralding disaster.

The simple fact that the court historian and court astrologer were one and the same person deeply affected the nature and development of Chinese historical writing for the next 2,000 years.

The operating principle of the astrologer was that reliable predictions about the future course of the stars could be based only upon accurate records of their past positions. Acting as the recorder of earthly events the court chroniclers held the same principle. They also believed that the affairs of men and the heavens were correlated (*tianren xiangying*) and it was their task to find the links between the two.

The astrological foundations of Chinese historiography are reflected in the principle enunciated in the quotation above: an accurate historical record is of practical value both as a guide to the present and as a predictor of the future. The second principle is the need for the historian to be not only an accurate recorder but also a moral didact. In practice the two were often in conflict. Moreover, what was morally desirable did not always fit with what was politically acceptable, and accuracy, too, was often sacrificed to political exigency. The stereotypical citing of historical events and people to make a moralistic point could on occasion get in the way of the historian’s obligation to provide an accurate record.

Because Confucius was thought to have edited the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*), this was the historical work that enjoyed the highest prestige in China until

the early twentieth century. It is hardly surprising therefore that many of the key terms in the Chinese historiographical tradition can be traced back to the *Spring and Autumn Annals* or to its three commentaries, for example, *baobian* (praise and blame), *bifa* (style of writing; i.e., the careful choice of words by which Confucius was thought to have indirectly revealed his true meaning), *hui* (concealment; i.e., the recording of bare facts should yield to social norms), *zhengtong* (legitimate succession), or *zhishu*, *zhibi* (honesty and forthrightness in historical writing; historical rectitude).

### *Historical genres*

Throughout Chinese history, the two main genres of historical writing were (1) annals (*biannian ti*), most famously the *Chunqiu*, Sima Guang's (1019–86) *Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* (*Zizhi tongjian*), and Zhu Xi's *Outline of the Comprehensive Mirror*, and (2) a composite style (*jizhuan ti*) combining annals, biography, institutional chapters, and chronological tables and covering either several dynasties (as does China's most famous work of history, Sima Qian's [145–86? BCE] *Records of the Scribe* [*Shiji*]) or a single one (as do most of the other *24 Standard Histories*). Other genres of history include topically arranged, institutional, miscellaneous, and notebook (*jishibenmo ti*, *zhengshu*, *zashi*, *biji*). Six other types of sources that were normally classified in the history branch of library catalogues are decrees and memorials, biographies, almanacs, geography, official posts, and book catalogues. Informal histories (*yeshi*) filled a gap in the histories of the higher culture, many of whose histories were also abbreviated and dramatized for a wider popular audience in novels, operatic performances, school primers, and jingles.

### *Primary, secondary, and basic sources*

Since the late seventeenth century, it has been the practice in European historiography to divide written sources into two types: primary and secondary—a distinction that then became standard in China in the early twentieth century. The customary explanation is that primary sources are documents prepared for administrative action by direct participants in a particular event and later stored in archives. Secondary sources are works composed for posterity sometime after the event on the basis of primary sources. They were usually written by those who had not participated in the event and their accounts were stored in libraries.

The distinction can be a useful one, but in practice, it is not hard and fast, especially for Chinese historical sources. The *24 Standard Histories*, for example, were largely based on reign histories (*guoshi*) prepared by the previous dynasty ultimately on the basis of sources that may have been drafted by participants/note takers, but the process of subsequent compilation put them through many layers of filtering and selection that were influenced by political criteria. In utilizing these sources students of Chinese history need to constantly remind themselves that much was left out in the course of compilation, including the cut and thrust of the various factions and players in the political/bureaucratic process. Therefore the question arises: Should, for example, the *24 Standard Histories* be counted as primary or secondary sources? The answer will depend on which *Standard History* and which part of it is being considered. To the extent that later *Standard Histories*, such as the *Old Tang History* (*Jiu Tangshu*), were the work of compilation committees rather than single authors, they tend to preserve more primary documents than those *Standard Histories* written by individuals, such as Ouyang Xiu

(1007–72), who tended to rewrite in balanced cadences on the basis of existing *Standard Histories* or compiled sources rather than to quote from primary sources.

While it is no doubt frequently true that the closer the source is in time and place to the matter under investigation, the more reliable it is, this should not lead to the easy equation of early sources with primary sources. Take the example of the *Records of the Scribe*. Whether because it is ancient or because it has been a key work in the Chinese literary and historical canon for so long, many people today would say without hesitation that the *Records of the Scribe* is a primary source, overlooking the fact that most of its chapters on pre-Han history were largely written on the basis of preexisting compiled sources, for example *Commentary of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan*). Moreover, the *Commentary of Zuo* itself is hardly a primary source, having been composed some centuries after the events that it relates and on the basis of various preexisting scribal and other accounts. This does not make either the *Records of the Scribe* or the *Commentary of Zuo* any less important as historical sources. On the contrary, because they often provide the only available written evidence on many of the famous people and events of ancient history, they are basic historical sources (*jiben shiliao*). But a basic source is not necessarily a primary one.

Basic sources need to be contextualized and read with the same critical attention to the author's or compilers' intentions as any other primary or secondary work. Nor should ancient Chinese history be seen (as was the case for nearly two millennia) as simply a question of retelling the legends and stories found in the *Commentary of Zuo*, the *Records of the Scribe*, or other canonical historical works. Still less should imperial history be seen simply as a summary of the *Standard Histories*, let alone as a summary of one of their many summaries.

Further complications arise from the fact that almost all pre-Qin sources were edited in the Han. Thereafter, in the process of transmission in a manuscript culture, they underwent all kinds of additional editorial changes. The implications for the student of Chinese history for any period in the 2,000 years up to the Tang are momentous. It is no longer sufficient simply to evaluate a source in terms of its closeness to a point in time on the assumption that the traditional date assigned to the transmitted edition is a reliable indicator of its actual date. At the very least, the texts of all sources, both primary and secondary, have to be examined carefully in order to establish when different parts of them were written (and by whom and for what purposes).

The historian's task is simpler for the last 1,000 years of Chinese history, because many of the sources, both primary and secondary, were printed, and, given the proximity in time, as we have seen, far more sources of all kinds have survived. Nonetheless, it remains true that despite the fact that parts of earlier archives were discovered in the twentieth century and new finds are made all the time, primary documents up to the early Qing are typically preserved in whole or in part in compiled sources and even fewer private records survive than official ones (see the list of excavated, archival, and other new sources in Section IV).

The importance of style (*wen*) in the production of good historical writing (*shi*) was emphasized by many, including the historiographer Liu Zhiji (661–721), the first in the world to write a lengthy book on historiography. However, despite his strictures and those of numerous others there was a tendency to describe things in literary stereotypes rather than to descend to the details of actual events or to investigate their causality. Take the example of war. Again and again battles are said to have left the ground scarlet for a thousand miles (*chidi qianli*), with no attempt to recount the course of the fighting, the strategy and tactics used by both sides, or to provide accurate numbers of the dead and

wounded. While it is true that fiction played a diminishing role in history, nevertheless even in the later *Standard Histories*, signs of supernatural birth are recorded of the founding emperor of a dynasty, including the appearance of mysterious lights in the sky or vapors, dragons, and spirits.

The connections between history and politics remained close throughout Chinese history. So, compiled sources have moral, political, and personal agendas and their author or authors follow one or more literary conventions, all of whose motives and conventions need to be taken into account by the modern historian.

Note that to the historian, literature itself can be a useful type of historical source. In the case of China there are at least two reasons for this: (1) official writing, including of documents, was often published in a person's collected literary works; (2) much of Chinese literature, including poetry, was of a social nature (see the chapters in this volume by Sanders and Wang).

Historians of recent Chinese history, it may be assumed, have an easier task than historians of earlier periods, because they have access to vastly more information. Moreover, much of the information is almost in real time as it appears in the media. This is true. But all the caveats regarding context and motive apply to reading twentieth-century historical documents as were mentioned for earlier sources. Moreover, given the sensitivity of recent history the record has only been partially released and some key modern archives have never even been opened (see Section VI).

### III. Transmitted texts

An important step for historians is to find out how many works and of what kind were produced in their chosen historical period and how many survived and which were lost and why. One obvious starting point for Qing historians is to use the *Comprehensive Catalogue of Works by Qing Writers* (*Qingren zhushu zongmu*, forthcoming) that is intended to list all known works in Chinese, written, edited, translated, or published, during the Qing, whether the works are extant or not. There are 227,000 entries in this catalogue of which about half have been lost. The catholicity of the definition of "books" and the inclusion of extant and lost works enables a comprehensive and hitherto unavailable overview of print and manuscript culture in the Qing. Comparable catalogues have not yet been compiled for other dynasties, for which the main recourse are the book catalogues (*shizhi*) in the seven *Standard Histories* that contain them. With the exception of the ones in the *Mingshi* and *Qingshi gao*, the others were based on the catalogues of the imperial collections of a given period or periods. None of these were intended to give a complete listing of all books available at a given time (all of the *Histories* contain references to dozens and in some cases hundreds of book titles in their biographies sections that are not included in their book catalogues). That said, the *shizhi*, used together with later *buzhi* (corrections and supplements to the book catalogues in the *Histories*), can give a good indication of what were considered to be the most important works circulating in the formal culture of the educated elite of a given period.

The *shizhi*, together with their numerous supplements and the 18 additional catalogues for the *Standard Histories* that did not have them, which were compiled in the Qing and later contain the titles of about 50,000 works (including repeat titles), most of which have long since been lost. The old *Harvard-Yenching Index*, No. 10, of *shizhi* and most of the important Qing supplements is now superseded by the innovative database of 7 book catalogues in the *Standard Histories* and 22 other public and private book

catalogues, *Historical Book Catalogue of China* (*Zhongguo lidai dianji zongmu*). It allows six different ways of browsing through the 2.5 million bibliographical entries that it currently holds.

Before leaving the subject it is worth mentioning that statistics of book production in China as elsewhere are notoriously unreliable. For example, the catalogue in the *Xin Tangshu* provides a figure of 370,000 *juan* for the palace collection of the emperor Sui Yangdi and adds the comment that when duplicates were removed the collection came to 80,000 *juan* (57:1422). Ever since the Song this has been quoted as marking the high point (in terms of quantity) of imperial book collections. A moment's reflection suggests that 370,000 *juan* is an extremely unlikely figure for the imperial library at a time when printing had not yet been introduced, because even a millennium after the invention of printing, the Qianlong emperor was able to collect only 172,621 *juan* for the *Siku quanshu zongmu* (*Complete Library of the Four Branches*).

The largest annotated catalogue of imperial China, the *Siku quanshu zongmu* (1795), contains notes on 10,264 works. It has now been doubled in size by the annotated catalogue edited by Li Xueqin and Lü Wenyu (1996), which contains abstracts of over 21,000 separate works.

The most thorough unannotated inventory of extant pre-1912 books, the *Catalogue of Old Chinese Works* (*Zhongguo guji zongmu*) contains a total of 187,000 entries. This surpasses by far previous estimates of 70,000 to 100,000 titles (not exemplars). The size of the name index to this catalogue is also impressive: 81,600 authors, compilers, editors, annotators, and collators are listed (by my estimate about 70 to 80 percent of whom lived in the Qing). But all is not quite what it seems. The reason is a definitional one. A glance at the History section (which has 66,502 entries) suggests why the total is so astonishingly high: (1) the cut-off date is not 1912. Books published in the old style in the "early Republic" (in practice that means up to about 1935) are included; (2) a work published in a collection (*congshu*) is counted as a separate entry even if that work is only a chapter or part of a chapter of a book; (3) the same title gets a separate entry if changes were made in the reprinting (including if notes and main text were printed in a different way or if the number of *juan* changed [even if the content remained the same]); (4) revised editions are given separate entries; (5) books written in minority languages if they contain Chinese, or foreign books (if they contain Chinese annotations), are included; (6) categories of books not normally coming within the definition of "old [i.e., pre-1912] works (*guji*)," such as genealogies (nearly 17,000 of them), lists of office holders (*jinshe lu*), and examination lists are all here.

The ZGZ is not yet digitized, but OPACs (Online Public Access Catalogues) of most of the major collections of Chinese books are now available and before long will be linked to make an online union catalogue of all major holdings of Chinese books in China's largest academic search engine, CALIS (China Academic Library and Information System), which inter alia pools the catalogues of holdings of major Chinese libraries of old Chinese books.

#### IV. New sources

##### *Official archives*

It is sometimes said that few archives survive from Chinese imperial history because so many were destroyed in warfare. While it is true that imperial book collections and imperial archives went up in flames on at least two dozen occasions in the course of

Chinese history, this is not the main reason. The main reason is that the introduction of paper and printing increased the volume of documents and duplicates to such an extent that efficient ways of regularly purging the archives had to be found. Basic to the system introduced in the early Tang was the distinction between long-term storage (*changliu*) and short-term storage (*fei changliu*). In order to make room for new documents, short-term documents in both central and local archives were destroyed or sold after ten years (following an inspection and purging conducted every three years). Only very few were earmarked for long-term storage and these were usually discarded once they had been summarized or published in digests, documentary compilations, or reign histories. The Tang archival procedures were followed with minor improvements by all subsequent dynasties and in the Republic (!) until the 1920s. An incidental effect of these measures was to ensure that the dynasty in power exercised a more efficient monopoly over the production of the “correct” account of the past based on primary documents.

As a result of the systematic and continuous purging of imperial archives at all levels, it is only from the late Qing that archival documents have survived in large numbers (ten million from the central archives and ten million from local archives) because the dynasty collapsed before they could be purged in the normal course of events. Parts of discarded local archives have however been discovered from the early empire preserved in wells in the Central South or in the dry sands of the Northwest (see list below). So exceptional have these discoveries been that in many cases they have led to specialized fields of study, for example oracle-bone studies (*jiaguxue*), bamboo-strip and wood-board studies (*jianduxue*), Dunhuang studies or Dunhuangology (*Dunhuangxue*), Huizhou document studies (*Huixue*), Qingjiang studies (*Qingjiangxue*), and, of course, Ming-Qing archive studies (*Ming-Qing dang'anxue*).

The value to the historian of the new archival sources varies as much as the sources themselves. Often they provide local detail on implementation and practice not found in the historical record, which usually reflects the concerns of the central government. For the earliest periods, newly excavated books and archival sources are transforming ancient Chinese history because of the paucity of textual sources. At the end of the empire, the Qing central and local archives, because of their huge size, offer the chance of a closer look at decision making and historical events in general than is possible for any other period. They also provide social and economic detail not found easily in other sources, especially in the archives documenting court cases.

### *Private documents*

Although the literary and scholarly output of China's elite has survived in very large quantities, especially from the later empire, and although this includes personal diaries, letters, notebooks, and other such works, documents related to private business or landholding are rare. Contracts, land deeds, accounts, and litigation of all kinds did not come within the purview of the Chinese historian, and the owners of such documents usually guarded them jealously from prying eyes. Many private papers must have been destroyed during the upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (one only has to recall the burning of land deeds and IOUs as a way of mobilizing the peasantry from the 1930s to the 1950s or the destruction of private papers during the Cultural Revolution). Nevertheless, documents of private individuals and businesses continue to surface from time to time.

The largest finds from the early years of Chinese history have been excavated from tombs. In addition, a considerable number of private communications were found

among the documents on bamboo slips and wooden tablets. They date from the Warring States to the Tang (about 500 contracts were found at Dunhuang and Turfan).

Although nonofficial records and private documents were voluminous in the more commercialized society of the later empire, only a tiny number of these escaped the ravages of time and the ups and downs of family fortunes and the impact of disasters, man-made and natural. Among the most numerous to have survived from the late Ming and Qing are genealogies.

Some business accounts and private contracts have been preserved, and a few, like the Huizhou documents or the Qingjiang forestry contracts, in the hundreds of thousands.

A list of excavated, archival, and other new sources (chronological order) follows (details in Wilkinson 2015):

- Shang oracle-bone divination inscriptions; excavated since 1900
- Zhou oracle-bone records; excavated since 1977
- Inscriptions cast on bronze vessels, eleventh to third centuries BCE. Some transmitted as rubbings, many recently excavated
- Documents on jade from the state treaty archive (*mengfu*) of the kingdom of Jin excavated at Houma and Wenxian since the 1930s
- Documents and books, mostly on bamboo slips, excavated from tombs and wells in the Warring States kingdom of Chu
- Warring States bamboo books and documents, mainly Qin
- Han silk books and documents (mainly from Mawangdui)
- Han maps on silk from Mawangdui
- Bone chit records (*gugian*) from the Former Han
- Han documents and maps, many from local archives at the northwest border, mostly public, but some private
- Han documents excavated from tombs
- Part of Donghai commandery archive (Later Han), Jiangsu
- Wu documents mainly from the commandery archive at Changsha
- Documents on bamboo slips from Wei-Jin Nanbeichao
- Manuscript documents from fourth to fourteenth centuries excavated from tombs and ruined cities near Turfan, Xinjiang
- Dunhuang documents: mainly religious but also some private and secular ones, fifth to eleventh century
- Xixia documents in the Tangut script, eleventh to thirteenth century
- Stone inscriptions from all periods
- Buddhist scriptures carved on stone steles from all post-Han periods
- A small part of the Ming central archives
- About ten million documents (mainly late Qing) from palace and other central archives
- Shengjing (Shenyang) archives
- Documents from Ba county archive, Sichuan, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries
- Documents from Nanbu county archive, 1657–1911
- Documents from Baodi county archive, Shuntian, Tianjin
- Documents from Huolu county archive, Hebei
- Village surveys from Qingxian, Shenzhou, and Zhengding, late nineteenth century
- Shuangcheng county archives, Heilongjiang
- Documents from the Danshui subprefecture and Xinzhu county archives, Taiwan, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

- Documents (2.4 million) in the Lhasa archives
- Documents from the nineteenth century Canton provincial archive
- Huizhou documents
- Private documents from Qingjiang (Guizhou) in the Qing mainly relating to contracts and forest management
- Merchant documents (Ming and Qing)
- Land deeds (mainly Ming and Qing)
- Taiping documents
- Litigation documents (late Qing), found at Huangyan, Zhejiang

## V. Digitization

Recent years have seen an enormous increase of electronic resources to sort, disseminate, and analyze Chinese historical data, from the oracle-bones of the Shang dynasty to the most recent scholarship in China and throughout the world. This has introduced an entirely new dimension in terms of the accessibility and control of the sources, unimaginable in the past.

Up to the end of the Qing, the best trained scholars had to rely mainly on the power of their memories. The generations that went to school after the abolition of the imperial examination system in 1905 and after the adoption of the vernacular in the 1920s had far less incentive to memorize the *Classics* than their forebears. So scholars concerned to preserve the national heritage began to facilitate access to it by compiling print indexes and concordances to the *Classics* and other ancient texts. But by the end of the twentieth century, the advent of digitization rendered most of these reference works redundant. Since the 1990s digitization has proceeded apace. Now huge works of the later empire running to hundreds of millions of characters are freely available online. Digitization has gone even faster for studies of twentieth-century history.

The next step will be to compile more relational databases. The advent of large databases of searchable digital texts is a quantitative extension of print indexes and concordances. In contrast, a relational database marks a qualitative change. The *China Biographical Database* (CBDB), for example, is not limited to a single source; rather, it ties together information from multiple sources. Just as a mosaic dictionary shows the diverse ways in which words are interrelated, a prosopographical relational database shows the ways in which individuals were connected to the world around them. The CBDB is by nature open-ended in the data from which it constructs its information; thus existing datasets and indexes (e.g., the book catalogues from the *Standard Histories*) can be loaded into the database to be cross-linked to other sources and databases. It could, for example, be linked to online databases of Chinese genealogies and has already been linked to the *China Historical Geographical Information System* (CHGIS). The website of CBDB provides examples of how to map its data and also for prosopographical and social network analysis.

It is customary to warn of the dangers of using digitized texts on the grounds that they often contain errors introduced during the course of digitization or that the best editions were not used; or because of the pitfalls of “cherry-picking,” that is, taking words or events out of context. This last caveat reminds me of the tut-tutting in the Song dynasty by scholars such as Zhu Xi who warned that the introduction of printing would undermine scholarship because students would no longer memorize texts. Or of those in Europe in the seventeenth century who resisted the introduction of

indexes to books on the grounds that it would tempt students to look up isolated passages rather than read the whole work.

## VI. The Republic of China (to 1949)

Almost as many historical sources survive from the 37 years of the Republic than from the preceding 3,100 years of Chinese recorded history. Proximity in time is one obvious reason. Another is the development of a mechanized printing and publishing industry that was capable of producing well over 125,000 book titles and in large enough print runs to ensure that almost all of them have survived.

The new presses also made possible the production of much larger quantities of relatively new types of source, notably print journalism. Newspapers (and periodicals) recorded events at both the national and the local levels in an abundance and quality, which make them one of the most important sources for the period. They were fed by a growing network of correspondents using the rapidly expanding telephone and telegraph systems.

Proximity in time and modern techniques of recording have led to another new type of source—oral history. The recollections of many thousands of participants in national and local events are available.

Recordings of music and of the voices of a few famous people have survived and been released. Recordings of Chinese Communist leaders were made both before and after 1949, but only a tantalizingly small sample have been released, including a few short speeches in Chairman Mao's characteristic Hunanese dialect and wheedling tone. Quantities of press and private photographs, movies, newsreels, and TV recordings provide an immediacy often not found in the usually carefully posed photographs that have survived from the late Qing.

Official documents burgeoned as never before, not only because of the modern printing industry but also because throughout the Republic there were several competing governments and political parties, each with its own printing press and archives. Much was destroyed by warfare, but many millions of printed documents, both central and local, have survived.

New organizations, such as chambers of commerce, universities, schools, and scientific associations all produced copious documents of a kind never before seen in China.

The search for a new basis for state building led to the production of a considerable number of social surveys, censuses, regular statistical series, and ethnographic investigations.

Finally, foreign governments and foreign nationals became directly involved in Chinese affairs during the Republic on a much larger scale than ever before. They reported regularly on events and personalities, and not a few published their memoirs.

Although the volume of sources available for the study of Chinese history in the first half of the twentieth century is enormous, much remains to be catalogued and evaluated and some of the most important archives, for example of the CCP Central Committee, still remain firmly closed to the public.

Large quantities of the published material were produced in a highly politicized atmosphere to support various conflicting political positions, all of which had in common the myth that the history of the Republic centers on an epic struggle between two main political parties, each claiming to have saved the nation from foreign invasion and enemies at home. But time can change the assessments of a past period.

At the very least, the painting of the Republic in the darkest colors no longer carries the conviction that it did in the years 1949–79. Then it was claimed that China had been held back between 1840 and 1949 by foreign encroachments and feudal oppression. The removal of these burdens and the attainment of sovereignty following victory (thanks to it according to the CCP) were supposed to lead to accelerated growth and prosperity. This seemed to be the case in the early 1950s, but the Great Leap Forward and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (covering most of the years between 1958 and 1978) now appear as massive and costly blunders. As a result it is no longer the Republic that seems an aberration in China's search for wealth and power, but these lost years. Clearly, the history of the Republic is ripe for reassessment (see Chen's chapter in this volume).

## VII. Post-1978 Chinese historical writing

The period since 1978 has been a golden age for historical writing in China, not only because anything by comparison with history writing during the years of the Cultural Revolution would seem an immense improvement, but more importantly because of the change in the entire context of post-1978 historical writing. The Chinese economy and society have changed in ways and at a pace never before experienced. These have of necessity provoked new ways of reading the past.

For example, as China's population moved from a predominantly agrarian to urban one in the early twenty-first century, the interest in urban history and in urban lifestyles increased enormously. Regional and local history are now booming, as pride in local traditions is fortified and financed by regional growth. As the pace of infrastructure projects has increased as never before, this has led to the chance discovery of a huge variety of archaeological evidence outside the traditional core region (see Section I above).

First women's history and now gender history have taken their place as major new forms of historical interpretation (see Lu's chapter in this volume). As the environment has deteriorated, interest in environmental history has grown (see Perdue's chapter). And as China's economy has become a major regional and international force, so, too, has interest in China's history as a regional power (see von Glahn's chapter). Another example would be the competing territorial claims in the South China Sea, which have provided a powerful stimulus for underwater archaeology.

The present intense interaction between China and the west, previously read in terms of oppression and revolutionary rejection (or as challenge and response) is now being rewritten in less essentialist and less simplistic terms (see Cohen's chapter in this volume).

The entire emphasis is switching from finding excuses for China's weakness to explaining its newfound strength.

This sea change is bringing about a long overdue examination of some of the cliché terms hitherto employed as if cast in bronze. Examples would include studies of the different contexts and uses of the terms "revolution," "feudalism," "peasant," "democracy," "economics," and "science."

In a word, a new "new history" is underway, widening its scope to embrace all past culture as its text (see Ching's chapter). In parallel, attitudes to what constitutes a historical source have changed dramatically. Now everything in past society is considered grist for the historian's mill—not only the great books, but also little texts that never conceivably made it into one or other of the canons. Not only written sources, whether

produced in a conscious historiographical tradition, or as literature or documents (both public and private), but also artifacts, ecofacts, and oral and visual sources. This broadening of scope has been driven by the new subjects studied and the introduction of new paradigms.

Also, new techniques are employed—the archaeoastronomer can simulate exactly how our ancestors would have seen the stars on any night in the past and in any part of the world. The archaeogeneticist is able to reconstruct early population movements in every continent using mitochondrial DNA analysis. The phoneticist can reconstruct how languages may have sounded a thousand years ago. The environmental historian can trace the effects of climate change not only in China but across the whole Eurasian continent and the rest of the globe. These new techniques have in common that they can be applied to all human populations, and their findings therefore invite cross-cultural comparisons. The resultant broader perspective coincides with China's shift from a regional to a world power. Yet the drum beat of politically guided patriotism still sets the pace in much of the history that is produced in such quantities in one form or another in China. How to free up their story and tell it in universal non-“Chinese Communist Party” terms is the challenge that is taken up by some Chinese historians, museum curators, and film and TV directors. It is a challenge that is more easily met by those who have the good fortune not to have to toe the Party line on history.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

(All databases accessed on August 31, 2015.)

#### *Archaeology*

China Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology in the Chinese Academy of Sciences: <http://www.ivpp.ac.cn>.

*Chinese Archaeology*. Annual. Kaogu yanjiusuo, 2001–. English Translations of articles in Chinese archaeological journals of the previous year.

*Chinese Cultural Relics*. Quarterly, Wenwu, 2014–. English translations and summaries of articles appearing in the previous three issues of the monthly journal *Wenwu*.

Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, Kaogu yanjiusuo): <http://www.kaogu.net.cn/html/en>. A convenient way of keeping up to date.

Underhill, Anne P., ed. 2013. *A Companion to Chinese Archaeology*. Wiley-Blackwell.

*Zhongguo kaoguxue dacidian (Dictionary of Chinese Archaeology)*. Wang Wei, chief ed., Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2014. Brief entries on all main archaeological sites as well as timelines covering 1899–2012.

*Zhongguo kaoguxue nianjian (Yearbook of the Archeological Society of China)*, Wenwu chubanshe, 1983–. Systematic coverage of the previous year's discoveries and activities, including state-of-the-field essays arranged by period and by subject; comprehensive coverage of new archaeological discoveries (brief descriptions arranged by province); archaeological exhibitions and conferences; international scholarly exchanges; comprehensive listings of books and articles arranged by subject and by province; details of the work of university and other archaeological departments; obituaries; and a list of newly published inscriptions.

*Zhongguo wenwubao*, biweekly. Guojia Wenwuju. Beijing, 1985–. Covers all kinds of archaeological, museum, and cultural news in more detail than the ordinary press and more rapidly and in briefer form than the archaeological journals.

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*Historical sources*

*Airusheng* (*Erudition*; Airusheng shuzihua jishu yanjiu zhongxin): <http://db.ersjk.com/db.jsp>.

The largest database for Chinese historians; includes *Zhongguo jiben gujiku* (Basic ancient Chinese books database), which alone contains 10,000 titles totaling 1.7 billion characters.

*Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*. Michael Loewe, ed. Society for the Study of Early China and IEAS, 1993.

*Hanji dianzi wenxian ziliaoku* (*Scripta Sinica* database [maintained by Academia Sinica, Nangang, Taiwan]) currently contains 925 titles of prime importance to historians of pre-1912 China: <http://hanchi.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/ihp/hanji.htm>.

*Internet Guide for Chinese Studies*. Edited at the Sinological Institute, University of Leiden: <http://sun.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/igcs>. To update it use the lists of digital resources for China studies available at research institutes and university library OPACs. Academia Sinica, for example, lists all its databases on its website.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Chinese History in China: The State of the Field (1980s–2010s)

MAY-BO CHING

### Introduction

Never before have historians in mainland China published as prolifically on Chinese history as since the 1980s. It has been more than a hundred years since Liang Qichao in 1902 proposed the notion of a “New Historiography” (*xin shixue*). Liang envisioned a modern Chinese historiography, in particular a quest for a societal perspective and an interdisciplinary approach for historical research (Liang 1936). If we set aside his nation-building agenda and his social evolutionist inferences, his proposal is still relevant to Chinese historians today. Liang himself never put his vision into practice; such a fundamental intellectual transformation could be accomplished only through the combined efforts of successive generations of historians. In the first half of the twentieth century, western social science and its application to historical studies in China were first introduced and institutionalized. During the second half of the century, however, an interlude of political and cultural trauma set back any pre-war efforts. This was followed by the reintroduction of western historiography into mainland China through a series of restoration and reconnection endeavors. These efforts were made by scholars who grew up before the 1940s and thus were armed with solid training in both Chinese and western learning, by industrious translators who translated into Chinese many studies on western history, western historiography, and western writings on Chinese history, and by a new generation of Chinese historians that emerged in the 1980s, many of whom have become stars of the field in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Literature on Chinese history published between the 1980s and 2010s in mainland China should, therefore, be evaluated against a century of ups and downs by asking to what extent the present outcomes have achieved the ends put forward by Liang Qichao, or, in other words, how “mature” has the new Chinese historiography become?

To say that Chinese historiography has been subject to the influence of western historiography may trigger some skepticism. At first glance, the titles of many monographs

and articles published in China since the 1980s do contain some western concepts, or more precisely, some keywords picked out of anglophone China studies, but these choices of words are often ephemeral and have little intellectual significance. The term “rebellions” has been substituted for what was formerly labeled “righteous peasant uprisings.” At one time the terms “elite” and “gentry” were used to offset the negative connotations of the term “landlord”; at another time the phrase “cultural nexus” replaced “exploitation” as the key to understanding changes that took place at the village level in the state-making process. Those who wish to avoid the term “revolution” choose instead “impact-response” and “modernization” and make these the key terms of post-1842 history. To some, the notion of a “Tang–Song transition” responds to previous concerns about the “periodization of feudal society.” To others, “involution” or “growth without development” seems a better explanation for the “enduring stagnation of Chinese feudal society.” It is perhaps even easier to change one’s professional identity by claiming a new territory, be it quantitative history, new cultural history, legal history, ecological or environmental history. As happened in many other areas, in the field of historical studies the post-1980s era witnessed a process of importation, transplantation, application, and quite often appropriation of western ideas, or, more precisely, an assortment of terms used in the anglophone and sometimes Japanese world of Chinese historical studies.

While it is unrealistic and unnecessary to evaluate all works produced in this general atmosphere, perhaps it is still worth asking why for many Chinese historians some western ideas proved more acceptable than others. A simple answer to this question is that, one way or another, many Chinese historians find these ideas helpful substitutes for concepts they have previously applied in tackling five longstanding issues in Chinese Marxist historiography: the periodization of Chinese history, the feudal land system, “righteous peasant uprisings” (*nongmin qiyi*), the formation of the Han nationality, and the sprouts of capitalism. If we contemplate the state of the field of Chinese history in mainland China along these lines, we may see that the rhetoric has changed but the problematique has not. These five longstanding issues and the quest for alternative narratives have already been the subject of some critical analysis (Dirlik 1982; Li 2010b). Rather than joining this already well-established discussion or pretending to be an all-encompassing summary, this chapter attempts to capture what the author thinks is regarded by mainland Chinese historians as important in the development of Chinese historiography over the past three decades. It intends to draw the reader’s attention to areas which may have appeared obscure at first but have gradually become the focus of debates. These debates, full of self-reflection and experimentation, have involved scholars making pioneering attempts to distance themselves from conventional Chinese historiography and to develop alternative paradigms for achieving a new and holistic understanding of Chinese history on their own terms. The new paradigms may still be Marxist, but only in a sense that they continue to seek structural explanation for human actions; they are no longer the officially endorsed “Marxist” historiography of old. Within the new paradigms the “five problems” are still addressed in one way or another, but the questions are reframed, approaches renewed, and outcomes are expected to break new ground.

Structured both chronologically and thematically, this chapter attempts to underline the ebb and flow of various approaches that emerged in mainland China between the 1980s and the 2010s. It begins in the 1980s, when social history was the main trend, and points out that by the end of that decade this approach was already criticized for

being prone to fragmentation. Around the same time, a regional type of approach became increasingly prevalent, yet it soon received similar criticisms for its tendency to parochialism and failure to develop any overarching views of China as a whole. Since the late 1990s, historical anthropology has emerged as a new paradigm associated with scholars previously categorized as regional historians. Their discourses focus on the central question of what makes China a meaningful entity. Any approach to this persistent query has to start with problematizing the very notion of “China.” These thought-provoking debates have evoked significant responses from historians who have previously focused on dynastic histories and are now looking for ways to revisit political and institutional histories. Since the advent of cyberspace, it has become necessary to understand to what extent accessibility and usages of source materials have changed, and how competitive the rising generation of the twenty-first century can be. As well, we must not lose sight of the possible political implications of a potential Chinese historiographical revolution as envisaged by forerunners like Liang Qichao.

### Social history: Grand narratives versus trivialization

If “social history” (*shehuishi*) was envisioned as a promising breakthrough in Chinese historical studies by the late 1980s (*Benkan pinglunyuanyuan* 1987), many of its outcomes have been criticized since the 1990s for trivializing history and lacking theoretical concern. Studies of social history are a continuation of efforts made by Republican pioneers (Zhao and Deng 2001) in the 1920s and 1930s, but those studies to a large extent concerned debates on the “nature of Chinese society.” They tended to be conjectural and politicized, yet they did result in a considerable quantity of empirical research substantiated by newly explored source materials. After the 1950s such debates subsided somewhat and did not resurface until the 1980s, when the idea of social history was brought up once more. Differing from the pre-war “social history” debate, the “social history” advocated in the 1980s aimed at a “history of daily life” (*shehui shenghuo shi*).

The men chiefly credited with leading the revival of social history in China are Nankai University professor Feng Erkang and his successors (Feng 1987). Feng believes that discourses concerning class struggle in past times provide only a mere “skeletal” basis for understanding Chinese society. Studies on social life and lifestyles are now necessary to fill this skeleton with “flesh and blood.” In other words, studies on social life and lifestyles not only involve researching a variety of topics such as rituals and customs, popular forms of culture and entertainment, religions, and festivals, but should also entail exploration of social organizations, social communities, and social structures operating behind the everyday routine. This is the agenda behind the studies on social organizations such as lineages carried out by scholars like Chang Jianhua, Feng’s former student at Nankai. Now an established professor, Chang has contributed to offering a wider picture of social history studies by reviewing those attempts made prior to the 1950s, updating the post-1980s state of the field, and introducing Chinese historians to the work of western social historians, notably E.J. Hobsbawm, Peter Burke, and the French *Annales* School (Chang 1997; Feng 2004). In 1988, faculty members of the Institute of Social History at Nanjing University published a collection of Chinese translations of works by Hobsbawm, Fernand Braudel, Jacques Le Goff, E.P. Thompson, and Charles Tilly (Cai Shaoqing 1988), which was considered a primer for the emerging field. Other universities also joined the venture. Whereas the Nankai cohort focused more on the Ming-Qing period, Qiao Zhiqiang of Shanxi University extended the

approach to modern Chinese history (*jindai shehui shi*), which was at the time still dominated by officially endorsed revolutionary discourses (Qiao and Xing 1998).

Since then, thousands of articles and books of social history have been published in China, and therein lies a problem. That everything has a history is undeniable, yet that *every thing* triggers a horde of researchers—resulting in a plethora of outcomes—can be disastrous. From the 1990s on, many social history studies were ridiculed for being “fragmentary” (*sui pian hua*) or for studying mere “leftovers” (*cangeng shengfan*). The social mechanisms behind social life (communities, organizations, and structures), as stressed by Feng Erkang and Chang Jianhua, were often overlooked. Zhao Shiyu, a Ming historian then working in Beijing Normal University, pointed out in 1993 that with few exceptions, topical studies of social history in China lacked wider historical philosophical concerns and were incapable of offering any theoretical frameworks for further analysis. Zhao has gone on to state explicitly that Chinese social historians should aim to derive new methodologies and perspectives for interpreting history. In this sense the social history proposed by Zhao and like-minded historians is not merely one branch of historical studies; it should be the ultimate goal of the post-1980s historiographical reform (Zhao 1993). Not unlike Liang Qichao, Zhao proposes to apply theories of sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, and linguistics to social history studies, and he believes this will produce outcomes that are helpful for testing the validity of theories, even revising or improving them.

In fact, the pursuit of “theory” (*lilun*) has always been an undertaking of twentieth-century Chinese historians. Zhao Shiyu’s sentiments are shared by many others, and some seek a resolution by suggesting that historical studies are useful for generating middle-range theories. Yang Nianqun (2001b), a Qing historian from the Institute of Qing History at Renmin University of China, proposes the application of the middle-range theory developed by Robert K. Merton to historical studies as a means of integrating theory and empirical research. Once dedicated to the study of the transformation of Confucianism in Qing China, Yang draws parallels between, on the one hand, the tension between the earlier highly politicized debates on the nature of Chinese society and the post-1980s revival of interests in empirical research and, on the other, that between traditional grand narratives and Qing evidential research (*puxue*). Yang’s quest for the application of the middle-range theory is exemplified by his compilation (Yang 2001a) under the name “new social history,” which contains select articles by ten Chinese scholars (including himself) from different backgrounds. Yang believes that the 1990s’ social history studies differ from those of the 1980s in both problematique and methodology. He foresees the emergence of a new intellectual community in China that will appreciate interdisciplinary approaches and is able to develop a variety of analytical frameworks compatible with the middle-range theory. Yang’s aspiration is echoed and yet also questioned by Zhao Shiyu, whose article was included in Yang’s compilation. Zhao (Zhao and Deng 2001) laments that given the divergence in assumptions, concerns, methodologies, and opinions among researchers under the same umbrella of “social history” such as that illustrated by Yang’s volume, the label “new” is almost pointless for presenting a coherent picture of post-1990s social history studies, because such a coherency does not exist.

### Regional approach: More than the sum

The deadlock created by the tension between the pursuit of grand theory and trivialization of evidential research was to some extent released by the regional approach that was advocated around the same time. In China there has been a long literary tradition of

compiling local or regional history, but here we are talking about something different. The regional approach that became prevalent in the 1990s grew out of the more established discipline of socioeconomic history, revitalized by government-initiated efforts. In the early 1980s the National Social Science Fund of the PRC inaugurated a nationwide project of Chinese socioeconomic history studies across two dimensions, namely temporal (periodization) and spatial (regional approach). The spatial approach was implemented by strategically assigning different regions to historians from related universities. Consequently, studies on Jiangnan (the lower Yangzi River region) were taken up by Nanjing University; Fujian, Xiamen University; and Guangdong, Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou. Including Jiangnan as an analytical region in this venture was only natural, because for many years the study of Chinese socioeconomic history and the discussion on the sprouts of capitalism have focused on Jiangnan. As for Fujian and Guangdong, there exists an academic tradition of socioeconomic history founded half a century ago by several forerunners, who were originally trained not as historians but as social scientists. At Xiamen University, the key figure was Fu Yiling (1911–88), who studied sociology in Japan in the 1930s (Fu 1983). At Sun Yat-sen University, socioeconomic historical studies were initiated by Liang Fangzhong (1908–70), who in the 1930s received his bachelor's and master's degrees in economics at Tsing-hua University. Notwithstanding their social science degrees, both Fu and Liang began their professional career in China as historians. Fu and his successors at Xiamen, notably Yang Guozhen, Zheng Zhenman, and Chen Zhiping, have been renowned for their collection, reading, and interpretation of local history materials including stele inscriptions, land deeds, and genealogies, as well as their founding and running of *The Journal of Chinese Social and Economic History* (*Zhongguo shehui jingji shi yanjiu*) (Zheng and Liu 2004). Liang, with his renowned study on the single-whip taxation method in China, laid the foundation for studies of Ming taxation reform and its impact on the local society. His study was carried on by upcoming scholars at Sun Yat-sen University, notably Tang Mingsui, Ye Xian'en, Liu Zhiwei, and Chen Chunsheng. For this group of Ming-Qing historians, prefixing "economic" with "social" is significant as they believe classical economic models are inadequate for understanding the operation of the traditional Chinese economy, and more substantial studies on social organizations and institutions are needed.

This regional approach soon became prevalent. Since the late 1980s, researchers have taken up some kind of local history in every region (usually at the level of the province). Nonetheless, encompassed within the same umbrella of "regional history" are a variety of research questions and approaches. Many scholars simply enumerate regional characteristics. Critics say such research is nothing more than the "local edition of textbooks of general history of China" (*Zhongguo tongshi jiaokeshu de difangxing banben*), which offers very little to the reinterpretation of the history of China as a whole. Some historians have therefore tried to work out a more precise label for the type of regional approach that they find worth pursuing, emphasizing that regional research into Chinese social and economic history remains their ultimate concern (*Zhongguo shehui jingji shi de quyuxing yanjiu*). They apply a regional approach because by grounding themselves in a particular region they find it easier to measure the impact of the state at the local level (Deng and Chen 1988).

In this work the nested hexagonal models of central place theory applied by the American anthropologist G. William Skinner (1925–2008) to Sichuan to analyze its marketing systems has been a spring of inspiration for Chinese historians engaged in regional analysis. Skinner's research was first introduced into China in the early 1980s, yet the first complete Chinese translation of his "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural

China” (Skinner 1964a; 1965a, 1965b) did not come out in mainland China until 1998. Like many other Chinese translations of western works, the Chinese edition of Skinner’s work triggered a whole series of discussions. Between 1998 and 2014, more than 150 articles on regional studies of Chinese history published in the mainland referred to Skinner’s work in some ways,<sup>1</sup> not to mention the countless classes, workshops, seminars, and conferences during which Skinner’s models were introduced or discussed. Nonetheless, among those works which were meant to critique the “Skinnerian models,” many merely ended up disputing the number of markets Skinner had calculated, how the boundaries of macroregions should have been drawn, whether circles or hexagons should have been used to draw the models, and whether the abstract models he proposed were in accordance with reality. More articulated discussions, for instance, those by Wang Qingcheng (2004) and Shi Jianyun (2004), are few. In any case, the meaning of model-making in Chinese social science has not been properly considered in these discussions.

If any breakthroughs have been achieved by the application of regional approaches to social and economic history in recent years, they are in a sense a repercussion of Skinner’s marketing system and macroregional models. Among the most outstanding outcomes are those conducted in Fujian and Guangdong. Studies of the Putian Plains in Fujian by Zheng Zhenman (1997) demonstrate how senses of local identities and the operation of local affairs were shaped by layers of communal systems that were formed in a long historical process from the Northern Song to the Qing during which local organizations and worshipping centers of different forms—irrigation associations, household registration (*lijia*), community shrines (*lishu*), village temples (*cunmiao*), lineage organizations, cross-village alliances—replaced, combined, and intertwined with one another. The case of the Han River Delta in Eastern Guangdong, as illustrated by Chen Chunsheng (2006a), shows how a distinct Hakka identity evolved gradually from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Over the course of these three hundred years of history, events in the Han River Delta—turmoil in the late Ming, the great coastal evacuation order of the early Qing, the practice of compiling genealogies narrating a make-believe history of ancestral origin, and the rise of Swatow as a treaty port in 1860—entangled with one another and triggered movements and encounters among different dialect groups, leading to the emergence of a self-conscious Hakka identity at the time of the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Employing a regional approach, these case studies modify Skinner’s model. On top of marketing structure, they ask such questions as: What are other social structures that evolve over time and contribute to the formation of a larger physiographical and socioeconomic system which is also a culture-bearing unit within which villages are located? How should administrative hierarchical systems through which state policies are implemented be evaluated alongside marketing systems? It is remarkable that models developed on the basis of classical economics by an American anthropologist have become an important premise of this particular cohort of Chinese historians.

### Historical anthropology: Till now a happy marriage

Perhaps because of the dual character that both history and anthropology possess—both cross the boundary between social sciences and humanities easily—the coupling of the two has borne much fruit in mainland China since 2000. But the path towards their marriage is an intricate one. In the late 1980s, the term “historical anthropology” (*lishi renlei xue*) was brought into China together with many other new directions in European

historiography, notably those of the French *Annales* School. However, whereas other ideas and approaches such as *longue durée* became quite popular among Chinese historians in those years, “historical anthropology” remained almost unnoticed.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, beginning in the 1980s, substantial cooperation between anthropologists from Hong Kong and Taiwan and historians in Fujian and Guangdong paved the way for the future alliance of the two disciplines. In the mid-1980s Helen Siu of Yale University and David Faure of the Chinese University of Hong Kong went to Guangzhou to collaborate with several historians at Sun Yat-sen University and began ethnographic surveys in the Pearl River Delta. Around the same time, a project titled “Comparative Studies of Minnan and Taiwan Culture and Society” (*Min-Tai shehui wenhua bijiao yanjiu*), in which more than 30 historians and anthropologists from the United States (Arthur Wolf), Taiwan (Li Yiyuan, Chuang Ying-chang), and Fujian participated, was jointly launched by Xiamen University and the Institute of Ethnology of Academia Sinica. In those years, Sun Yat-sen and Xiamen Universities were the only two universities in mainland China with an active anthropology department, although it turned out that anthropologists outside China often found themselves better in tune with historians than with anthropologists in China. Between 1991 and 1993 the Guangdong and Fujian groups came together under the scheme of “Studies on the Traditional Chinese Sociocultural Formation in South China” coordinated by Chen Chi-nan, a Taiwan anthropologist then working at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Before then, the label “historical anthropology” was rarely mentioned.

The institutionalization of historical anthropology in China came at the turn of the millennium. The year 1999 was significant for the development of humanities and social sciences in mainland China, as it witnessed the beginning of major financial support given by the PRC government to humanities and social sciences through sponsorships on a variety of “key research institutes” set up in different universities approved by the Ministry of Education (MoE). Since 1999, more than 150 “key research institutes” have been founded. The abovementioned social history studies group at Nankai was further institutionalized with the founding of the Centre for Social History of China, which was soon endorsed by the MoE as one of the key research institutes. “Historical anthropology” in China, on the other hand, was still a new frontier full of uncertainties in some people’s eyes. The venture was developed by Sun Yat-sen University with the founding of the Centre for Historical Anthropology, which was later approved as one of the key research institutes by the MoE. A chain reaction ensued. Whereas in the 1980s historical anthropology was still something foreign and novel, between 2000 and 2014 more than 170 journal articles bearing the words “historical anthropology” in the title were published in China. Among them were empirical studies with titles beginning with the phrase “historical anthropological studies of” or ending with “from a historical anthropological perspective.” Some of these publications were meant to be critical reviews. Anthropologists were more eager to debate the nature of the discipline, even though in China, as foreseen by Jacques Le Goff, it was historians who led the institutionalization process (Xu 2001; Zhang 2003; Wang 2007; Zhang 2013).

Despite its novelty in the eyes of many, historical anthropology in China can, like social history, also be considered a revival of previous paradigms in historical studies by its initiators. Chen Chunsheng, the first director of the Centre for Historical Anthropology, has made an exhaustive account of the academic legacies that he and his colleagues have inherited. In addition to the two socioeconomic historians Fu Yiling and Liang Fangzhong, other pre-1949 intellectual resources that Chen is associated with include

the Institute of Philology and History at Academia Sinica (later renamed Institute of History and Philology) founded by Fu Sinian in Guangzhou, folklore studies promoted by Gu Jiegang, Rong Zhaozu, Zhong Jingwen in Sun Yat-sen University, social surveys conducted by sociologist Chen Xujing (Lingnan University) among the boat people of the Pearl River Delta, and ethnographical studies by ethnologists Yang Chengzhi and Jiang Yingliang (both in Sun Yat-sen University) on minorities in the southwest. Chen emphasizes that the problematique and approaches that he and his cohort have been applying are in actuality a continuation of various interdisciplinary academic paradigms that emerged in the 1920s. In other words, current historical anthropological studies have not emerged *ex nihilo* but have roots in previous scholarship. By blending traditional methods of documentation with field observations and collecting textual and oral accounts on site, Chinese historians will be able to develop a set of analytical tools for comprehending local source materials and hence local knowledge, and with more publications of case studies that share similar concerns and approaches, new interpretations of Chinese history may be derived (Chen 2006b). In retrospect, it is perhaps no coincidence that Jacques Le Goff's 1993 remark encouraging historians with anthropological orientations to establish a new discipline called "historical anthropology" was made at Sun Yat-sen University. His comment has become an endorsement for that endeavor in China.<sup>3</sup>

The fruit of the marriage can be illustrated by the works of Liu Zhiwei, which synthesize the collaboration between historians and anthropologists in the Pearl River Delta and demonstrate how historical studies may benefit the synthesis. Being accustomed to collecting and reading written materials, Liu was amazed by the oral accounts he and Helen Siu collected in the field. With more and more ethnographical experiences, he realized that the many dichotomies that appear in documents—landlords versus tenants, major lineages versus inferior households, outsiders and insiders, and the very essentialized ethnic categories of Han and Dan—are in fact full of ambiguities and fluidities. As noted by Siu, the contrast between self-identified labels and those imposed by others has always been striking. Liu remarks that investigating the formation of such dichotomies shows a history of long-term physiographical changes, struggles for power and resources, responses and reactions to state policies, interpretation and appropriation of various religious traditions, and literati ideologies in the local arena. Anthropologists can help draw researchers' attention to the power relationship and sociocultural structure represented by these labels. A critical reading of source materials will take cognizance of the fact that how local agents narrate their history in both written and oral forms also has a history, and is structured by previous narratives and history in which it is embedded. In this manner, the structuralist tradition of anthropology has shifted its focus from "structure" to "structuring," that is, how structures are formed over a historical process. Historians will contribute better to revealing the ongoing process of structuring if they are more aware of the "structures" that carry meanings and constraints (Liu Zhiwei 2003; Siu and Liu 2006).

### Problematizing "China"

Critics who find social history trivial and regional approaches fragmented may also find historical anthropology overly preoccupied with field work at a micro level. They are worried about the "loss of China" in research, despite the fact that scholars engaged in historical anthropology ventures do clarify from time to time that their ultimate goal is a holistic understanding of China and Chinese history. Eventually it will be the joint effort of countless spatial-cum-temporal researches that will help explain the evolution of

“China” as an entity in whatever terms. More and more historians believe that the notion of “China” has to be deconstructed before its history can be reconstructed. “China” needs to be problematized, or China studies will be problematic.

At this juncture, scholars of Chinese intellectual history are more ready to offer a broader lens for looking at “China as a whole.” Ge Zhaoguang, the author of *An Intellectual History of China*, proposes the notion of “viewing China from the periphery” (*cong zhoubian kan zhongguo*) as one of the five themes of research which he launched at the National Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies founded at Fudan University in 2007. Following his undertaking of positioning China in the historical context of Asia, in particular East Asia, Ge’s notion of “viewing China from the periphery” calls for intensive research on materials about China collected or written abroad, mainly in but not limited to Japan, Korea, Mongolia, and Vietnam. These materials would present the viewpoints of East Asian intellectuals other than their Ming-Qing counterparts between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such a perspective, Ge expects, would be helpful for releasing China studies not only from the China-centered view of *tianxia* (under heaven), but also from the previous over-reliance on western sources (western-centric [Eurocentric] point of view). Ge’s search for an Asian perspective as an alternative to the Eurocentric point of view is meant to be a major backbone for his venture of problematizing China. He proposes to think beyond the Eurocentric nation-state paradigm for studying “China” in motion, asking how “China” as a socio-political and cultural entity has evolved over time. Specializing in medieval cultural and religious history, he argues that the emergence of certain senses of the “Chinese consciousness” (*Zhongguo yishi*) can be traced back to the Song dynasty. Such senses of Chinese consciousness became the foundation for historical memories, discourse on space, and national identities held by many Chinese people in the centuries that followed. Along these lines Ge is engaging in debates with postcolonial western historiography, challenging a tendency to understate the continuity in senses of Chineseness over the long course of history (Ge 2011; 2012).

Perhaps the best place to experiment with the notion of “problematizing China” is the southwestern part of China (present-day Guizhou, Yunnan, and the southern part of Sichuan), which was not integrated into the Chinese empire until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Despite the growing number of publications in Chinese, English, and Japanese on this region, Wen Chunlai (2008) from Sun Yat-sen University selected in particular the Yi people in the northwestern part of Guizhou as his research subject. According to Wen, the Yi people, unlike many other frontier populations, used to have their own writing system and political organizations, whose history can be traced back to the Song period when a number of autonomous states coexisted in the southwest. Wen argues that a certain sense of Yi identity already existed at that time and substantiated a relatively autonomous political, social, and cultural entity. This entity mostly worked against the Ming and Qing political and social institutions, but did at times adapt to their Han-Chinese culture. Wen rejects the postmodernist notion that ethnic identity is merely a modern invention while also refusing to side with the claim that the Yi is one single people that has existed from the days of old. What he is looking for is a middle way between the ontological and constructionist views of ethnic identity (see Mullaney’s chapter in this volume).

The notion of “problematizing China” has also been proposed to address the apparent dilemma of unity and diversity, yet the question remains how a balance can be struck between the two that would lead to useful methodological directions. Reexamining the

idea of Sinicization, the emerging “new Qing history” studies in the United States have evoked responses among historians specializing in Qing studies both on the mainland and Taiwan (see Liu and Liu 2010; Wang 2014). Acknowledging the significance of the questions raised by the new Qing history concerning the legitimacy of the Qing and of the importance of non-Chinese materials, Ding Yizhuang of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences critically reviews the “grand unification” (*dayitong*) discourse that has been prevalent among many mainland Chinese historians (Ding 2009/2010). She looks at how Manchu intellectuals might have perceived their own identities and their identification with the idea of the Chinese nation that emerged in the late Qing (Ding 2014). Placing the historical-geographical orientation of the new Qing history alongside that of Chinese scholarship, which has evolved since the Song, Yang Nianqun suggests a search for a third road to strike a balance between the “northeast/inner Asia” orientation and the “south/north” orientation, and between the Sinicization narratives and the emphasis on the “Manchu way,” so as to achieve a genuine multidimensional view of the formation of the Qing empire (Yang 2011a; 2014b). In any case, to avoid politicizing the debate, these mainland historians try to synchronize the perspectives at two poles, at a time when a new Qing History Compilation Project is being launched with strong financial support from the PRC government.

A comparable debate was started by David Faure and Liu Zhiwei in response to a special 2007 issue of *Modern China* devoted to “Ritual, Cultural Standardization, and Orthopraxy.” The two authors suggest that the apparent dilemma of unity and diversity should be tackled by appreciating the long duration of the legitimizing process over large and varied geographic regions of China through a systematic documentation of the history of the adoption of legitimizing symbols, and by comparing these histories across local cultures instead of reiterating the existence of variations between local practices and perceived unities (Ke and Liu 2008, 2009; Sutton 2009). It is worth noting that although questioning unity and emphasizing local variations can be politically sensitive in mainland China, the debates concerned, involving scholars from different countries with different academic backgrounds, are sincere intellectual discussions and are not demarcated along political or national lines.

### **More “new”: New institutional history and new political history**

Since the decade of the 2000s, reflections in response to the impact of socioeconomic history with a regional approach on Chinese historiography have become more apparent among scholars who work on periods other than Ming-Qing. Historians working on ancient and medieval history have begun to pay more attention to society than to the court (Li 2012). By the same token, some scholars who work on modern and contemporary China, including those specializing in Chinese Communist Party history, have begun to conduct research at a micro and local level, and their efforts are being complemented by some fieldwork-oriented Ming-Qing historians who plow through post-1950s local archives and source materials and conduct on-site interviews and observation in rural communities. At the same time, historians working on Republican China are seeking to distance themselves from the revolutionary paradigm with its focus on peasant society and to look for new arenas in cities. This shift has resulted in a huge amount of such topical research as urban development, municipal constructions, public health and hygiene, media and entertainment, religions, and social campaigns, as well as studies of post-1911 symbols and monuments.

There are also attempts to counterbalance the slant to socioeconomic approaches and to work out a grand yet operative agenda to guide studies of modern China. Stressing that government codes, regulations, and institutions (*dianzhang zhidu*) have been a strong point of traditional Chinese historiography, and that such research orientations have been relatively ignored by historians who work on modern China, Sang Bing proposes a series of systematic and topical studies on “knowledge and institutional transformation” (*zhishi yu zhidu zhuanxing*) as a thematic breakthrough for reexamining late Qing and early Republican history. Sang maintains that studies of government regulations and institutions should involve not only examining their origins and developments in the literal sense, but also how they have been put into practice and what reactions and consequences have resulted. He argues that the knowledge and institutional transformation that took place during the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century was undeniably triggered to a large extent by Sino-foreign conflicts and exchanges. He calls the transformation’s impact consequential, almost marking a “great divide” in Chinese history. But precisely because this transformation process involved “Sino” (and thus “traditional”/“imperial” China, to which we as modern people are alien) and “foreign” (and thus “Japanese” and “western,” the meanings of which are always ambiguous) elements, and because modern Chinese scholars are products of this “great divide,” twentieth-century researchers are part of these institutions and cannot avoid using their terms and vocabularies. To be critical and reflective of themselves, the terms, vocabularies, knowledge, and institutions that twentieth-century scholars have been using need careful scrutiny. Sang believes that by historicizing terms and concepts, modern researchers will be better armed to prevent themselves from falling into the dichotomies of “east” and “west,” “traditional” and “modern,” “backward” and “advanced,” which have for a long time dominated the discourse of the studies on modern China (Sang 2004; 2012).

Sang and his collaborators do not use the term “new institutional history” (*xin zhidushi*) to describe what they do. But among some Song historians this term is paired with “new political history” (*xin zhengzhishi*) as pointing the way forward. Institutional and political histories in the traditional sense used to dominate studies of Song history. By promoting a “living institutional history” (*huo de zhidushi*), Deng Xiaonan (2004) implies that researchers should consider institutions or institutionalization as a social process as well as a web of connections, and examine how certain institutions have evolved and have been put into practice in reality. Studies of the Song bureaucracy, for example, involve not only the nature and organization of the government, but also the formation and operation of the institutions concerned. Moreover, cross-dynastic institutional continuity also requires Song historians to look at the state of affairs in mid- and late Tang as well as in the Five Dynasties. Historians today should be able to overcome the constraints of their Song counterparts who looked at the Tang and the Five Dynasties from the traditional point of view, which was mainly concerned with the rise and fall of the dynasty (*benchao shiguan*). This statement is significant for Chinese historians in China as their professional training and grouping have always been periodized according to imperial dynasties. Alongside new institutional history is “new political history.” Huang Kuanchong (2009b) from Taiwan echoes Deng Xiaonan’s discussion in his article entitled “From a Living Institutional History to a New Political History.” Whereas traditional political history pays much attention to studying a few emperors and officials as decision-makers and competitors for power, new political history requires researchers to examine the interaction between the central government

and local society and to consider political observers and practitioners as part of a literati group rather than as a few manipulative and influential individuals. Meanwhile, thanks to the efforts made by scholars on collecting and annotating source materials, the increasing availability of literary collections which reveal in detail the activities and personal opinions of Song men facilitates this new research orientation. Compared to the above-mentioned academic fashions such as social history, regional approaches, and historical anthropology, “new political history” is so “new” that the discussion has as yet been recapitulated only in the form of a “written conversation” (*bitan*) among scholars from mainland China, Taiwan, and Japan, which was published in the *Journal of Historical Science* (*Shixue Yuekan*) in 2014.

### Generation Y and e-research

The post-1990s development of historical studies in mainland China is like its economy: its growth is swift, its scale massive, its resources substantial, and, more importantly, it is to some extent planned and mobilized by the state, specifically the Ministry of Education, which attempts to interfere with academic development from time to time. The Chinese Communist strategic practice of building an echelon or cohort of successors (*tidui*) matches well with the traditional Chinese norms of continuing lines of scholarship (*jiufa*) from one generation to another. The result is that junior scholars in mainland China receive more attention and support from their institutions and governments than their foreign counterparts. Compared with their predecessors they have more resources at a young age to launch their own research projects, to attend and organize conferences or seminars solely for their age group (typically those born in the 1980s), to visit or study abroad, and to have their work published in China and overseas. Many universities have been for some years recruiting new faculty among overseas PhD graduates. Even for postgraduate and undergraduate students there are cross-university seminars and summer classes for scouting talents. Some of the best works of this new generation show that they are better equipped to blend together traditional Chinese scholarships with modern social science problematiques, and to have conversation and cooperation with foreign counterparts. In this age of information they are busy circulating ideas and sharing resources on blogs and Chinese apps such as WeChat. They are encouraged to be innovative, and are also doing their best to be. How far they can go, however, may take another ten years to evaluate.

What is already clear at this stage is that the impact of massive publication and digitalization of source materials on historical studies is far-reaching. With the application of a variety of digitized databases of such fundamental Chinese history literature as the *Twenty-Five Histories* (*Ershiwu shi*), *Complete Library of the Four Branches* (*Siku quanshu*), Confucian classics, gazetteers, genealogies, Ming-Qing government archives, literary collections, steles and inscriptions, with the compilation and digitization of a huge number of modern newspapers and journals, and with the gradual release (and occasional closing) of Republican and PRC archives to the public, Chinese historians, especially those who work on the post-sixteenth-century period, find themselves immersed in an ocean of source materials and are crying for a way out. In this age of overwhelming information, historical study can no longer simply be the elementary documentation of the chronology of terms. Instead, it requires a contextualized understanding and interpretation of the operative meaning of those terms (and thus the material culture, institutions, and social phenomenon that they represent) on the

basis of preliminary search, which can now be done by machines. In this manner the traditional training of edition study (*banben*) and textual criticism (*jiaokan*) plays a vital role in judging the validity of texts selected for constructing and complementing these databases.

In light of the mass production of doctoral theses, journal articles, and monographs resulting from data-running, keyword-searching, and the routines of cut-and-paste, it is not uncommon for many Chinese historians to remind their students of the Tang historian Liu Zhiji's three yardsticks for assessing the competency of historians: intelligence (*shicai*), knowledge (*shixue*), and sense of judgment (*shishi*). In other words, a proper intellectual monitoring of the expansion of raw data is urgently needed in this age of cloud computing in order to distinguish good academic work from mass-produced outcomes. Likewise, students of Chinese history also need the sophistication to pick reliable references from the fairly inclusive China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database (cnki.net), in which the China Academic Journal Network Publishing Database has collected published articles from more than 8,000 types of academic journals published in China. Equally noteworthy is the more traditional printed media. With a promising market backed up by a huge reading population, resourceful presses in mainland China are often willing to print 1,000 to 5,000 copies of academic works of various topics and subjects, in contrast to the decline of academic publishing in many other parts of the world.

### Not yet a conclusion: The “Second Revolution”<sup>4</sup>

There is no easy answer to Liang Qichao's question posed at the beginning of this chapter: Have Chinese historians become well versed in an interdisciplinary approach? Have they accomplished the writing of a holistic history? Has Chinese history been helpful in deriving general laws and models for understanding changes and transformation of human societies? One western social scientist's answer to these questions after 60 years was a hypothetical yes. In a short piece published in 1964, G. W. Skinner affirmed that the characteristics of China make it an extreme and exceptional case but one that could “not be omitted from comparative analysis directed toward the development of universal theory” (Skinner 1964b, 522). It is worth noting that as an anthropologist starting his research with field work on the contemporary society, Skinner gave deliberate emphasis to imperial China.

A Chinese historian's response to Liang Qichao's appeal after another 50 years is more complex, and, perhaps surprisingly, places more hope on the study of contemporary China. Wang Jiafan (b. 1938), a historian held in high regard on the mainland and elsewhere, gave a concise review of the development of twentieth-century Chinese historiography at the concluding session of a conference held in 2012, which discussed the opportunities and challenges posed by the expansion of new materials to Chinese history.<sup>5</sup> Himself a Ming-Qing historian, Wang gives deliberate emphasis to the study of modern and contemporary China. Seemingly casual, Wang's comments are in fact heart-touching statements addressing a whole new generation of Chinese historians. They are, therefore, worth quoting at length:

The changes undergone by our historical studies over the past thirty years ... can be summarized as an attempt “to escape from the writing of general history” (*zouchu tongshi*)—if I may put it in this way. We find the previous writing of general history unsatisfactory. I am one of those who muddled through in compiling general history. I know that business well.

Those kinds of general history are full of simple judgments of black and white, of abstraction, arbitrariness, ideological control, distortions, and even of faked or false facts. In the beginning we were young and did not know history well; we trusted everything. However, with more and more studies we began to question whether they are true or not, and to be dissatisfied with these kinds of general history. What I would like to assert now is that after thirty years of effort we should set for ourselves a goal. From now on we should come out [of our previous state]; we are like what Mr. Lu Xun says in his “What happens after Nora leaves home?”—We have left the old home of general history; we have wandered in society [i.e., engaging in social history]; and now we are still looking for a new home. After all we must have a home to go to. With all the efforts we have made we should go back to the goal of compiling a general history.

What I mean to say is that our goal of compiling a general history has undergone two revolutions. The first one was the “New historiography” movement initiated by Liang Qichao. It was aimed at reforming the classical tradition of general history established by Sima Qian. Apparently Liang’s slogans look very similar to ours, but ultimately he did not achieve his goal, namely, writing a people’s history that would replace the traditional history of emperors and kings, generals and ministers. We later changed his slogan into “history from below,” attempting to shift our attention from the upper levels to the grass roots of society. This revolution was in effect started in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with social history as its marker. We have undergone a very long preparatory stage to put this revolution into practice. This is because while advocating a “history from below,” the foremost concern [of scholars] is in fact the future of China. If there was any “social history” in those years [i.e., before the late 1970s], it was in fact in debates on the nature of Chinese society. Our socioeconomic history originated from these debates on the nature of Chinese society. It was not until some years later that a *bona fide* social history revolution commenced. Over the past thirty years [more and more Chinese historians] have gone to the field to be with the people and to experience their lives. From then on they have become more able to reflect upon the governance and control of the state from the people’s point of view.

While the preceding is a critical reflection by Wang Jiafan on previous scholarships as well as on his own life, what follows is his message to a new generation of Chinese historians of the twentieth-first century:

We are now witnessing and are also beginning a second revolution of historical studies. This “Second Revolution” is shifting its focus downward in a sense that its center of attention is moving from traditional and modern history to contemporary history. This revolution has just begun. ... Some innovative ideas are emerging, and they are still a hidden tendency; some studies are still underground. Slowly this undercurrent will become the mainstream, a hotspot, and an established discipline. We should trust that China is proceeding and developing. Why do I say something like this? I tell my post-graduate students that I do not want them to study the Ming and Qing periods, and some of them do work on the modern period. I think there should be more and more young people studying contemporary China. If they do not equip themselves for this field within the coming decade, they will not be able to catch up with the trend in twenty years from now.

Like many other Chinese historians, Wang’s aspirations for Chinese historiography goes side by side with his aspirations for the future of his country. The possibility of rewriting the history of the People’s Republic of China means a lot more than mere academic achievement, as it points to the possibility of opening up a new future for China. This future is, hopefully, foreseeable from the wisdom of the past.

### Notes

- 1 See the data downloaded from China Academic Journal Network Publishing Database at <http://cnki.net>. Accessed June 1, 2016.
- 2 The Chinese term *lishi renlei xue* for translating the French *anthropologie historique* appears probably for the first time in a short article Jin Chongyuan (1985), who later published a more elaborate piece in 1986. Jin highlighted the studies of *anthropologie historique* and *histoire des mentalités* among the French historians. In 1989, a more comprehensive picture of the state of French historiography was introduced in mainland China with the publication of *New Historiography (Xin shixue)* in 1989, a collection of Chinese articles selected from *Faire De L' Histoire* (co-edited by Jacques le Goff and Pierre Nora, 1st ed., 1974) and *Nouvelle Histoire* (co-edited by Jacques le Goff and Roger Chartier, 1st ed., 1978), in which a chapter titled “Historical Anthropology” by André Burguière is included. In the same year, another very influential translated work coming out in China was *New Directions in European Historiography (Ouzhou shixue xin fangxiang)* (by Georg G. Iggers, 1st ed., 1975, trans. Zhao Shiling and Zhao Shiyu).
- 3 In 1993 Le Goff came to China and joined a seminar-cum-tour conference jointly organized by L'Institut TRANSCULTURA and Sun Yat-sen University. On that occasion he had conversations with history faculties, sharing with them his prospect for the future of history. Pointing to the dilemma faced by western anthropology in the postcolonial era, Le Goff says, “ethnology is now turning into anthropology, i.e., the science about humans, and not the science about races. This research approach is very essential, as with this approach we will be more capable of understanding the history of people’s daily lives—the history of all human beings, not merely the history of the upper class. However, anthropology evolves from the schools of functionalism and structuralism, both of which pay little attention to times and history. In view of that, for those historians who want to be anthropologists, they should establish a discipline, namely, historical anthropology.” The conversation was recorded, transcribed, translated, and published in Chinese six years later. See Liu Wenli 1999.
- 4 In modern Chinese history, the “Second Revolution” refers to the military campaign launched by the southern provinces in July 1913 in an attempt to depose Yuan Shikai, who was blamed for selling the country to foreigners and thus being a traitor to the newly established Republic. Since this episode a “Second Revolution” has always meant a second attempt to fulfill a formerly unaccomplished mission.
- 5 Entitled “New Source Materials and New Historiography: Opportunities and Challenges” (*Xin shiliao yu xin shixue: jiyu yu tiaozhan*), the conference was held at Zhejiang University August 25–26, 2012.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

Note: This Further Reading list consists only items in English. But students of Chinese history should realize that among the many works produced by mainland Chinese scholars the best are written in Chinese. To fully appreciate the documentation and the argumentation of high-quality scholarly works students should equip themselves with adequate Chinese proficiency. Meanwhile, Chinese academia has taken some initiatives to translate selected Chinese journal articles into English. Early attempts are made through *Social Sciences in China* (since 1980), an English edition of *Zhongguo shehui kexue* published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. In recent years, two English journals on Chinese history have jointly been launched by Chinese institutes and foreign presses. They are, namely, the *Frontiers of History in China* (China Higher Education Press and Brill, since 2006), and the *Journal of Modern Chinese History* (Institute of Modern History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Routledge, since 2007).

- Dirlik, Arif. 1978. *Revolution and History: The Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919–1937*. Berkeley: University of California Press. A contextualized and historicized treatment of Marxist historiography in China, examining the intellectual currents in the 1920s and 1930s.
- Liu Wennan, Arif Dirlik, Luo Zhitian, Timothy Cheek, Peter Zarrow, Yang Kuisong, and Huang Daoxuan. 2013. (Articles resulting from the forum titled “Reflections on Chinese Revolutionary History and Its Contemporary Legacy.”) *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, 7.2: 240–65. doi: 10.1080/17535654.2013.854947, 850860, 850863, 850865, 850866, 850868, 850869. An up-to-date example of dialogues between mainland Chinese, Taiwan, and overseas scholars on the current state of Chinese revolutionary history.
- Rawski, Evelyn. 1991. “Research Themes in Ming-Qing Socioeconomic History—The State of the Field.” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 50.1: 84–111. A critical review of the state of Ming-Qing socioeconomic history studies in the Chinese-, English-, and Japanese-speaking worlds in the 1980s and 1990s.
- Sang Bing. 2009. “The Boundary of Source Materials for Recent Chinese History and the Integrity of Historiography: With Reference to the Compilation and Publication of Relevant Historical Materials.” *Frontiers of History in China*, 4.4: 510–36. doi:10.1007/s11462-009-0021-z. Expresses the concern and responses of experts on modern Chinese history in view of the boom of source materials.
- Xie Wei. 2010. “Thirty Years of Modern Chinese History Studies: Past Experiences and Prospective Trends.” *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, 4.1: 91–104. DOI: 10.1080/17535651003779475. A state-of-the-field account of post-1980s modern Chinese history studies.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# Chinese History in Japan: The State of the Field

SHIBA YOSHINOBU

### Written and unwritten laws

A group of legal historians in the Meiji and Taisho periods (1868–1912, 1912–26) took the initiative to pursue modern academic research on the legal history of Japan and China (Rinji Taiwan Kyūkan Chousakai 1903–11; 1909–11). As is well known the Japanese legal system had evolved from an early stage of borrowing from Tang China to the next stage of a native legal system enforced by the samurai class of the Kamakura, Muromachi, and Tokugawa periods, with elements of the Ming and Qing dynasty statutes and codes adopted for administrative purposes. The task assumed by these legal historians was to reconstruct traditional Japanese and Chinese public and private laws, customs, and legal norms, then to interpret them in light of comparative principles, concepts, connotations, and terminology of ancient Roman and European law codes, and finally to place their findings within a comprehensive framework for all legal systems known as the “pandecten” (in German, *Pandekten*).

Miyazaki Michisaburō (hereafter Miyazaki M., 1855–1928) was the first chair of the department of legal history. Based at the Faculty of Law at the University of Tokyo, he came from a family which for generations had specialized in studying the institutions of the court aristocracy as well as those of the central government of the different shogunates. He himself studied Roman and German laws in Europe, and upon his return to Japan devoted his research to the interpretation of the traditional legal systems of China and Japan. Some of his writings on the private laws of obligation, transaction, loans and pawning in premodern China eventually became known outside of Japan, if only indirectly through their use by Yang Lien-sheng in his post-World War II books *Money and Credit in China* (1952) and *Studies in Chinese Institutional History* (1961). Miyazaki’s successor at the University of Tokyo, Nakada Kaoru (1877–1967), also studied German and French law abroad, and became famous for his overall reconstruction of the Japanese legal system from the Heian to the Tokugawa period. Thanks largely to his and Miyazaki M.’s

efforts the main body of primary sources for the reconstruction of Japanese and Chinese legal history became known to scholars. Nakada's planned inquiries into the Tang Statutes and Codes and his analysis of family law in the Tang and Song periods were left incomplete. But he had mentored two excellent successors, so that the first of these topics was accomplished by Niida Noboru (1903–66) and the second far more extensively by Shiga Shūzō (1921–2008).

In 1929 the Institute for Oriental Culture with its two branches at Tokyo and Kyoto was inaugurated, to provide a multidisciplinary forum for humanistic, social and natural scientific research on East Asian history and culture. Niida was appointed assistant at the Tokyo branch under the continued guidance of his mentor Nakada.

Niida's first published book at the Institute was his landmark 1933 study *A Reconstruction of the Tang Statutes, Through a Gleaning of the Surviving Archival Records*. Four years later, while still just 33 years old, he followed this accomplishment with his second book, *The Sources of Legal History in the Tang and Song Periods* (1937). The accolades that greeted both of these works, for their theoretical clarity and for their exhaustive investigation of difficult sources and issues, quickly elevated these volumes into monuments of scholarship indicative of the high standards expected of Japanese Sinology by the 1930s. But from around 1940 his principal research concern shifted from written law to customary law. In that year he was invited to join the Institute for Research on East Asia as a member of the Special Committee directed by Suehiro Izutarō (1888–1951), the Professor of Labor Law at the Faculty of Law in the University of Tokyo.

Japanese scholarly interest in Chinese customary law can be traced back to at least 1900. Four important surveys on customary law were conducted in Taiwan from 1901 to 1911, on the southern Manchuria land system in southern Manchuria from 1907 to 1911, and on landownership, rural financing, agrarian institutions and taxation, rural autonomy, and rural life from 1940 to 1943 in North China.

After World War II the Japanese study of Chinese legal history is best represented by the remarkable achievements of Shiga Shūzō. As the chair of the department of Legal History of East Asia (1960–82) at the Faculty of Law in the University of Tokyo, he first gained attention with his 1950 study *Family Law in China*. This volume largely substantiated Nakada's findings on common family property during the Tang and Song periods, and as such Niida Noboru criticized Shiga Shūzō's 1950 study *Family Law in China* for neglecting the findings of the modern investigation teams in North China and underestimating the coercive power of the family head over other family members. In his 1952 book *The Principles of Chinese Family Law*, Shiga reexamined Chinese family law with a masterly command of the relevant primary sources. More importantly, he scrutinized the legal usage of major concepts and terms related to family law in both China and the west, and by pointing out their similarities and differences he was able to base his argument on a clear set of analytical concepts.

This book is Shiga's answer to the criticisms raised earlier by Niida. It is thus concerned with how we can define the concept of the "family" in Chinese legal terms and how we can persuasively document that concept in the extant primary sources. To answer the first question, Shiga adopts several approaches. He begins by defining the term *jiazu*, taking care to show how it can denote the "family" in both a narrow and broader sense. We know that *zong*, or *zongzu*, are Chinese terms for "family" in the broadest and most inclusive sense. The ancient Roman term *familia* (family) as opposed to *agnatio* (lineage, blood) suggests a way to resolve this issue. Namely, in the cases of the Roman *familia*

and *agnatio* as well as the Chinese *jiazu* and *zongzu*, each group of kinsmen, regardless of its size, shares responsibility for the upkeep, obligations, management, and inheritance of common family property. Hence, the family in China should be understood in a private legal sense as consisting of those family members bound together by a common ownership of family property.

Shiga's second point concerns the extent to which the Chinese family was subject to public government law. It is true that in dynastic statutes and codes the Chinese family appears as the party liable for registration, taxation, and duties of security maintenance imposed by the state. Hence, some scholars like Niida have argued that the coercive power of the household head derived from his position of responsibility to the government in these matters. But it is also true that throughout imperial times from the Qin through the Qing, official interference in family affairs was usually minimal. This empirical evidence implies that, more often than not, family affairs were essentially matters of private law.

Shiga's next point concerns how we can substantiate these conceptual claims and what kinds of sources can be used. Here he starts with an analysis of the structure and procedure of judicial judgments (*pan*) from the Song through the Qing dynasty. Generally, charges were brought to lower courts, where the county magistrate or prefect passed judgment on minor categories of offenses. If they found a case hard to solve or involving an offense that merited a serious category of punishment, they sent it up to a higher court at the provincial seat or even the capital. At any rate, both magistrates and prefects were expected by the state to judge minor types of civil and criminal offenses and hopefully bring about a reconciliation. Conflicts within the family group were one of the most common types of cases that lower courts had to deal with. Their routinely passed judgments are in fact the most instructive primary documents we have on legal reasoning and enforcement at the local level. From time to time collections of famous judgments were compiled and published to serve as a guide for other judgments, most notably the late Southern Song collection (1262 ed.) known as *Minggong shupan qingming ji*. Cited often by Nakada and Niida, its text was available in full only from the late 1970s, when a complete version of the 1569 edition was discovered in Shanghai.

Shiga then extended his research into the judicial system and procedures of the Ming and Qing, examining very carefully not only the texts of the Song and Ming editions of the *Minggong shupan qingming ji* but also those of other judgment collections from the Ming and Qing. In a chapter of his last book *The Law and Judgments in the Qing Period* (1984), Shiga clarified the relation between three key grounds of legal reasoning, that is, *fa*, *li*, and *qing*. For Shiga, *fa* literally means written law of all sorts, whereas both *li* and *qing* imply the "consciousness of a norm." *Li* may broadly equate with "natural law," while *qing* connotes "human feelings," that is, the special mitigating, extenuating, or intensifying circumstances of a particular case. In sentencing, these three grounds could be used independently or jointly.

Shiga's interpretation of these three key grounds for reaching a judgment suggests that in traditional China the unwritten law functioned as a supplement to the written law. Today, from their exploration of local legal documents, an increasing number of Chinese history specialists in Japan are finding fresh insights for their study of the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing. If they continue to enjoy access to legal archives in China, they will provide us with a much clearer picture of not just past legal practices but also traditional Chinese society as well.

## Social and economic history

When Japanese historians started their research into the history of Chinese society and economy during the Meiji and Taisho periods, their central concern was to explain changes in premodern Chinese society. This viewpoint has persisted as the main focus of Japanese study of Chinese history. Naitō Torajirō (pen name Konan, 1866–1934) was born into a family that had for generations specialized in the study of the Chinese classics and literature. He thus was naturally familiar with Chinese society, its cultural style, and its worldview. After a highly successful career as a journalist covering China, he assumed the professorship in Oriental History upon its establishment at the University of Kyoto in 1906.

When the Republican Revolution took place in 1911, he felt an urgent need to explain this change in light of the long-term persistence of rule by civil bureaucracy in China. After thoughtful consideration he reached the conclusion that a Tang–Song transition, beginning in the mid-eighth century and fulfilled by the late eleventh century, constituted the key watershed in the civil bureaucracy's two-millennia-long rule of imperial China. He identified the *coup d'état* led by the provincial military governor An Lushan in 755 as the breaking point in this transition. According to Naitō, this uprising was the final blow to rule by an aristocracy, whose power had weakened central government rule from the third through the late sixth centuries and whose power was still evident even after the Tang had reinstated centralized rule over the empire. For Naitō the An Lushan Rebellion also signified a shift in China's social structure from an immobile, fixed, and stagnant order under an aristocracy to a more mobile, dynamic, and diversified order under the new social elites of the literati and gentry. Naitō referred to this marked social change as the shift from the "medieval" to the "early modern" phase of Chinese society.

The question of a "changing China" was tackled also by Kuwabara Jitsuzō (1870–1931), but from a geographic perspective. In 1909, Kuwabara was appointed Professor of Oriental Studies at Kyoto University. Kuwabara became famous for his works on three themes, on east–west contact in the thirteenth century, on Chinese systems of family and law, and especially on the long-term southward shifts in China's economic center. These works are distinguished by a remarkable range of documentation and by the detail of their investigation. Also, compared with Naitō, Kuwabara's scholarly interests remained apolitical. He was concerned not so much with the periodization of Chinese history as with geographic and anthropological topics. His lengthy article "North and South in the Evolution of Chinese History" (1925) is a milestone in modern Japanese sinological research. This essay even today has much to teach us about the major changes in Chinese history. Kuwabara demonstrates that the essential driving forces of Chinese history and society were the continual shift of their ecological and economic centers of gravity from ancient to modern times and from the north to the south. He came to conclude that secular trends such as demographic patterns, the process of human colonization, changes in resource utilization, urbanization, and the transport system, all point to long-term changes in the ecological and economic centers of China. In other words, from its beginning Chinese society had been characterized by a geographic division of labor, and thereafter by a growing differentiation, complexity, and diversity of culture and production.

Roughly contemporaneous with Kuwabara was the Tokyo specialist in Chinese economic history Katō Shigeshi. Katō had assisted Kanō Naoki in composing the draft report for the *Qing Administrative Law* project (1903–15) under the chief editorship of Oda Yorozu. His written contributions to this project were the sections concerned with

“revenue economy” (such as the land system, currency, and traditional industries) and certain sections on central and local administration. These topics became the foci of Katō’s later research. Katō never studied in Europe, but he acquired important information on current trends in European economic history through a close friendship with a fellow professor at Keio University (where Katō taught from 1917 to 1925), Fukuda Tokuzō (1874–1930), a pioneer in the economic history of Japan. Both he and Fukuda were attracted to the writings of the German and British Historical School of economics (by scholars such as Gustav Schmoller, Karl Bücher, and William Ashley). Moreover, he felt that as Japanese study of the premodern Chinese economy was still rudimentary, it was necessary to establish an empirical base for future generalization through a firm command of the primary sources.

In 1925 Katō was appointed professor at Tokyo University, and from around this time he published a series of major works on Chinese economic history. His first publication dealt with China’s land system from the Han through the Tang. Katō’s next research topic was Chinese currency. Beginning with the publication of his monumental work *A Study of Precious Metals in the Tang and Song Periods* (1926) he devoted himself to path-breaking research on the minting and circulation of various types of currency in large and small denominations, especially silver ingots, promissory notes, paper notes, and silver coinage in the Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing periods. His third research topic was commerce, trade, and the process of urbanization in the formation of rank-sized hierarchies from the Tang through the Qing periods. Of particular importance were his pioneering works on the nature of commercial tax from the mid-Tang onward, and on the emergence of Chinese urban guilds or associations of tradesmen and artisans, known as *hang* during the Tang and Song and as *huiguan* or *gongsuo* during the Ming and Qing. His fourth topic was demography, in a series of quantitative studies on population statistics from the Tang and Song. A fifth concern of his was the history of production, leading to studies on the varieties of rice seeds, sugar-making, tea culture, salt production, and the state monopoly on tea and salt. As Katō was concerned more with the private sector than with public finance, he recommended to students who shared his preference that they attain a full mastery of sources like local gazetteers, genealogies, the collected writings of scholar officials, random notes, books on technology, and pharmacopeia (*bencao*).

Sudō Yoshiyuki and Fujii Hiroshi were two of Katō’s most accomplished students (Sudō 1956; Fujii 1953–54). Sudō inherited Katō’s interest in the land system, or the forms, management and land tenure of large landed estates in the Tang, Five Dynasties, and later the Song period. Indeed, his large corpus of detailed research brought a great deal of light to our understanding of the social structure of the Song. However, problems arose when he came to interpret these findings. Although he introduced many types of landlord–tenant relationships and knew of the complex regional or areal varieties of Song land tenure, he rather hastily concluded that restrictive and semi-servile tenancy was the general pattern of Song tenancy. In so assuming, he failed to consider several facts: first, the common use of hired labor in the peasant economy; second, an improvement in the position of tenants over the course of the Song; and third, the prevalence of small-sized independent farmer operation in the Song agrarian economy.

Fujii Hiroshi studied the salt monopoly, taxation, and activities of large merchant groups in the Ming and Qing. His work on the extensive activities of Huizhou merchants, emanating from villages on the southern edge of Anhui province, was particularly influential, because for the first time it probed the full range of long-distance transactions

by a powerful regional merchant group. These Huizhou merchants engaged in multiple business activities, ranging from salt monopoly trading, and pawnbrokering, to large-scale transactions in cotton textiles, timber, tea, porcelain, paper, and fertilizer. Organized along lineage lines, their commercial houses formed extensive trade and remittance networks that dominated rival groups of merchants in the Yangzi Valley.

Meanwhile, Miyazaki Ichisada (1901–95) in Kyoto was carving out a unique approach to research on China. While he is often said to have substantiated his teacher Naitō's views, his research and accomplishments in fact were far broader. Essentially, his research interests had two goals: to write a global history of Eurasia and to give a more balanced understanding of China's history by shedding light on less studied aspects of its social, political, and cultural development. While in describing economic growth in China he relied much upon Katō's achievements, their methods of researching Chinese history differed greatly. Miyazaki once compared his scholarly stance to that of a natural scientist. At first he would choose a topic and then devise a working hypothesis for the issue he wanted to research. After probing the sources for confirmation or rejection, he would proceed to frame a broader and yet more nuanced hypothesis.

In studying the history of the Chinese civil service, Miyazaki first examined how this bureaucracy sustained itself so successfully for so long. He came to focus on certain of its practices: the division of functions between military and civil officials, the system of promotion, the system of recruitment, and the system of censorship. In his first book, *China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examination of Imperial China*, 1976 (trans. Conrad Schirokauer), he presented a general history of civil service examinations from the Jin through the Qing periods. He showed that Song administration may have brought about stable centralized rule through reformation and expansion of the Tang examination system but that such success came at a cost. Instead of attaining the anticipated Confucian ideal of a government run by ranks of officials above the mass of obliging commoners, this meritocratic selection of official resulted in a government riven by deep division. In addition to the great majority of examination failures, there was an army of disenchanting *yamen* clerks and other local government employees who were now barred from entrance into official ranks and regular promotion.

The postwar revival of research on Chinese history was initiated by reflection upon the errors of military expansion and insular chauvinism that had shaped prewar historical works, regardless of their author's intention. In the late 1940s the debate that raged among China historians was over how to situate China's early modern age within world or even universal history. Lasting from the early 1950s to the early 1970s, this historiographical debate was often led by Marxists anxious to "periodize" Chinese history. Parallel controversies about Japanese history, especially whether to characterize the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) as "early modern" or "feudal," helped to fuel and prolong the concurrent debate about China.

In brief, the Marxists claimed that society progresses through a linear sequence of historical stages, by virtue of a class struggle between the ruling and the exploited classes for control of the means of production. The Marxists directed the focus of their criticism towards the notion of an early modern phase in Chinese history that had previously been proposed by Naitō Konan and Miyazaki Ichisada. Scholars who preferred to devote themselves to empirical research tended to withdraw from these disputes, while others, like Yabuuchi Kiyoshi, who edited three books on the overall history of technological advancement in China, positively supported Miyazaki's views of periodization (Yabuuchi 1963, 1967; Yabuuchi and Mitsukuni 1969). This controversy is often

referred to as a debate between the Tokyo and Kyoto schools of sinology, but this view is incorrect. The Tokyo School contained many non-Marxists, just as the Kyoto School contained some Marxists.

The strict Marxists in this debate identified Chinese society from the late Tang through the mid-Qing as “feudal.” At the outset, the Marxists, in the belief that tenancy with semi-servile status had dominated other systems of land tenure all over society from the Song through the mid-Ming, argued that the stage of “feudalism” or “medieval serfdom” existed during these periods in China. However, such tenancy was not universal. A Northern Song statistic suggests that over 60 percent of the total population were independent free peasants. Then, on the supposition that the state as the supreme landlord in the country extracted much of the populace’s surplus wealth through taxation, the Marxists turned to concentrate on finding “feudal” features in the functioning of the Twice-a-Year Tax system, which was first introduced in 780 and had endured till the end of the Ming. It required heavy corvée service to the *yamen* from the taxpayers. By the end of the Ming, service could be commuted to payment of silver; until then, regardless of whether taxpayers were landlords or free independent farmers, they were looked upon as the objects of the forced labor services levied by the state. This argument, which identified Chinese society from the Song through the Qing dynasty as “feudal,” along with its simplified dichotomy of state and peasantry, petered out inconclusively by the 1970s. In fact, younger scholars, increasingly dissatisfied with the diminishing returns from this periodization debate, began to express their doubts about the utility of this Marxist framework to the study of Chinese history.

In the following decades up to the close of the century Japanese historians of China have put forth a series of fresh interpretations, especially for the period from the late Ming through the Qing. Central to these researchers’ concerns has been the need to explain not a “stagnant China,” but its opposite. Population statistics suggest that the country’s population, having fallen in the early Ming to about three-quarters of its Northern Song peak, more than doubled by the end of the Ming. The social and political disorder in the Ming–Qing transition did not greatly disrupt this long-term expansion, and the total size of the Chinese population tripled between the late Ming and the late Qing.

The obvious question is how to account for this growth. Some researchers examined every sign of technological innovation that might have contributed to a rise in production. But they could find no firm evidence of such innovation, and indeed concluded that apart from several minor improvements post-Song China saw a general decline in the number and pace of technological innovations. We should not overestimate the significance of the Chinese adoption, often on hillsides, of the South American potato, sweet potato, maize, and peanut plants because these crops were used mainly for famine relief. Migration to southern Manchuria, Xinjiang, Yunnan, and Taiwan during the Qing may have given some relief from an oppressively high population density. The construction of large new polders in central and southern China, which had contributed greatly to the expansion of cultivated land and grain production there since the Tang, had by and large come to an end by the late Ming.

Ming and Qing researchers then sought to explain late imperial China’s economic growth from the demand-side, from an expanded geographic division of labor that intensified the trend towards the development of market networks and an enhanced role for merchant activities. Still using Marxist terminology, concepts, and assumptions, Adachi Keiji and Yamamoto Susumu both took the initiative in postulating revisionist interpretations in the 1980s and 1990s. They maintained that a national market for

commodity production had existed in the Song or even much earlier. What distinguishes the late Ming and Qing market structure from that of the Song, they argued, is a greater diversification and hence stratification of the national market into a tripartite hierarchy of national, provincial and local market levels. In the middle of the Qing a further change took place in which the provincial-level market tended to become more independent of the national market.

In order to substantiate his discussion, and in the wake of earlier studies by Fujii and Nishijima Sadao, Adachi (1978) conducted an in-depth study of cotton and cotton cloth production in the core area of the lower Yangzi Valley in the late Ming and early Qing. Adachi found that soybean cake was widely used as commercial fertilizer for cotton production by better-off peasants in the lower Yangzi. Soybean cake was imported by traders from south Manchuria in exchange for the delta's cotton cloth and sold on to consumers back in south Manchuria. By the early Qing the cotton and cotton textiles produced in the lower Yangzi had gained a reputation for high quality in the national textile market. As a result, a multiregional division of labor in this and other industries emerged, whereby a "developed" production area with its core in the lower Yangzi was linked to a "developing" area upstream along the Yangzi (Jiangxi, Hubei, and Hunan provinces), and other peripheral areas to the west, south and north of the "developed" and "developing" areas. In this core-hinterland-periphery patterning, the "developing" areas responded by exporting either their surplus rice to the "developed" lower Yangzi area or their own cotton textile products to neighboring peripheral zones.

The increased commercialization of the Chinese economy and society in the late Ming and the Qing became a mainstay topic of Japanese research in the 1980s and 1990s. But how was this commercial growth enabled by the currency in circulation? The question is hard to answer. We know well that from the mid-Ming through the early Qing China enjoyed a massive inflow of Japanese and New World silver. While the study of this influx of foreign silver as well as the domestic production and demand structure of silver had attracted the attention of Japanese historians even before the war, their research on the import of silver bullion in more recent generations has focused mainly on the response of China's domestic market to this external influence. Kishimoto Mio (1997) carried out rigorous research into the time series of price movements of rice, cotton, cotton cloth, silk yarn, land and labor from the early to mid-Qing. After tracing their wild fluctuations in the business cycle she concluded that frequent ups and downs of prices in the business cycle in the early Qing by and large coincided with fluctuations in the supply of foreign silver in the Chinese market. She assumed that the domestic markets, regional and local alike, were open and that they did not regulate or restrict the supply and demand of currency.

## Conclusion

In modern Japanese research on the history of the Chinese legal system, Japan's premodern experience—that is, its initial adoption of Tang statutory law, followed by a shift to a body of endogenous laws composed of the laws of the samurai class and the customary norms of manors—undoubtedly provided a guiding model of change to pioneering scholars like Nakada in their efforts to integrate an understanding of written and unwritten law. After Niida successfully outlined the system of Tang statutory law, his and others' scholarly interest moved down the hierarchy of the legal system to the provincial, prefectural, and even county levels. Scholars began to devote their attention to the

interaction of statutory and customary laws, especially during the Ming and Qing periods. Shiga Shūzō, the path-breaker for this type of research, reconstructed the institutional apparatus for legal procedures at the regional or local levels and simultaneously unearthed a great body of primary sources relevant to this kind of inquiry. As a result, Japanese study of Chinese legal history from the Song through the late Qing has recently shown considerable vigor and success.

In the field of Chinese social and economic history the major task for Japanese scholarship has been to provide an explanation for “a changing China.” In political history much research has continued to focus on the replacement of a ruling aristocracy by a combination of an autocratic throne and a civil bureaucracy during the Tang–Song transition. In economic history scholars have consistently concentrated on the issue of economic growth, that is, the growing importance of market forces in a market economy and commercial society, both of which emerged in the Tang–Song transition. When all these research findings are combined, the belief that Chinese imperial rule is divided into two periods, with the late Tang as the watershed years, remains the predominant understanding of Chinese social and economic development among Japanese historians today.

The postwar Marxist critique of the periodization scheme of the Naitō–Miyazaki hypothesis, especially its identification of the early modern phase in Chinese history with the Song through the Qing, ended inconclusively. Yet the debate bequeathed several lessons to younger scholars. First, scholarly concerns shifted from the Tang and Song to the Ming and Qing dynasties. Second, as seen in recent studies of legal history, scholarly interest has moved down the hierarchy of social and economic organization to the regional and local levels. Third, a penchant for raising and defending theoretical positions rather than undertaking empirical research has often predominated. Nonetheless, Katō Shigeshi’s assessment—“Our history of the Chinese economy remains at a rudimentary level, and we have a long way to go before we can claim clear and certain generalizations”—is still a valid warning for us today.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

- Elvin, Mark. *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*. 1973. London: Eyre Methuen, and Stanford: Stanford University Press. (Recommended for gaining a macroscale view over the trajectory of society and economy in China.)
- Glahn, Richard von. 1996. *Fountain of Fortune: Money and Monetary Policy in China, 1000–1700*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (Recommended as a basic reading for the history of currency in the Song through the early Qing.)
- McDermott, Joseph P. 2013. *The Making of a New Rural Order in South China. Vol. 1: Village, Land, and Lineage in Huizhou, 900–1600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Provides a ground-breaking, in-depth study of social history in the Song through the Ming.)
- Skinner, G. William, ed. 1977. *The City in Late Imperial China*. 1977. Stanford: Stanford University Press. (Recommended for deeper understanding of the urbanization process in late imperial China.)
- So, Billy K.L., ed. 2013. *The Economy of Lower Yangzi Delta in Late Imperial China: Connecting Money, Markets, and Institutions*. 2013. London: Routledge. (Offers a multidisciplinary approach to Lower Yangzi economy in late imperial China.)

## CHAPTER FIVE

# Chinese History in Europe: The State of the Field

HARRIET ZURNDORFER

It is now some 20 years since the Swedish scholar Hans Bielenstein, then Dean Lung Professor of Chinese Studies at Columbia University, asserted that the study of Chinese history in European universities left much to be desired in comparison to how the field fared in institutions in the United States (Bielenstein 1995). Referring to the numbers of European authors who had contributed to the then eight available volumes of the *The Cambridge History of China*, he found it “staggering” that there were five times more Americans writing for the series than Europeans (242–43). Bielenstein was not alone in his pessimism about the state of Chinese historical studies in Europe at that time. In 1995, Tang dynasty specialist Denis Twitchett also lamented the damage of decades of neglect to China studies in the university curricula of British universities, which resulted in inadequate and understaffed libraries, and deficient institutions to train PhD candidates (Twitchett 1995, 252). Twitchett, along with other well-known sinologists such as Wolfgang Franke in Hamburg and Herbert Franke in Munich belonged to the generation that had built Chinese historical studies in postwar Europe but then witnessed its demise during the 1970s because of two factors: political influence, which split traditional humanistic study from contemporary leftist dogma (Chesneaux 1996; Zurndorfer 2004, 207); and the launch of mass education in European institutions of higher education, which in effect cut short the length and depth of China study (Zurndorfer 2008). As a result, by the 1980s the core curriculum of required classical language training in many European university China study programs was reduced, while intense historical and literary study, which had once been integrated into Chinese language and linguistic tuition, was either downgraded or slashed altogether. It seemed clear at that point that Europe’s once enviable academic tradition of philological sinology with its focus on the close examination of classical Chinese texts was finished (Barrett 1989).

In retrospect, and with all due respect to the above-mentioned individuals, one may also view these developments in the last decades of the twentieth century as part of a transitional period when tertiary education in Europe became integrated according to

the European Union's 1997 Bologna agreement (Field 2003). This accord standardized degree requirements among member states' institutions of higher learning in all subjects with the result that educators at all levels from chancellors to teaching staff had to communicate with each other over scholastic priorities and the role of universities, which are in the main funded by Europe's taxpaying public. These discussions also led to greater awareness of what had been achieved in the study of the history of the non-western world in Europe until then, as well as how marginal this focus remained (Sachsenmaier 2011, 122–26).

Nevertheless, since the 1990s Chinese history studies in Europe have made tremendous strides, although not to the extent to which the field has developed in North America.<sup>1</sup> By the twentieth century's end, with China's importance as a global economic power becoming more evident, academic interest in the country also increased, and consequently the study of Chinese history attracted more intellectual attention in the European academy. The sinological tradition has not totally disappeared as there remains a strong cultural and philological strain to the focus of research. Publications by European scholars also demonstrate a certain appreciation of interdisciplinary study that has resulted in works combining expertise in several fields including art history, anthropology, and literary scholarship with Chinese history.

This chapter highlights the principal achievements since the 1990s in Europe in the study of Chinese history, chronologically from early China to the late twentieth century, and with an accent on key trends in research. Although Chinese historical study is certainly part of a global scholarly network encompassing North America, Australia, and East Asia, the analysis here is limited to those authors whose home teaching and research base is located in European institutions of higher learning. This discussion is also confined to those scholars working in the United Kingdom, as well as in France, Germany, and the Netherlands, where the majority of these persons tend to publish in English—a situation which has helped make them well known outside of Europe, and to gain access to international research projects and funding. Mention is also made, however, of some works written in German and French that have proved to be significant contributions to the study of Chinese history. In the second part, this chapter considers a number of problems with Chinese historical study in Europe and its prospects in the long term.

### **Highlights of published Chinese historical studies by European authors since 1995**

#### *Early China*

A small group of European scholars are involved in the investigation of ancient Chinese manuscripts originating in the archaeological finds of the last decades that have radically changed the premises for the study of the Warring States, Qin, and Han eras. In order to facilitate contact and exchange, they have met at a series of workshops commencing in 2000, and in 2004 established the European Association for the Study of Chinese Manuscripts (EASCM).<sup>2</sup> A number of the papers from the first three of these workshops appear in print, and reveal the intensity and diversity of the topics discussed by the participants, ranging from the archaeological background of tomb texts, to kinship regulations, to historiography, to mirror inscriptions.<sup>3</sup> Like their North American and East Asian colleagues who too have directed research on the Guodian manuscripts, they have made path-breaking discoveries on texts and text-based cultures in early China.

Among the most outstanding results of this ongoing research is the study by Galambos (2006) which exposes the complex interactions of separate writing traditions before and after the so-called Qin “unification” of the scripts. He questions the extent to which Qin script reform managed to impose new norms on the diversity of orthographic usage. Also relevant here is the work by Meyer (2011), who used a collection of bamboo slips from the Guodian finds. He has shown how these texts may be treated as objects in their own right, and demonstrated the relationships between the material conditions of text production, writing, and philosophy of the Warring States era, all of which tally toward a sea change in the material and intellectual culture of this period. Other experts examining these writings have indicated that the practice of dividing extant texts with the names of “schools” like Confucianism, Daoism, Legalism, and so on, needs to be revised.

### *Early imperial to mid-imperial China*

This revisionist stance with regard to Confucianism is the subject of Loewe (2011), which argues that the well-known Han dynasty scholar-official Dong Zhongshu (198–107 BCE) was not a Confucian, that he did not precipitate a Western Han founding of Confucianism as the state ideology, and that Confucianism was, in fact, not established during the Western Han (see also Loewe 2012). Similar revisionist treatment of Han-dynasty administration by Giele (2006) overturns conventional thinking about the role of the emperor. With a detailed assessment of the various editions of the administrative guide *Solitary Decisions* (*Duduan*), this volume contends that the emperor was hardly the sole judge and arbiter in many bureaucratic and legal matters of the Han era. Also utilizing recent archaeological discoveries (as well as printed texts), Sterckx (2011) examines the food culture of early imperial China, both in substance—the types of cuisines and beverages (including prices, banqueting customs)—and in terms of moral and social meanings. This is a highly innovative work which reveals the central importance of food to ideas about spirits, sages, and rulership, and explains much about how early Chinese authors used food-related metaphors to convey all sorts of philosophical and religious ideas.

Texts and textual culture are principal themes in European academics’ conceptualization of Chinese history, and with more evidence available as the age of mass reproduction developed during the post-Han era, they have considered the connections between printing and other factors. Barrett (2008) demonstrates the relationship between printing, religion, and imperial power strategies. He argues that by the Tang dynasty the shifting climate of popular and elite Buddhist and Daoist practices provided the impetus for printing, of which Empress Wu (r. 691–705) took advantage to disseminate a sutra favoring her spiritual eminence, thereby helping her to gain political support. Other China historians have utilized the textual evidence among the Dunhuang finds to elucidate economic and social conditions during the mid-Tang to Song transition period. Trombert (1995) examines some 124 loan contracts to peasants for food and to would-be travelers for cloth, dating circa the ninth and tenth centuries and originating in Buddhist establishments. His study reveals the harshness of peasant life and the dominance of clerical authority in the region. Trombert’s colleague Jean-Pierre Drège (2007) and other Paris-based scholars have made indefatigable efforts to stimulate research on Dunhuang remains in the study of libraries, books, and book transmission before the Song dynasty.

The Tang–Song transitional period has also been the subject of recent analyses. Standen (2007) argues that the tenth century was neither a sad ending of the longer

Tang dynasty nor a chaotic preliminary phase leading to the Song. She contends that the Khitan Liao (907–1125) was not just a “conquest state” but a political entity in its own right which played a significant role in shaping the tenth-century transformation of the post-Tang world. Her work raises questions about the role of ethnicity as well as political ideals in Chinese history both at this specific juncture in time but also in other eras. Another important study of the Khitan is Marsone (2011), which scrupulously traces the origins of this group and the significance of its leader Yelü Abaoji (872–926) to the creation of the Liao dynasty. Dudbridge (2013) goes beyond state documents to sketch the Five Dynasties era in the voice of Wang Renyu (880–956), a literatus witnessing events of this period. The result is a human account of political change and military upheaval which also takes into consideration the lives of women and the lower social orders.

### *Late Imperial China*

The study of the late imperial period, the millennium between the founding of the Song dynasty and the fall of the Qing, has not gained the same amount of attention in the European academy that it has elsewhere, but what has been published shows a variety of approaches and themes. The long-standing European tradition of relying on philological and literary tools remains evident. For example, Lamouroux (2003) provides a meticulous French translation of the “national accounts” (*kuaiji*) chapter in the Song dynastic history, which he sees as a “political drama” because the *Songshi*'s editors were more interested in portraying sincere (but also gullible) emperors, self-serving ministers, and resolute critics of imperial self-indulgence and ministerial incompetence than in conveying statistical data. France was the birthplace of the Song project initiated by the French-Hungarian scholar Étienne Balazs (1905–63), and thus Lamouroux carries on this long-term interest in Song dynasty documentation, including local history study (Will and Ang 2010). Song dynasty statecraft receives another penetrating investigation in De Weerd (2007), who confronts two major themes of that era: the shift of Neo-Confucianism from heterodoxy to orthodoxy, and the change from state activism to elite activism in education and politics. With her exploration of collections of model examination essays, De Weerd presents multiple and competing uses of the examinations in public and private schools, and establishes the links between political officials, private teachers, examination candidates, and commercial presses, arguing that the latter played a key role in promoting competing ideologies.

This interest in printing and book culture in the later imperial period is manifested in other works by European scholars. McDermott (2006) argues that despite the early origins of printing in China during the Tang dynasty, the shift from manuscript to printed editions was not complete in the Jiangnan region until the sixteenth century. Although he acknowledges that by the thirteenth century certain reading materials such as the Confucian classics were widely printed, he maintains that it was only in the late Ming dynasty with the increasing demand for civil service examination aids and the popularity of “stories” (*xiaoshuo*) among the general populace that commercial printing did expand. He also contends that even then and later, Chinese scholars had little interest in creating a broad, print-based community of knowledge. Concentrating on Huizhou, one of the principal late Ming printing centers, Bussotti (2001) explores the illustrated books produced in this region, which were of very high quality. Her investigation also includes an analysis of the Huang family of wood engravers and their illustrated editions. Kerlouégan (2011–12) examines an unusual set of Ming publications, the 240 editions of works

attributed to Ming princes, members of the imperial clan whose courts scattered throughout the realm became sites of cultural production and prestige.

Scholarly attention to print culture also extends to various book genres and their impact on the intellectual life of imperial China. Hilde De Weert's European Research Council (ERC)-funded project "Communication and Empire" aims to demonstrate the role of "notebooks" (*biji*) and letters among the elite in the formation, maintenance, and disintegration of the Song empire.<sup>4</sup> Another genre about which European scholars have written recently is the encyclopedia: both in collective (Bretelle-Establet and Chemla 2007; Wagner and Dolezelová-Velingerová 2013) as well as in individual studies (Kaderas 1998; Zurndorfer 2013).

Research on Chinese local history has also engaged European scholars. Moll-Murata (2001) examines the historiographic qualities of local "gazetteers" (*difangzhi*) from Song to late Qing for the locale of Hangzhou, and demonstrates how the function of gazetteers there changed from being handbooks for regional administration to instruments of self-representation initiated by local elites. Schottenhammer (2002) meticulously analyzes the economic boom of the coastal prefecture Quanzhou (Fujian) during the Song dynasty and the gradual involvement of the central government in local trade there. Here technological history, monetary policy, the particularities of the silk and ceramics industries are all discussed to elucidate the failure of the Song state to monitor its economic interests in the long term. Gerritsen (2007) analyzes how elite men from Ji'an (Jiangxi) related to their community from the late Southern Song to the end of the Ming dynasty. She shows how this group mediated between universal Confucian ideals and local institutions and practices. In his study of Huizhou (Anhui) from 900 to 1600 based on the rich and extensive private documents of this locale, McDermott (2013) investigates in great detail how local lineages developed and insured their economic success by creating credit associations within the organization of ancestral halls, thus laying the foundation for that area's preeminent regional merchants, who dominated Chinese commerce in the late Ming and Qing.

The Yuan dynasty is in many ways part of Eurasian history and recent studies have pursued Mongol-Yuan development in the context of its empire configuration. Michal Biran's ERC-funded project "Mobility, Empire and Cross-Cultural Contacts in Mongol Eurasia" combines a world history perspective with a close reading of primary sources in Chinese, Arabic, and Persian, and aims to explain why, how, when, and where people, ideas, and artifacts moved, and the effects of such movements in Eurasia.<sup>5</sup> Thus Yuan China is viewed in a framework of migration history, cross-cultural contact, and prosopographical analysis. Biran's research mission builds upon decades of scholarly attention to the Mongols and their empire (Jackson 2000).

The best-known European to visit China during the Yuan era was Marco Polo, but debate about whether he actually did sojourn there, prompted by Frances Wood's 1995 book, has led to further published research indicating there is little doubt that the Venetian lodged in Cathay. Haw (2006), exploiting contemporaneous Chinese sources and material evidence, compares Marco Polo's detailed description of Beijing's palaces and parks with recent unearthed archaeological finds and his own fine knowledge of Chinese flora and fauna, and concludes that the European visited China. Vogel (2013) scrutinizes the revenue and administrative geography of the Mongol Yuan empire with precision and vigor, leaving the reader with little doubt about the Venetian's presence in China.

Beginning with the Ming period, there are more publications featuring an interdisciplinary approach. Craig Clunas, with his six monographs (1996; 1997; 2004a; 2004b;

2007; 2013), all on Ming topics, has demonstrated the strength of reading Chinese history through art and anthropology. His 2004a book, first printed in 1991, focusing on tastemakers' manuals, resonated with anthropological concerns for ritual, social space, and material culture, and examined the relationship between manufactured things and the power-holding elite who valued these items. In other books, Clunas took this interest in consumption and material culture into added cultural domains in order to analyze the changing functions of gardens (1996), to draw the varying tropes of production and reception of pictorial images (1997), to provide a demystification of literati culture (2004b), and to map comprehensively Ming visual and material culture (2007). Clunas's most recent monograph (2013) focuses on the Ming princes as cultural innovators and traces their contributions to material production, in buildings, gardens, tombs, paintings, jewelry, bronzes, musical instruments, thus documenting the impact of this group on Ming history. In sum, Clunas's total oeuvre delineates how possessions and the desire for them were just as significant in China as elsewhere in the development of the modern world.

The intersection of Chinese history with other disciplines may also be viewed in the works of Santangelo (2003; 2010; Santangelo and Guida 2006; Santangelo and Yasushi 2011). These books explore the emotional history of China during the Ming-Qing era, partly through literature, and partly through linguistics, and display great erudition. For many years Santangelo has studied the terminology and vocabulary of sentiment in Chinese texts and has pursued a program to establish emotions as a new subfield of China study. This work goes beyond the study of the concept of "emotion" (*qing*) because Santangelo and his colleagues delve into the linguistic complexities of texts. Santangelo has outlined his methodology via his website,<sup>6</sup> and one may admire the extent to which he and his collaborators have investigated the complexities of Chinese literature in the interest of mapping emotions in Chinese history, but to date this endeavor has not earned the kind of feedback that Clunas has enjoyed. For example, there are very few reviews of Santangelo's publications and no debates have evolved in printed form about the project. Such disregard may in part be attributed to the novelty of the subject as a topic that may not appeal to historians.

Better integrated into the compass of Ming history in terms of international recognition expressed in reviews in a wide variety of learned journals have been studies in the history of science, technology, and medicine (Engelfriet 1998; Grant 2003; Volkmar 2006; Schäfer 2011), the military (Liew 1998; Filipiak 2008), maritime trade (Ptak 1998; 1999; 2003; Zurndorfer 2016), and travel (Ward 2001; McDowall 2009). A major work of Chinese women's history is Berg (2013), which expounds on women's roles as both consumers and producers of culture in the late Ming to early Qing era. This book concentrates on the literary accomplishments of both gentry women and courtesans. The latter social group is the focus of other recent studies investigating their changing status in the Ming (Zurndorfer 2011), and their contributions to learned culture in imperial China (Zurndorfer 2014).

The first half of the Qing period has not occupied Europe-based China historians as much as the second half of the dynasty beginning in the nineteenth century. But what has appeared demonstrates once again the preference for the use of philological and literary tools. Central to this endeavor has been the unflagging efforts of Giovanni Stary to promote Manchu studies through research in the literature, linguistics, and religion of the Manchus, and in the process to demonstrate their significance for Chinese historical study. Relevant here among the many works Stary has published are his analyses with

Pang (1998) on Manchu texts before the Qing conquest, and again with Pang (Pang and Stary 2010) linking the Ming with the Qing. His major contribution has been to establish that in many cases Qing historiography edited and rewrote early Manchu history.<sup>7</sup> Also important to Qing study is the work by Newby (2005), which traces Qing foreign policy in what is now Xinjiang from its expansionist phase during the Qianlong era (1736–95) to its retrenchment in the nineteenth century, and which is based on Chinese and Manchu archival records and secondary literature in Russian and other languages. Careful linguistic research of Qing judiciary practices by Bourgon (1999) has demonstrated the problems with using European and Japanese terminology to analyze Chinese legal procedure.

### *Modern China*

It is to their great credit that the majority of postwar European historians of modern Chinese history, that is, the period beginning in the nineteenth century, did not succumb to the “tradition-modernity paradigm” that had for decades dominated so much scholarship elsewhere. As Pierre-Étienne Will elucidated in his inaugural address for his chair in modern Chinese history at the Collège de France (1994), to understand Chinese developments in the late imperial period and thereafter, one needs to investigate the process of state building since the seventeenth century, which, he suggests, displays more similarities with trends in modern Europe than might perhaps seem evident. But, as he also advises, this research cannot be completed without the use of “traditional sinological skills” that are needed to uncover the specificities of Chinese written sources. Will’s total oeuvre, which encompasses a wide-ranging and precisely executed series of investigations of the administrative and juridical institutions of the late empire and Republican era, has focused on such topics as administrative manuals; judicial documentation (including penal codes); the lives of engineers, philanthropists, and militarists; autobiography and history. These studies are available from 1999 onward in PDF format, and since 2008 as televised videos.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the presence of British and other imperialist powers in China from the nineteenth century onward, and a vast amount of available archival materials, there have been relatively few publications focused on foreign relations and wars. Exceptional, then, is Lovell’s 2011 book on the Opium War, which is both a narrative of the clash based on extensive research into both English and Chinese primary sources, and a historiography of how contemporaries, both inside and outside of China, have over time treated this encounter to help justify nationalist aims. In terms of influence, Britain dominated other nations entangled in China. But as Bickers argues, such power was not a unitary, coherent phenomenon, and thus in his 1999 volume he shows the differences in involvement of British missionaries, officials, expatriates, and settlers in the region. His “culture of colonialism” approach is also evident in his 2003 book, which gives an illuminating account of the Shanghai Municipal Police as a mechanism of imperialism. Shanghai has dominated much of the research by Christian Henriot, beginning with his 1997 [2001] book on prostitution and sexuality there, and his 1999 historical atlas of the city. In recent years Henriot and Bickers have worked together to retrieve valuable pictorial materials from the colonial period for projects to visualize China’s history. Foreign influence in China also extended to print culture, and, as Mittler (2004) shows, *Shenbao*, a western-style newspaper, went native to please its audience, and in particular, the Chinese literati.

Revisionist studies of China's twentieth-century wars include Van de Ven's 2003 analysis of the Nationalists' resistance to the Japanese, which challenges the "Joseph Stilwell–Theodore White paradigm" that the Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) regime during the 1920s through 1940s failed because it was militarily incompetent, corrupt, and authoritarian. Mitter (2000) demolishes the myth of resistance in Manchuria from 1931, while the same author's (2013a) book builds a persuasive case that China fought hard against the overwhelming Japanese technical superiority during the 1937–45 War. This last publication is the first full account of China's struggle and analyzes the roles of Chiang, Mao Zedong, and the collaborator Wang Jingwei. Mitter's narrative argues that the Sino-Japanese War stimulated Chinese society to search for a new identity as a result of the fundamental destruction and disorder the conflict engendered.

This pursuit of identity is also an important theme in books by Harrison. Focusing on the public rituals and political symbols in the transformation of the Republican state and its citizens, Harrison (2000) has argued that a new sense of Chineseness emerged out of a political process collectively shaped by both elite creators and popular recipients, rather than as a top-down formation. In her 2005 study, Harrison dissects the diary of one individual, Liu Dapeng (1857–1942), an impoverished Shanxi province-based scholar, through which the reader learns the details of everyday life from food and clothing to fertilizer and mule carts, and can witness how this once prosperous center of banking and international commerce became a backwater. In her most recent study (2013) Harrison writes another micro-history, this time about a Catholic village and how it has confronted the outside world during the last two centuries. How slow changes for women's education emerged in the late Qing to early Republican era is the subject of Bailey's path-breaking 2007 study. Bailey views the movement for female schooling as a dialogue of "modernizing conservatism." This is one of the themes explored further in his 2012 analytical study on women in twentieth-century China.

### **Problems and prospects of Chinese historical studies in Europe**

Given the steady stream of publications in Chinese historical studies by Europe-based scholars during the last two decades, it would seem that the disquiet about the future of the field expressed by Bielenstein and Twitchett as well as Timothy Barrett two decades ago was unwarranted. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the continuing challenges that present-day China historians confront as they attempt to build on their achievements for a new generation of experts. Ongoing problems with Chinese history studies may be considered under four broad headings: organization, financing, library resources, and Eurocentrism.

In general, the organization of Chinese historical studies in Europe is disparate, without any central framework providing regular contact between senior researchers and junior academics—the exception being those involved in early China studies. The European Association of Chinese Studies (EACS) meets every two years and serves as a forum for younger scholars to present the results of their research to a wide audience. But history is only one part of a broader disciplinary spectrum of subfields around which the EACS conference panels are organized. Rarely do any of the authors discussed above attend these meetings, and if they do, it is to support the paper presentations of their graduate students. Moreover, despite the EU Bologna agreement, the study of Chinese history is very much at the mercy of national academic cultures which have different priorities and financial specifications. In France, for example, universities located outside

Paris (which must accept all high school graduate applicants) may offer Chinese language studies for undergraduates, but it is the elite institutions in Paris and Lyon with their rigorous entrance examinations and quotas that incorporate specialized courses and research training in their curriculum (Bastid-Bruguière 2008). Chinese studies in Germany, in contrast, are centered in university departments which are all-encompassing—“they have to cover everything China-related, from early history to business Chinese, and [there is] relentless public pressure on China specialists to study contemporary affairs” (Falkenhausen 2009, 35). At the same time chaired professors in German institutions have the autonomy to determine the intellectual agenda of their departments, which frequently results in an overpowering focus on literary topics (especially related to works dating from early China), as opposed to themes related to the late imperial or modern eras.

Funding for research may also be a problem. In the Netherlands, where Chinese history is taught only in the Chinese department of Leiden University, the bulk of the budget for masters' degrees and postgraduate education is determined by the number of undergraduates who register and graduate in China studies. While some private subsidy is invested in specialized topics for research and PhD training, to date only relatively rich countries in the EU can provide this option, which is usually offered as a “package deal” whereby PhD candidates and postdocs under the leadership of a professor pursue a particular episode or theme in Chinese history for a limited period of time. An example where such funding has benefited the wider intellectual community was the British Leverhulme Foundation–financed collaborative project headed by Rana Mitter that focused on the Sino-Japanese War and resulted in a series of publications (monographs and learned articles) by all the participants. Less successful was an academic undertaking, also generously underwritten by a private foundation and executed in the first decade of this century, which aimed to write the history of maritime China within the context of a Braudelian-scoped East Asia. The result, a hodgepodge series of poorly edited conference volumes and hastily prepared PhD dissertations, exemplifies the problems of poor academic leadership and planning. Because these publications are without any theoretical rigor and systematic analysis of oceanic encounters in a framework of Ming and Qing institutions, social bodies, political apparatuses, economic priorities, and internal conflicts, there is little to learn here about the significance of Chinese maritime history. In general, funding via the “package deal” negates the value of individual postgraduate applications and, instead, validates the research agenda of a particular professor or academic department.

Chinese libraries in Europe were once among the best in the world, but years of neglect since the 1980s have taken their toll. As Wilkinson writes, “With few exceptions, the holdings of Chinese books by European public and university libraries are not as large as the top half dozen collections in the United States” (Wilkinson 2012, 974). He adds that these European collections have not been able to keep up with the huge increase in academic books and journals published in China. This sad state of affairs may be traced to the lack of provision in university and other institutions' budgets, which are under the scrutiny of ministerial bureaucrats who are invariably unacquainted with the requirements of China scholarship. Although the European Association of Sinological Librarians provides a website with reports about specific resources,<sup>9</sup> one is better served in finding Chinese book information by using the main digital catalogues of Harvard or Princeton Universities.

Eurocentrism continues to pervade the academic study of history in many European countries. “In Germany, for example, only about five percent of historians are experts on

either transcontinental history or the history of regions outside of Europe” (Sachsenmaier 2009, 15). In all of Germany, where China study has become very popular, there is only one history department possessing a professorship in Chinese history (Sachsenmaier 2011, 123). While many European nations, including Germany and the Netherlands, have entertained the importance of teaching global history, the task of studying the historical development of locations in Asia, Africa, or the Middle East is usually relegated to specialized experts who are part of sinology or Islamic Studies departments where the accent is on language training. The implication of this situation is that Chinese history is not part of mainstream history, that is, that of Europe and North America. In France there has been a tendency to locate postgraduate study in China centers that are multi-disciplinary and focused on the contemporary (Bastid-Bruguière 2008, 124), a situation which reinforces the exceptionality of Chinese historical development. In addition to one professorship of sinology each at Oxford and Cambridge, both universities have separate chairs for the study of modern Chinese history administered by the Faculty of History. There are 10 other UK universities with history departments employing both tenured and non-tenured China historians to teach and conduct research.

To sum up, the study of Chinese history in European universities has to a certain degree improved since the end of the last century, but at the undergraduate level it tends to be a tidbit in a congested menu of language-focused education with not enough attention paid to the intellectual appeal of Chinese history study. One recipe to improve the situation is to follow the British formula whereby Chinese-language majors studying for a Bachelor of Arts degree may attend courses in history departments possessing China experts who are also able to train them and PhD candidates in the rigors of historical methodology as well as document retrieval and interpretation. But such a curriculum would cost more money than European universities are willing to spend, with the result that the study of Chinese history remains exposed to the whims of government bureaucrats and, in many instances, the indifference of those China scholars who supervise students and consider the teaching of history peripheral.

### Notes

- 1 See Jiang et. al. 2013 for an overview of what has been accomplished there.
- 2 Online at <http://www.zo.uni-heidelberg.de/eascm/index.html>. Accessed May 26, 2016.
- 3 These papers are published in *Monumenta Serica* 51 (2003); *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 59-1 (2005); *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 63-3 (2009).
- 4 Online at <http://chinese-empires.eu/about>. Accessed May 27, 2016.
- 5 Online at <http://mongol.huji.ac.il>. Accessed May 27, 2016.
- 6 Online at <http://users.libero.it/santangelo/database.htm>. Accessed June 4, 2016.
- 7 Stary’s many achievements are studied by Walravens 2013.
- 8 Online at <http://www.college-de-france.fr/site/pierre-etienne-will>. Accessed May 27, 2016. The lectures of Will’s predecessor Jacques Gernet are available in Gernet’s 2007 book.
- 9 Online at <http://www.easl.org/libra.html>. Accessed May 27, 2016.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

Barrett, Timothy. 2008. *The Woman Who Discovered Printing*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Beautifully written volume which is suitable for both the general reading public and scholars. Exemplifies how the traditional sinological approach to texts may be combined with historical study.

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- Kampen, Thomas. 2000. "China in Europe: A Brief Survey of European China Studies at the Beginning of the Twenty-first Century." *China Review International*, 7.2: 291–95. Broad discussion of the state of the field before the year 2000.
- Will, Pierre-Étienne. 1990. *Bureaucracy and Famine in Eighteenth-Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Translation of the author's 1980 volume in French. A fascinating and acute analysis of how the imperial state increasingly came to utilize the market economy to support disaster relief.
- Zurndorfer, Harriet. 2004. "Not Bound to China: Étienne Balazs, Fernand Braudel and the Politics of the Study of Chinese History in Post-War France." *Past and Present*, 185: 189–221. Unravels the complexities of Europe-based China studies during the 1950s and 1960s.

## CHAPTER SIX

# Chinese History in the Era of the China Dream

GEREMIE R. BARMÉ AND MICHAEL SZONYI

The coexistence of multiple historical narratives and the use of history as a tool for political legitimation are widespread and perhaps even universal phenomena. In today's China, however, they assume a particular salience because of the importance attached to particular historical narratives by the ruling party-state and the extraordinary effectiveness of propaganda and educational systems that promote this story in that country.

At least three distinct though interconnected historical narrative strands circulate in China in the early twenty-first century. The first is the dominant narrative, 'Official China'—official because it is both sanctioned by and in part funded and produced by the People's Republic of China (PRC) government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The second narrative, which we can label "Other China," consists of the multiple, often contending, stories told by academics, media writers, cultural producers and online commentators. These create an intellectually ebullient and diverse narrative, one characterized by publishing efflorescence, disputation and academic contention. The Other China coexists with or is at times also in the unsteady embrace of Official China. Somewhat embattled in recent times, this Other China has evolved over the past decades and has reconnected China and its narratives with global trends in thought and scholarship. Third, there is "Personal China." Like "Other China" this is not a single unified narrative but is made up of the countless individual narratives that Chinese people use to make sense of their own history in relation to larger forces.

"Official China," the main focus of this chapter, is a crucial part of what has emerged as the *leitmotif* of the Xi Jinping era (2012–), the "China Dream" (*Zhongguo meng*). The expression "China Dream" is not new, it was referred to as part of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics and a book by that title written by a PLA Colonel appeared in 2010. A *New York Times* column by Thomas Friedman entitled "China needs its own dream" may have had something to do with the term's popularization, though this is steadfastly denied within China.<sup>1</sup> Xi first used the slogan publicly when he came to power as Party General Secretary in November 2012; since then it has become omnipresent in the

media and especially state propaganda, the subject of popular songs, academic conferences and detailed explication in CCP ideological organs like *Qiushi* (*Seeking Truth*).

Xi elaborated on the content of the China Dream in a speech in March 2013 shortly after taking office as President. The China Dream means the creation of “a moderately prosperous society, a prosperous, democratic, civilized and harmonious modern socialist country.” Achieving the dream means “achieving national prosperity and revitalization of the happiness of the people, which deeply reflects the Chinese people’s dream today and is consistent with our glorious tradition ... The realization of the China Dream must rely on a Chinese way which is socialism with Chinese characteristics ... The China Dream is the dream of a people, and it is also the dream of each Chinese person.” In April 2014 *Qiushi* magazine amplified this definition and stressed the link between the nation and the individual: the China Dream is the “means for bringing together the state, the nation and individuals as an organic whole.” The China Dream can do this, the article said, because it “accentuates the intimate bond between the future and destiny of each and every person with that of the state and nation” (Davies 2014, 146).

The China Dream is thus a dream of national wealth and power. In the Official China narrative it can be achieved only by following the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics under the leadership of the party-state. It is a dream that is also supposed to be consistent with Chinese tradition, as determined by the CCP. Chinese people can realize their individual dreams only if they also accept the common goals of the national China Dream. Thus, unlike the American dream, which was an obvious source of inspiration, the China Dream is a collective dream rather than an individual one. This of course conveniently makes it possible for those in power to determine whose wishes are consistent with the China Dream and whose are not (for more on the China Dream, see Cheek’s chapter in this volume).

History is implicated in and is indeed central to the China Dream in at least three ways. First, history matters to the China Dream because Xi has said so. “Only by bearing history in mind,” he told leading cadres at the Central Party School in 2011, even before promoting the China Dream formula, “especially the history of the Chinese revolution carried out by the people under the leadership of our party, will we be able to understand the past profoundly, grasp the present in an all-round way, and create the future correctly” (Xi 2011).

Second, history matters to the China Dream because it has been constructed in opposition and repudiation to other historical dreams. As another article in *Qiushi* puts it, China has experimented with several dreams in the last two centuries, including “dreams of foreign matters/self-strengthening,” “constitutionalist dreams,” “scientific democracy dreams.” All of these dreams eventually turned into nightmares. Other dreams, of universal modernity and of Enlightenment, do not even bear mentioning in the official narratives and are therefore repudiated only implicitly. “Only Marxism-Leninism and socialism, like a beam of sunlight from history, illuminated China’s stage and illuminated the road by which Chinese people would advance” (*Qiushi* 2013). The China Dream is thus constructed in implicit contrast to the dream of revolution and liberation that dominated China in the decades after 1949. This is fundamentally important political work, as this version of history serves to justify the Chinese government’s turn away from revolutionary goals while maintaining the revolution’s monopoly on power. As we will show below, the repudiation of the dream of revolution and liberation is more artful than just this: it depends on redefining the earlier dream in such a way that it prefigures or lays the groundwork for the real China Dream.

Third, history matters to the China Dream because at its core this story is a historical narrative. That is, the dream is explicitly conceived in relation to and as the culmination of a long-term historical process, “the great revival of the Chinese people” (*Zhonghua minzu weidade fuxing*). The dream of a “strong China” (*qiangguo meng*) has animated Chinese thinkers and leaders for over a century, since the dark days of the failing Qing dynasty in the late nineteenth century (Zhao Suisheng 1997, 726; Schell and Delury 2013). Mao put the CCP at the center of the story in his 1940 essay “On New Democracy,” and the CCP has long claimed the leadership of China’s revival. In recent years, this idea of national revival seems to have been first mooted in 2001 by then Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin. His successor Hu Jintao picked up on this formulation and referred to “revival” (*fuxing*) more than 20 times in a single speech on the hundredth anniversary of the 1911 revolution. Usage of the term has since proliferated (Elliott 2011a).

The narrative of the China Dream interprets modern history as a two-part story of China’s century of humiliation at the hands of foreign imperialism and its subsequent rise and return to greatness. The second part focuses on revival: it tells how the sagacious leadership of the CCP has enabled China to recover from the effects of humiliation, and of how China continues to progress under Party leadership towards its current glorious goals.

The most prominent and immediate institutional expression of this narrative at the time of Xi Jinping’s rise to power in 2012 was the “Road to Revival” exhibition at the National History Museum on Tiananmen Square in Beijing. The exhibition received its most prominent visitors in November 2012 when Xi Jinping, newly appointed to the position of Party General Secretary, led the new Politburo Standing Committee on a tour to see it. It is no coincidence that it was during this visit that Xi gave what would become known as the “China Dream” speech, establishing the Dream as the core of his ideological agenda (“Xi Jinping” 2012).

The Road to Revival exhibition covers the history of China from the First Opium War (1839–42) to the present. It highlights, according to the plaque at the entrance “the explorations made by the Chinese people from all walks of life who, after being reduced to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society since the Opium War of 1840, rose in resistance against humiliation and misery, and tried in every way possible to rejuvenate the nation.” Its five sections detail imperialist subjugation, the 1911 revolution, the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the construction of the “new socialist China” in the Maoist era, and the period of reform and opening up beginning under Deng Xiaoping and continuing to the present (the 1978 plenum at which the reform agenda was endorsed is described as “epoch-making,” the first use of the term in the exhibition) (Denton 2014).

While the story of imperialist humiliation is a familiar one, the treatment of the Maoist era marks the key distinctive feature of the new official narrative. Echoing the Resolution on Party History of 1981 (see Cheek’s chapter in this volume), *Qiusi* also gestured obliquely to the ill-conceived and implemented policies of the Maoist period while insisting that they have bequeathed a positive legacy to contemporary China:

The road of socialism indeed was not all smooth sailing. After the establishment of New China, due to a lack of experience, we also took a not-so-small detour. For a while indiscriminately imitating the model of the Soviet Union, we experienced the “left” error in terms of the party’s guiding thinking, and even saw the tragedy of the “Cultural Revolution”

giving us an incredibly profound experience and lessons. However, despite the arduous and bumpy exploration, this winding process also provided valuable experience, theoretical preparation, and a material foundation for initiating socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new period. (*Qiusbi* 2013)

The reform era is thus made possible thanks only to the foundation established in the Maoist period, the policies of which are thereby transformed into historical necessities and fundamentally continuous with the reform era policies that replaced them.

A number of aspects of the official story are especially controversial or particularly at odds with academic and other histories. Here we single out just a few for further discussion.

The first is the positive assessment of elements of China's distant and recent past in the official story. In contrast to narratives that prevailed in the Maoist period, the new Official China Story implies a conciliation of history, an embrace of traditional Chinese culture and of the dynastic and Republican pasts. In what must be an unconscious mirroring of developments in the field of economic history (see the chapter by von Glahn), traditional value systems captured by the umbrella term "Confucianism" are now seen as positive, progressive, and useful to China's continued success. Filial piety is even being reconstructed as a possible solution to the challenges of a rapidly aging population at a time when public welfare services remain underdeveloped.

In the new official narrative, even the long-defeated archenemy Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang can be celebrated for their efforts in fighting the Japanese. It is not hard to see this aspect of the official story as intended both to encourage positive attitudes towards Taiwan and enhance national unity by pointing to a shared history of opposition to the nation's enemies. As Xi Jinping put it in a speech marking the anniversary of the formal outbreak of hostilities with Japan, that war "awakened the Chinese nation and enhanced its unity to [an] unprecedented height" (Xi Jinping 2014c).

A second theme is the relationship of modern China to the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). This issue took on a colorful new dimension in April 2015 with the publication of an attack on the historians of the so-called New Qing history (see the discussion in the chapters by Biran and Guy) that appeared on the website of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Targeting the argument of New Qing historians that the Qing was established by the Manchus after their invasion of China, and that subsequent Qing expansionism was thus imperialism rather than national unification, the author of the article accused these historians of being "pseudo-academics" driven by "imperialist arrogance" (no fewer than 88 exclamation marks drive the point home) (Li Zhiting 2015). It is not clear what has motivated this attack at this time. But its vitriol certainly does show the salience of history today as well as reflecting the fervor with which "historical nihilism" (*lishi xuwuzhuyi*), that is, any views that depart from Party orthodoxy, is denounced. To take only the most obvious implication of the debate, if the Qing was an empire created by imperial expansion, then the current territorial boundaries of China, largely inherited from the Qing, are not inherently Chinese but simply an imperialist legacy, and therefore potentially open to change. This challenges the assumption that the boundaries of China are "sacred" and historically inviolate. This challenge is relevant not only to regions like Xinjiang, Tibet, or Taiwan, but also to recent tensions in the South and East China Seas.

The issue of border tensions raises the theme of China's historical international relations. In 2007, Party leaders introduced the formulation of the community of shared destiny (*mingyun gongtongti*) to describe the relationship between the mainland and Taiwan. In 2013, that formulation was expanded to describe China's relations with its

neighbors. This approach, coupled with calls for the United States and China to develop a “new model of great power relations” that accommodates both parties so-called core interests, might simply be interpreted as a rhetorical justification for China’s assertion for regional hegemony, were it not that some of its proponents also argue that regional international relations should be based on Confucian-style principles such as amity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness rather than the principle of sovereign equality alone. It is thus also a call for a distinctively Sinocentric East Asian approach to international relations, one with links to the traditional model of tributary relations in which China supposedly exercises benevolent and mutually beneficial oversight over the region. In other words, this might be interpreted as a way to operationalize a modern version of the *Tianxia* (All under Heaven) tradition of international relations. This approach is also linked to scholarly efforts to generate a distinctively Chinese international relations theory (to the historically minded, it cannot but resonate with a previous effort to reorganize regional relations: the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere of militarist Japan). Zhao Tingyang, an establishment scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in particular has been promoting the “Tianxia system” both as a new model of the international system that is explicitly inclusive and implicitly puts China at its center, and as a way of recovering China’s own ability to think, reconstructing its world views, values and methodologies, and thinking about China’s future, Chinese concepts about the future and China’s role and responsibilities in the world (cited in Zhang 2009).

The official narrative is about both the past and the future. Many discussions about the China Dream situate the present day in relation to two historical periods. The shorter historical period is the “Former and Latter Thirty Years” (*qianhou sanshi nian*), that is, the Maoist era from 1949 to 1978 and the reform era from 1978 to 2008. We have already seen efforts by proponents of the official narrative to establish continuity between these two periods, celebrating the achievements of both and minimizing the challenges that the change in direction poses for political legitimacy. Xi Jinping has particularly laid down the law on this theme: no criticism of either the Mao period (the first 30 years) or of the reform period (the second 30 years) is to be tolerated. Both have contributed to his “China Story” (*Zhongguode gushi*) and the unfolding of the China Dream.

The longer-term period is the “Two Centuries” (*liangge yibai nian*). Less confusing in Chinese than it is in English, this formulation refers not to a period of 200 years but to two overlapping periods of 100 years each. The first century refers to the 100 years since the foundation of the CCP in 1921, the second to the 100 years since the establishment of the PRC in 1949. Both of these periods will soon come to an end. China’s goal for the first centenary (in 2021) should be “moderate prosperity” (*xiaokang*), another term with rich historical allusions, for the whole nation. By the second centenary in 2049, China should enjoy “democracy, harmony, strength and wealth”. In other words, the China Dream has a timetable, one dictated by history. By 2049, the national rejuvenation that became necessary due to imperialist pressure some two centuries ago is to be accomplished.

The official narrative has implications for what is to be remembered and what is to be forgotten. It involves the creation of new collective rituals, such as the recent effort to mark the 1937 Nanjing Massacre with a national Day of Collective Mourning (December 12). The term for the military conflict of which the massacre is part is itself the subject of discrimination in the official narrative, with the neutral but Western-inflected term “World War II” rejected in favor of the Sino-centric “War of Resistance to Japan” (*Kangri zhanzheng*). Other anniversaries, most obviously the anniversary of June 4, 1989, are necessarily ignored by the official narrative.

So far we have devoted our attention to the Official China story. What can be said of the other two narratives? The official China story is promoted by official institutions: the CCP's Publicity Department (the Chinese title of the department is unchanged, but its official English translation has recently been changed from the more familiar Propaganda Department) and state regulatory agencies such as the General Administration of Press and Publication and the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television. State control of mass media ensures that the three narratives are not discrete (Brady 2008). The Official China Story shapes the Other China Story; the stories that make up the Private China Story are reworked by scholars and journalists to produce the Other China Story, and narratives in the Official mode presented in mass media shape people's own understandings. There is no way to summarize or systematize the countless narratives that make up Other China and Personal China; though a taste of ordinary lives is given in the profiles given in *Chinese Characters* and the efforts of intellectuals high and low to make sense of these narratives are introduced in William Callahan's *Chinese Dreams* (Shah and Wasserstrom 2012; Callahan 2013). Here we only point out some interesting points of intersection between the stories.

Beginning with the "scar literature" (*shanghen wenxue*) of the late 1970s, narratives of personal suffering have been an implicit challenge to the official narrative. The Internet has meant a proliferation of such narratives, and created new possibilities for the sharing of these stories (Yang Guobin 2009). A powerful impression one gets from these stories is that they can simultaneously undermine, reinforce, or reduce to irrelevance the official narrative. Oral histories of the Great Leap Forward famine were an important source for Yang Jisheng's influential *Tombstone*, which sharply contradicts the Official China interpretation of the political movements of the 1950s and 1960s as mere twists and turns on the road to today's successful policies (Yang Jisheng 2012). Elderly rural women interviewed by Gail Hershatter sometimes invoke "the old society" to describe the bitterness of the past. But whereas in the official China narrative "the old society" refers to the period before Liberation in 1949, these women often used it to describe the Maoist period. Since the valence of the term "the old society" is utterly negative, this is an unobvious critique of the state and of its version of history (Hershatter 2011, 25).

The Personal China Story is not easily susceptible to shifting political winds. The same is not true of the Other China Story, which has come under attack as part of a larger movement of controlling ideas in contemporary China. A confidential but widely circulated document issued by the General Office of the CCP in 2013 provides guidance to Party cadres on the control and suppression of ideas. Entitled "Concerning the Situation in the Ideological Sphere," and known popularly as Document 9, these instructions identify seven dangerous "Western" values that need to be controlled. Teaching of these subjects is reportedly forbidden. Among the dangerous values is "historical nihilism." This is a catchphrase for criticism of the history of the Party. Challenging the Official China Story ("rejecting the accepted conclusions on historical events and figures") is explicitly identified as historical nihilism. Even questioning the current ambiguous judgment on Mao Zedong ("denying the scientific and guiding value of Mao Zedong thought") is to fall into the nihilist trap. The document is remarkably honest about why historical nihilism is so dangerous. Since it rejects the official narrative, it "undermines the CCP's historical purpose, which is tantamount to denying the legitimacy of the CCP's long-term political dominance" (Chinofile 2013). One could not ask for a clearer statement of why history matters to the CCP today.

The Official China narrative of China's past is expressed in speeches and other texts, as we would expect. It is also expressed in ritual. In September 2015, a grand collective and invented ritual was performed in Beijing. The Celebration of the 70th Anniversary of the Chinese People's War of Resistance to Japan and the Global Anti-Fascist War saw some twelve thousand troops led by 56 generals parade for inspection by Xi Jinping and a television audience across China and around the world. It was a state ritual that testified to the power of history in contemporary China. The celebration of a struggle that ended before most of the participants were born was clearly intended to convey a message not just about the past but also about the present and future. The display of military prowess and the latest technology sent a message that China has decisively moved past a century of humiliation and is reclaiming its traditional greatness. Under the wise leadership of the CCP, which defeated China's enemies and oversaw this rejuvenation, China is well along on the road to realizing its dream. With all of its other underpinnings of legitimacy under stress from the many changes to China in recent decades, it is no wonder that broadcasting such messages has become a matter of great concern to the PRC leadership today.

### *Note*

- 1 See the debate about this hypothesis at <http://www.economist.com/blogs/analects/2013/05/chinese-dream-0>. Accessed May 31, 2016.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

- Many of the themes in this chapter are developed further in essays on the The China Story Project website (see Barmé, Jaivin, and Goldkorn 2014).
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## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Chinese History in World History

GREGORY BLUE

Despite thoroughgoing scholarly critiques (e.g., Finlay 2004), the brisk sales of Gavin Menzies' best-seller (2002) claiming that the Ming-dynasty admiral Zheng He discovered a transatlantic sea route to the Caribbean before Columbus seem to resonate with certain popular feelings that it is time for China to be given its due on the world stage. Yet what constitutes "due recognition" of nonwestern histories? Addressing this question is a challenge academic historians have recognized at least since Fernand Braudel wrote of the need to overcome the "historiographical inequality" entailed by the world's wealthy countries devoting far more attention and resources to writing their own histories than to examining those of other parts of the world (Braudel 1981, II, 134). To be sure, few modern historians of China have ever escaped considering the relation of Chinese to European historical experience. Since the 1970s, however, the recognized urgency of rethinking Chinese history and its significance in humanity's global past has increased among world historians as well. Many have allotted Chinese history new places of prominence in their writings and teaching. In the process, some have made world history a vehicle for bringing scholarship and issues related to China (and other parts of the nonwestern world) to the attention of the broader historical discipline and the general public. In particular, practitioners of "the new world history" have collectively provided a stimulating environment that has encouraged innovative lines of investigation regarding China's history.

It was not always thus. Consider, for example, *The Historians' History of the World*, the grand collaborative series organized by Encyclopaedia Britannica and published in 1904, at a peak of the colonial era, which involved the collaboration of some of the biggest stars in the period's historical firmament. Out of a total of 534 chapters, the series included a total of 5 devoted to East Asia—2 on China and 3 on Japan. (India did better, with 11, while Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the pre-Columbian Americas got none.) All five East Asian chapters were tucked away at the end of the final volume, which already covered Poland, the modern Balkans, the Ottoman Empire, medieval and

modern Persia, and Central Asia. In contrast to nearly two hundred pages devoted to Switzerland and over three hundred on Scotland (Williams 1904–5, XIV, 519–662; XV, 1–47; XXI, 1–327), the two chapters devoted to China amounted to a total of 56 pages. The first, titled “The Psychology of Chinese Civilisation” (Williams 1904–5, XXIV, 523–41), was a belittling character sketch of an allegedly historically immobile race, while the second, “The History of China,” skimmed the Chinese past lightly, treating the earliest origins to the fall of the Ming dynasty in three pages and the Qing down to 1820 in one and a half, before smugly turning to the first Opium War, the Taiping, the Triads, and various bracing aspects of Sino-western relations, culminating in a full seven pages on the “heroic” suppression of the Boxer Rebellion (Williams 1904–5, XXIV, 542–78). The approach, including the racial lens and the self-justificatory air, was typical of the times. One passage may suffice to sample the flavor: Marked by an astonishing “uniformity” pervading their “anatomical structure,” “customs and institutions,” industries and agriculture, even their climate, the Chinese were in principle to be “placed at the beginning of history, because they have from the earliest times hung like a dried branch on the tree of civilisation, not exerting the slightest influence upon the growth of culture among the rest of mankind” (Williams 1904–5, XXIV, 524). Fortunately, virtually no one writes like that anymore. The last century has deeply altered not only Chinese socio-political life but also understandings of the country’s past and its significance for world history. No one in the least acquainted with developments in the humanities and social sciences since World War I will find this surprising. Yet keeping in mind the earlier clichés, however offensive, helps one gauge both the intellectual distance traveled and some of the risks attached to western traditions of world-history writing as a genre.

### What *is* world history?

“I do not think that the history of China [with the exception of a few episodes] will ever be considered as forming an essential part of the general history of humanity,” wrote the German sinologist Carl Arendt in 1886. This blunt exclusion of some 20–25 percent of the globe’s population from “the general history of humanity” implied a very particular conception of what constitutes “world history.” Arendt’s explicit reason for excluding China was the “undeniable monotony” of its history (Arendt 1886, 142). His reasoning was overdetermined, however, by other notions widespread at the time—beliefs that China as a totally *sui generis* civilization had always “isolated” itself from other societies and never influenced other cultures. Likely also in Arendt’s mind was the Hegelian and Rankean commonplace that China had never achieved the spiritual maturation required for nationhood and hence for genuine participation in history, an idea built into the bones of the nineteenth-century academic division of labor (Wolf 1982, ch. 1) between History (limited to the west’s “progressive” nations [Ranke 1881, I, viii]), Anthropology (for “peoples without history”), and Oriental Studies (for peoples precocious in antiquity but long “stagnant”).

Since the 1990s warnings have sounded, in various quarters, of the possibility of world history serving as a cultural discourse justifying capitalist globalization. Given the myriad ways in which it has been interpreted, the concern is not unreasonable. Yet “world history” as a way of approaching the past no more began with neoliberal globalization than Deng Xiaoping’s post-Mao reforms marked China’s “entry into the human community.” As a form of written literature, world history has varied greatly in substance and style over many centuries. Conventionally traced back to Herodotus in the west and

to Sima Qian in East Asia, it took on distinctive formulations under the guise of “universal history” in diverse medieval and early modern cultures (Woolf 2011, 36, 41–42, 127–29, 193–95, 336–37), and then again in nineteenth-century Europe. The father of modern historiography, Leopold von Ranke, a champion of history-writing centered on the nation-state, wound up his career composing his own world history (Ranke 1881–88), an account justified by his perception that “nations do not draw their impulses for growth from themselves alone,” but which he confined to interactions among European polities (Ranke 1884, xi). Even though studies centered on western nation-states dominated academic history-writing in the decades before 1914, world histories were never lacking during that heyday of unabashedly chauvinistic historiography, nor between the world wars when nationalist sentiments again ran hot. Yet the horrors and upheavals of World War I did give impetus to striking new interpretations of world history, including the organicist masterworks of Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee as well as “orthodox” Soviet Marxism, which before long came to strongly influence Chinese understandings of the Chinese and global past. In the 1950s, negative methodological and ideological reactions to Toynbee and Spengler as well as to “orthodox Marxism” made the following decade something of a low-tide mark for world history among professional historians in the west, at a moment when increased research specialization fed disparagement of the university survey course to which world history was then typically consigned. However, countervailing intellectual and political shifts grew in the 1970s, as a new multipolar international order began to complicate the early Cold War’s dichotomous “east–west” antagonism. Scholars thus increasingly sought to push past the limits on understanding that went with restricting one’s intellectual horizon to an individual state or region, a shift of academic orientation that coincided with changes in immigration policies and moves towards multiculturalism in western educational institutions. The new wave of world history—aka “the new world history” (Bentley 2006)—that came to flourish from the early 1980s constituted a major innovation within historical scholarship, one that some professional historians found exhilarating and others unsettling. The emergence of this new wave coincided, incidentally, with the rise of the People’s Republic of China in international importance.

What constitutes “world history” is a complex and controversial question; views vary widely as to what it should properly include. The main task of this chapter is to consider the world-history literature in one concrete respect, namely how it has dealt with China. My approach recognizes “world history” in principle as variously a medium for representing the past, a field of ongoing research, a changing body of knowledge, and an evolving body of literature. My aim is to trace major contributions over the last century and to situate those of roughly the last four decades; my focus will be on how certain prominent scholars committed to writing world history have gone about representing China in a broader framework. The scope of “world history” is defined broadly here to include historical studies designed to investigate processes, structures, and events transcending the confines of the particular nation-state or cultural region. For simplicity’s sake, I subsume global history, transregional history, “big history,” and the cross-civilizational parts of international history within the category of world history. Underlying this chapter is the view that examining the past at the global and transregional levels is an option in the researcher’s toolkit that is quite compatible with investigating history on national, local, and micro-historical levels, each of which also yields irreplaceable insights. World history is thus imagined here as one of several lenses that can be useful for bringing facets of the past into focus. In recent decades, researchers have brought it to bear on all the

main thematic types of history—political, economic, social, cultural, military, gender-focused, and environmental. At the level of narrative structure, world histories run along a spectrum from the open-ended to the closed, with Hegel's vision of world history as commencing in "the east" and culminating in Europe (Hegel 1956, 103) representing an example of closed emplotment that still sometimes colors perceptions of China. Like all historians, world historians must select what to include in their accounts, and by long-standing convention (Ranke 1884, xii–xiii), the examination of *connections* and the drawing of *comparisons* between relevant units of analysis are here taken both as the two key modes of world-history research and as the basic determinants of the field's standards of selection. The colonial era's perceptions of China's perennial "isolation" and of its "peculiar" historical "stagnation" thus underwrote China's exclusion from world history by Carl Arendt and others in the age of the New Imperialism. This chapter's aim is to consider how such perceptions came to be challenged and how representations of China have accordingly changed within the world-history literature.

### China and world history in the west, World War I to 1978

The early twentieth century inherited from the nineteenth several important theoretical scaffolds for depicting the course of world history. Prominent among these frameworks were those stemming from the Kantian, Hegelian, and Marxist traditions as well as from Comtean positivism, Rankean historicism, and Social Darwinism. The differences between these were significant, despite the fact that all of them, perhaps with the partial exception of Rankean historicism, drew on Enlightenment models of identifiable stages in humanity's development, and that theories of racial difference and hierarchy could be incorporated into them explicitly or implicitly to different degrees. All of these intellectual traditions would be transformed in various ways in the new century.

The years following China's 1911 Revolution saw major shifts in the way people around the globe thought of China. As a theorist, Max Weber gave a significant intellectual blow to the racial vision of a semi-primitive, perennially unchanging civilization. His studies on the comparative sociology of religion (Weber 1920–21)—including monographs on China, India, ancient Judaism, and Islam as well as, most famously, on Protestantism and the "spirit of capitalism"—were designed to answer the question—not entirely new, but treated by him in new ways—of why the west alone had developed typically modern forms of rationality in all aspects of social life, including a distinctive capitalist economy (Brook forthcoming). His approach to that question powerfully influenced later generations of social scientists and humanists, along the way providing the starting point for several schools of historical interpretation, including that associated with American modernization theory. Often overlooked is his qualified recognition that political and commercial forms of capitalism had emerged in China by Ming times (Weber 1951, 84, 103). On his reading, however, the domination of Confucian attitudes meant the imperial-era's economy lacked the "sober bourgeois" spirit that in Europe accompanied the austere change-oriented ethic borne by dissenting Protestants whose relationship with "the world" was one of tension between "this-worldly" immersion and "other-worldly" ambition. Weber's reading of history in effect reinscribed the notion of Chinese stagnation within the social sciences, in cultural rather than biological form. In later comparative history and Asian studies, the Weberian notion spread far and wide that Confucianism and Daoism were too "this-worldly" and Buddhism too "other-worldly" to foster the attitudes and behaviors characteristic of modernity in general and industrialization in particular.

Europe's fragmented cultural environment following World War I saw the publication of notable new departures in the domain of world history. In the wake of Germany's defeat, Oswald Spengler caught the public's imagination there and elsewhere with his pessimistic vision of organicist cycles of civilizational blossoming and maturation followed by decay (Spengler 1918–23; Spengler 1926–28). Unlike Hegel, he did not treat China's civilization as representing a stage of history that Europe had long surpassed. Yet, while he acclaimed its flourishing in antiquity, he too depicted it as moribund ever since. Reacting more hopefully after the horrors of war, H.G. Wells's *Outline of History* (1922) painted history as a story of progress and looked to the global past for patterns of cooperation and convergence that could anchor a new, peaceful world order. Despite celebrating Han- and Tang-dynasty glories at the expense of European brutality in Roman and medieval times, his discussion of Chinese history remained meager (ca. 20 pages out of 1,500), the bulk of it centered on addressing the historian's then standard "China problem," namely why China had for so long remained "stationary." Answers to this question in the nineteenth century had ranged from "racial character" to economic, social, and cultural features. Wells's personal solution was that "intellectual fetters" were responsible, but he reported that some of his project's collaborators blamed the "socio-economic system." Arnold Toynbee, for his part, in explicit response to Spengler, advanced his own cyclical model of civilizational development in his 12-volume *A Study of History* (Toynbee 1934–61). More knowledgeable than Spengler about the broader world, Toynbee identified ancient "Sinic" civilization as long dead, but recognized an imperial, Buddhism-based, "Far Eastern" civilization that he felt was in final decay in 1939. Meanwhile, in the face of growing social agitation in the industrialized world and anti-colonial agitation across Europe's empires, racist and eugenicist interpretations of history were reaching fever pitch. After taking Paris in 1940, Hitler saw fit to republish the *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* by Arthur de Gobineau, an author identified with scorn of all things Chinese (Blue 1999b). The Holocaust was soon to follow.

The evolution of Soviet Marxism had by then taken a number of turns that would affect international scholarly debates after World War II. This "historical materialism" represented a body of work that, like the Weberian system, oriented the focus of historical explanation toward economic history. During the Soviet Union's first dozen years, when various interpretations of Marxism contended, debate became particularly intense regarding the "nature" of Chinese society and its historical trajectory. From the mid-1920s these issues became politically fraught due to their perceived implications for policies for guiding the Chinese revolution. The key point at issue was that of establishing the "stage" of historical development at which Chinese society stood, the two main candidate-positions being that it embodied either a "feudal" mode of production founded on large-scale land ownership similar to Europe's or an ecologically specific "Asiatic" mode characterized by hydraulic engineering works controlled by a centralized state (Nikiforov 1970; Bailey and Llobera 1981). Prior to May 1927, Stalin adopted the position that the Chinese Communist movement should form a united front with the Guomindang to battle Chinese warlords and foreign imperialism. Amidst the political and conceptual swirl in Soviet leadership circles before and especially after Chiang Kai-shek's move to annihilate his erstwhile Communist allies, certain Bolshevik opponents to Stalin took the "Asiatic mode" as a basis for arguing that a bourgeois stratum dominated China, with the Guomindang the political representative of that element. The corollary that Chinese Communist forces trusted Chiang at their peril amounted to a criticism of Stalin (Fogel 1988), who in turn, having consolidated his power, definitively rejected the "Asiatic

mode” theory in its several articulations, including both those of the Soviet opposition and those formulated by Comintern China specialists. In the latter group, the two most prominent figures to fall foul of the times were the Hungarian Lajos Madgar (aka L.I. Mad’iar) and the German Communist Party’s China expert Karl Wittfogel. The first perished in Stalin’s purges, but the second, a member of the Frankfurt School for Social Research, managed to flee Hitler and continued publishing in the west, where he would have widespread influence on thinking about Chinese history (Wittfogel 1935; Nikiforov 1970; Blue 1999a, 110–18). Stalin’s “orthodox Marxist” notion of a universal path of historical progress held that socioeconomic progress, wherever it had occurred, had run through the same five stages or “modes of production” (primitive communalist, slave-owning, feudal, capitalist, and socialist, each somewhat idiosyncratically identified). This view, with several modifications, would become foundational after 1949 in the People’s Republic, in the standard interpretations of world history and the country’s national history (Brook 1989).

In the mid-1950s, two major historical projects on Chinese history appeared that have influenced understandings of Chinese history for world historians ever since: Joseph Needham’s multivolume *Science and Civilisation in China* (1954–) and Wittfogel’s *Oriental Despotism* (1957). Marshaling voluminous new materials to argue that before 1500 imperial China had had one of the world’s richest scientific-technical traditions, Needham readdressed the old question of why China had not developed modern science and capitalism, using Wittfogel’s earlier Marxist theorizing on capitalism and the “Asiatic mode of production” as a key point of reference to explain both China’s achievements and the west’s eventual construction of modern science. Wittfogel, however, had moved on, for having reestablished himself in the US as an Eisenhower Republican, he now read the entirety of China’s imperial past as a precursor to Stalinism and Maoism, the “despotic” character of which he saw as having originated in China’s “Oriental” environmental conditions but spreading, and still threatening to spread, far beyond. This interpretation of world history resonated strongly in Western social scientific circles in the atmosphere of darkened attitudes towards China after the 1949 Communist assumption of power.

The Cold War was among other things a clash of ideas, one in which sharply competing readings of the past underwrote prescriptive lessons for the future during the process of European decolonization. In this context, alternative readings of Chinese history were offered by “orthodox Marxism” (e.g., Avdiev 1953, 614–74; with eventual critiques regarding China in Pulleyblank 1955; Anderson 1974, 453–549; and Nikiforov 1975) and by modernization theory, the set of neo-Weberian analyses that traced a series of stages of human development culminating in liberal capitalism (e.g., Levy 1952; Rostow 1962; Black 1966). While proponents of both orthodox Marxism and Western modernization theory tended to take the individual state as an autonomous unit of analysis and the “level of national development” as the key point of reference in social and governmental planning, more linkage-oriented perspectives emerged from the late 1950s. One that had a strong impact on both academic historians and the general public was *The Rise of the West* (1963) by William McNeill, who took inspiration from Toynbee and charted the modern rise of Europe to global dominance by comparing Europe with other major civilizations, including China, but who stressed interactions and forged a more open-ended, noncyclical interpretation of humanity’s trajectory through time. A second major alternative to modernization theory and “orthodox Marxism” was dependency theory, with its associated notion of the “development of underdevelopment” first formulated for Latin America but then applied elsewhere. From this grew the neo-Marxist world systems

interpretation of the history of the modern global economy, the most detailed scholarly example of which was the *Annales* school historian Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World System* (1974–89). On Wallerstein's definition, a capitalist "world system" emerged from the fifteenth century with Europe as the "core" that by stages came to dominate ever expanding "peripheral" and "semi-peripheral" regions. In Wallerstein's conception, China until the nineteenth century fell outside these three categories, and constituted an "external zone" unincorporated into the "world system."

As stimulating as Wallerstein's historiographical approach was, his theoretical formulation appeared to underplay some striking research produced by others within the *Annales* school. In particular, major projects on the early modern transpacific trade, with its massive bullion flows from Spanish America to Asia (Chaunu 1960–66), and on the Sino-western trade at Canton down to 1833 (Dermigny 1964), both powerfully documented China's integration into the global system of exchange. Analyses from these works and from Wallerstein's informed Fernand Braudel's grand scholarly synthesis on early modern capitalism and material civilization (Braudel 1981), the third volume of which highlighted East Asia's economic vitality in this period, including its long-term capacity to maintain demographic parity with Europe. A key distinction employed by Braudel that would nuance later world historians' interpretations of China's late imperial economy was that between "capitalism" and the Smithian-style market-economy (based on productivity gains from division of labor and specialization), which governed everyday economic relations in places beyond early modern Europe as well as within it. Within Chinese studies Mark Elvin's *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (1973), elaborated partially in response to Needham's project, took discussions in a similar direction with the notion of a "high-level equilibrium trap" that fostered steady demographic and economic growth, but stopped Chinese society from shifting to high per-capita growth. Such contributions set the stage for a new turn in world-history scholarship as China entered the international arena anew amidst Deng Xiaoping's reforms.

### Rethinking China in the PRC's early reform era

Paths to the future rarely work out exactly as anticipated, but if they did, a reasonable person might expect heightened international interest in China to have accompanied the PRC's enhanced—if still limited—engagement with the broader world from 1978. Evidence of various kinds suggests that such a raising of awareness did occur in various parts of western academia. In what ways was this process manifest in the world-history field as well? Examining the shifts in argument, in the range of topics researched, and in publication patterns helps one assess the current place of China in world-history scholarship. Let us attend first to some analytical shifts.

Among studies published in the late 1970s and early 1980s that offered new perspectives on the relation of Chinese history to world history, three stand out as notable watersheds, two primarily for researchers in Chinese studies, and the third for world historians. The first to appear, in the year Deng Xiaoping launched his program of reforms, was a special issue of Philip Huang's journal *Modern China* that brought together reactions by scholars of differing theoretical orientations to Victor Lippit's extended essay on "the development of underdevelopment" in China (Lippit 1978). Remarkable here was the convergence between the economic historian of China Albert Feuerwerker, who worked within a modernization framework, and Gunder Frank, a pioneer of dependency theory now making his first foray into Chinese studies. Both authors

focused on the nature of China's economic growth during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with Feuerwerker stressing the difference between traditional and modern types of growth and Frank arguing that the notion of "the development of underdevelopment" (which he, with Wallerstein and Samir Amin, had used to explain poverty in Latin America and Africa) could not reasonably be applied to China where growth had not fit the dependency-mold (Feuerwerker 1978; Frank 1978). Three years later, *The Modernization of China* (Rozman 1981), bringing together leading proponents of modernization theory and similarly inclined historians of China, highlighted research on the importance of markets and commerce in late imperial China and drove home the robustly commercial nature of China's "traditional" order in a way that shook lingering impressions of a largely "natural" late imperial economy. This volume not only publicized fresh insights into Chinese economic history, but also inclined modernizationist economic historians of China to think in more comparative terms; before long, historians of China from the western Marxist tradition were going in similar directions (e.g., Bergère 1986). In the meantime, *The Pursuit of Power* (1981) by William H. McNeill, North America's then most celebrated champion of world history, also encouraged English-speaking historians to reimagine China's place in the world. Though his study's central aim was to underscore the importance of military innovations in the west's path to world dominance, his broad-ranging research accomplished something else as well: Influenced by Robert Hartwell's work on the Song-dynasty iron industry, McNeill opened the volume with a chapter on China that depicted Song technical and organizational innovations as sparking a commercial revolution that surged across Eurasia. Though following Weber in arguing that governmental political controls blocked the emergence of free-market capitalism, *The Pursuit of Power* presented China no longer as a perpetual outlier in the story of the development of capitalism, but rather as an initiator of crucial historical changes that powerfully propelled Eurasia toward a modern transcontinental trading system. This recognition would return in force from the late 1980s, in particular with Janet Abu-Lughod's *Before European Hegemony* (1989), which sketched the transcontinental extent of trade in an era of equilibrium between the major Old World civilizations and then depicted the Black Death and the consolidation of Ming rule as radically altering China's role and consequently the "world system" as a whole.

By then, several other significant studies offered new or revised comparative perspectives on China. Two of the most prominent were E.L. Jones's 1981 *The European Miracle* and Paul Kennedy's 1987 *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. Jones's comparative political-economic explanation of factors behind the west's rise to world dominance highlighted a cluster of favorable European traits, including its particular resource endowments, good location (suitable for accessing demographically invaluable "ghost acreage" in the Americas), and a fragmented state system equipped with the capacity to provide its populations with social goods superior to those forthcoming from the major comparator-states—the centralized Ottoman, Moghul, and Ming/Qing empires, all three of which Jones characterized as "revenue-pumps" (thus Oriental despotisms of an economic variety), rather than as institutions inclined to enhance their populations' living conditions. In turn, Kennedy's ability to address sharp American geopolitical anxieties (in the first place concerning Japan) gave broad interdisciplinary impact to his study, which used leadership-cycle theory to draw political lessons about relations between established and "rising" great powers. Kennedy portrayed China as the state that had been the world's most powerful at the end of the medieval era but that thereafter lost that position to a succession of western hegemonies.

On a different front, growing East Asian prosperity and self-confidence during the 1980s coincided with the emergence of new academic perspectives on regional cultural traditions—especially Confucianism—that would influence world-history research in various ways. Studies first of Japan and then of China challenged a key plank in Weberian analyses of the uniqueness of the West by arguing that the economically stimulating tension between “this-worldly” and “other-worldly” elements that Weber had identified in strains of Protestantism (and that other scholars had since found in post-Reformation Catholicism) were in evidence in East Asian religions as well (Morishima 1982; Yü 1987; 2004), a conclusion that fit well with long-standing recognition of East Asian industriousness.

### The “new world history” and some alternatives

“World history” is a broad church that includes a variety of approaches and perspectives. Probably nothing has reconfigured the field more in recent decades than the expansion of the body of research and interpretation known as the “new world history” (Bentley 2006). The phrase designates the broad movement that has coalesced especially around the World History Association (hereafter WHA), founded in 1982, an affiliate of the American Historical Association but with an international (primarily English-speaking) membership. The WHA’s success in bringing together a critical mass of researchers and teachers of world history has enabled it to function as a major forum for analysis, deliberation, and debate on a wide range of world-history topics. Intellectually the “new” world history’s core mission has been to examine historical topics that transcend single states, regions, and cultures. In practice, it promotes comparative historical exploration of the world’s diverse regions as these have related to one another over the long and medium terms.

While lines are not always hard and fast between the “new world history” and the genre’s older strains, which remain very much alive, the older strains often manifest a committed Euro-American inclination, highlighting historical achievements of “the west” and lessons to be drawn from them, while contributions to the newer movement have tended to give more multidimensional attention to “the Rest,” including China. Within both groupings, it should be noted, some authors discern a directional path (or set of paths) of global social development, while others do not. Authors who identify as “Eurocentrists” in principle (Fukuyama 1992; Landes 1998; Ferguson 2011) typically identify such a path with the historical experience of “western civilization”—that is, Europe and its settler-colony offspring—seen as constituting the preferred model of universal development that other peoples did not to live up to in the past, but might in future adopt. Other world-history authors, of diverse hues, including both champions and critics of western culture and institutions, maintain that each people has necessarily developed according to its own established characteristics and endowments.

Debates between such positions often turn as much on preferences and expectations for the future as on assessments of achievements and experiences in the past. In the immediate post-Cold War years, for instance, Fukuyama’s *The End of History* (1992) famously predicted the inevitable global triumph of liberal democracy and an international liberal culture, while equally “establishment” authors articulated multilinear readings of world history to affirm the incommensurability of civilizational values and cast doubt on the suitability of pushing (at least some) institutions developed in the west onto cultures elsewhere (Huntington 1993; 1996). The latter approach is by no means simply a western move. Singapore’s veteran president, Lee Kuan Yew, apparently meant

to assert just such a point when he handed Fared Zakaria several pages from John Fairbank's *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation* to underscore his much trumpeted affirmation of "Asian values" (Zakaria 1994, 113–14, 126). Although Huntington identified China's civilization as one of eight major rivals to the West, affirming civilizational value-differences need not entail a belief that such values will necessarily result in military–political "clashes." Other thinkers, presumably including Lee, have argued for respectful coexistence and cooperation on the basis of civilizationalist positions (Abdel-Malek 1981). Such an outlook may underlie Xi Jinping's recent declarations on the direction of world history and the validity of Confucian values as well as on the importance of cross-cultural exchanges (Xi 2014). Yet it seems likely that a potential "clash of civilizations" was on the minds of Hu Jintao's Politburo when it called in two of China's top world historians for consultations, apparently on cycles of hegemony in international relations and the history of relations between established and "rising" great powers (Spakowski 2009, 485–90).

Although political–military relations may be foremost in the minds of political leaders who turn to world history, professionals in the field have been exploring a far wider array of topics. One simple indication comes from considering the winners of the WHA's annual book prize, first instituted in 1998: Among these, one finds comparative and transregional thematic studies concerning the history of state formation, empires, political economy, famine, the environment, exploration, human migration and immigration policy, urban segregation, and science and technology. China has been a central focus of 4 of the 18 winners (Frank 1998; Pomeranz 2000; Davis 2002; McKeown 2008); it has received at least chapter-length treatment in 3 others (Lieberman 2003; Nightingale 2012; Burbank and Cooper 2011), and has had significant comparative treatment in yet 7 more (McClellan and Dorn 1998; McNeill 2000; Christian 2004; Radkau 2008; Parthasarathi 2011).

### **A shift of focus in political-economic history: China approaches center stage**

Discussing studies on the full range of world-history themes and periods is well beyond what can be attempted here. Let us instead concentrate on the evolution of thinking on a topic that has received probably the most prominent attention, namely early modern political economy. Around the year 2000, four influential works addressed China's place in world history in this regard. One, David Landes's colorful *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (1998), aimed at a general audience, was an updated restatement of the modernizationist case for attributing industrialization and rising standards of living to a "European miracle." The other three studies, directed at specialists within the China studies field as well as at academic readers beyond it, advanced arresting new interpretations of China's late imperial economic history that resonated powerfully across the world history community and substantially shifted understandings of China's place in world history. All three can be seen as critical responses to E.L. Jones's work, which Landes enthusiastically embraced. Two—Gunder Frank's *ReORIENT* (1998) and Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence* (2000)—have been referred to above; the third was Bin Wong's *China Transformed* (1997).

The first to appear in print, Frank's *ReORIENT* (1998) was unabashedly provocative, starting with its opening dismissal of almost all previous social theory and historiography as Eurocentric and inadequate for describing, much less explaining, how the

history of the modern world had unfolded. *ReORIENT*'s core argument was that the centuries from 1450 to 1800 during which global maritime trade was first constructed were not a period of European global dominance (as conventional scholarship had long held), but rather a predominantly "Asian Age," in which China and India constituted the main moving forces driving world economic growth. In Frank's analysis, the great imperative of "early modern" European rulers was to join the vibrant Asian trading system, a task they accomplished through taking control of key trade routes and then "buying into" the Asian system with silver from the Americas. Invoking research on bullion flows (Flynn and Giráldez 1995; von Glahn 1996) as well as other evidence of transcontinental economic patterns, Frank rejected Wallerstein's characterization of China as an "external zone" isolated from the expanding global economy. Instead, he argued, it was the single most important engine of early modern economic growth, via the fiscally whetted thirst for silver that its expanding economy created. The major European maritime powers first "bought a ticket" on the train of fifteenth-to-eighteenth century Asian expansion, and only later, after 1750, took over the engine and ascended to global hegemony. As Frank's and other readings of Chinese early modern economic vibrancy became increasingly accepted, the tendency in world-history circles was to extend Abu-Lughod's era of civilizational equilibrium toward the eve of the Industrial Revolution.

Frank's new appreciation of late imperial China's pre-1750 economic record immediately found its nemesis in Landes's broad-ranging comparative survey, which began by bluntly attributing Europe's fundamental superiority over other regions to "Nature's inequalities" (Landes 1998, ch. 1), meaning in the first place its geographical endowments. While viewing China as "the one civilization that might have surpassed the European," Landes's concern then was to explain its "failure to reach its potential" (Landes 1998, 55). This he proceeded to do in a colorful narrative that drew on Wittfogel (1957) for core ideas and that selectively tapped the Chinese-studies literature to highlight China's limitations and weaknesses, while dismissing research affirming Chinese achievements as "political correctness," "multicultural" (Nathan Sivin), and simply "bad history" (Frank) (Landes 1998, 27, 348, 514 n.)

While Frank's study highlighted early modern global connections, R. Bin Wong's *China Transformed* leaned toward the "comparative" end of the world history spectrum. Its main intended readerships seem to have been world historians and historians of Europe, who mostly remained unaware of recent work on late imperial China. Among its arguments, four resonated especially with world historians. At the level of methodology, Wong decried skewed cross-cultural comparisons, maintaining that a comparison's analytical utility depends on the degree of spatial and contextual similarity between the poles of comparison (thus China or India might be fruitfully compared with Europe as a whole, but one risks confusing orders of scale and complexity in comparing either one to smaller units, such as the Netherlands or early modern England, both of which correlate better with other economically advanced, similarly sized zones, like the lower Yangzi basin, Bengal, or Japan's Kansai region). Analytically Wong argued for grounding comparative conclusions about the performance of different states in evidence-based assessments of the distinct tasks each saw facing them, with both the advantages and the disadvantages of each state's strategies weighed in relation to the advantages and the disadvantages accruing to the other's. In this regard, Wong provided new empirical analysis of the East Asian record of vigorous Smithian commercialization, sophisticated institutional structures, and life expectancy comparable to Europe's. Finally, at the level

of social theory, he noted that the East Asian record suggests a need to recognize multiple paths into modernity (e.g. Wong 1997, 16–22).

Building on discussions stimulated by Frank and Wong, Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence* (2000) went further in joining "connective" and "comparative" approaches to world history, marshaling further evidence and bringing new arguments to bear on the classic social scientific question of why capitalism arose in Europe rather than elsewhere. Drawing a strong theoretical distinction between Smithian markets and industrial capitalism, Pomeranz centered his multifaceted study on why it was that post-1750 Europe alone had developed the latter when the former had flourished in China too. Focusing in on economic patterns in Britain and the lower Yangzi basin, he argued that the most economically developed regions of Europe and China experienced similar levels of economic development in the decades before 1750, that China and Japan had environmental resources as beneficial to development as Europe's, and that *internal* dynamics alone were insufficient to account for the emergence of the Industrial Revolution in the west. Instead, he held, all the Old World's leading economic regions were headed toward a pattern of economic stasis if confined to living off their domestic resources alone. What in his opinion enabled Britain in particular to launch the Industrial Revolution and sustain a new, more productive form of economic growth, were three key factors: namely, control of New World lands (E.L. Jones's "ghost acreage," 1987, 70–84) that lessened pressures in Europe for meeting the demands for timber and food brought by population growth; second, the New World plantation complex using slave labor to forcibly exploit major segments of land, and thus providing increasing quantities of highly profitable sugar, tobacco, coffee, and cotton to European markets; and, finally, the relative accessibility of Britain's coal as fuel for steam-powered factories. Within Pomeranz's analysis, three intertwined narratives were discernible: a story of impressive records of Smithian economic growth in both Europe and China; a story of how, in the absence of technical breakthroughs, China's physical environment imposed continuing or worsening constraints on its economic growth after the mid-eighteenth century; and a story of how Britain's mobilization of human and other resources, at home and overseas, allowed both long-term escape from the previous constraints related to land and labor and a take-off to continually expanding production, industrialization, and eventually rising popular living standards.

While Frank (1998), Landes (1998), Wong (1997), and Pomeranz (2000) have all had serious impacts on world history research, it was the last of the four that sparked the most prominent debate. Its picture of China's Smithian economic dynamism so strikingly contrary to long conventional readings of global history—according to which China's economy remained stagnant in per capita terms from the fourteenth to the twentieth century (Maddison 2001, 44, reprising Maddison 1998)—was one of several factors that fanned the intensity of the interest and heightened the sharpness of some responses. It is impossible here to cover the ensuing debate, much less parse it in detail (for fuller accounts see Bryant 2006 and Lieberman 2009, 565–76), but a few highlights can give an impression of its scope. One of the sharper responses actually came from within Chinese studies in the form of Philip Huang's criticisms reasserting his view that the Chinese rural order had been on a path of involution (Huang 1990, following Geertz 1963)—in which peasant impoverishment grew as population rose—far more than Pomeranz allowed. The heat of that exchange (Huang 2002; 2003; Pomeranz 2003) could make one wonder whether one was facing a clash of incommensurable paradigms regarding Chinese economic history,

one focused on explaining the roots of the Chinese revolution, the other on tracing those of the Dengist reforms. Generally, however, the response to Pomeranz's work, even by most who disagreed with aspects of it, was admiration for the "energy, imagination and erudition" with which the author tackled one of the grand themes of world history—thus Mark Elvin, whose early review urged critical scrutiny but nonetheless deemed Pomeranz's case "essentially correct," venturing that western historians who failed to understand that point would be unable to contribute anything "even ... good enough to be 'wrong'" on the contrasting paths taken by China and Europe (Elvin 2001, 754). Fortunately, Europeanists this time were drawn into the discussion, which Pomeranz participated in with unflagging attention. The formidable Robert Brenner, writing with China historian Christopher Isett, endorsed Maddison's reading of the Chinese economy and faulted Pomeranz for taking life expectancy as a surrogate for standard of living, glossing over early modern England's increasingly higher per capita standard of living, underestimating the uniqueness of British institutions, and obscuring the extensive British use of coal long before the Industrial Revolution (Brenner and Isett 2002). The Dutch historian Peer Vries found "coal and colonies" inadequate as explanations for the divergence between Europe and China, which he was inclined to attribute instead to differences in technological culture (Vries 2001; 2004). The place of modern European technology and science, already raised in Elvin's review, became an ongoing issue in the "divergence" debate: Frank had argued (1998, ch. 4) that China's economic vibrancy into the eighteenth century signaled that its technological capacities equaled those of Europe, a position later adopted by Robert Marks (2007: 110–12) as well as implicitly by Robert Allen, both of whom supported Pomeranz's reading of the importance of British coal resources for industrialization (Allen 2009b, 145–46, 81–84). Other scholars (Goldstone 2009; O'Brien 2013) have argued, however, that early modern Britain's unique scientific-technical culture allowed pure science to be applied to practical knowledge during the Enlightenment via a route not open to China. An alternative analysis for the "divergence" that was consistent with Pomeranz's was brought to the debate by Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and Bin Wong, who argued that Europe's political fragmentation and especially its accompanying endemic warfare were crucial for industrialization, though at high social costs (Rosenthal and Wong 2011). The debate was still in full swing in 2011 when the *Economic History Review* devoted a special issue to "Asia and the Great Divergence" and the journal *Historically Speaking* published a "Ten Years After" forum on Pomeranz's volume (Coclanis et al. 2011; Pomeranz 2011).

### Other perspectives, other interests

We have already briefly noted the thematic diversity within scholarship on world history and the substantial extent to which China has been addressed in scholarly works since the 1980s. The above treatment laying out comparative interpretations of China's late imperial political economy within the "early modern" framework suggests that world history is fully capable of generating complex, concrete analyses that are subject to debate and revision in the light of evolving investigations. Supporting this claim is the observation that China has gone from being excluded from world histories at the beginning of the twentieth century to being a major topic of world-history discussion today. Yet debates about the "great divergence" and comparative modernization are far from the only opportunities world historians have used for bringing China into world history. To think otherwise would gravely underestimate the richness of the subject and indeed

of the existing world-history scholarship, which has treated China in relation to a broad spectrum of historical themes and across the full array of historical periods. A few classic examples must suffice:

- Jerry Bentley's (1993) survey of religious syncretism and interactions between the major Old World religious traditions from late antiquity until the sixteenth century takes China as one of several major cultural regions whose religious trajectories his synthesis traced.
- More recently, Victor Lieberman's two-volume magnum opus on South East Asia from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries (2003; 2009), which is focused on placing the region in global and comparative perspective, provides an insightful original analysis of imperial China that incorporates recent sinological literature and effectively moves to "decenter" Europe by applying Chinese and Burmese perspectives on statecraft.
- Similarly, Alexander Woodside's *Lost Modernities* (2006) elucidates the impressive core of bureaucratic theory and practice in late imperial China and its neighbors and explores the remarkably modern institutional problems they share with states today in the west and elsewhere.
- Jürgen Osterhammel's marvelously multidimensional global panorama of the long nineteenth century (2014) exploits the global framework to provide original comparative analyses of varied aspects of Chinese life from its bureaucracy and education system to its urban life and industries, to its famines and revolutionary movements.
- Finally, the seven-volume *Cambridge World History* (Wiesner-Hanks 2015) ranges over the whole human past, and, in stark contrast to Williams's *Historian's History*, includes substantial discussions of Chinese history in every volume, by a team that includes dozens of historians of China contributing on a wide array of topics.

Works of scholarship are of course not the only medium in which people encounter history. Happily world historians with Chinese expertise have devoted their talents to writing accessible works of high popularization. Two of the most imaginative examples happen to relate to the seventeenth century: John E. Wills's *1688* (2002), an intensive global exploration of a single key year, and Timothy Brook's *Vermeer's Hat* (2008), which traces the era's global trade flows by way of discussion of the painter's creations. An earlier work that engaged much popular interest in China was Frances Wood's 1996 best-seller making the case, perhaps playfully, but too often believed, against Marco Polo ever having set foot there. (Hans Ulrich Vogel's massive 2013 scholarly riposte sadly seems destined to be read only by scholars.) A genre even more widely read than popular nonfiction, if not nearly as appreciated, is the entry-level university textbook. Nowadays virtually all major textbooks for introductory world history courses feature coverage of China in each of the major periods treated, in many cases with Zheng He's voyages serving as a vital point of transition to the age of transoceanic maritime exploration and trade—thankfully with no hint his fleets reached the Caribbean or Italy.

### Closing remarks

In just over a century, world historians have gone from excluding China from their subject's precincts to incorporating it as a major component of their scholarship. The diversity of approaches and perspectives involved in that process of incorporation is a feature of world-history scholarship that the present brief sketch has highlighted. In closing this

chapter, it is only right to note that for some people the very idea of world history raises serious moral and political concerns. Some scholars firmly repudiate world history as a form of western or elite cultural repression (Nandy 1995) or a potential tool of “cultural genocide” (Lal 2003, 289; 2011). Others, on the contrary, condemn the “new world history” as fatally pervaded by anti-western bias and as fawning on nonwestern cultures (Duchesne 2011). Both kinds of generalization appear abusive. More interesting and germane here are the opposing views advanced by Arif Dirlik and Jerry Bentley, both of whom have thought subtly about the ethics of world history and the problem of Eurocentrism in the current globalized context. Dirlik suggests that “Eurocentrism,” in the sense of Euro-American global hegemony, today takes the form not of excluding, but rather precisely of incorporating all peoples into the prevailing world order, an observation that encourages us to think carefully and critically about the possible meanings of how China is now integrated into the western world-history literature. Dirlik’s further zeroing in on the tendency of much “new” world history literature to stress the benefits of inclusion in the international order and gloss over resistance to negative facets may sensitize readers to the political/ideological implications of various works and to the forms of employment available to historians writing world history (Dirlik 2001; 2003; White 1973, 7–11, 22–29). If Dirlik cautions about possible pitfalls of world history, Bentley seeks to justify the enterprise while recognizing its moral tensions. Between what he sees as the extremes of dogmatic, especially religious and patriotic, assertions of the meaning of history and bald repudiations of history as a form of understanding, he pitches world history of a particular type—namely large-scale, empirically rich, ecumenically oriented, critical narrative history—as the best interpretive bet for giving the world’s peoples due recognition for their achievements and for orienting students and others toward dealing intelligently with the world’s complexities (Bentley 2005, 76–81).

Bentley’s “wager” seems to have paid off so far, in that the “new world history” movement has served over recent decades as an effective forum for discussing how the experiences of different parts of the world relate to one another. The movement’s capacity to function fruitfully as a medium for generating and disseminating new ideas has been predicated on the readiness of research scholars with different interests and areas of expertise to share their findings, outlooks, and experiences and to engage in dialogue with other teaching professionals. Since the 1980s, the western literature on world history has engaged with a wide range of evidence related to Chinese history and has been greatly enriched intellectually by doing so. At the same time, the “new world history” has also played a significant role in encouraging and disseminating innovative new lines of research related to Chinese history and the historical relations between China and other parts of the world. The record of creative cross-fertilization between Chinese history and world history raises the prospect that further discussion and debate on historical comparisons and connections is likely to offer those willing to accept them stimulating opportunities for exploring the rich complexity of human experience, enhancing understanding across cultures, and scrutinizing the implications of different forms of social organization and social action.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

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PART II

**Chronologies**

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# Early China in Eurasian History

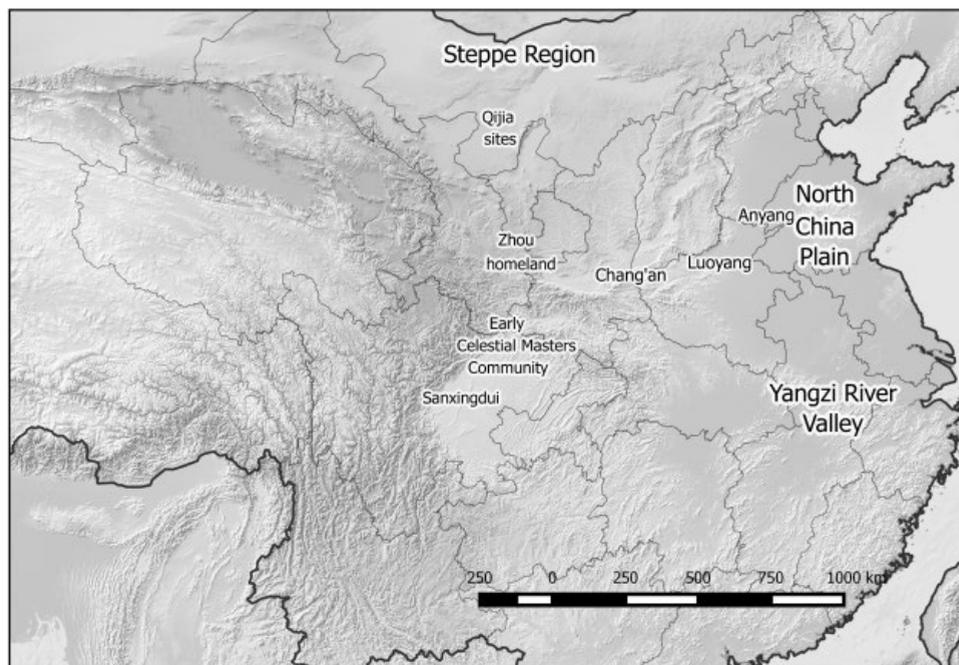
*MICHAEL PUETT*

Narratives of modernity have long haunted the study of early China. For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, China was in many ways the most significant Other for narratives of the rise of the west. China was seen as a civilization that for much of its history was quite comparable to Europe, but that for some reason or set of reasons had failed to enter the modern world on its own as Europe had. And early China was often interpreted accordingly. Early China was commonly seen as the foundation of Chinese civilization, as the place where many of the critical institutional, political, and cultural features of Chinese civilization emerged—features that both created the extraordinary growth of China and yet also ultimately held China back.

Much of the scholarship focused on questions such as: What was the origin of Chinese civilization? What does this tell us about the resulting development of China? What are the distinctive features of Chinese civilization? How and why did these features take shape in the early period, and how did they define (for better and worse) later Chinese history?

There was a clear pattern to many of the answers to these questions. For much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the answers were negative. Chinese civilization was presented as derivative from and/or lesser than western civilization. Certain distinctive features of Chinese civilization were seen as having inhibited the emergence of modernity in China. In the last few decades of the twentieth century, a reaction set in, and the emphasis shifted toward emphasizing both the indigenous origins of Chinese civilization and the positive qualities of features that defined the civilization. The very features that had been singled out for critique in the earlier scholarship were now instead praised as those that might potentially lead to a better modernity. A few brief examples will demonstrate the pattern.

To begin at the beginning (as such a paradigm would define the beginning): What was the origin of Chinese civilization? For much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a common answer was that Chinese civilization emerged through diffusion from the west. Chinese civilization was thus presented as inferior to and derivative from western civilization. By the 1970s, this had been replaced by a model emphasizing the



Early China – major regions and sites. Map by Lex Berman.

indigenous origins of Chinese civilization. China was presented as forming a “cradle of the East,” giving birth to a distinctive East Asian civilization, much as the Near East, Greece, and Rome had formed a cradle for the birth of western civilization. (For an analysis of the full debate, see Puett 1998.)

Discussions of the specific features designated as distinctive for China went through a similar paradigmatic shift. Cultural values of harmony, for example, were variously ascribed to early religious practices such as shamanism or to later philosophical movements such as Confucianism. Again, the normative interpretation shifted from largely negative (an emphasis on harmony, e.g., being seen by Weber as having led to the lack of the tension with the world that had been crucial for the emergence of capitalism in the west) to largely positive (harmony being presented as an antidote to the alienation from fellow humans and nature in the modern world). Despite the shift in normative valuation, however, the general paradigm remained remarkably stable.

Over the past two decades, however, this paradigm has been shaken dramatically. This is in part a result of the significant questioning of the paradigm that has occurred for the study of Chinese history in general. But, more specifically for the early period, an explosion of recent archaeological discoveries has opened up the possibility for rethinking many of our long-held assumptions.

We now have a great deal of evidence concerning the regional differences of the areas of what would ultimately become China, as well as the ways in which these regional cultures interacted over time. This has largely rendered moot any discussions of the fundamental features of “Chinese civilization,” as scholars have instead turned to analyses of regional cultural spheres.

Archaeologists have also discovered an extraordinary range of texts from a wide variety of genres, including divination texts, inscribed bronze vessels, legal codes, legal cases, and administrative documents. These documents span from the Bronze Age world of the late Shang through the early imperial period. Much of the most important scholarship of the past two decades has focused on explicating these paleographic materials. Many of what were once thought to be defining assumptions in early China are now seen as at most positions in a set of complex social and cultural debates.

In addition, we now possess large amounts of archaeological evidence from the rest of Eurasia as well. This has allowed us to rethink issues such as “cradles of civilization” versus diffusion. We are finally able to think not of China as a singular entity that either did or did not emerge autochthonously, but rather of the different ways in which the regions that make up what is now China were interacting with and became part of a larger Eurasian history.

The goal of this chapter will be to focus in particular on the latter issues: how these new materials may allow us to begin to rethink and reformulate the larger comparative issues from the past. One of the goals for the next generation, along with continuing the work of interpreting the new paleographic materials, is to think through how to return to larger comparative questions, but in a different way than the implicit (and often explicit) modernity narratives that have dominated earlier scholarship.

### **The geography of Eurasia**

To rethink early Chinese history, it is helpful to move to both higher and lower levels of analysis. Lower, in the sense that we need to think in terms not of “China” but rather of regions; and higher, in the sense that we need to see the connections between these different areas and the rest of Eurasia.

The borders of contemporary China include a number of diverse geographical regions. For reasons we will be exploring, these regions ultimately came to be controlled by a series of empires emanating from the North China plain. But, when we explore the earlier history of these areas, it is important that we begin by looking at the regions as distinct, albeit interacting. These interactions included the larger interaction spheres that made up Eurasia. Instead of simply asking how, for example, the states in the North China plain connected to what is now southern China, we should also be asking how the states in the North China plain connected to the rest of Eurasia.

The North China plain is on the same latitude as the stretch of Eurasia that includes, on the other end of the continent, the Near East and the Mediterranean regions. This was an area that proved to be highly conducive to agriculture. Moreover, since all of these regions are roughly on the same latitude, sharing similar climates and soil conditions, technologies and practices that worked well at one end of this belt of Eurasia tended to work equally well in the other. (For an excellent discussion of these processes, see Diamond 1997.) This was as true of domesticated foods and animals as it was of military technologies such as chariot warfare and, later, the use of mass infantry armies. A recurrent theme we will see throughout the early period is that technologies that took off at one end of Eurasia were often equally effective at the other end.

The region in between the North China plain and Near East or Mediterranean is a belt of semi-arid deserts that runs across central Asia. This region could support agriculture, but not at the levels one finds at the two ends of Eurasia. Beginning in the last

century before the Common Era, this is the region through which the trade networks that would later come to be called the Silk Road emerged. Goods, of course, traveled across these trade networks, but so did religious movements.

Directly to the north is the huge band of grasslands known as the steppe region. Since agriculture is extremely difficult in the steppe, human domestication turned toward pastoral nomadism, in which humans would live off domesticated animals who themselves would live off the grass. After the development of horse riding, the populations throughout the steppe region became highly mobile, dramatically expanding the scope of where they could travel. It is impossible to understand the history of Eurasia without looking in detail at how the agricultural civilizations were interacting with, trading with, and at times warring with the nomadic populations in the steppe regions.

South of the North China plain was the Yangzi River valley. This area is densely forested, mountainous, and far wetter than the North China plain. The radically different environment meant that the technologies and innovations that worked so well across Eurasia in the latitudes of the North China plain worked poorly in the south. If everything from domesticated wheat to chariot warfare to mass infantry formations could move easily across the east–west latitudes that connected the North China plain to the Mediterranean region, those same technologies were much less conducive to the terrain in what is now southern China. The dominant crop in this region was rice, rather than millet or wheat. And the types of military formations that proved to be so effective in the North China plain were relatively ineffective here.

In all likelihood, the peoples of this area were speakers of languages ancestral to those now spoken in Southeast Asia. This changed slowly, as immigrants from the North China plain gradually moved into these areas.

Continuing to move south and eastward, one reaches the southeastern coast. This has long been an area defined by maritime trade. It is likely that this is the area from which the peoples now known as Austronesians spread. The spread of the Austronesians was probably not unlike later diasporas from this same area: the spread probably occurred across the maritime trade routes that in all likelihood began at a very early period.

One of the key sets of questions facing the field of Chinese history is to work out how these areas interacted with the rest of Eurasia over time, from the earliest period to the present. Instead of the old debate of diffusion versus indigenous origins, we are finally in a position to rethink these questions from a historical perspective. Ultimately, this will help us to rethink our entire narratives of modernity and the rise of the west.

### **Animal and plant domestication**

After the end of the last Ice Age, the human domestication of plants and animals began in a number of areas across Eurasia. One of the exciting issues for archaeological research is to work out not only when and where the various grains, animals, and fibers that have been crucial to Eurasian cultures were domesticated, but also how these various domestications were appropriated and utilized in various regions across Eurasia. The concern, in other words, is not to work out what is “autochthonous” and what is “diffused,” or which culture made which domestication first. The concern is rather to explore the historical implications of the various ways such domestications played out in Eurasian history.

Millet, soybeans, hemp, pigs, chickens, and silkworms were among the domesticated products of populations living in the North China plain. All of these would ultimately spread across the east–west belt of mid-Eurasia, just as wheat and barley, originally domesticated in the Near East, spread to the North China plain (see the excellent summary by Shelach-Lavi 2015).

Rice, on the other hand, was a domesticated product that worked poorly in the east–west belt of mid-Eurasia. Instead, it would spread further south, becoming a major crop in what is now South China and Southeast Asia.

### **The Bronze Age states of Eurasia**

As these domesticated products were appropriated and utilized by cultures across the fertile belt of Eurasia, populations began to grow and social hierarchies began to set in. This marked the beginning of what would become a pattern in the agricultural areas of Eurasia. Except when other institutions would come into play, the agricultural areas of Eurasia tended to be dominated by hereditary elites.

Many of these hereditary aristocracies made use of another technology that began spreading across Eurasia: bronze. Bronze was an alloy of tin and copper that was relatively expensive to make. It tended to be associated with aristocracies—so much so that this entire period of aristocratic rule has come to be known as the Bronze Age. Explorations of the larger interaction spheres of the Bronze Age remain one of the more exciting areas for future research (Sherratt 2006).

Bronze metallurgy began to spread throughout Eurasia during the third millennium BCE, appearing in Xinjiang by the beginning of the second millennium BCE, and in Qijia sites in Gansu and Qinghai soon thereafter.

The first site in the North China plain that started using bronze to significant degrees was Erlitou, in the first few centuries of the second millennium BCE. But the ways that bronze was appropriated and the uses to which it was put in the North China plain were distinctive. Among the most important uses of bronze in Erlitou was the making of bronze ritual vessels. Moreover, the bronze-casting methods employed involved the use of piece-mold techniques, allowing for a more complex form of casting than that which developed elsewhere.

In stories from the Warring States period, the beginning of the Bronze Age aristocratic states in China was associated with Yu, who, among other things, was said to have cast bronze vessels. Unlike the previous rulers Yao and Shun, Yu, as he grew older, did not yield the kingship to the most virtuous figure in the realm. He on the contrary gave the kingship to his own son. This began the first dynasty, called the Xia.

According to the tradition, therefore, the beginning of the Xia was both the beginning of hereditary monarchy and associated with bronze. Several scholars have accordingly tried to identify Erlitou with the Xia dynasty. But attempts to link archaeological sites with the later written record are still only speculation at this point.

Other bronze-using societies also appeared in what is now China. One of the most famous of these is Sanxingdui, in modern Sichuan (Bagley 2001). We know little about the culture of Sanxingdui, other than that the culture was clearly distinctive from that of the North China plain. For historical reasons we will trace shortly, it is the Bronze Age societies of the North China plain that would become so important for later Chinese history.

## Chariots

Returning to Eurasia, we continue to see the spread of other technologies, including the chariot. The chariot was invented in the western portion of the steppe around 2000 BCE. Over the subsequent four centuries, it became a major war vehicle in the western end of Eurasia (Anthony 2010).

Paleographic evidence demonstrates the spread of war chariots across Central Asia over the subsequent few centuries. Although the mechanisms of the transmission are not clear, it presumably involved a process of neighboring groups adopting a military technology that was becoming increasingly dominant. The first appearance of the chariot in the North China plain is in Anyang in 1200 BCE (Piggott 1974; 1978; Shaughnessy 1988).

Unlike Erlitou, we can clearly correlate Anyang with our historical record.

### The Bronze Age dynasties of the North China plain

Anyang was the last capital of the Shang dynasty—the dynasty that, according to later stories, followed the Xia. The reason we can say this with confidence is that Anyang is the first site from which we have written documents. The documents are in the form of inscriptions on turtle plastrons and ox scapulae. The inscriptions are records of divinations made to the ancestors of the Shang kings. (For an excellent discussion of these materials, see Keightley 2000.) Intriguingly, the Shang ancestors closely match the list of Shang kings that we have in Han dynasty historical accounts. So, at least the Shang was a historical dynasty. And Anyang is the first time we have an unambiguous correlation of the later historical record with an archaeological site.

Even if it were not connected to the historical record, Anyang is a telling site in terms of larger Eurasian patterns. By 1200 BCE, the Shang state looked quite similar to agriculturally based states across Eurasia. When comparing it to, for example, the Mycenaean kingdom in Greece at roughly the same time, one notes a society dominated by an aristocracy using bronze weapons and chariots, and marked, among other things, by the use of writing. States across the east–west band of Eurasia were beginning to look very similar.

But, given this general similarity across the east–west band of Eurasia, what is particularly interesting were the permutations of differences between them. Detailing the nature of the polities in the North China plain and the ways that these polities made use of the pan-Eurasian technologies will help us to understand some of the religious practices and political theories that would later become so important.

One of the key uses of bronze, along with weapons for the aristocracy, was for the creation of ritual vessels. Bronze vessels were used to make offerings to deceased humans, calling on them to behave as proper ancestors and therefore to support the living. They would also be called upon to support each ancestor in each higher generation, ultimately moving up the hierarchy to the highest deity called Di.

It is clear from the divination rituals that the ancestors were seen as highly capricious. The goal of the rituals was to attempt to determine the intentions of the ancestors and to determine what sacrifices would gain their support or at least convince them to be less antagonistic.

The general political and ritual complex one sees in Anyang seems to have been shared among other groups across the North China plain. One of these, the Zhou, lived to the

west of Anyang. The material culture of the Zhou was extremely similar to the Shang: in general we see similar burial practices, similar use of ritual bronzes for sacrifice, similar use of writing to record divination rituals, and a similar (although apparently more extensive) use of chariotry in warfare.

In the mid-eleventh century BCE, the Zhou launched an attack on the eastern state. The Zhou conquered the Shang state and took control of the North China plain.

The primary deity of the Zhou was called Heaven (Tian). The Zhou equated Di and Heaven. In texts that would later be collected into the *Book of Documents (Shujing)*, the Zhou claimed that Heaven had supported the Shang while they were good rulers, and then withdrew that support after they failed to maintain their virtue. This doctrine they claimed to be the “Mandate of Heaven”: Heaven would grant the mandate to a good ruler, who would then found a dynasty. When the lineage failed to live up to its duties, Heaven would withdraw the mandate and instead offer it to the most deserving figure, who would then begin a new dynasty. In the Zhou interpretation, this is what had happened when the Shang defeated the Xia, and in turn what happened when the Zhou defeated the Shang.

The leading lineage would thus control the kingship. The king would theoretically control all of the land and resources of the kingdom. He would then parcel out this land to his close relatives and supporters, who would rule the land as long as the leading lineage remained in power. One of the exciting fields of research for the Zhou is to use excavated and received materials to explicate how this Western Zhou form of governance worked. Li Feng (2008) has argued that the Western Zhou state was more bureaucratic than we have previously recognized, while Lothar von Falkenhausen (2006) has instead argued that the governance system was largely kin-based.

These three Bronze Age dynasties—the Xia, the Shang, and the Zhou—would come to be known as the Three Dynasties. They would later be associated in Chinese history with relatively decentralized kingdoms (compared with what was to develop later in the North China plain). And, because of the Mandate of Heaven, they would also be associated with a rule of virtue.

As is perhaps implied in the name of the “Three Dynasties,” this period came to a close. To explain the transformations over the next several centuries, it will be helpful to return to a larger Eurasian perspective.

### **The rise of pastoral nomadism in the steppe**

The Bronze Age aristocratic states that dominated the agricultural areas of Eurasia in the second millennium BCE were all destroyed over the course of the ensuing several centuries. The changes were again pan-Eurasian.

Let us begin with the steppe region. Sometime around 1000 BCE, horse riding became more prominent on the steppes. Horse riding allowed for the possibility of a full flourishing of pastoral nomadism across the steppe region. It also had significant military implications. Once groups started riding horses and domesticating them for endurance and speed, significant cavalry forces began to emerge. By the eighth century BCE, highly effective cavalry formations started developing across the steppes (Drews 2008). This began a pattern that would ultimately be crucial for later Eurasian history.

Given the nature of the steppe region, populations were relatively low. Small groups would travel with their domesticated animals. However, when a large number of groups could be brought together under a charismatic leader, the resulting cavalry forces were

often militarily overwhelming. At various times in world history, such alliances would occur, and the nomadic groups would attain a position of extreme dominance over the armies of the agricultural states. The most famous such occurrence happened in the thirteenth century with the emergence of the Mongol empire. But there were several other periods in Eurasian history when the steppe region became militarily dominant as well—including the period that witnessed the breakdown of the great agricultural empires in the fourth and fifth centuries of the Common Era. And, in other periods, the rise of powerful nomadic empires occurred in direct correlation with the emergence of powerful agricultural empires.

### **First millennium BCE**

If steppe warfare was developing toward cavalry formations in the first millennium BCE, the agricultural areas began developing in different ways. These developments are often referred to as the Iron Age, which is shorthand for a number of shifts that occurred across the agricultural regions of Eurasia at this time.

If bronze was an expensive substance to create, and was therefore associated with aristocratic culture, iron was on the contrary a widely available natural substance. Moreover, iron is, at least potentially, a far easier substance to work with than bronze. The difficulty of using iron comes simply from the fact that a high temperature is needed in order to cast iron effectively. But, once the technology was known, iron implements—both weapons and tools—could be easily mass-produced.

For agricultural work, the implications were enormous. Farmers throughout much of Eurasia—including China—were still using wood and stone implements well into the first millennium BCE. With the invention of iron, however, it became possible to supply farmers with iron tools. The result was a tremendous population growth throughout the agricultural areas of Eurasia.

This population growth had implications as well for the nature of warfare in the agricultural areas of Eurasia. The form of warfare associated with the Bronze Age had been predominantly aristocratic. The chariot riders were aristocrats, armed with bronze weapons. With the population surge, however, it became possible to start creating mass infantry armies. Moreover, iron technology made it possible throughout much of Eurasia (with the exception of, as we will see, the North China plain for a few more centuries) to mass-produce iron weapons with which to equip these expanded armies.

The emergence of mass infantry armies was directly related to the creation over the first millennium BCE of well-organized states to arm and train these mass infantry armies. And, with the formation of strong states and mass armies, social mobility of those born below the aristocracy started becoming possible.

These developments had other far-reaching implications as well. One of the consequences of the breakdown of the earlier hereditary states was a dramatic questioning of the religious practices associated with those aristocratic worlds. Beginning in roughly the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, and continuing for two to three centuries thereafter, a number of new philosophical and religious movements emerged in the agricultural states of Eurasia. This is the period that witnessed the emergence of the Orphics, Pythagoreans, the Platonic movement, Jainism, Buddhism, and, in China, Mohists, Confucians, and a figure named Laozi, who would later be credited with beginning Daoism.

## China in the first millennium BCE

If these are the overall developments occurring across Eurasia, let us again turn to the specific permutations occurring in the North China plain. And, to do so, let us pick up where we left off—the Western Zhou dynasty.

As noted earlier, the Western Zhou was a relatively decentralized aristocratic kingdom. As later political theorists in China would point out, there was an inherent tendency toward fragmentation in the Zhou form of political arrangement. When the Zhou king would initially make a land grant to a close supporter, it would be to someone whom he at least thought could be controlled. Over the generations, however, this control would tend to lessen; in each generation the respective lineages would have less connection with each other. Over time, therefore, the lineages would tend to become increasingly independent.

The implications of this are easy to imagine. After two or three centuries, one of the other lineages might begin to grow in power and start gaining more support from other lineages. Eventually, if the Zhou became weak enough, one of the other lineages might be able to overthrow the Zhou, claim the Mandate of Heaven, and begin a new dynasty—the fourth aristocratic dynasty.

But this did not happen. Or, rather, only some of this happened. The Zhou did indeed start declining in power. But, instead of another aristocratic lineage emerging to overthrow the Zhou and begin a new dynasty, the developments occurring across Eurasia instead came into play.

The first such impact occurred in the eighth century BCE. The emergence of effective cavalry formations in the steppe region created massive dislocations, as groups that successfully began developing cavalry units started driving off those who did not. One of the losers in this was the Quanrong, a group of non-horse-riders that seems to have been driven from the steppes. The Quanrong pushed into the Zhou homeland and forced the Zhou eastward. The Zhou set up their new capital in Chengzhou (modern-day Luoyang), a city founded by King Cheng. The next phase of the Zhou is accordingly referred to as the “Eastern Zhou.”

The weakened Zhou certainly would have seemed ripe for overthrow by this time. But then the other developments from Eurasia began impacting the North China plain. Instead of another lineage emerging to overthrow the Zhou, the entire social hierarchy of the aristocracy itself began to be undermined.

The most extreme example occurred in the state of Qin. In the mid-fourth century BCE, the state of Qin undertook a series of reforms aimed at centralizing state control, breaking down aristocratic rule, creating a series of laws and punishments that applied to everyone (commoners and aristocrats alike) equally, and creating a bureaucracy based upon principles of merit rather than birth. The goal of these reforms was to have the state take direct control over land and resources and utilize these resources for war. The Qin succeeded in creating an enormous, and extremely well-trained, mass infantry army that eventually overwhelmed the other states. Although most of the weapons used were bronze, the Qin reforms were clearly a permutation of the larger developments occurring in the agricultural areas of Eurasia at this time.

These reforms created two main avenues for possible social mobility. The first was the army: excellent skills demonstrated on the battlefield could lead to advancement in the ranks. The second was the bureaucracy: those who could prove their bureaucratic efficiency were in a strong position to be promoted.

There was also a built-in bias that worked to promote social mobility. For these reforms to be successful, it would be necessary for the state to be able to take direct control of as many resources as possible. But of course, each locality was controlled by aristocrats, who certainly had no desire to give up control. There was thus a strong incentive to hire people born below the aristocracy. Such people would owe their position entirely to the state and would have every reason to work on behalf of the state's growth.

The reforms successfully achieved many of the state's primary goals: breaking down the aristocratic families in the state of Qin and creating a strong, centralized state that was able to run an effective, well-trained mass infantry army. Some of the most exciting research being undertaken for the Warring States period consists of utilizing archaeological evidence to shed light on this breakdown of the aristocracy (see, e.g., Falkenhausen 2006).

A further result of the reforms is that they forced the other states to start undertaking similar measures. Indeed, much of the history of the ensuing century reflects a clear pattern: those states that did not initiate similar reforms and did not develop the kind of mass infantry armies being created elsewhere were swallowed up by those that did. Eventually, the entire North China plain came to be controlled by a small number of highly centralized states. By the latter part of the third century BCE, only one of the states still survived.

This period—which spanned the fifth through third centuries BCE—has come to be known as the Warring States period, for the obvious reason that it was characterized by the political strife that resulted from newly centralized states competing for dominance.

The Warring States period is also significant for another reason. Although the reforms achieved the state's goals, they also resulted in several unintended consequences. Figures born below the aristocracy began being educated, hoping that, by gaining training in reading, writing, and the art of debate, they too might be able to gain employment in the newly formed bureaucracies. Some, of course, did succeed in gaining positions in government, but many did not. And this created an entire group of people who were both highly educated and extremely dissatisfied with the new societal landscape.

Out of this group emerged a number of radical movements. One of these, the Mohists, began under the leadership of a charismatic founder named Mozi. The Mohists were organized around the claims that Heaven was a purely good deity who ruled over a pantheon of ghosts who in turn always acted to reward the good and punish the bad. Since the cosmos was flawlessly moral, humans were called upon to create an equally moral realm on earth as well. Among the many things this entailed was the formation of paramilitary units that would stand in defense of any city that was being attacked—the goal being to bring an end to offensive warfare. Although the Mohists would eventually die out, many of the characteristics of the Mohists would be repeated in later millenarian movements.

Other movements would also have far-reaching implications in later Chinese history. One of the more influential of these emerged out of the teachings of a figure named Confucius. Confucius's teachings emphasized the importance of returning to the rituals of the early Western Zhou—a series of rituals he then reinterpreted to be about moral cultivation.

Yet another figure that would ultimately be highly influential was Laozi. Whether or not Laozi was in fact a real person is unclear. (The name simply means “Old Master.”) Regardless, the work associated with him, the *Laozi*, would become one of the most influential texts of Chinese history. It would be read as a guide to effective rule, as a text of military strategy, and, in later Daoist movements, as a revelation from a god.

## The age of empires

The emergence throughout the agricultural areas of Eurasia of highly centralized states geared toward creating well-trained mass infantry armies came to a head by the last few centuries before the Common Era. Those states that were the most effective in developing these armies defeated those that were less effective, until, in each major agricultural region of Eurasia, one huge empire remained. In the Mediterranean world, that empire was Rome. In South Asia, it was the Mauryan empire. And in China, it was the Qin-Han.

This unification did not, however, result in submissive populations in each area. On the contrary, the first few centuries of the Common Era witnessed another wave of religious movements every bit as powerful as the wave that had occurred midway through the first millennium BCE. During this period, a series of salvationist religions swept across the agricultural areas of Eurasia. Christianity, Mahayana Buddhism, Daoism, and, a bit later, Islam, all emerged out of this context.

As always, the permutations of this larger historical development that occurred in the eastern part of Eurasia are particularly interesting.

During the Warring States period, the state of Qin had clearly become the dominant power. Although all of the other remaining states by this time were using an institutional system like that of the Qin, the Qin was nonetheless doing it better. The Qin armies were the best trained and best armed, and the institutions of the Qin succeeded in placing more troops on the ground than any of its competitors, allowing it to defeat state after state. In 221 BCE, Qin defeated the last state standing and began a new dynasty.

But this would not be a dynasty like the Three Dynasties of the past. The Qin ruler, instead of taking the Zhou title of “king” (*wang*), instead took the title of “First Emperor” (*huangdi*—more literally, “august god”). In stone inscriptions celebrating his rule, the First Emperor also celebrated the fact that he had created a state far greater than any that had preceded.

The First Emperor had a different vision of a dynasty from that which had existed during the Zhou. At no point did the First Emperor claim to have received the mandate of Heaven. Therefore, there would be no moment when the Qin might lose the mandate and thus allow another dynasty to be formed. Such a vision was built into the imperial title itself: the First Emperor was the “first,” and his son would be the “second,” and this would continue for ten thousand generations. The Qin portrayed itself as having brought an end to the dynastic cycle that underlay the aristocratic world of the Three Dynasties. The Qin was to be an enduring empire that would never fail.

The First Emperor immediately began a number of major public infrastructure projects to unify the land. Roads were built connecting the empire, and the wheel gauge of wheeled vehicles was standardized (thus ensuring that the tracks in the roads would be the same throughout the empire). Weights and measures were also unified. (For an excellent study of the Qin that fully incorporates a full utilization of existing archaeological evidence, see Pines et al. 2013.)

Although the Qin fell within fifteen years, the ensuing Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) was able to build on the Qin system to consolidate imperial rule in the North China plain. The east–west agricultural band across Eurasia that we have been exploring was at this time divided between two massive empires—the Roman empire on the western end of Eurasia, and the Han on the eastern end. An extremely fruitful avenue for future research is to compare the forms of empire that developed at this time (see Scheidel 2010; 2015).

Concurrent with the redevelopment of a strong empire in the North China plain was the emergence of a powerful empire among the pastoral nomads to the north and west—the Xiongnu. The parallels in time between the emergence of the agricultural and nomadic empires in the last few centuries before the Common Era raises the very likely possibility that they are related. This will be an important area for future scholarship as we continue to explore the contours of Eurasia history (see Di Cosmo 2004; Wang Mingke 2009).

### **Geographical limits to the empires of the North China plain**

The institutions that were created by the Qin and developed under the early Han would remain highly important thereafter in the North China plain. Maintaining a strong bureaucracy focused on building mass infantry armies, building public infrastructure, and running a clear legal system would prove to be highly effective in governing this region. Indeed, the success of subsequent empires in this area depended to a significant extent on the degree to which they were able to develop these institutions effectively. (For an outstanding use of paleogeographic materials to analyze the workings of the legal system in the early Han, see Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015.)

When these institutions were particularly strong, the empires would be able to expand dramatically into regions beyond the North China plain. But they would also face recurrent geographical limitations on that expansion.

For instance, Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BCE) of the Han launched a major military campaign against the Xiongnu, the nomadic empire to the north. Although the wars would ultimately be successful in that the Xiongnu were driven westward, they would come at great cost and would ultimately weaken the empire in the North China plain as well. Moreover, the Han would never succeed in actually controlling any part of the steppe. The grasslands always served as an effective barrier against armies from the North China plain: mass infantry armies need to be fed and supported, and, since food could not be grown in the steppe, the armies could at best be stationed in the grasslands for only brief periods of time.

A different sort of geographical barrier existed to the south. The Qin and Han launched a series of successful campaigns into the south, ultimately bringing under their control not only what is now southern China but also what is now northern Vietnam. But keeping the southern regions under control would prove to be a recurring problem for empires emanating from the North China plain. If building extraordinarily strong mass infantry armies was effective in the North China plain, it would often be less effective in the highly forested, mountainous, wet south—an extremely inhospitable terrain for a mass infantry army.

The south on the contrary tended to be decentralized, and not readily controllable by strong institutional structures. In the southern coastal regions, the differences were even starker. Not only was the coastal region an area relatively poorly controlled by the types of institutional structures being developed in the north, but the culture had long tended to operate according to very different rhythms. The economy and livelihood of the area revolved around maritime trade. Recent archaeological work is demonstrating how extensive were the trade networks that spread throughout Southeast Asia from an early period (see Jiao 2007). This region also tended to seek autonomy from the forms of regulation associated with the centralized states of the North China plain.

The tension that one begins seeing in the Han period, between an empire in the north devoted to using centralized forms of statecraft to control all resources, and a southern coastal region focused on maritime trade and seeking autonomy from the imperial north, is one that would continue throughout the remainder of Chinese history.

### Reactions against empire

In part because of the ultimately successful but nonetheless extraordinarily costly wars against the Xiongnu, a reaction set in at the court at the end of the first century BCE against the strong imperial expansions that had defined much of the previous two centuries. Several court officials began calling for the Han to abandon the legacy of the Qin and to return to the teachings they claimed had been developed by Confucius, teachings that promoted a more decentralized, moral rule. A number of texts ascribed to Confucius were by this time consolidated as the Five Classics—the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*), which was seen as having been written by Confucius, and the *Record of Rites* (*Liji*), *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*), *Book of Documents*, and *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), which were seen as having been edited by Confucius.

The scholars also called for the entire ritual system that had been created by the First Emperor and consolidated under Emperor Wu to be replaced by the ritual system that had supposedly existed in the Western Zhou dynasty. The ruler was to be called “Son of Heaven” (the Zhou royal title) and once again to rule under the Mandate of Heaven.

In the 30’s BCE, the court finally accepted many of these recommendations. The imperial ritual system was abolished.

But this was not enough. Calls for a fuller return to the Western Zhou would only grow more intense over the next century. In 9 CE, Wang Mang, one of the ministers of the Han, staged a coup and created a new dynasty. Claiming that the late Western Han ritual reforms were insufficient, Wang Mang called for a repudiation of the Qin-Han period and a full return to the Western Zhou. Wang Mang modeled himself after the Duke of Zhou, the minister of the Zhou who was particularly respected by Confucius. The Duke of Zhou had stepped in as regent to rule the Zhou when the king at the time—King Cheng—was too young to do so. Wang Mang was, in a sense, presenting himself as doing what the Duke of Zhou would have had to do if the Zhou rulers had not been good—he was not simply serving as a regent but in fact beginning a new dynasty.

To further his claims to be restoring the vision of the Duke of Zhou, Wang Mang changed the administrative titles to match those described in the *Rituals of the Zhou* (*Zhouli*)—a text attributed to the Duke of Zhou that purported to provide the institutional and ritual structure of the Western Zhou kingdom.

Wang Mang’s usurpation was not successful. But when the Han was finally restored in 25 CE, it very much continued the claims of returning to pre-imperial visions of rule. The main capital was moved from Chang’an—the capital of the grand empires of the Qin and Western Han—back to Luoyang, the Zhou capital that had been founded by King Cheng during the regency of the Duke of Zhou. And the court supported the study of the Five Classics.

These two modes of governance would continue thereafter in varying forms in the North China plain. On the one hand were the strong forms of imperial governance practiced by the Qin and Western Han and associated with the title of “Emperor.” On the

other were the claims that rulers should, purportedly like those of the Western Zhou, govern by virtue, claim to rule only insofar as they were deserving of the Mandate of Heaven, and follow the teachings of Confucius. This mode of governance was associated with the Zhou title “Son of Heaven.”

These two major modes of rulership were rarely clearly differentiated—as seen, most immediately, by the fact that rulers would keep both titles: “Emperor” and “Son of Heaven.” Moreover they would be endlessly worked upon, altered, and combined. Scholars have often adopted the term “imperial Confucianism” to describe this intermixing of imperial bureaucracies with moral policies attributed to Confucius, but the term may imply a greater uniformity than actually existed.

### Salvationist religions

The salvationist religions that emerged in the first few centuries of the Common Era had their counterpart in the eastern end of Eurasia as well.

In 142 CE, Laozi, now seen as a god, gave revelations to a figure named Zhang Daoling. Zhang Daoling would go on to found the Celestial Masters, based upon the teachings of Laozi. (The *Laozi* itself was read by the Celestial Masters as an earlier revelation by the god Laozi.) Very much like the Mohists before them, the Celestial Masters were committed to the view that the high god—Heaven for the Mohists, Laozi for the Celestial Masters—was a good deity who had created a moral universe. The people were then called upon to follow the doctrines of this higher, good deity—the perceived current disorder of the world being a result of humans failing to follow these teachings. The institutions of the state should be organized as a meritocracy in which those who best followed the teachings would be promoted to higher positions of power.

The Celestial Masters saw the Han as a corrupt regime. Indeed, the reason that Laozi gave further revelations in 142 was because the world was in such chaos that Zhang Daoling needed to create an alternative community in which people would properly follow the teachings of the *Laozi* and work to generate a better world after the coming cataclysm. The Celestial Masters declared their independence from the Han and created an autonomous organization in what is now Sichuan. The attempts by the Han to bring the Celestial Masters back into its orbit failed completely. (On the Celestial Masters, see Kleeman 1998. For translations of some of the key texts, see Bokenkamp 1997.)

Yet another millenarian movement along these lines also emerged in the northeast. Called the “Great Peace” (Taiping), the movement also claimed that a higher deity—here called Heaven, like that of the earlier Mohists—was good and provided divine revelations for humanity. The Han had failed to follow these teachings, and had now brought the world to chaos. Unlike the Celestial Masters, who created an autonomous community to wait out the coming apocalypse, the Taiping movement on the contrary tried to overthrow the Han state. The ensuing revolt was ultimately put down by the Han, but at great cost. The court essentially ceded power to the military generals who were called upon to end the revolt, and, after the revolt was finally put down, the Han was never again able to gain control over its armed forces. The generals themselves started vying for power, and their ensuing wars helped bring about the end of Han. Finally, Cao Pi declared an end of the Han dynasty and proclaimed the beginning of a new dynasty—the Wei.

The significance—or lack thereof—of these developments can best be seen if we return to a larger Eurasian perspective.

### Late antiquity

The fall of the Han is often compared to the fall of the Roman empire. In both cases, the argument goes, the fall of the respective empires resulted in a fall into disunity. But, in fact, this is a misleading comparison. It is true that, after the Han fell, another empire that would be able to control the south as the Qin or Western Han had done would not emerge for several centuries. However, if we think in terms of empires in the North China plain, the fall of the Han is actually not comparable to the fall of the Roman empire. After the Han fell, a new dynasty, called the Wei, was formed in the North China plain. It was modeled on the same use of centralized state institutions that had been developed in the Qin-Han period, and it was every bit as dominant over the North China plain as the Qin and Han had been. The same was true for the ensuing Western Jin dynasty. In sum, dominant empires in the North China plain continued throughout this period.

But the reason that the Wei and Jin would be seen by later historiography as a fall into disunity is that they failed to control the south. This failure to control the south was seen as disunity by later historians simply because the south would in later eras come to be seen as an inherent part of China. (By the same token, for later historical reasons, northern Vietnam would not come to be seen as an inherent part of China, so the failure of empires in the North China plain to control northern Vietnam would not come to be seen as a sign of disunity.)

The real parallel with the fall of the Roman empire actually comes later.

I have mentioned that there have been moments when the steppe region has been militarily dominant over the agricultural areas in Eurasia. The most famous such moment came in the thirteenth century, when the Mongol empire came to dominate much of Eurasia. Another moment occurred in the fourth and fifth centuries. The dominance was less extreme than in the thirteenth century, and, unlike the thirteenth century, there was not a single group that became dominant throughout Eurasia. But this was nonetheless a period when the agricultural civilizations were overrun by steppe peoples.

The exact causes of this dominance are still unclear. In the thirteenth century, it was due to a combination of highly charismatic leaders as well as various technological breakthroughs. In all likelihood similar factors were of significance during the fourth century.

Even if the causes are not yet fully understood, the results were nonetheless clear. In the early fourth century, the Jin fell to a series of invasions from the steppe region. And a century later, the Roman empire fell as well.

It might therefore be worthwhile to question the periodization that would mark the fall of the Han as the end of antiquity and the beginning of the Wei as the start of “early medieval” China. Another approach would be to think of the Eastern Han, Wei, and Western Jin (i.e., first through fourth centuries) as one period, directly comparable to the Roman empire over the same period of time. If we choose to maintain the periodization of “antiquity” for the larger span of time under consideration in this chapter, then the period from the first through fourth centuries of Chinese history would be termed “late antiquity,” in direct comparison with the same period on the western end of Eurasia. “Early medieval,” then, would be used for the periods after the fall of the Roman empire (in the western end of Eurasia) and after the fall of the Western Jin empire (in the eastern end of Eurasia).

## The Silk Road

We have been tracing throughout this chapter the degree to which cultures in Eurasia were linked. These links were growing only stronger over time. If bronze technology took some 1,500 years to spread, the chariot took 500. By the time one moves midway through the first millennium BCE, phenomena at either end of Eurasia were appearing almost simultaneously: the appearance of religious-philosophical movements in the sixth and fifth centuries, the emergence of mass infantry armies and then empires in the last few centuries of the first millennium BCE, and the emergence of salvationist religions in the first few centuries of the Common Era.

Also in the first few centuries of the Common Era, the links became even more direct as a series of trade networks began opening up across Eurasia. In other words, instead of a process of technologies or innovations occurring in one part of Eurasia and then spreading from one culture to a neighboring culture over a period of centuries, one now finds materials traveling directly across Eurasia through trade routes. Indeed, the two dominant agriculturally based empires in Eurasia—the Han and the Roman empires—even knew of each other’s existence. The Romans referred to the Han as “silk” (silk being a major export item from the Han), and the Han referred to the Roman empire as the “Great Qin”—knowing it only as a great empire to the west.

With these trade networks, the salvationist religions began spreading as well. Over the next several centuries, Mahayana Buddhism, Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity, and, later, Islam all spread across these trade networks.

### The legacies of the early period

By the end of the early empires, several key sets of institutions and orientations were clear. One of the most significant of these was the development of centralized statecraft institutions that proved to be extremely successful in governing the North China plain and, when run well, in building mass infantry armies that could expand beyond the North China plain.

A second was associated with calls to return to the values of the Three Dynasties, and more specifically the Western Zhou. The calls would be to maintain a more decentralized form of statecraft. This mode of governing was associated with the title “Son of Heaven,” and with claims of legitimacy based upon a Mandate of Heaven.

And a third, associated with millenarian movements, was based upon claims that a just deity had created the cosmos, that humans should model themselves on the moral cosmos so created, and that they should therefore build a perfectly meritocratic society. Even when these claims did not take the form of a full movement, they would remain a powerful language of protest.

These three modes were rarely seen as cleanly separated. On the contrary, they would be constantly reworked and intermixed. But the result was a series of institutions and cultural schemes that would be built upon thereafter.

As we have seen, these developments were permutations of larger trends occurring across Eurasia. As we continue to see Chinese history as an integral part of a larger global history, questions concerning the “rise of modernity,” or why certain civilizations did or did not achieve modernity, will finally cease to be asked. We will on the contrary be able to turn our attention to analyzing how the areas we would ultimately come to call China were an inherent part of a larger set of global developments.

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*Suggestions for further reading*

- Li Feng. 2013. *Early China: A Social and Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. An excellent survey of early Chinese history from a leading scholar in the field.
- Loewe, Michael, and E.L. Shaughnessy, eds. 1999. *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 BC*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. An outstanding overview of current scholarship on early Chinese history.
- Nylan, Michael, and Michael Loewe, eds. 2010. *China's Early Empires: A Re-appraisal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. An excellent discussion of how archaeological evidence is altering our understanding of early Chinese history.
- Yuan Xingpei, Yan Wenming, Zhang Chuanxi, and Lou Yulie, eds. 2012. *The History of Chinese Civilization*, vols. 1 and 2. English text edited by David Knechtges. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. An excellent overview of current scholarship from the People's Republic of China, with an extensive discussion of existing archaeological evidence.

## CHAPTER NINE

# Was Medieval China Medieval? (Post-Han to Mid-Tang)

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The fall of the Han dynasty (formally, with the abdication of the last Han emperor in 220, and effectively a generation earlier, following the outbreak of rebellions in 184) is conventionally said to mark the beginning of imperial China's great Age of Division. As the preceding chapter by Michael Puett suggests, however, there was still considerable continuity stretching from the Han into the subsequent Three Kingdoms (220–80) and Western Jin dynasty (265–317) periods, the latter of which even briefly reunified China in 280. The truly epoch-changing rupture arguably came only after that, with the establishment of the first ephemeral “non-Chinese” state in North China in 304 (initially called Han, and then [Former] Zhao, 304–29), which ushered in an episode of bewildering chaos in North China known as the Sixteen Kingdoms (304–439). Even the return of relative stability in North China after 439 was still followed by a prolonged period of division between opposing Northern and Southern dynasties that lasted until 589. Between the third and sixth centuries there were some 35 historically recognized “dynasties” in China. Not only was China divided during these centuries, moreover, but from 304 until 581 most of the ancient Chinese heartland in the north, most of the time, was under identifiably “non-Chinese” rule, making this a particularly complicated and pivotal period in imperial Chinese history.

The description of these northern regimes as “non-Chinese” requires some qualification, however, and a more nuanced understanding of the details. To begin with, “China” and “Chinese” are not Chinese language words or concepts. The most generic Chinese language term for the country we call China, *Zhongguo* (Central Country), while truly ancient in origin, began more as a geographic description than a national identity, and as late as the fourth century still did not necessarily include regions south of the Yangzi River (Knechtges 2003, 45–46). The label “Han,” which is an authentically Chinese term that is used today to mean “ethnic Chinese,” did not begin to be so used until the sixth century (and then only in the north), and did not really stabilize on that meaning until much later (Yang 2014c). In the fourth century, meanwhile, there were two states that literally

called themselves “Han” (Han/Former Zhao, and Cheng-Han, 304–47), neither of which had ethnic “Han Chinese” rulers. At that time, the people we might in English describe as “Chinese” were more apt to be labeled “Jin people” (*Jin ren*), meaning people from the supposedly legitimate Western and Eastern Jin dynasties. Nor does there even appear to have been any clearly perceived distinction between Chinese-speaking and non-Chinese speaking peoples. There were multiple spoken languages in use at that time in China, but contemporary sources simply do not appear to have made what we would today consider to be the fundamental distinction between “dialects” of Chinese (or Sinitic languages) and those that were unrelated to Chinese (not Sinitic) (Chittick 2014, 3).

The “non-Chinese” people of fourth-century North China were, furthermore, at least to some extent, ancestral to the Chinese people of today. They lived in China (few came from anywhere very far away anytime recently), contributed to the mainstream of Chinese history, and were already somewhat affected by mainstream Chinese culture and civilization. For example, a fourth-century ruler of much of North China (Shi Le, 274–333) who came from one of the most exotic of those “non-Chinese” peoples (the Jie)—some of whose distant ancestors may even be traced to Central Asia—nonetheless regarded what is now southern Shanxi province as his home, and in 317 authorized a restoration of the (then banned) “Chinese” “Cold Food” (*han shi*) festival because it was an old Shanxi custom that he had grown up with (*Jinshu*, 105.2749–50; Holzman 1986, 57–59). Although there were numerous spoken languages, a single fairly uniform version of written Chinese enjoyed a near monopoly on writing throughout the entire region. And, however ethnically and linguistically varied the population of China in the fourth century had been, all of these peoples eventually contributed to an emerging new “Chinese” synthesis. Indeed, it has even been claimed that the “non-Chinese” rulers of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–524) “and their descendants pretty much set the course of Chinese history, not just politically but also culturally, for nearly a millennium” (Chen 2012, 2). Certainly, Northern Wei led fairly directly into the gloriously reunified Tang dynasty (618–907). The Northern dynasties of this period, therefore, arguably fall into a somewhat different category than the “non-Han dynasties” covered in the chapter in this volume by Michal Biran. Yet, at the same time, at least until the end of the sixth century, they also clearly retained distinct ethno-cultural identities and non-Sinitic spoken languages. Hence the pivotal nature of this era.

### Historical synopsis

In 184, the religious rebellion of the Yellow Turbans shattered the unity of the Han dynasty, and China descended into conflict between rival warlords. The most outstanding of these warlords was Cao Cao (155–220), who eventually consolidated control over most of the northern heartland of Chinese civilization under the name of a puppet Han dynasty emperor. It was not until after Cao Cao died, however, that his son finally dared to openly usurp the throne and establish a new imperial dynasty, called Wei (220–65). The following year, another warlord with a claim to descent from the Han imperial family founded a dynasty in the area of modern Sichuan, in the southwest, which is known to history as Shu-Han (221–63). A year later, yet a third state, called Wu (222–80), was established in the southeast, with its capital at what is now Nanjing. These three regimes are popularly known as the Three Kingdoms.

In an innovation with lasting consequences, in 220 the Three Kingdoms Wei dynasty established a new system for selecting government officials known as the Nine Ranks.

Under this system, specially designated officials were appointed for each regional administrative unit and charged with ranking potential candidates for office on a scale of 1–9, based supposedly on their local reputation, for consideration by the Ministry of Personnel (Miyazaki 1956). Although the original idea was to promote talent, because the evaluators favored men from already established “good” families, the system contributed to the consolidation of what would become the characteristic Great Family elite of the age. This elite has been the focus of much attention from modern scholars. We will return to the question of whether or not it constituted an “aristocracy” later.

In 263, Shu-Han was conquered by the Wei, which itself in turn succumbed to a usurpation in 265 and was replaced by the Western Jin dynasty. In 280, Western Jin conquered Wu in the southeast, temporarily reunifying all of China proper. After little more than a decade, however, internal power struggles began to ravage Western Jin, and civil wars known as the “disturbances of the eight princes” (300–307) shredded imperial unity. By 317, the Western Jin had disintegrated, and centralized government in North China collapsed almost entirely.

In the south, a junior member of the Western Jin imperial family managed to reestablish a continuation of that dynasty, known to history as the Eastern Jin (317–420). The Eastern Jin capital was located at the site of modern Nanjing, and it became the first in a succession of five Southern dynasties that endured until 589. Together with Three Kingdoms Wu, these five Southern dynasties are commonly called the Six Dynasties. The core of these Southern dynasties was in the lower Yangzi River drainage area, and these dynasties stimulated significant economic development and commercialization in that region (Liu 2001). They also began the epochal shift of China’s economic and demographic center of gravity from the north to the south that culminated later in the Tang and Song (960–1279) dynasties.

While Southern dynasty China enjoyed a degree of cultural and economic exuberance beginning in the fourth century, North China initially collapsed into chaos. The Western Jin dynasty had fallen as a result of civil war rather than “barbarian invasions,” but during those civil wars cavalry drawn from ethnically distinct frontier populations had become militarily significant. After the collapse of imperial government in the early 300s, bands of such warriors formed multiple ephemeral states, most of which had identifiably “ethnic” rulers. Chinese sources conventionally speak of five major ethnic groups in fourth-century North China, collectively known as the “five *hu*” (*hu* being a generic Chinese term for northern foreign peoples).

Their regimes were typically hybrids. For example, the first of the “non-Chinese” Sixteen Kingdoms was founded in Shanxi in 304 by a man who claimed descent from nomadic Xiongnu royalty (the Xiongnu empire had been based in what is today called Mongolia). He also, however, claimed descent from Han dynasty Chinese emperors, bore the old Han dynasty imperial surname (Liu), had studied under a Confucian scholar and lived for years in the Chinese capital, and pointedly named his new state “Han.” (The name was later changed to Zhao, which is called “Former Zhao” by historians to distinguish it from other states with that same name.) He claimed the Chinese title “emperor” (*huangdi*), but he also invoked the old non-Chinese Xiongnu supreme title *shanyu* (or *chanyu*), and established separate administrations for his “Chinese” and “non-Chinese” subjects.

In the long run, the historically most significant of the five *hu* peoples proved to be not the Xiongnu but the Xianbei (Holcombe 2013). The Xianbei were themselves divided into several differently named subgroups, and may have originated in the area of

what is now Manchuria and northeastern Inner Mongolia. They spoke languages unrelated to Chinese (possibly affiliated to Mongolic), and their rise at this time was associated with the introduction of a new type of heavily armored cavalry.

This was an age of unprecedented cultural openness and cosmopolitanism—a time when the line between “China” and “not China” was far from clear. The triumph of Indian Buddhism in China beginning in the fourth century was only the most spectacular example of outside influence during these centuries, as music, dance, art, clothing and hair styles, food and drink, and even the status of women were profoundly affected by (primarily northwestern) foreign styles. The chair, for example, may have been introduced to China from the west together with Buddhism during this period (Kieschnick 2003, 229–47). A second- or third-century eastern Roman plate decorated with an image of Dionysus and the gods of Mount Olympus (Watt et al. 2004, 184–85), and a pitcher from a tomb dated to 569 that is decorated with scenes from the Trojan Wars (Dien 2007, 276–77), have been discovered in northwest China. Even in South China, a cache of fourth and fifth century Sassanid Persian coins and artifacts has been found in what is now Guangdong, and several Southern dynasty imperial tombs feature fluted stone columns suggesting Greek derivation (Dien 2007, 191, 280–81).

After more than a century of chaos in North China under the Sixteen Kingdoms, a subgroup of the Xianbei known as the Tuoba established a more enduring imperial dynasty called the Northern Wei in 386. By 439, this Northern Wei dynasty had reunified all of the north. Beginning in the late 400s, the Northern Wei implemented a series of Sinicizing (i.e., Chinese-izing) measures that transformed the regime into a more thoroughly Chinese-style state. These measures included requiring the taking of Chinese names and speaking the Chinese language, and the relocation of the Northern Wei capital to the venerable ancient Chinese site of Luoyang in 494.

Modern Chinese scholars have understandably been obsessed by this program of alleged Tuoba Xianbei assimilation into Chinese civilization, but non-Chinese scholars have been more skeptical, generally insisting that any Sinicization was only selective and limited. After 523, moreover, when the Northern Wei dynasty was rocked by rebellions in the garrisons along its northern frontier and split (in 534) into separate northwestern and northeastern dynasties, there was even a revival of Xianbei language and culture. Xianbei people remained politically and militarily dominant in North China until 581, and Xianbei culture made lasting contributions to “Chinese” civilization (e.g., in clothing styles—see Lingley 2010). While emphasizing that the cultural exchange was mutual, however, it remains undeniable that the Xianbei identity in China was eventually absorbed into a new fusion under the Tang dynasty, and ceased to exist.

After the splitting of the Northern Wei dynasty, both of the resulting new Eastern Wei (534–50) and Western Wei (535–57) regimes were dominated by warlord families, who each in turn eventually usurped the throne to found their own new dynasties. In 577, the last northwestern dynasty (Northern Zhou, 557–81) conquered the final regime in the northeast (Northern Qi, 550–77), reunifying North China. In 581, a palace coup replaced the Northern Zhou with a new dynasty called Sui (581–618), whose rulers are conventionally considered to have been “Chinese” (although, in reality, they had intermarried extensively with the Xianbei and were culturally mixed). In 589, the Sui then conquered the last Southern dynasty and reunified the whole of China proper. Despite considerable commercial prosperity, the Southern dynasties had been weakened by extreme economic polarization, a string of military usurpations and vicious internal power struggles, and by a devastating rebellion in 548–52.

The victorious Sui dynasty, which also completed the Grand Canal linking the river systems of north China with those of the south, soon overreached itself with a series of massive failed invasions of a kingdom in northern Korea called Koguryō. The Sui dynasty then collapsed amidst multiple rebellions, and a new dynasty, called Tang, was established on its ruins in 618. Although it took Tang a decade to consolidate control over the whole of China, the dynasty proved enduring, and it inaugurated one of the most glorious periods in all of Chinese history.

In 626, in a steppe-style succession struggle reminiscent of the dynasty's Tuoba Xianbei roots, the Tang founder's second son ambushed and killed his own older brother, the crown prince, together with a younger brother. Two months later, their father abdicated the throne to him (Eisenberg 2008, 167–94). Just ten days after the new emperor (posthumously known as Emperor Taizong, r. 626–49) ascended the throne, however, the Qaghan (or Khan) of the Eastern Türks in Mongolia (Illig Qaghan, r. 620–30) advanced his army to a bridge less than seven miles west of the Tang capital at Chang'an (modern Xi'an). The Türk Qaghan withdrew only after Emperor Taizong personally met with him, sacrificed a white horse, and offered generous gifts. Afterwards, Emperor Taizong was determined to avenge this humiliation, and, as internal rifts opened within the Eastern Türk empire, the Tang dynasty was able to exploit those divisions and defeat and capture Illig Qaghan in 630. Following this defeat of the Eastern Türks, Emperor Taizong was hailed as “Heavenly Qaghan” by the peoples of the eastern steppes—a non-Chinese title that Tang emperors would continue to claim until the late eighth century (Pan 1997, 179–83).

In 690, a former concubine who had become a favorite of Emperor Gaozong (r. 650–83) managed to ascend the throne in her own right, becoming the only reigning female emperor in all of Chinese history, Wu Zetian (625–705). There had, of course, been innumerable empresses (that is, wives of emperors) in Chinese history, and several very powerful women—typically from a position behind the throne as empress dowager. In pre-Tang Northern dynasty Xianbei culture, women had also enjoyed a significantly more prominent position than was normally the case in China. Empress Dowager Wenming (441–90), for example, had been an absolutely towering figure in the Northern Wei dynasty. However, Wu Zetian was the only woman to ever actually hold the title “Emperor.” She briefly replaced the Tang with her own dynasty, called Zhou, but in 705 the aging female emperor Wu was deposed and the Tang dynasty restored.

The early eighth century is generally considered to have been the most culturally glorious period of the Tang. This halcyon age was cut short, however, by the rebellion of An Lushan (d. 757) in 755. Although the rebellion was eventually suppressed and the Tang dynasty survived until 907, Tang imperial authority never fully recovered.

The early Tang dynasty, meanwhile, had been the golden age of the legendary Silk Roads. Tang power reached deep into Central Asia, and a catalog of the exotic foreign items brought to Tang could literally fill a book, as Edward Schafer did with his *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand* (1963). But, if early Tang witnessed a continuation of the cosmopolitanism of the previous Age of Division, the turmoil of those centuries had also created the conditions for a new synthesis once stable conditions returned. Over the three centuries of the Tang dynasty, what had begun as a consciously multiethnic and multicultural empire was consolidated into a substantially more homogenous “China” (Abramson 2008).

To increase administrative efficiency in a somewhat sclerotic Great Family-dominated society, meanwhile, in the early sixth-century south, even before the Sui and Tang

reunification, men of demonstrable literary ability had begun to be selected for government positions. Under the reunified Sui and Tang dynasties, then, an early version of what became China's renowned civil service examination system was implemented, and became an increasingly important institution. Testing had much earlier origins in China, and examinations had continued to be administered throughout the Age of Division, as Albert Dien (2001) has demonstrated with a study of a set of test answers from 408 discovered near Turfan. Nevertheless, the maturation of the examination system that began during the Tang dynasty proved to be a major turning point in Chinese history, associated with a fundamental change in the nature of the Chinese elite, and arguably marking the beginning of a whole new era.

### A cycle of Cathay?

At first glance, including everything from the end of the Han dynasty in 220 to the middle of the Tang dynasty (roughly around 750) in a single historical period, as I have done in this chapter, seems strange. Such a periodization combines the unified Tang dynasty with the centuries of political fragmentation that preceded it, while splitting the Tang dynasty itself between two entirely different eras. The Age of Division and (Sui-) Tang are handled by two separate volumes in the recent Harvard History of Imperial China series (Lewis 2009a; and 2009b), and they are also separately treated by the *Cambridge History of China*. Other than “medieval,” there is no established label for the whole period.

However, in 1922, the pioneering Japanese sinologist Naitō Torajirō (also known as Naitō Konan, 1866–1934) published a highly influential article in which he provocatively suggested that the mid-Tang dynasty marked a major watershed in Chinese history (Naitō 1922). The distinguished Chinese scholar Chen Yinke (1890–1969) soon reached a similar conclusion, noting in a 1954 essay that early Tang and late Tang were significantly different periods, both in terms of government, society, economics, and culture. Chen took the seminal Tang dynasty precursor of late imperial Neo-Confucianism Han Yu (768–824), as a particularly pivotal figure (Chen 2001), although he also recognized that important changes had begun even earlier in the mid-eighth century (Chen 1994, 55). Following Naitō and Chen, it has since come to be widely—though not universally—accepted that a major historical transition began in mid-Tang, reaching maturity in the subsequent Song dynasty. Facets of this Tang–Song transition are examined in greater detail in the chapter written by Nicolas Tackett later in this volume.

At the same time, if important changes began in the mid-to-late Tang dynasty, marking the start of a whole new era in Chinese history, the roots of earlier Tang institutions must be traced back to the preceding Age of Division. Chen Yinke (1982) convincingly demonstrated this point in a masterpiece study that he first published in 1944. Elements of continuity reaching from the Age of Division into early Tang included, among other things, a remarkable system of government farmland allocation known as the “Equitable Fields” (*juntian*) that was first implemented by the Northern Wei in 485, and a system of “Garrison Militias” (*fubing*) that was developed in the sixth century northwest. In order to properly understand the early Tang dynasty, therefore, it is necessary to study the previous Age of Division. In fact, in a book called *The Great Tang Empire*, Miyazaki Ichisada (1901–95) devoted a mere 61 out of 333 pages to the Tang dynasty itself, focusing the majority of his attention instead on the events leading up to the founding of the Tang (Miyazaki 1993). Because of these continuities reaching from the Age of

Division through early Tang, and the important transformations that began in mid-Tang, it can therefore indeed plausibly be argued that this period does constitute a coherent historical bloc. Whether or not it should be called “medieval,” however, is another question.

### Was medieval China “medieval”?

Premodern Chinese history was traditionally often periodized simply by using the standard sequence of dynasties. Many early western observers, meanwhile, dismissed premodern China as “stagnant,” and lacking the kind of meaningful developmental sequence exhibited by European history. In an understandable reaction against such condescending foreign attitudes, modern East Asian scholars have therefore been much concerned to discover a comparable pattern of historical development in China. Frequently, this has been achieved simply by borrowing the conventional European tripartite division into ancient, medieval, and modern. An early example of this is the periodization scheme proposed by Liang Qichao (1873–1928) in 1901, in which the medieval age was conceived of as including almost the entire imperial period from the Qin unification in 221 BCE to the end of the eighteenth century (Gao 2006a, 3).

This basic three stage periodization scheme remains common, with much disagreement over exactly where to place the divisions. As a label for the middle period, however, Naitō Torajirō sometimes (although not in his most famous article: see Naitō 1922, 1) favored the term “Middle Antiquity” (*chūko*) over a more literal Japanese translation of the European expression “Middle Ages” (such as *chūsei*) (Miyakawa 1955, 537). Recent Chinese scholars have also often used this same relatively neutral term “Middle Antiquity” (pronounced *zhonggu* in Mandarin). English-speaking scholars, meanwhile, sometimes use a three part division between pre-imperial antiquity and early and late imperial periods (often divided by the start of the Song in 960).

During the twentieth century, the Marxist variant of the standard European periodization scheme, which identified a purportedly universal sequence of economically defined modes of production proceeding from an (ancient) slave society to (medieval) feudalism and then to (modern) capitalism, became common in East Asia. (The sequence has sometimes also been complicated by introducing Karl Marx’s vaguely conceived “Asiatic mode of production.”) Since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, a Marxist framework has been more or less obligatory in mainland China—at least to the extent of automatically labeling much of premodern Chinese history “feudal.” Marxist approaches also tended to dominate post-World War II Japanese academic fashion. Because it was assumed that modern capitalism could not be arrived at without passing through medieval feudalism first, a truly astonishing amount of ink was spilt in East Asia trying to identify when the transition from slave society to feudalism might have occurred in China (and whether or not there was any incipient capitalism later). Suggested transition points from slave society to feudalism proposed by PRC scholars have ranged from Western Zhou (ca. 1045–771 BCE) to the Han dynasty. In Japan, the Kyōto school, following Naitō Torajirō, viewed China’s medieval period as lasting from the end of Han through mid-Tang, while the postwar Japanese Marxist scholars known as the “Tōkyō school” saw Chinese feudal society as only just beginning in mid-Tang (Zurndorfer 1995, 40–42).

In reaction to overly mechanistic applications of Marxist theory in postwar Japan, Tanigawa Michio (1925–2013) developed his controversial *kyōdōtai* (cooperative system)

theory, which postulated local community relations in medieval China that somewhat ameliorated the expected harshness of naked Marxist class antagonisms (Tanigawa 1985). In the PRC, meanwhile, there was a great deal of excellent scholarship that managed to sidestep excessively rigid confinement within the European-derived theoretical model and follow the evidence instead. The prolific historian Tang Changru (1911–94), for example, although working diligently within the Marxist framework, still noted frankly that if the Han dynasty was a slave society then it was an “Asian-style slave society” in which slaves were few and greatly outnumbered by independent self-cultivators and tenant farmers (Tang 1993, 17–19). Since the introduction of market-based economic reforms in the late 1970s, serious concern for Marxist theory has, furthermore, waned in the PRC.

While postulating a vague “middle period” of some kind for Chinese history is fairly unproblematic, identifying it closely with medieval European feudalism proves more difficult. In trying to make the argument that China did indeed have a “Middle Ages,” Keith Knapp (2007) turned to the cases of the Islamic Umayyad (661–750) and Abbasid (750–1250) dynasties for medieval examples that were geographically intermediate between Western Europe and China, and might therefore be expected to better illustrate supposedly universal medieval characteristics. Knapp observes that these Islamic states were decentralized and had military elites endowed with something resembling fiefs (*iqta*) like medieval Europe, stressed patron–client relationships as did both Europe and China, and retained functioning bureaucratic governments and were richly cosmopolitan societies that celebrated book-learning like contemporary China. Knapp explains these similarities not as mere coincidence but as the result of “the migration of Inner Eurasian peoples” (Knapp 2007, 12). Although the extent to which this was a great Eurasian age of “migrations of peoples” (*Völkerwanderung*) is controversial, significant Eurasian interconnections are undeniable, and Knapp’s point is an excellent one. At the same time, however, it also only underscores the danger of universalizing a particular Western European feudal model.

If there were broad Eurasian linkages throughout this period, and if China was in the midst of an especially open and cosmopolitan age, Western Europe, by contrast, really was relatively isolated and peripheral during its Early Middle Ages, and might have been relatively atypical of Eurasian developments as a whole. Nor was Western Europe in this period obviously in any way “more advanced” than the rest of Eurasia. If anything, Tang through Song dynasty China may be said to have held a leading position in any putatively uniform sequence of Eurasian development. Precisely because our model of medieval feudalism is based so narrowly on the specific Western European case, therefore, it may not be the most appropriate general model.

There are, to be sure, certain obvious parallels between China and Europe in this period, including the collapse of ancient unified empires (Rome and Han), political fragmentation, the prominence of new ethnic groups (such as the Franks and the Xianbei), the spread of new religions (Christianity and Buddhism), the appearance of armored horse-riding warrior elites, a hereditary aristocracy, and a manorial economy tilled by dependent farmers. Some PRC scholars have been particularly inclined to identify the emergence of private dependency relations—including tenant farmers who are sometimes alleged to have “resembled serfs”—as an indication of feudalism in China (Tang 1990, 135). Yet, in China, many of these features either did not last very long, or must otherwise be qualified. Moreover, such essential characteristics of European feudalism as vassalage and the fief seem to have been almost entirely absent in China.

Horse-riding armored warriors dominated north China (but not the south) from the fourth century through the sixth, and then disappeared as a class. Chinese imperial unity was restored in 589, permanently ending the period of political fragmentation. The Age of Division through mid-Tang might have been, as Naitō Torajirō claimed, an unusually “aristocratic” period in imperial Chinese history. Yet, Dennis Grafflin (1981, 66) argues vigorously “that the aristocracy described by Naitō did not exist,” and even Naitō himself noted the absence of feudalism (meaning fiefs and enfeoffment) (Mou 2011, 42). Although Japanese scholars since Naitō have generated an entire subfield of research into the supposed “aristocratic society” of the era, the Chinese Great Families of this period continued to derive their status primarily from office-holding in the central imperial government (which was, furthermore, not itself normally directly hereditary), and locally important families remained merely large private landowners rather than medieval European-style lords of semi-autonomous domains (Kawachi 1970, 482–83). Beginning during the Tang dynasty the incipient examination system profoundly changed the nature of the late imperial Chinese elite and produced a society very different from medieval Europe.

In South China, commerce and a market economy began to flourish after the fourth century, coming to permeate almost all levels of society. Even in the north, where governmental collapse had been most devastating during the fourth century, the commercial slowdown lasted only a couple of centuries. The economic development of Southern dynasty China should not be exaggerated, but South China did now witness the first stirrings of that economic revolution that would come to full fruition later in the Song. In addition, the rise of wealthy “commoner” (*shuzhu*) landowners and merchants in South China by the fifth and sixth centuries was already beginning to undermine any “aristocratic” order that might have existed (Gao 1986, 210–19; Zhang, Tian, and He 1991, 171–78). And the Equitable Fields system that was implemented in North China after 485 does not seem to have any counterpart in medieval European feudalism.

As paper replaced the unwieldy strips of wood or bamboo that had been used for writing in the Han dynasty, and as commercial markets made books more widely available, there was a great expansion of book collecting in China during this period (even before woodblock printing began to have an impact in late Tang). By the Tang dynasty, books and literacy were probably “significantly more widespread” than in contemporary Europe (Nugent 2010, 3). Even allowing for Christopher Beckwith’s (1987 180–83, 195) revisionist argument that literary culture was also expanding in Europe at this time, literacy in early medieval Europe was overwhelmingly confined to the clergy and religious purposes. This, too, is in contrast to a Tang dynasty China where education remained predominantly secular.

Despite the pervasiveness of Buddhism in Tang dynasty China, Buddhism did not replace other religious beliefs in China, but coexisted with them. China never became exclusively Buddhist—a “Buddhadom” comparable to medieval European “Christendom.” In China, furthermore, religion had effectively been brought under secular authority by mid-Tang times. Parallels between the rise of Buddhism in China and Christianity in the Late Classical West should not, therefore, be exaggerated. Without denying the existence of broad Eurasian commonalities, medieval Europe and contemporary China were significantly different. If there was any universal Eurasian Middle Ages, our “medieval” model should not be too narrowly defined by Western European-style feudalism.

### Conclusion: The state of the field

As a result of Meiji (1868–1912) Japan’s early enthusiasm for western learning, and Japanese interest in this period of Chinese history because of its formative influence on the development of Japan’s own unique civilization, Japanese sinologists took a leading role in the development of modern historical studies of “medieval” China. Before long, Chinese scholarship also found itself stimulated by modern western approaches. Chen Yinke, who studied in Japan, Europe, and the United States, is an outstanding example of this sophisticated blending of traditional Chinese and modern western learning.

After the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949, scholarship in mainland China acquired an obligatory Marxist framework, and during the Cultural Revolution years (broadly understood as including much of the 1960s–1970s) academic historical studies were severely curtailed altogether. Meanwhile, non-Marxist Chinese-language scholarship continued to flourish in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and among the overseas Chinese. Because of the inherently conservative approach taken in Taiwan during the Cold War years, however, while scholarship there was often very solid, it was seldom inclined to develop radically new interpretations.

During the Cultural Revolution years, therefore, as peculiar as it may sound, Japan may have been the world’s leading center for the study of this period of Chinese history. However, with the new age of openness in the PRC beginning after roughly 1978, accelerating Chinese economic takeoff, and an increasingly dynamic cultural and economic synergy between the PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, there has been a surge of new Chinese activity, and Chinese-language scholarship has regained what may be considered its natural position of dominance.

Also quite naturally, the volume of English and other European-language scholarship pales in comparison with that in Chinese and Japanese. Beginning in the 1930s, the Hungarian-born scholar Étienne Balazs (1905–63) published a series of path-breaking studies in French and German. Since the 1950s, the American-born but French-based Donald Holzman (1926–) also produced some exceptional studies in both French and English, which remain standard even today. The booming prosperity of American universities in the post–World War II years (combined with Cold War geopolitical concerns), meanwhile, made possible a burst of China area studies in the US, although relatively little of that was focused on the Han-Tang period. The distribution of attention across the range of possible topics, moreover, remains uneven.

In terms of chronological focus, the Tang dynasty, as the acknowledged golden age of Chinese poetry, a culminating era in Chinese Buddhism, and a peak period in China’s regional influence on its neighbors, has long attracted special interest among scholars in every language. By one estimate, the twentieth century alone generated nearly a thousand books and over twenty thousand articles on the Tang dynasty (Hu 2000, 78). By contrast, the preceding Age of Division, perhaps because it is both so atypical and so complicated, has been described as a kind of “black hole” in western understanding about China. Chinese scholars, who correctly perceive the Age of Division as posing a critical challenge to the continuity of a unitary “China,” and Japanese sinologists, who locate the roots of some of their own culture in this period, have paid substantially more attention to the Age of Division. In English, however, the field has been slow to develop. A volume in the authoritative *Cambridge History of China* series dedicated to the Six Dynasties was envisioned in the mid-1980s, but remains unpublished today (although publication is

now expected soon). An English-language newsletter on the period first appeared in 1977, and was reborn as a proper journal, *Early Medieval China*, in 1994.

In terms of discipline, scholarship in all languages has tended to focus on literature, thought, and religion. One bibliographical compendium of publications on literature during the Six Dynasties that was published on Taiwan in 1992 already listed approximately seven thousand titles (Hong 1992). Much work continues to be literary in orientation. In English, for example, Jack Chen (2010) recently contributed an analysis of the Tang Emperor Taizong's (r. 626–49) fabrication of his own literary-historical image, Antje Richter (2013) produced a pioneering study of letter-writing during the Age of Division, and Xiaofei Tian (2005) examined literary perceptions of illumination by candlelight in Southern dynasty poetry.

Affiliated to the discipline of literature, the translation of Chinese texts continues to be a project of great importance to English-speaking scholars. Major achievements in translation include Richard Mather's (1976) English rendition of the *Shishuo xinyu*, a delightful fifth-century collection of historical anecdotes that was once considered so linguistically challenging as to be almost untranslatable (Balazs 1964, 231); David Knechtges' translations (1982–) from the influential sixth-century anthology of belles-lettres, the *Wen xuan*; and Stephen Owen's multiple volumes of translation of Tang dynasty poetry.

As the formative age of Chinese Buddhism as well as religious Daoism, this period is critical to religious history (Zürcher 1959). The interaction of Indian Buddhism with Chinese civilization is a particularly fascinating episode, which Robert Sharf has recently (2002) explored with an analysis of an eighth-century Buddhō-Daoist text. Stephen Bokenkamp (2007) and Robert Campany (2009) have both made significant contributions to the flourishing field of religious Daoist studies. Studies of art from this period often also focus on religious artifacts, such as the magnificent Buddhist sculptures at Longmen (McNair 2007).

Social historians have been much preoccupied with study of the “medieval Great Families,” and there have also been specialized studies of institutions such as the Equitable Fields system (e.g., Hori 1975), or the rise of an eccentric ideal of gentlemanly life in reclusion (Berkowitz 2000). Because this period coincides with the dawn of history for neighboring civilizations in Korea, Japan, and Tibet, and was a time of peak activity across the “Silk Roads,” international relations have also been a topic of wide interest (Beckwith 1987; Pan 1997; Holcombe 2001; Wang 2005; Hansen 2012; Skaff 2012; Wang 2013b). And, while few recent archeological discoveries can rival the fabulous sealed library cave that was found at Dunhuang over a century ago, the steady accumulation of new artifacts has enormously enriched our knowledge of the material culture of this era (Watt et al. 2004; Dien 2007; Steinhardt 2014).

Some of the most dramatic recent changes in our understanding of premodern China have involved the swing from imagining China as having always been especially closed, isolated, and exceptional, towards seeing it instead as part of the larger Eurasian world. Such changing intellectual (and political) fashions have less relevance for the Age of Division and early Tang than they do for other periods of premodern Chinese history, because it has always been clearly understood that this was an unusually open period. The current climate of globalization may have contributed, nonetheless, to a greater willingness to recognize the foreign connections, and to a new appreciation for this gloriously cosmopolitan era.

*Suggestions for further reading*

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## CHAPTER TEN

# A Tang–Song Turning Point

*NICOLAS TACKETT*

Between the mid-Tang dynasty and the mid-Southern Song dynasty, China was transformed by a series of social, economic, and political changes so fundamental that some scholars have spoken of this period as the transition between the medieval and the early modern ages. Much Anglo-American scholarship on the history of Tang and Song China has been devoted to exploring the various elements of the “Tang–Song transition.” This chapter provides an overview of this scholarship, while also describing select pertinent work in Chinese and Japanese. I focus on change across the Tang–Song period as it pertains to six topics: (1) the sociopolitical elite; (2) institutions and political culture; (3) the economy; (4) thought and religion; (5) women and gender; and (6) foreign relations and “proto-nationalism.” I conclude with a discussion of the burgeoning scholarship on the Five Dynasties. As we shall see, the period of most dramatic change varied across the six topics, though it fell generally between the eighth and twelfth centuries. Consequently, this chapter will limit its scope to scholarship dealing with this period, and will not deal with the extensive literature on the early Tang and on the Southern Song.

### **The Naitō thesis**

One of the earliest accounts of the Tang–Song transition was by the early twentieth-century Japanese historian Naitō Torajirō (Fogel 1983, 88–99). Naitō focused on four fundamental transformations. The first was the transition from “aristocratic government” to “monarchical autocracy,” consisting of the demise of the Great Families that had dominated China’s government across multiple dynasties, accompanied by a new land tenure system and institutional innovations diminishing the power of top ministers. The second transformation involved the dramatic monetization of the economy, and the third certain fundamental changes in classical scholarship rooted in a rejection of earlier commentarial traditions. Finally, Naitō noted parallel developments in literature and the arts. So fundamental was this set of transformations that Naitō claimed that the Tang reflected the end

of the “medieval period,” while the Song constituted the beginning of the “modern era.” Naitō sketched out his thesis in broad strokes, leaving it to the next generations of Japanese scholars to explore the details of the political, economic, social, and cultural transformations he had described. Though a sharp interpretive divide emerged between Naitō’s disciples in the “Kyoto” school and the more Marxist-leaning “Tokyo” school, all recognized the dramatic nature of the societal changes spanning the Tang–Song period (von Glahn 2003a; Lau 2008, 3–42). In the three decades after World War II, with Mainland China largely inaccessible to western researchers, many young scholars of Chinese history went to Japan while researching their dissertations. As a result, English-language scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s was often derivative of Japanese scholarship, while scholarship of the 1980s and later continues to reflect Naitō’s influence.

The Naitō thesis in its original formulation has not gone uncriticized. In portraying the Tang–Song transition as a shift towards the “modern era,” Naitō was undoubtedly influenced by his own understanding of early modernity in Europe—when absolutist monarchies came to displace the aristocracy, while simultaneously a commercial revolution transformed society. In the context of growing skepticism towards universalist periodizations, the notion of China’s early modernity in the Song dynasty is now seen as problematic. Moreover, by implying that China’s early modernity led to centuries of stagnation throughout East Asia that only post-Meiji Japan managed to escape, Naitō’s ideas have been implicated in mid-twentieth-century Japanese militarist ideology (Fogel 1984; Zhang 2005). But despite criticisms of elements of Naitō’s interpretive framework, most of the dramatic changes he outlined have been confirmed in the detailed studies of later historians, as we shall see below.

### The sociopolitical elite

New source material, including excavated tomb epitaphs dating to the Tang, as well as the prosopographic data contained in the Chinese Biographical Database (CBDB), has provided historians with exciting new possible avenues of research, though it remains the case that most Tang and Song social history inevitably focuses on the political elite and the higher socioeconomic strata. One particularly significant societal transformation spanning the Tang–Song transition involves the changing nature of the elite dominating the bureaucracy and political power. From the early post-Han period through the Tang dynasty, high political office was largely monopolized by a circumscribed group of great clans, who defined their status and right to rule on the basis of an inherited family tradition of education and government service (Johnson 1977; Ebrey 1978; Tackett 2014a). These clans, which had survived across multiple dynastic transitions, disappeared entirely from the scene by the early Song, replaced by a new capital-based political elite whose prestige derived increasingly from success in the civil service examinations. In a subsequent development spanning the Northern to Southern Song transition, this capital elite declined in significance, as provincial elites came to play an increasingly important role in national politics (Hartwell 1982; Hymes 1986; Bol 1992, ch. 2; Bossler 1998). One explanation for this second development lies in the vastly increased competitiveness of the civil service examinations, described by Chaffee (1995), spurred by a substantial increase in the literate population in China’s early age of print. With families now unable to specialize in government service, officeholders no longer relocated to the capital—where they had aggregated for centuries, even during the political disunity of the tenth century (Tackett 2006)—preferring instead to diversify their family strategies and

entrench themselves in the provinces. It should be noted that the “localist thesis,” as articulated by Hymes (1986), implies not that local elites emerged for the first time in the Southern Song, but rather that bureaucrats of national significance came for the first time to be selected from among them.

Explaining the first development—the disappearance of the great clans—is more complex. Common past explanations have focused either on late Tang economic growth or on mid-Tang institutional change—namely, the expansion of the examination system during the reign of Empress Wu, the post-An Lushan provincial governments, and the dismantling of the equal-field system. These changes, it has been argued, produced new opportunities for upward mobility that could be exploited by new landed and commercial elites. However, in a detailed study of Tang chief ministers, Johnson (1977) has shown that the great clans continued to dominate the top political offices until the very end of the dynasty. My own work corroborates Johnson’s conclusion by demonstrating that a circumscribed capital-based network of intermarrying elite families dominated the bureaucracy at all levels—even those of the provincial governments—until the late ninth century. The social capital embedded in their marriage network served as the critical resource allowing these elites to coopt the examinations and all other potential avenues of upward mobility. It was not mid-Tang institutional changes that destroyed these old families, but rather the catastrophic violence marring the last quarter century of Tang rule (Tackett 2014a).

The Song elite was very different from its Tang counterpart. The original core of the Song sociopolitical elite came disproportionately from Hebei—a region that had been autonomous in the Late Tang and that had developed its own provincial culture—and brought with it to the Song capital a new, more meritocratic culture (Tan 2013). Though one should not exaggerate the actual extent of upward mobility during the Song, meritocracy as an ideal is evident in the decision to expand the examination system, in the development of an examination culture, as well as in the fascination during the Song with “rags to riches” stories (Hymes 1986, ch. 1; Chaffee 1995; Bossler 1998, 18–20). With the popularization of the printing press and the expanded availability of education via government schools and private academies, the educated elite grew enormously in size over the course of the Song. The literate population plausibly reached 10 percent of the population in wealthier prefectures. Because there were now insufficient opportunities for members of this new elite to serve in government, they diversified their economic base—turning to trade and other formerly denigrated pursuits—while embarking on a variety of intellectual endeavors new to this period, including connoisseurship and the collecting of antiquities, calligraphy, and paintings, as well as travel and travel writing (Egan 2006; Ebrey 2008; Zhang 2011). With greater educational opportunities, Song elites seem also to have acquired a new self-confidence—evident in their resuscitation of the term *shidafu* to describe themselves (Tackett 2006, 177 n. 201), as well as in the self-assurance with which “able exegetes” reinterpreted both Confucian and Buddhist texts (Halperin 2006, 68)—and to have seen themselves as belonging to a vast, empire-wide community of educated individuals.

### Institutions and political culture

Historians of the Tang and Song have tended to focus their attention on at least three distinct transformations in the political organization of the empire. The first consists of the breakdown in central government control in the late Tang, commonly seen as

originating with the mid-eighth-century An Lushan Rebellion, when, during the process of reestablishing imperial authority, the Tang court divided up the empire into several dozen provinces. Because provincial governors appointed their own staffs and controlled their own armies, it is widely believed that the provinces were manifestations of the decentralization of political authority and the militarization of society, processes culminating in the violent breakdown of unified rule at the turn of the tenth century. In reality, although three provinces in Hebei did remain under the control of independent military oligarchies until the end of the dynasty, the late Tang provinces elsewhere were neither autonomously minded nor necessarily militarized, and often worked with the central government to improve bureaucratic efficiency. Indeed, outside of Hebei, most of the civilian staff members of the provincial governments—including the governors themselves—were capital-based elites on temporary assignments, with little incentive to push for autonomy. The post-Tang regimes—including the independent kingdoms in the south—coalesced only after a series of late ninth-century rebellions destroyed both the central government and these provincial power structures (Tackett 2014a, ch. 4).

The second development involved a rationalization of the bureaucracy in the Weberian sense. Beginning in the Song, the civil service examinations were used more extensively for bureaucratic recruitment (Chaffee 1995); the performance evaluation system was formalized and routinized (Deng 1997); and there was a growing tendency to staff certain offices, especially those requiring financial expertise, with men on specialized career tracks (Hartwell 1971). It is this development that Naitō saw as indicative of a shift towards “monarchical autocracy,” as it, in principle, weakened the ability of bureaucrats to resist imperial authority. In fact, Song bureaucrats continued with great success to push their own policy agendas, partly by monopolizing the interpretation of Classical texts, of the historical records, and of the Song imperial clan’s “ancestors’ family instructions,” all of which were critical in the policymaking process (Deng and Lamouroux 2005; Lamouroux 2012; Bol 2006); and partly by exploiting the examinations to form an “intellectual field” in which court examiners, teachers, and private printers could engage with one another (De Weerd 2007). The principal weakness with Naitō’s notion of autocracy is that he erroneously imagined a rivalry between the emperor and the bureaucracy analogous to the rivalry between monarchs and aristocrats in early modern Europe.

The third development relates to a changing relationship between the state and society. The Northern Song—especially during the regime of Wang Anshi’s “New Policies”—was a grand era of state activism. In this period, the state established new government-run institutions at the local level, while seeking to micromanage society even in frontier regions (von Glahn 1987; Smith 1991). From the Northern Song to the Southern Song, however, the state significantly reduced its presence. Basic institutions—from granaries, to schools, to charitable estates—were increasingly organized by local elites as part of a “localist” turn. Though it has been argued that the state’s presence declined because it could not keep up with demographic growth, Hymes and Schirokauer (1993) propose instead that the expanded responsibilities of local elites represented a “social contract” negotiated over the course of the Song, as a larger educated population sought to serve their communities in accordance with Neo-Confucian precepts. There is still some disagreement on the extent to which the state’s relation to society changed. Bao (2001), for example, has shown that, even late in the Southern Song, the fiscal administration was sufficiently effective at the local level to guarantee adequate revenue. One way to resolve this apparent disagreement is to focus not on a zero-sum competition between local elites and the state, but rather on the changing nature of the interface between state and

society. In a detailed study of Southern Song Mingzhou, Lee (2014) recognizes activism by local elites, even while demonstrating that the state worked with these elites in support of community projects.

Recent scholarship suggests potential avenues of new research on political change across the Tang–Song transition. In light of a recent study on factionalism during the Song (Levine 2008), it may now be worth reconsidering Naitō’s theory that Tang factions were aristocratic power alliances, whereas Song factions were driven primarily by ideological differences. There is also room for more research on changes in the ideological and symbolic legitimation of imperial and dynastic sovereignty, mirroring detailed monographs on the early Tang (Wechsler 1985; Chen 2010). Finally, it would be useful to supplement an early article by Liu (1962) on transhistorical transformations in the structure of the Chinese empire with more research on the changing geography of power across the Tang–Song transition, for example, by analyzing the distribution of powerful ministers and their families within the capital and across the empire (Seo 2001; Tackett 2014a, ch. 2; 2014b).

### Economy

The medieval economic revolution, as first articulated in mid-century Japanese scholarship, consisted of three interrelated phenomena. The first was a commercial revolution, entailing a significant monetization of the economy; the use of paper money and new credit facilities; the diversification of items of mass consumption; an increase in non-agricultural occupations in the countryside; the emergence of long-distance trade in such non-luxury goods as rice, vegetables, fruit, paper, and iron handicrafts; developments in transport technologies, including both riverine and ocean-going boats; and the rise of a non-governmental shipping and brokerage system (Shiba 1970; Elvin 1973, chs. 10–12). These developments were accompanied by the emergence of a free market in land (McDermott 1984), a decline in anti-mercantile laws and sentiments (Twitchett 1968), and the first broad use of commercial taxes as a source of government revenue (Twitchett 1970).

The second phenomenon involved new forms of urbanization. Whereas during the first century of Tang rule, the state had maintained a tightly controlled system of urban markets, and divided large cities into walled wards subject to strict curfews, these restrictions broke down late in the dynasty. Urban commerce flourished, with shops increasingly established outside of the official marketplaces and even beyond the city walls. These developments even impacted urban planning, as well-ordered grids of wide thoroughfares gave way to more haphazard market-driven urban development (Twitchett 1966; Steinhardt 1990, 137–60; de Pee 2010). By the Song, with the appearance of village markets across the countryside, there developed a network of “natural” urban centers—situated, as posited by Skinner’s (1964a; 1978) model of local economic activity at important commercial crossroads rather than at the sites of “artificial” state-established administrative centers. Some of these new urban sites became as large in size and population as administrative towns (Shiba 1975). Although Shiba’s work has been rightfully critiqued for its near exclusive focus on the economically advanced Yangzi Delta region, he has more recently explored market towns in other regions of China as well (e.g., Shiba 2001). Finally, the third phenomenon associated with the medieval economic revolution was a demographic transformation, whereby an increasing percentage of the Chinese population came to inhabit South China rather than the traditional heartland in the north (Hartwell 1982).

There is some disagreement on how to explain such radical economic change. Tang historians, notably Twitchett, tend to date most of the changes to the period 750–1000. In their view, the An Lushan Rebellion played a critical role. The weakened state post-rebellion could no longer regulate and contain commercial activity. Much of the evidence for Tang economic growth is anecdotal, based on documentary sources from Dunhuang or relating to the capital city of Chang’an. Song historians, who have made more extensive use of statistical evidence and have focused more on the Yangzi Delta region, have tended to date the major elements of the economic revolution to the Song. The primary causative factor in this second view was the southward demographic shift. The ability to multi-crop in South China, in conjunction with new rice poldering and land reclamation technologies, led to agricultural surpluses that could then be transported at low cost on the extensive riverine network in the south, a conjunction of conditions that drove commercial development and urbanization (Elvin 1973, ch. 9).

Since the classic accounts of the Tang-Song economic revolution, there has been a wealth of important new work. Hartwell (1982) and Smith (1988) have dealt more explicitly with regional variations across the vast Chinese empire, demonstrating how Skinner’s macroregions—large regional economic systems defined by physiography and major watersheds (Skinner 1977; 1978)—structured economic activity as early as the Song dynasty. Clark (1991) and So (2000) have explored how the burgeoning foreign trade impacted the Chinese economy, both by sustaining regional development in the vicinity of the great port cities, and by promoting the routinization of long-distance trade empire-wide. On the question of technological change, Hartwell (1962) and Wagner (2001) have examined the growth in coal and iron production in North China; and Cherniack (1994), as well as Chia and De Weerd (2011), have explored the cultural and social impact of commercial printing.

An important thrust of new research deals with maritime trade, briefly surveyed by Shiba (1983) and Hartwell (1989). It was beginning in the tenth century—spurred by the invention of new navigation technologies, by the loss post-An Lushan of Chinese control over Gansu and the Tarim Basin, and by the promotion of overseas commerce by several political regimes of the Tang-Song interregnum—that trade across the South China Sea began to replace in importance the overland Silk Road. The history and organization of the “Nanhai” trade (Heng 2009), state institutions in charge of the trade (So 2000), the imperial clan’s investments in it (Chaffee 1999, 227–42), and the role played by the Chinese port city of Quanzhou in particular (e.g., Schottenhammer 2001) have already been described in considerable detail, laying the groundwork for future research. There has been somewhat less work on trade in Northeast Asia, though numerous Japanese scholars (cited in Enomoto 2003), as well as von Glahn (2014) more recently, have begun to reconstruct Sino-Japanese commercial relations during the Song. Much of the new scholarship on maritime trade benefits from archaeological data that will likely provide fodder for innovative new work in future years.

### Thought and religion

The Tang-Song transition also involved fundamental changes in Confucian thought, culminating in the twelfth century and later with the rise to dominance of what Anglo-American scholars have called “Neo-Confucianism,” and what Chinese scholars refer to by the terms *daoxue*, *lixue*, or simply “Song learning.” At the core of Neo-Confucianism was the conviction that it was possible to transform all of society from the ground up.

Classical scholars through the first half of the Tang, by contrast, were concerned primarily with imperial and court ritual practice. Because the rituals prescribed in the Classics were believed to have been modeled by the sage kings of antiquity on the normative patterns of heaven and earth, their implementation at court fulfilled the emperor's primary responsibility to maintain cosmic order. The Neo-Confucians were far more interested in the moral principles that one could deduce from a careful reading of the Classics. By training local elites to serve as a moral vanguard, it was possible to bring order to society with or without the help of the emperor or the imperial bureaucracy. For Neo-Confucians, cultivation of the self was critical, and could be accomplished by reading the Classics, internalizing their fundamental principles, and then bringing one's own conduct in line with them. All humans had an innate moral nature, so all might be transformed through education into "moral actors" (*junzi*). Education, thus, served to improve all of society rather than merely to prepare men for government service.

Many people new to Song history have some difficulty understanding what is actually new about Neo-Confucianism. The crux of the problem lies in the fact that the voluminous writings of the great Neo-Confucian systematizer Zhu Xi, including his comprehensive commentaries to all of the Classics, have to this day colored our reading of these texts, even affecting their translations into English. The common translation of the term *junzi* (literally, "lord's son") as "the gentleman," for example, reflects a relatively late understanding of the term that accords well with a Neo-Confucian worldview that saw everyone as potential moral actors (Nylan and Wilson 2010, 103–7). It was also the Neo-Confucians who elevated the "Four Books," including the *Analects* of Confucius, to canonical status—largely because these books were particularly amenable to an interpretation adhering to the objectives of Neo-Confucian moral philosophy. Given that Confucius and his *Analects* were far less significant prior to the Song, it is arguably misleading to refer to Classical scholarship in Tang times and earlier as "Confucianism." It is also problematic to treat the *Great Learning* and *Doctrine of the Mean*—relatively unimportant texts until they became two of the "Four Books" in the Song—as representative of the thought of the Warring States Period (e.g., in de Bary and Bloom, 1999, 330–39).

What accounts for the rise of Neo-Confucianism? One common explanation posits that it constituted the Confucian solution to Buddhism. This simplistic hypothesis—partly inspired by the fact that Zhu Xi sought to synthesize moral philosophy with metaphysics through an elaborate theory of principle (*li*) and material force (*qi*)—has lost favor in recent decades. A more convincing explanation—treated most comprehensively by Bol (1992; 2008)—takes a broader range of societal changes into consideration. The revitalization of Confucianism began in the Tang, with a shift from court-centered scholarly projects focusing on ritual to scholarship by individual scholars with ever broadening interests (McMullen 1988; Chen 2009). By the eleventh century, members of the emerging *shidafu* class were increasingly confident that it was possible for them to attain a better understanding of the fundamental principles of the Classics, and to apply this new understanding to transform society. Wang Anshi's New Policies—as well as other proposals for comprehensive reform by prominent bureaucrats like Fan Zhongyan and Ouyang Xiu—exemplified precisely this conviction that it was possible for educated men to transform the world. By the Southern Song, however, the *shidafu* had lost faith that the state and its bureaucracy could effectuate such change on its own. Meanwhile, they had expanded in numbers to the point that, though they all strove to be *junzi*, few had any hope of ever serving in government. Though the intellectual environment of the twelfth century was rich and diverse (Tillman 1992), Zhu Xi and his brand of

Neo-Confucianism came to dominate because it provided a solution to the dilemma of the *shidafu*, by encouraging them to exercise local moral leadership in lieu of government service, as part of a program to transform society.

It was once argued that the rise of Neo-Confucianism led to a concomitant decline in Buddhism and Daoism. Scholars nowadays, however, recognize the enduring vitality of these religious traditions in the Song (Ebrey and Gregory 1993). Indeed, it was only in the Song that the distinctive characteristics of Chan Buddhism emerged, including new forms of practice and a new interest in defining lineages of transmission (Foulk 1993). Daoist practice was similarly transformed, with the popularization in the Song of exorcisms and therapeutic rites, as well as of techniques of self-cultivation termed “inner alchemy” (Davis 2001; Robinet 1997, ch. 8). Finally, there were developments in popular religion that mirrored broader societal change. New urban centers tied to marketing rather than administrative networks spurred the emergence of city god cults, as well as of a system of market town-based temples that would survive into the twentieth century (Johnson 1985; von Glahn 2003b). Simultaneously, commercialization led to new competition between rival temples for practitioners, as well as to the spread of specific cults along trade networks (Hansen 1990). Finally, the localist turn led to the popularization of the cults of deities whose authority was rooted in the locality rather than derived from an ability to access the divine bureaucracy (Hymes 2002).

### Women and gender

Much of the new interest in women’s history since the 1990s has sought to dismantle a simplistic model of the declining status of women post-Tang that tied the popularization of footbinding, the increased confinement of women to the inner quarters of the home, and the emergence of a cult of widow fidelity to the spread of Neo-Confucian moral puritanism during the Song. Thus Ko (2003) stresses the erotic (not moral) origins of footbinding, as well as its link to a new “bodily culture,” whereas Ebrey (1993, 41–43) proposes that, by making women more delicate, footbinding helped maintain a contrast with the ever more refined male literatus. There are also grounds for arguing that strict sexual segregation, though described by Song Confucian moralists, may not have been widespread until later times (Hymes 1997, 234–37). Finally, Birge (2002) has tied widow fidelity to Mongol Yuan espousal of the levirate (the practice whereby a widow was obliged to marry her deceased husband’s brother), while Bossler (2013) has argued that it emerged partly to encourage men’s loyalty to the state after the Jurchen invasion of North China.

If many of the changes once attributed to the Song in fact occurred in later times, how were the lives of women transformed across the Tang–Song transition? One development involved dowries and inheritance. Although there are dissenting views (Bernhardt 1995), most scholars now believe that, under the Song, unmarried daughters received half a son’s share of the inheritance, that dowries remained with the women after divorce or remarriage, and that the legal system actively protected women’s property rights (Ebrey 1981; Yanagida 2003; Birge 2002; McDermott 2004; Lau 2004; 2008, 408–94). It was only during the Yuan dynasty and later that women lost these rights to property. How the Song situation represents a change from the Tang, however, is unclear due to limited data, although Ebrey’s (1991) account of escalating dowries between the Tang and the Song may reflect a growing confidence among the bride’s kin that she could retain control of the dowry during her lifetime.

Another important change stemmed from the broadening of the educated elite under the Song. With increasing pressures on young men to prepare for the examinations and on households to diversify their economic pursuits, women came to be valued more as family managers and as educators of their children (Birge 1989, 343–52; Ebrey 1993, 117–19; Bossler 1998, 17–20). Simultaneously, with the commercialization of the textile market, the value of women to the household may have increased due to their domestic textile work (Ebrey 1993, ch. 7). By contrast, there was also a substantial growth in the market for women, including both courtesans and concubines. Later, by the Southern Song, partly as a reaction against this market, there developed a preference for integrating concubines, especially concubine mothers, into the household (Bossler 2013).

One of the critical problems in studying women's history across the Tang–Song transition remains the question of source material, especially pre-Song source material. Yao (2004) suggests ways scholars of the Tang may use excavated tomb epitaphs more extensively; de Pee (2007, 221–46) and Xu (2011a) propose methodologies exploiting tomb architecture and murals. In contrast to the substantial scholarship on women's history, there has been relatively less work on broader questions of gender. Besides the brief discussions by Ebrey and Bossler on ideals of masculinity discussed above, as well as a few short pieces in Deng (2003), work on gender has largely been limited to the study of the gendered body in medical theory (Furth 1999).

### Foreign relations and “proto-nationalism”

One of the oldest, most entrenched contrasts between the Tang and the Song depicts the first as militarily strong and the second as militarily weak. This simplistic contrast—rooted, to be sure, in Song China's own portrayals of itself as having successfully subordinated the military to civilian authorities—does not take into account the fact that the Song faced far greater threats than did the Tang, including the Khitans and Jurchens, whose origins in Manchuria provided them with experience managing a Chinese-style agricultural empire (Barfield 1989), as well as the world-powerful Mongols. In fact, the Song had one of the largest premodern standing armies ever—with over a million troops in the mid-eleventh century—and managed to hold off the Mongols for decades longer than much of the rest of Eurasia. A second claim is that China changed from a cosmopolitan empire in the Early and High Tang to an increasingly xenophobic one in the post-An Lushan period. However, as Holcombe (2002–3) has shown, even in the decades immediately following the An Lushan Rebellion, China remained open to foreigners—and it would remain so in the subsequent Song dynasty (Clark 1995).

A pivotal event with far-reaching consequences on China's place in the world was the Peace of Chanyuan (Shanyuan) of 1005, negotiated between Song China and its northern neighbor, the Khitan Liao dynasty. This peace lasted over one hundred years. Early studies by Rossabi (1983) and Tao (1988) have stressed one impact of the peace: the diplomatic parity and clearly demarcated borders that existed between Song and Liao, phenomena upending the assumption that China could interact with its neighbors only on the basis of a sinocentric tributary system. More recent work on Tang and Song foreign relations has suggested alternative ways to conceptualize productively China's evolving place in the world that do not assume a teleological progression towards the modern state system. Thus Skaff (2012) has shown how Chinese regimes might be influenced by elements of Eurasian steppe political culture, while Wang argues that Tang China existed in a “multi-polar Asia” with other active participants (Wang 2013b).

By not assuming that the modern state system constitutes the only rational model of inter-state relations, one can explore the development of an “East Asian World Order,” and the impact of the Chanyuan Peace on this alternative world order (Tackett forthcoming).

Besides developments in foreign relations, there is also the intriguing possibility that there emerged, by the middle of the Song, some sort of “proto-nationalist” sentiments among educated elites (Trauzettel 1975; Tillman 1979). Ge (2004) and Bol (2009) have also described interesting new uses in this period of the term *Zhongguo* (today’s word for “China”). And Smith (2006a) has stressed the political significance of irredentist sentiments in the late Northern Song. Finally, though Standen (2007) cautions against assuming there existed expectations of Han ethnic loyalty toward Chinese regimes prior to Chanyuan, it is quite clear that, by the middle of the eleventh century, Song court officials did imagine that the ethnic Chinese population of Yan—the portion of the North China Plain under Liao occupation—felt precisely such loyalty to the Chinese regime to their south. Given this set of developments, it is not surprising that later Ming loyalists, anti-Manchu revolutionaries, and modern nationalists turned to figures from the Song—Yue Fei, Wen Tianxiang, and so on—as sources of inspiration. One must be careful how one defines this “proto-nationalism.” It was not a mass movement akin to modern nationalism, but rather an emerging idea circulating among educated elites, roughly equivalent to what Duara (1995, 71) calls “remembered historical narratives of community.” Here, too, one finds that post-Chanyuan geopolitics—as well as a new sort of cosmopolitan worldview that emerged during the Chanyuan peace among the vast numbers of Song political elites with first-hand experiences traveling to Liao on diplomatic missions—can help explain this new way in which elites imagined the trans-dynastic political entity to which they belonged (Tackett forthcoming).

### The Five Dynasties period

Though situated temporally right at the middle of the Tang–Song transition, the Five Dynasties period, spanning much of the tenth century, has received relatively little attention from historians. A key problem involves the complexity of the political situation during this period of disunity. The solution to the problem, of course, is to avoid regime- or court-centered narratives, focusing instead on broader historical trends. Clark (2009) has suggested a useful periodization. The most tumultuous period (880–910) began in the immediate wake of the Huang Chao Rebellion, when numerous autonomous warlords in both North and South China seized control of territories often no more than one or two prefectures in size. The fall of the Tang in 907 marked counterintuitively the end of this period of unalleviated chaos, as new, more stable regimes accrued the political legitimacy to proclaim new dynasties and kingdoms (for a graphical depiction, see Tackett 2014a, 215–18). The next period (910–50) was one of state-building and recentralization, during which time multiple states coexisted in relative peace. Finally, during the last period (950–79), the Later Zhou and Song states reunified the empire by force, and began to demilitarize the provinces.

How did this period contribute to changes across the Tang–Song transition? The independent southern regimes, in competition with each other and with the northern dynasties, had strong incentives to develop their local economies. State-sponsored trade, land reclamation, and infrastructure projects in the south set the stage for the later commercial boom (Clark 1991; 2009, 171–88). Meanwhile, rampant, large-scale migrations of people—following multiple migratory pathways (Tackett 2006, ch. 4)—had similarly

important consequences. The relative peace and prosperity of the south spurred a long-term southward demographic shift. Meanwhile, the process of recentralization in the north had the effect of relocating to the capital large numbers of provincial elites, especially from the northeast, where several of the new regimes had originated (Wang 1963). This relocation led to detectable changes in metropolitan culture (Tan 2013). The vagaries of political survival in a period of rapid regime changes also had an important long-term impact on issues as varied as who would constitute the new Song sociopolitical elite, and which Chan lineages would come to dominate (Tackett 2006, ch. 5; Brose 2015).

Finally, it is conceivable that the historical memory of the Five Dynasties as formulated in the early Song had a far-reaching impact on Chinese political culture. As part of its efforts to justify its reunification and centralization project, the Song took great pains to delegitimize provincial autonomy, rejecting new theories of multistate sovereignty proposed during the tenth century (described by Wang 2011b), as well as *fengjian* discourse (which idealized the decentralized “feudal”-like political system of the Western Zhou). Provincial autonomy as a legitimate possibility was only resurrected briefly in the early twentieth century, with the short-lived federalist movement (Duara 1995, chs. 5–6). In the view of nationalist historians today, the tenth century is remembered as an aberration, a brief moment of disunity before China’s inevitable reunification. Had the federalist movement won out, perhaps the Five Dynasties would be remembered as a manifestation of the Chinese provinces’ yearning to be free.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

- “Along the River during the Qingming Festival.” Online [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/86/Alongtheriver\\_QingMing.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/86/Alongtheriver_QingMing.jpg). High-resolution digital image of a fascinating twelfth-century painting depicting city life after the medieval economic revolution. Vols. 26 (1996) and 27 (1997) of the *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* contain several articles discussing this painting in detail. Accessed June 1, 2016.
- Chaffee, John W., and Denis Twitchett, eds. 2015. *The Cambridge History of China*. Vol. 5, Pt. 2: *Sung China*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Beginning with an excellent opening article by Charles Hartman on Song government and politics, this latest volume of the Cambridge series (published after the present chapter was completed) provides cutting-edge scholarship by top scholars on topics such as the legal system, the military, economic and social change, maritime trade, and Neo-Confucianism. Readers should also be on the lookout for vol. 4 (on the Tang), ed. Anthony Deblasi, which should be available around 2019.
- de Weerd, Hilde, ed. “Song Research Tools.” Online at <http://www.songyuan.org/SongTools>. Guide to bibliographies, indexes, and other reference resources for Song historians. Particularly valuable for graduate students. Accessed June 14, 2016.
- Gernet, Jacques. 1970. *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Classic account of the impact of the Tang–Song transition on everyday life in China by one of the great French sinologists of the postwar period.
- Zhu Xi. 1991. *Chu Hsi’s Family Rituals*, translated with introduction by Patricia Buckley Ebrey. Princeton: Princeton University Press. English translation of one of the most widely published books in world history. Provides a good sense of the practical impact of Neo-Confucian belief on Chinese family life.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# Periods of Non-Han Rule<sup>1</sup>

*MICHAL BIRAN*

For about half of its recorded history, parts or all of imperial China were ruled by ethnically non-Chinese (more accurately: non-Han) peoples. Most of these “alien”—sometimes inaccurately called “conquest”<sup>2</sup>—dynasties were established by nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples from Inner Asia,<sup>3</sup> mainly Mongolia and Manchuria. The non-Han rulers contributed tremendously to both imperial and modern China, starting with the resurrection of an effective imperial polity in the fifth–sixth centuries CE, to the reunification of the Chinese realm under the Mongols in the thirteenth century, and up to the shaping of China’s territorial boundaries and its multiethnic identity mainly under the last imperial dynasty, the Manchu Qing (1636–1912). Even Beijing’s position as China’s capital is one of the legacies of nomadic rule.

Their lasting contributions notwithstanding, for many years these non-Han dynasties were treated as the stepchildren of Chinese history, and their role was marginalized, obscured, or even totally ignored. Furthermore, throughout the twentieth century, the dominant prism through which these dynasties were studied—in both East and West—was that of Sinicization, the thesis that all the non-Han peoples who entered the Chinese-speaking realm were assimilated into Chinese culture. The peoples were classified according to the degree to which they adopted Chinese ways, and the study of their history aspired to detect the process by which they were inevitably attracted to the superior Chinese culture, eventually adhering to it—or failing to do so, collapsed. It is mainly since the 1980s that this narrow prism has largely been abandoned, and the non-Han rulers have started to be treated on their own, Inner Asian, terms. In this chapter I review the reasons for the marginalization of the non-Han dynasties and the developments, in terms of both sources and historical frameworks, that led to their new understanding, briefly introducing the common Inner Asian facet of these polities and other nomadic empires.

### Main players: The non-Han dynasties

While Inner Asian people of non-Han origin ruled parts or all of North China during the period of disunion between Han and Sui-Tang (especially in 386–581 CE), and during the Five Dynasties period (906–60), this chapter focuses on the more enduring non-Han dynasties of the tenth century and onward: the Khitan Liao (907–1125), Jurchen Jin (1115–1234), Tangut Xi Xia (982–1227), Mongol Yuan (1206–1368) and Manchu Qing (1636–1912). These dynasties maintained their own cultural identity while ruling a multiethnic state that included a considerable Han-Chinese population; each controlled territories that had long been ruled by Chinese in addition to territories that were not part of China proper; and each adopted a certain number of Chinese trappings and administrative models. Yet they also differ from each other in terms of the ethnic and ecological origin of the ruling elite, their territorial extent, longevity, and various other aspects. Notably, the Yuan and Qing ruled over the whole of China proper—and much more—while the Liao, Jin, and Xia coexisted with the Han-Chinese Song dynasty (960–1279). (For more details see table 11.1)

I prefer to term these polities “non-Han” rather than “non-Chinese” for two reasons: first, most of them—all apart from the Xi Xia—were considered Chinese dynasties by traditional Chinese historiography, that is, they were acknowledged as part of the Chinese dynastic cycle and holders of the Mandate of Heaven, and had an official history compiled for them by their successors. Second, all of these dynasties are considered “Chinese” in the contemporary definition of “Chineseness” as inclusive of all the residents of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in its current boundaries (*Zhonghua minzu*). From the perspective of current PRC historiography, the history of the Khitans, Tanguts, Jurchens, Mongols, and Manchus is an integral part of Chinese history (Baoerhan et al. 1986). Whatever the accuracy of this view, it seems heuristically useful to distinguish “Chinese” from “Han” in our context.

The history of these five non-Han dynasties was closely intertwined. The Jurchen and Mongol tribes were subjects of the Liao, and the Tanguts were their tributaries. After the Jurchens established the Jin dynasty, they became the Tanguts’ overlords, but ceded the control of Mongolia, trying to dominate it indirectly by divide and rule policy. After the Jin subsumed the Liao, most of the Khitans remained under Jurchen rule, but a group led by a prince migrated westward to Central Asia, where they established the Western Liao or Qara Khitai dynasty (Xi Liao 1124–1218). Under Chinggis Khan and his heirs, the Mongols exterminated the Qara Khitai (1218), Xi Xia (1227), and Jin (1234) dynasties. Tanguts, Jurchens, and especially Khitans played an important part in the shaping of the Mongol world empire. In the long run, most of the Khitans, Tanguts, and Jurchens were assimilated into either the Mongols or the Chinese during the Yuan–early Ming periods. Only a minority of the Jurchens who remained in their homeland, northern Manchuria, retained their ethnic identity. In 1616 they established the Later Jin dynasty; in 1636 the dynasty was renamed Qing and the people Manchu. These later Jurchens remained in constant contact with the Mongols, first under Yuan rule and later through various interactions with the post-Yuan Mongol tribal confederations. They were well versed in Mongolian political culture—including the Chinggisid tradition and Tibetan Buddhism—and eventually used this expertise to take over the various contemporaneous Mongolian confederations: incorporating the Chahar of Inner Mongolia in 1634 and the Khalkha of Outer Mongolia in 1691, and exterminating the Zungars of Xinjiang in 1757–59 (Farquhar 1968; Allsen 1997b; Perdue 2005; Biran 2013). Even this short survey suggests

**Table 11.1** Major non-Han dynasties (in comparison to the Song)

<i>Dynasty</i>	<i>Liao</i>	<i>Xi Xia</i>	<i>Jin</i>	<i>Yuan</i>	<i>Qing</i>	<i>Song</i>
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Khitans</i>	<i>Tanguts</i>	<i>Jurchens</i>	<i>Mongols</i>	<i>Manchus</i>	<i>Han-Chinese</i>
<i>Dates</i>	907-1125	982-1227	1115-1234	1206-1368	1634-1912	960-1276
<i>Territory</i>	Small part of North China (the 16 prefectures- the Beijing-Datong area); Manchuria; most of Mongolia	Northwest China: Ningxia and Gansu; parts of Inner Mongolia, Shanxi and Qinghai	Manchuria (including parts now belonging to Russia); North China up to the Huai River; no Mongolia	At its height: Korea, Mongolia, Tibet, Manchuria, China proper, Yunnan Burma; with nominal authority, also much westward up to Iran, Anatolia, Afghanistan; Russia and Siberia.	At its height, Manchuria; China proper, Mongolia; Tibet; Xinjiang (including territories now belonging to Russia)	China proper minus the 16 prefectures (Northern Song 960-1126); South China proper, from the Huai River (Southern Song, 1127-1276)
<i>Origin and main mode of subsistence of the founders</i>	Southern Manchuria; pastoral nomadism	The Ordos region; mixed economy (trade, pastoralism, agriculture)	Northern Manchuria; mixed economy (fishing, hunting, stock raising, agriculture)	Mongolia, pastoral nomadism	Manchuria, mixed economy (fishing, hunting, pastoralism, agriculture)	China proper, agriculture
<i>Languages and scripts</i>	Khitans, Chinese, Turkic	Tangut, Chinese, Tibetan	Jurchen, Chinese, Khitan	Mongolian (Uighur and Phags-Pa scripts); Chinese; Persian (+ various other languages among subjects)	Mongolian; Tibetan; Chaghatay (= Uighur)	Chinese
<i>Main ethnic groups</i>	Khitans, Han-Chinese, Bohai, Mongols, Jurchens ...	Tanguts, Han-Chinese, Tibetans, Turks	Jurchens, Han-Chinese, Khitans	Mongols, Han-Chinese; Muslims; Europeans; Koreans; Tibetans; Uighurs; Khitans; Tanguts; Jurchens, etc.	Manchu, Han-Chinese, Mongols, Tibetans	Han-Chinese
<i>Legitimation</i>	Khitans; Confucian; Buddhist	Tangut; Confucian; Buddhist	Jurchen; Confucian	Mongol-Chinggisid; Confucian; Tibetan-Buddhist	Manchu; Confucian; Mongol-Chinggisid; Tibetan-Buddhist	Confucian

(Continued)

**Table 11.1** (Continued)

<i>Dynasty</i>	<i>Liao</i>	<i>Xi Xia</i>	<i>Jin</i>	<i>Yuan</i>	<i>Qing</i>	<i>Song</i>
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Khitans</i>	<i>Tanguts</i>	<i>Jurchens</i>	<i>Mongols</i>	<i>Manchus</i>	<i>Han-Chinese</i>
<i>Dates</i>	907–1125	982–1227	1115–1234	1206–1368	1634–1912	960–1276
<i>Administration</i>	Dual administration: northern administration for the nomads (Khitans, Mongols, etc.) according to Khitan tribal norms; southern administration for the sedentaries (Chinese; Bohai); overlap between civil and military functions; some Chinese officials selected by exams; other officials by recommendations, origin, personal connections	A combination of Tangut tribal customs and Songlike bureaucracy; division into 12 military zones grouped as left and right wings; overlap between civil and military functions	Starts with dual administration; gradually moving into Han-Chinese-like administration, though Jurchens retain certain privileges and organizational modes; overlap of civil and military functions; officials chosen mainly according to imperial exams (in Chinese and Jurchen)	Dual administration: double appointments (often Chinese and non-Chinese) to most offices; classification of subject population according to professions and ethnicity; overlap between civil and military administration; partial use of the examination system mainly from 1313 onward; most officials chosen according to qualifications, recommendations, origin, personal connections	Different administration to different ethnic groups: Chinese; Manchus; Mongols; Tibetan and Muslims; overlap between civil and military administration; use of the examination system mainly for Chinese subjects	One administration; clear distinction between civil and military; officials selected mainly by imperial examinations

that the five peoples had a complex history of their own that did not begin or end with their rule in China. Moreover, their Inner Asian interactions were no less—and at times much more—significant than their interaction with the Chinese.

### **Historiographical frameworks: From Sinicization to Inner Asian polities**

The marginalization of the non-Han dynasties in Chinese history derives from two main reasons: the nature of the sources about these dynasties and the national interpretation of China's history in the twentieth century. As for the sources, while each of the above dynasties had its own language and developed its own script/s, few indigenous historical documents survive (especially for the Liao and Jin). Most of the extant sources were compiled in Chinese by Chinese literati. These members of the bureaucratic milieu were eager to accentuate their own importance, often portraying an ideal state of affairs rather than the real one. This perspective created a picture of routine adaptation of successive invaders to the traditional norms of Chinese government and to the advanced sedentary civilization, which allegedly overwhelmed the barbarian rulers. This intrinsic bias of our sources facilitated the adoption of the Sinicization discourse, capsulated in the Han-period cliché, that “you can conquer China from the back of the horse but cannot rule it from the back of the horse” and stressing the dichotomy between the Chinese (Hua) and the Barbarians (Yi, Rong, Di, Man, etc.).

This bias was powerfully reinforced by the attempts of post-imperial Chinese scholars to create a national history that would culminate in the creation of the modern Chinese nation-state. From this point of view, the non-Han dynasties were seen “as an interruption to the grand sweep of Chinese history” (Franke and Twitchett 1994, 1), a dark era in which barbarians ruled over the civilized Chinese, mitigated only by the conquerors' eventual absorption into the superior culture of the conquered. The vilification of alien rule was particularly strong in light of the Qing's poor performance vis-à-vis the Western imperialist powers since the nineteenth century, and the rise of Chinese nationalism under late Qing rule. The discourse of ethnicity (Han-Chinese versus Barbarian-Manchu) therefore played a central place in the process of nation-building, emphasizing the Hua-Yi or Han-Barbarian dichotomy, and blaming the barbarian rulers for everything that went wrong in Chinese history.

The gradual shift of paradigm in China occurred under the communist regime. Especially since the 1980s, the non-Han dynasties have been fully integrated into Chinese history and appropriated as “minority dynasties.” The by-now extinct Khitan, Jurchen, and Tanguts, or the still-existing Mongols (and Manchus), were seen as ethnic minorities, parts of the greater Chinese nation, whose rule is therefore legitimate, and the struggle against which loses the aura of “patriotic resistance” (Baranovitch 2010; Rawski 2012). This perspective enables the inclusion of these dynasties into the Chinese national narrative, appropriates their achievements into those of “the multi-ethnic Chinese nation,” and glosses over the trauma of foreign conquest. This bear hug (or dragon embrace), however, results in yet another distortion of historical reality, as it ignores the Inner Asian facet of these dynasties.

From the 1990s, a new wave of studies of the non-Han dynasties has striven to overcome the Sinicization paradigm. This shift derives from several complementary trends. First is the increasing use of non-Chinese sources, both literary and archaeological. Second is the rise of new historical approaches, such as world, global, and regional histories as opposed to national ones. Third is the rise of cultural history, which, among

other things, brings into the limelight the common Inner Asian culture of the non-Han dynasties, on the one hand, and the influence of this culture on China through neighboring nomadic empires even in periods of Han rule, on the other.

### *New sources*

The study of the non-Han dynasties benefited greatly from the use of indigenous, as well as external, but non-Chinese, literary sources, and from incorporating archaeological findings. In terms of indigenous sources, the most apparent transformation has been the use of Manchu materials for studying the Qing. As this “New Qing History” influenced the whole field of non-Han studies, I will describe it in some detail below. Until the 1980s, mainly due to the huge influence of John King Fairbank (1907–91), the doyen of East Asian studies in the US, most western scholars ignored Manchu materials as a source for Qing history, assuming that all documents of the empire were either in Chinese or had been translated from Manchu into Chinese (or vice versa). This premise was challenged by another Harvard scholar, Joseph Fletcher, Jr. (1934–84), who strove, in the late 1970s to early 1980s, to write an integrative history of Inner Asia, based on its indigenous sources. Fletcher studied various Inner Asian languages, including Manchu, and trained or inspired many of the leading scholars of the New Qing History, notably Beatrice Bartlett, Pamela Crossley, and Peter Perdue (as well as other prominent Inner Asianists, such as Kim Hodong and Beatrice Manz). Bartlett was the first to challenge the marginalization of the Manchu materials. Her 1991 study of the Grand Council, the inner cabinet of Qing rule, was based on Manchu archival materials and proved that much of the Qing correspondence—even in the middle and late Qing—was conducted exclusively in Manchu, above the heads of its Han officials (Bartlett 1985; 1991; Rawski 1996). Stimulated by the better access to Manchu archival materials in both Beijing and Taiwan since the 1980s, the growing availability of Chinese-language sources and a host of secondary literature (notably Wakeman 1985), the New Qing History continued to prosper after Fletcher’s untimely death, with Evelyn Rawski, Pamela Crossley, and Mark Elliott among its prominent representatives. The common feature that links them together is their attention to the Inner Asian character of the Qing and its multifaceted culture. The secret of Qing success, according to these historians, is not an early adoption of systematic Sinicization, but the opposite: a clever manipulation of its connections to various groups of subjects, Han and non-Han alike, which created a universal rulership that disseminated different images to its divergent subordinate groups, whose culture and administration would remain separate. This Manchu-centered perspective also led to a focus on the emperors and their ruling strategies, as well as on the conquest elite—bannermen and imperial kinsmen—as opposed to emphasizing the Chinese under Manchu rule (e.g., Rawski 1998; Crossley 1999; Elliott 2001). The focus on the Manchus’ Inner Asian facet also invited more nuanced analyses of Qing expansion (Millward 1998; Perdue 2005) and frontier policies (Kim, Mosca, and Zatsnepine 2014) and encouraged the study of Mongolian, Tibetan, and Chaghatay materials from the Qing realm. Facilitated by the Chinese “new Qing history project” that edited and digitized sources in “ethnic” languages as well as in Chinese and Manchu (Zhao Ma 2008), the use of such materials promoted the study of Qing non-Chinese territories. They provide a comparative framework for reevaluating Qing policies in China proper, and enable an analysis of the Qing’s continental colonialism (e.g., Perdue 1998; Elverskog 2006; Kim 2012; Brophy 2013), in contrast to the former stress on the Qing as a victim

of western imperialism. This, however, is still a vexed issue in China, where imperialism and colonialism are reserved mainly for the western powers. Moreover, as PRC control of Tibet, Mongolia, Manchuria, Xinjiang—and Taiwan—is based on the Qing rule over these territories, the Chinese identity of the Qing is a highly political issue. That old paradigms die hard is apparent in the harsh attack on American New Qing historians, published in the official website and bulletin of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in spring 2015. They were accused, *inter alia*, of differentiating the Qing from China and of referring to the Qing as an imperialist force that invaded Tibet, Mongolia, and Xinjiang instead of celebrating the unification of China by the Sinicized Qing.<sup>4</sup>

While none of the other dynasties left a similar corpus in its native language, advances in the study of indigenous sources has contributed considerably, especially to the study of the Xia and the Liao. The rich Tangut literature is represented by collections originating mainly from Khara-khoto (Heishuicheng, Inner Mongolia), Lingwu (near Yinchuan, Ningxia), and Dunhuang. The bulk of this literature was unearthed in the early twentieth century by famous Silk Road explorers such as P.K. Kozlov, Aurel Stein, and Paul Pelliot, but new materials continue to surface in China. The Tangut language and script were deciphered in both the Soviet Union and China, mainly from the 1960s, and the important collections of St. Petersburg, China, the British Library, and Japan have all been published and catalogued recently (Kychanov 1999; Du Jianlu 2012; Xibei di er minzu xueyuan 2005; Wu Yulin and Arakawa 2011). This mainly Buddhist literature, some of which dates to the post-Xi Xia Yuan period, is extremely valuable for the study of Tangut and Yuan Buddhism, and the history of printing (Tangut Sutras are among the first existing examples of movable-type printed texts). The non-Buddhist materials include dictionaries, court odes, letters, and, notably, the twelfth-century Tangut law code. Available in both Russian and Chinese translations, this corpus sheds light on Tangut social institutions, government, military, commercial, and foreign policies and enables the comparison of Tangut law with the Chinese law of the Song and Tang (Kychanov 1987–89; Dunnell 1994; Shi Jinbo, Nie, and Bai 1994).

As for the Liao, upon becoming imperial, the Khitans created two scripts, the small and the large, both only partially deciphered at present. The study of the small script has been greatly enhanced by the discovery of various Khitan tomb inscriptions, some of which are bilingual, that enable a better understanding of how the Khitans referred to themselves (Kane 2009; 2013). Yet this corpus of about 40 epitaphs does not allow a full understanding of the Khitan language. The large script is an even greater mystery. Its corpus includes a few seal characters and the only extant Khitan book, unearthed in Kyrgyzstan, near the capital of the Western Liao, in the 1950s but described only in 2011. With its 127 leaves, this intriguing manuscript is by far the longest Khitan text available, and was probably a chronicle or an official document. However, it is still undeciphered, and given the paucity of other Khitan large-script materials may remain so for a while (Zaytsev 2011). In contrast, Jin's extant Jurchen-language materials contain mainly translations of Chinese works, although the occasional original document—such as the list of those who had passed the Jurchen examinations—attest to Jin's hybrid Chinese-Jurchen culture (Jin Guangping and Jin Qicong 1980; Jin Qicong 1995; Xin Wen 2015).

The Yuan case is more complicated. *The Secret History*, the only extant Mongol source for the rise of Chinggis Khan (r. 1206–27) and the rule of his son and heir Ögödei (r. 1229–41), now available in Igor de Rachewiltz's seminal translation (de Rachewiltz 2004; 2013), is a mine of anthropological information. Later Mongolian works, though

heavily Buddhist, can also shed some light on Yuan history. Also significant are several Mongolian inscriptions (often bilingual) and documents; literary, mostly Buddhist, texts, unearthed mainly in Turfan, Khara Khoto, and Dunhuang; and letters retained in European archives (Tumurtoogoo 2006). These are instructive for understanding how the Mongols saw themselves, providing a good corrective to the Chinese view represented mainly in the official dynastic history, the *Yuanshi*. One glaring example is the Mongol inscription that equates “Da Yuan” (the Great Yuan, as the dynasty was called in China) with “Yeke Monggol Ulus” (the Great Mongol Empire, the United Empire), thereby suggesting that for the Mongols, the Yuan was not only the China-centered state under Qubilai Khan’s direct rule but the whole Mongol empire, stretching from Korea to Hungary (Cleaves 1951; Kim Hodong 2014).

Moreover, due to the gigantic dimensions of the empire, the history of Chinggisid expansion and rule was recorded in a bewildering variety of languages—Persian, Chinese, Mongolian, Russian, Arabic, and Latin are the most important, but nearly any other language is also relevant. Naturally, no scholar can master all of these languages, but reading multilingual external sources from various parts of the empire can partly compensate for the bias and mediation of the historical texts, mostly penned by sedentary, non-Mongol authors. Thus, for example, Morris Rossabi managed to portray a rounded picture of Yuan’s founder, Qubilai (Khubilai) Khan (r. 1260–94) (Rossabi 1988), which reflected not only the prism of the Chinese literati but also the point of view of the Mongols’ non-Chinese employees, by extensively using Marco Polo’s book, compiled in Genoa in the early fourteenth century, and the Persian *Collection of Chronicles* (*Jāmi‘ al-tawārīkh*) compiled by Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 1318), the Ilkhan’s vizier and first world historian. Rossabi’s study also signaled the shift of research from the Chinese under Mongol rule (Langlois 1981; de Bary and Chan 1982) to the rulers themselves.

Yet it was the seminal works of Thomas T. Allsen that revolutionized the field and established a holistic, Eurasian perspective for studying both the Mongol empire and Yuan China. Equally familiar with the Chinese, Persian, and Russian sources, and fully aware of the various historiographical traditions involved, Allsen placed the Mongols and their nomadic culture at the center of his inquiry and highlighted the cultural exchanges that took place under their rule, thereby illuminating the Eurasian aspects of the Yuan and getting a fuller picture of Mongol institutions and priorities such as shamanism and mobility (Allsen 1987; 1997a; 1997b; 2001). This Eurasian perspective is gradually becoming more prominent. And while multilingual training is certainly desirable, and is more common among emerging scholars, working with sources from one part of the empire with full awareness of studies dealing with its other parts can also result in excellent comparative works (e.g., Melville 2006; Robinson 2009; see Biran 2013).

While for the other peoples we do not have such a broad array of non-Chinese and non-indigenous sources, wider use of external sources is also helpful and important for adjusting China-centered scholarship. Thus the Tangut, Japanese, Arabic, Persian, and Turkic sources that refer to the Liao, for example, fragmentary and sparse though they are, still give a broader picture of Liao international relations, zooming out from Liao-Song bifurcation (Hansen, Louis, and Kane 2013). In the Qing case, many more sources are naturally available, although their full use has yet to be pursued. Matthew Mosca’s work on Qing–India relations in 1750–1860 is a bold example of how shifting the focus from Manchu–Chinese relations, or Qing–western relations,

enables a deeper understanding of the Qing view of the world and the evolution of its geopolitical policies (Mosca 2013).

Archaeology is another means for getting a better indigenous picture of the non-Han polities. This is especially relevant for the Liao and Xia: the cultural richness of Liao tombs and the sophistication of their architecture stand in sharp contrast to the erstwhile “barbarian” image, and attest to the Liao’s wealth and prestige. Liao burial goods reveal a distinct and magnificent material culture in which gold played a pivotal role. The combination of nomadic artifacts, Chinese items, and imports originating in Europe, the Middle East, and Central, East, South, and Southeast Asia—all reveal the thriving and wide-ranging commercial contacts of the Khitans, as well as their complex cultural preferences (e.g., Shen Hsueh-man 2006; Li Qingquan 2008). The extensive archaeological finds—and the good PR of Inner Mongolian archaeology authorities, where most remains are located—have prompted unprecedented scholarly interest in the Liao dynasty, especially in China, and have done much to improve the dynasty’s image in popular and academic circles. However, archaeological findings from Liao territories outside China (usually published in Mongolian, Russian, or Japanese; e.g., Kradin 2011; Enkhtur 2014) are less often taken into account by Chinese and western studies alike; the various planned collaborative projects will hopefully change this.<sup>5</sup>

Archaeology has contributed much also to the study of the Xi Xia. The peculiar architecture of the gigantic imperial Xia tombs near Yinchuan, as well as many other manifestations of the Xia’s distinctive Himalayan-Buddhist material culture, are not only exceptionally impressive in visual terms, but also constitute a statement of ideological and cultural independence (Piotrovskii 1993; Steinhardt 1993). In both cases, combining archaeology and multilingual sources is by far the best way to study the history, policies, and identity of these dynasties. While few people in the west (including Russia) deal with the Xia and Liao (e.g., Franke and Twitchett 1994; Dunnell 1996; 2009; Biran 2005; Standen 2007; 2014; Hansen, Louis, and Kane 2013; Kradin and Ivliev 2014; Solonin and Hill 2014), their study is flourishing in China: recent bibliographies compiled by Liu Pujiang, Zhou Feng, and Sun Guojun list over 6,500 Liao-related publications, almost all in Chinese, and the majority date from the past 25 years (Liu Pujiang 2003; Zhou Feng and Sun Guojun 2008–13; Hansen, Louis, and Kane 2013). Tangut studies in China are available mainly through two Xia-related journals, *Xi Xia Xue* and *Xi Xia Yanjiu*, both established in the twenty-first century, and leading scholars include Nie Hongyin and his student Sun Bojun.

In the Mongol case, the splendid archaeological and visual artifacts, recently displayed in various international exhibitions (e.g., Komaroff and Carboni 2002; Bemmman, Erdenebat, and Pohl 2010; Watt 2010), did much to improve the Mongols’ image, although their processing is only in its infancy. Since the archaeological and external sources for the study of the Jin dynasty are less impressive in comparison to the other dynasties—one exception is the recent work on Jin’s walls (Sun and Wang 2009)—and are scattered between Russia and China, indeed most research still concentrates on the Chinese under Jurchen rule (Tao Jing-shen 1977; Bol 1987; Tillman and West 1995; Franke and Chan 1997). Yet when the prism is changed, even a new look at traditional Chinese sources provides different results. Focusing on the Jurchen emperors, whom she calls by their Jurchen, not Chinese, names, Julia Schneider recently stressed the pragmatic and basically similar policies of Jin emperors, previously classified in western sinology as either Sinicized or revivalists of indigenous culture (Schneider 2012; 2014).

*New histories*

The new view of the non-Han dynasties derives not only from the impact of new sources, but also from the different approaches to history that have gained popularity in recent decades. These decades have witnessed the rise of world, global, and regional histories that counterbalance the once overwhelmingly essential national history framework. Whether the unit of historical research is Northeast Asia, Eurasia, or the whole planet, it enables the historian to decentralize China, thereby leaving more space for the Inner Asian regimes (Rawski 2015). Moreover, these new historical concepts give greater importance to inter-regional and cross-cultural connections. From this perspective, “the centrality of Central Asia” (Frank 1992) is more apparent, and the historical role of the nomads is no longer that of destroyers of civilizations, but of promoters of information exchange between the various sedentary civilizations (McNeil 1963; Kradin 2014). This point of view raised interest in Inner Asia’s nomadic empires in general, both those that conquered parts of China and those that, like the Xiongnu, the Turks, the Uighurs, and the post-Yuan Mongols, consciously preferred to stay in the steppe, manipulating China—or other sedentary realms—from outside, through trade and raids.

This approach, however, often still viewed the nomads as passive and inferior to the sedentaries, as a means whose mediation allowed the superior sedentary civilizations to exchange knowledge. Such an approach is also apparent in one of the most influential works on China–Inner Asia relations, Barfield’s *The Perilous Frontier* (1989). In contrast to the classical theory, according to which nomadic empires rose to power when China was weak (Lattimore 1940), Barfield argued that nomadic empires rose and fell simultaneously with Chinese empires—as the steppe polities needed a strong Chinese empire to exploit in order to assert their stability. He sees the formation of nomadic empires as a secondary phenomenon, dependent on the earlier formation of a sedentary empire in China. Barfield also differentiated between Mongolian-steppe polities, that usually remained in the steppe, exploiting China from afar, and Manchurian or mixed-economy states that conquered parts of China, rising when both China and the steppe were weak. The (huge) anomaly of this division is obviously the Mongol empire. While appealing and thought provoking, Barfield’s thesis does not always fit historical realities (Di Cosmo 2015). It still treats the nomads as inferior players vis-à-vis China.

The acknowledgment of nomads’ active role in both state formation and cross-cultural contacts benefited from the rise of cultural history since the 1970s. This trend, that underlines the study of cultural representations and the constructed character of ethnic and racial identities, highlights the common Inner Asian character of nomadic empires and the non-Han rulers of China. Based on the pioneering studies of Wittfogel and Feng (1949), Morris Rossabi (1983), Joseph Fletcher (1986), Herbert Franke (1987; 1994), and, thanks to the efforts of historians and anthropologists, notably Thomas Allsen, Peter Golden, Anatoly Khazanov, and Nicola Di Cosmo, scholars have begun to realize that a nomadic or Inner Asian civilization, which has its own parameters and distinctive culture, existed. This culture, while having its own material and other aspects, is basically political, as politics was the main glue that held the nomads together, whether in the loose framework of tribes or “headless states” (Sneath 2007) or in larger and more centralized political units. Nomadic empires rose out of nomadic warfare in times of crisis—ecological, natural, or political—as the tribal level sufficed for conducting most aspects of the nomads’ everyday life, including raiding their neighbors’ realms. Nomadic empire was thus temporary in nature, and for its successful maintenance its ruler had to be able

to assure his followers that it was worthwhile for them to stay with him, especially since they could easily decamp to greener pastures.

To win the subjects' acceptance of a single legitimate political authority, Inner Asian political culture included both religious-ideological aspects and practical means for governing an empire. In terms of ideology, the ruler's legitimation was based mainly on a divine mandate bestowed upon a chosen clan, and the heavenly ordained charisma that accompanied it.<sup>6</sup> The practical means included a patrimonial mode of governance that implied the practice of redistribution; a partial overlapping of the administrative system with the military organization; decimal military organization backed up by a supertribal guard; and a developed system of symbols, titles, and ceremonies meant to strengthen the ruler's control of his kinsmen and subjects. Territorial expansion and contact with sedentaries—whether by trade, raids, or conquest—were also important features for providing the ruler with the necessary goods to reward his supporters. The non-Han polities discussed here chose conquest as their way to deal with sedentaries. Territorial expansion, which resulted, *inter alia*, from conquest of parts or all of China, was an essential part of the state formation that played a major role in the shaping of their identities and government. It demanded the creation of a military-civil elite personally loyal to the leader, transcending tribal allegiances (the Manchu banner system and the Mongol army after Chinggis Khan's reforms are obvious examples), and encouraged the adoption of Chinese-style policies.

Indeed, nomadic culture was hardly isolated—the nomads' inherent mobility and the fragility of the nomadic economy resulted in continuous contacts with contemporary sedentary neighbors or subjects. Moreover, instead of the old concept of a clear-cut dichotomy between China and “the Barbarians,” the China–Inner Asian frontier is understood as a region, in which mutual influences diffused. The archaeological record, clearly attesting to settlement and limited agriculture even in the steppe, shows a far less definite separation between two mutually exclusive ecological systems. Furthermore, nomadic society was pragmatic: the nomads' ability to adjust to changing circumstances, whether due to natural forces or political upheavals, meant that they were ready to learn from various outsiders and borrow from other cultures, as long as these borrowings were useful for assuring their rule. This often resulted in an amalgamation of different methods of administration, legitimation concepts, religions, and languages, especially while nomads were also ruling over sedentary populations. Such appropriation is often described as barbarian assimilation into the more elaborated sedentary culture (if along China's frontier, as Sinicization) or as proof of the non-autarkic character of nomadic culture. Instead, such amalgamation may better be described as part and parcel of the Inner Asian mode of governance, and is consistent with the multicultural outlook of Inner Asian nomads.

For our non-Han polities, the Chinese model had various appealing benefits: first, it enhanced the prestige of the ruler *vis-à-vis* his kinsmen (cf. Abaoji, Liao's founder, who declared himself emperor to avoid the Khitan system of rotation, which limited the term of a leader to nine years; only under Chinggis Khan did the steppe political culture elevate the leader to a height parallel to that of the Chinese emperor). Second, Chinese ways of ruling were more centralized and therefore more efficient in curbing the power of tribal aristocracies and military potentates, whose unruliness was one of the major threats to stability in any nomadic polity. Third, Chinese administrative models were useful for ruling the empire's Chinese subjects, who were often demographically dominant, and for coopting the local elite. Even superficial adoption of Chinese trappings

(e.g., the imperial institution with its rich ritual pageantry; Chinese official titles) was crucial for gaining legitimation—and the resultant collaboration—among the Chinese elites and the subjugated populace. Such adoption could start long before the conquest of China, due to preliminary encounters with Chinese or partly Sinicized dynasties. For instance, Khitans and Tanguts were considered “external subjects” (*wai chen*) of the Tang, the Jurchens of the Liao, the Mongols of the Liao and Jin, and the Manchus of the Ming. However, this conscious practical and selective adoption of Chinese ways, which stands at the center of the “Sinicization” discourse, should not obscure the multiple alternative policies, which were adopted from the steppe culture, and were at least equally important.

The impact of the tribal past was apparent in such aspects as the importance of personal-patrimonial rather than bureaucratic relations between the ruler and his officials; a more deliberative and consensual decision-making process; the special position of the ruling clan, including women and dowagers; bitter—and often violent—succession struggles among the clan members; strong reliance on tribesmen as a clearly defined segment of the ruling elite, at the expense of Han bureaucrats. The tension between the patrimonial-indigenous and the Chinese-bureaucratic modes of rule characterized all polities. Yet, ruling over distinct ethnic groups practicing different modes of subsistence, the Inner Asian rulers usually avoided indiscriminate imposition of their ethnic culture (language, religion, etc.) on their subjects. Instead, they consciously allowed each group to retain its characteristics, trying to make the most of them for the empire—in both practical terms and for legitimating purposes.

Therefore, these polities remained multiethnic, multilingual, multireligious. They practiced dual or multiple forms of administration and various legitimation concepts: indigenous, Confucian-Chinese, religious-Buddhist (and, in the Qing case, also Chinggisid), and plural legal systems. Chinese concepts were always one facet of these dynasties’ multicultural organization—and they regarded the appropriation of Chinese trappings as an integral part of their imperial culture. Therefore it is possible to highlight continuities in the Song-Yuan-Ming, Ming-Qing, or late imperial China as a whole. However, the non-Han dynasties also had other, sometimes multiple, facets, that were also part and parcel of their identity and culture (Golden 1982; Khazanov 1994; 2015; Allsen 2001; Smith and von Glahn 2003; Di Cosmo 1999; 2002; 2015; Biran 2015).

This composite imperial culture also meant that the nomads played a role in promoting cross-cultural exchange. They were not only a passive medium transferring elements from one sedentary civilization to another, but participants, who initiated much of the intercultural exchange and whose norms and priorities were the filter and catalyst that determined which cultural elements would be transmitted throughout Eurasia. Such contacts also resulted in mutual influences between rulers and ruled, despite the policy of separating the various groups. Again, however, such assimilation was not one-sided. Under Inner Asian rule, many Chinese adopted—voluntarily or not—the conquerors’ dress, hairstyle, naming patterns, as well as some social norms and ideological components (e.g., Serruys 1987; Robinson 2009; Crossley 2015). In fact, recent scholarship stresses the impact of Inner Asia on Han-Chinese dynasties even in periods in which the nomads stayed outside China (Chen 2012; Skaff 2012; Robinson 2008b). Yet Chinese elements were more dominant when the conquerors were a tiny minority among their subjects and less connected to the steppe tradition, as in the case of the Jin. The Chinese demographic advantage was also significant when the conquerors lost their political dominance, and often led to a certain Inner Asian assimilation into the Chinese, although, as shown above, this assimilation was not always comprehensive even in the long run.

*New questions*

Studying these multicultural empires on their own terms opens a host of new, often world-history related, research questions, and promotes the comparative study of empires synchronically (comparing the Liao and Jin to their contemporaries in the western steppe, the Seljuqs and the Qarakhanids; or the post-Mongol Eurasian empires including the Ming and Qing, but also the Moghuls, Uzbeks, Safavids, and Ottomans) or diachronically (the evolution and various stages of the Inner Asian model). Based on recent collective volumes, dissertations, and monographs (e.g., Smith and von Glahn 2003; Struve 2004; Rossabi 2013; and see Mullaney's chapter), as well as two major conferences held in the summer of 2014—Harvard's "Middle Period China (800–1400)" and Jerusalem's "New Directions in the Study of the Mongol Empire"—it is apparent that the study of the Yuan and the Qing is now flourishing, and a few promising directions for current and future research are apparent. These are based also on developments in Chinese studies in general, such as the editing and annotation of dynastic histories in China, the digitization of sources, and the use of databases for acquiring prosopographical and geographical information.

Much effort has been invested in studying the multicultural environment of these dynasties, in terms of the social history and social mobility of various ethnic, professional, and religious groups, as well as in the study of specific cultural exchanges—scientific, legal, religious, and artistic ones. Long-term commerce—maritime, continental, frontier—has also attracted much interest, though the comparison between the active Yuan globalization and the passive Qing one still awaits thorough investigation. A prominent feature is the study of networks—commercial, religious, scholarly—that is especially relevant for the highly mobile non-Han dynasties.

Environmental history, which due to the nomadic component of these dynasties is even more pertinent for them than for other polities, has also attracted much interest, from the importance of the Little Ice Age to the rise of the Qing, through the contribution of Mongolia's especially wet climate in the thirteenth century to the rise of Chinggis Khan (Pederson et al. 2014), to the importance of natural disasters for Yuan politics (Brook 2010). An ecologically informed history of the China–Inner Asian frontier is certainly desirable.

This vitality and promising directions also suggest that a new synthesis of the political, social, and cultural history of these dynasties, catering to western audiences, is due. The Harvard "History of Imperial China" series, while producing an excellent monograph on the Qing (Rowe 2009), adopted an old-fashioned attitude towards the non-Han polities. Thus no volume was dedicated to the Liao, Jin, or Xia, while the Yuan was squeezed with the Ming into one Sinocentric volume, which does not do justice to the Eurasian facet of Yuan history (Brook 2010). Christopher Atwood's forthcoming chapter on the Yuan in *The Cambridge History of the Mongol Empire*, will hopefully fill part of this void, but it is about time that the new developments in the study of these dynasties reached the textbooks too.

In sum, the non-Han polities were much more than foreign barbarians overwhelmed by Chinese culture. They were successful, enduring regimes with a complex and multicultural identity of their own and a common Inner Asian political culture. Their combination of Chinese and Inner Asian modes of government and their long periods of rule contributed much to the shaping of Chinese history and government in the imperial and modern periods. Instead of stressing their "alien" or non-Chinese character, they should be acknowledged as part and parcel of what we call Chinese history, perhaps the northern variant of Chinese history as opposed to its southern, Han-dominated one.

### Notes

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- 2 The term “conquest dynasty” as a designation of a non-Han dynasty is inaccurate, because almost any Chinese dynasty, from Zhou (1046–256 BCE) and Qin (221–207 BCE) onward, rose to power by conquering its rivals, including, most notably, the preceding dynasty.
- 3 The term “Inner Asia” refers to the regions in Asia that were outside the realm of agricultural civilizations. While its boundaries have changed throughout the years, in the period discussed here, they included Mongolia, Manchuria, Siberia, Tibet, and Central Asia. Central Asia refers to the area between the eastern border of modern Iran and the eastern border of Xinjiang.
- 4 Li Zhiting, online at [http://www.cssn.cn/zx/tt/201504/t20150420\\_1592989.shtml](http://www.cssn.cn/zx/tt/201504/t20150420_1592989.shtml). Accessed August 29, 2015.
- 5 One such collaboration is the excavation of the so-called “Chinggis wall,” actually the Liao northern line of fortifications that stretches for nearly 750km across China, Russia, and Mongolia. This wall, probably designed to protect the Silk Road's northernmost route, is currently being excavated simultaneously by Mongolian, Russian, and Chinese teams (Lunkov et al. 2011).
- 6 This is of course similar to the Chinese Mandate of Heaven, but the concept of the mandate was different: Unlike the Chinese case, *Tenggeri*, the steppe God, did not bestow his mandate on every generation, thus the steppe world was often left without a unifying ruler. Yet the notion of the mandate remained as “an ideology in reserve,” ready to be revived if the creation of a supra-tribal empire were to be attempted (DiCosmo 1999; Biran 2015).

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

# Song to Qing: Late Imperial or Early Modern?

R. KENT GUY

On first reflection, Chinese dynasties have a deceptive resemblance to each other, and the Confucian habit of reading history as a series of dynastic cycles has long worked against recognizing secular change between dynastic eras. However, through much of the twentieth century it has been recognized that the last four dynasties of China's history, the Song (960–1279), Yuan (1279–1368), Ming (1368–1644), and Qing (1644–1911), were qualitatively different in social, political, and intellectual terms from the dynasties that preceded them.<sup>1</sup>

Economically, the late imperial was characterized by a robust and resilient commercial economy. Production for the market was the norm in many areas, and arrangements for buying, renting, and selling cultivation rights existed throughout the period. Through much of the period, China had an elaborate network of local, intermediate, and regional markets, and by the later half of the era, China participated vigorously in international markets. There were to be sure economic downturns and cycles, some due to political circumstances and others natural in origin, but following these eras, the commercial economy reasserted itself.

Socially, the last four dynasties were dominated by a landholding class, for which western historians have borrowed the term “gentry” from English social history. Surviving by their landholdings and occasional commercial enterprise, the significant activities of this group varied through the enormous and diverse Chinese landscape. Collectively they aspired to social control, and if circumstances permitted, political influence. The vehicle for their aspiration to political office was the civil service examination, and the Chinese term for which “gentry” is often perceived to be a translation, *shen shi* (the gentlemen who wore the sash), refers to the sumptuary badge of office that those who passed the examination were allowed to wear. Most recent writing in English, however, uses the term more broadly to refer both to those who passed, and the much larger group who aspired to pass the examinations. Political authority in the last four dynasties was vested in an emperor, whose powers were absolute. However, the continuous existence

of an emperorship did not mean that all emperors ruled in the same way; individual emperors made a difference, but probably more important, dynastic houses differed in their ambitions and agendas. Military strategies could be aggressive or defensive, different choices could be made about how to collect and supplement the agrarian revenue that was the fiscal foundation of all dynasties, and dynastic houses could take different approaches toward the great landed families that made up the social elite. However imperial authority was exercised, the late imperial period was marked by a gap that grew wider as the period progressed between the emperor and the social elite. There were efforts of various sorts to bridge this gap, some successful and others not, but the existence of difference between the court and the political community was characteristic of the era, and provided the tone of political discourse.

The sophistication of economic institutions, and the new technologies developed in agriculture, printing, and warfare meant that Chinese society of the late imperial period more closely resembled the society of early modern Europe than it did contemporary twelfth-century European society. To be sure, political thought and organization changed more slowly in China than did other elements of society, though by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, strands of thought emerged that bore comparison with early modern political thought in Europe (Rowe 2001). Moreover, China under the Qing participated in the process of imperial expansion that characterized the political histories of many of the empires of the early modern world. Acknowledging these comparisons by calling the last four dynasties “early modern China” is an important antidote to the idea that China was stagnant for parts of its history; China was not unchanging, though the pathways of historical change were hardly the same everywhere.

## The Song

China was always an agrarian society, but there were significant variations in the nature and amount of agrarian output. Early farmers lived on the North China plain and produced largely dry field crops like wheat, barley, and millet. In the ninth century as the Tang center failed, the dynasty was no longer able to protect its subjects from mounted invasions from the north and families fled to the south, moving into the valleys of the Yangzi River and its tributaries. As the economy of the southeast grew, migration increased, producing a “dramatic redistribution” of Chinese population (Hartwell 1982). The engine of economic growth in the southeast was the introduction of a new crop, early ripening rice, with seeds often distributed by the government. Rice was a highly labor-intensive crop, but it was so vastly more productive than earlier dry field crops that the additional labor could readily be sustained (Bray 1986). The gains that rice promised could not be achieved immediately. Paddies needed to be constructed, new agricultural tools invented, and new modes of water control developed. With these innovations came new types of money, credit, and water transport (Elvin 1973).

Rice agriculture proved to be so productive that it not only supported the additional labor necessary for cultivation, but also provided a surplus to feed a non-agrarian population, whose numbers filled burgeoning Song cities. Cities were hardly new in China. Tang-dynasty Chang’an was the largest and most cosmopolitan city in the world, and the center of civilized life in East Asia. What was new in the Song was the number of cities and the range of activities they supported, including markets open from morning to night, artisanal production and distribution, theater, restaurants, and tourism (Gernet 1962; Zhang 2012). Marco Polo, who visited East Asia in the fourteenth century, was

amazed above all by the size and sophistication of Chinese cities. One of the most impactful new industries was printing. Chinese governments had the responsibility of maintaining the classical canon and making it available to their subjects, and the Song dynasty was quite active in this regard. But during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, demand for texts exceeded the government supply, and private firms, printing for profit, emerged to meet the demand (Chia 2002). The printing involved was by woodblocks which, given the availability of carvers and the nature of the Chinese language, was the most efficient way of reproducing Chinese texts.

Of all the changes that marked the Song era, probably the most important and certainly the most analyzed by western, Chinese, and Japanese historians was a change in the social character of the elite. Resting on the foundation of a productive economy, and defining themselves against a reconceptualized monarchy, landholders came to think of themselves in a new way. The great families of Tang were aristocrats with pedigrees, who served in government according to the ranks of their families on long-established rank lists of prominence. As the Tang center collapsed, so did the social order of great families. The new Song emperor made clear that he still valued men from established families, not for their pedigrees, but for their ability to conserve and sustain Chinese heritage (Bol 1992, 32). Elite change was slow as were changes in economy and politics. During the first part of the Song, officials offered their service to the state and intermarried with similar families, often residing near the capital (Hartwell 1982). Toward the middle of the dynasty, wealthy families began to focus their attention more on their local societies, marrying locally, devoting time and resources to the preservation of local order, providing relief in time of dearth, and mediating local disputes (Hymes 1986; Bossler 1998).<sup>2</sup>

The Song elite still saw serving the state as a political goal. Every regime of any longevity in China developed a way of incorporating members of great families into its apparatus. The Tang did this by aristocratic rank; the Song used examinations. Although there were some examinations for specialized purposes in the Tang, testing became the primary mechanism for government recruitment in the Song and remained so until the end of the dynastic order in China. The recruitment of officials, in Song and subsequently, involved a series of examinations held in successively larger geopolitical centers, culminating with an examination in the imperial palace over which the emperor presided (Chaffee 1985; Elman 2000). The examinations offered a possibility of social mobility, although the degree to which it was possible for the poor man to rise through the system has been disputed. Tales of the poor students studying at night by the light of a flickering candle and rising up the ladder of prestige were as common in fiction as they were uncommon in practice, and for the most part modern scholarship has concluded that the examinations served to determine in any generation which members of elite families would serve the state (Ebrey 1988).

The fact of examination competition, combined with the Chinese tradition of partible inheritance, introduced a new tension into elite life. In brief, the issue was how a family that had achieved success in one generation could assure continuing success. Land holdings could easily be lost as they were divided in each generation; no amount of investment in education guaranteed success on the examinations and no amount of investment in county and community brought social immortality. Families had to strategize, sending one son to business, one to the market, and keeping one to manage the farms. They could contract marriage alliances with families who seemed to be on the rise, in hopes that coat tails would accommodate affines; they could set aside some property, when means allowed them to acquire it, as a charitable estate. This last strategy necessitated

keeping a genealogy so that limits could be set to the number who could benefit from a family's accumulated resources. It was also possible, within certain limits, to game the examination system. None of these approaches was foolproof, and the burdens were built into late imperial elite life. The institution of the clan, or corporate lineage organization, was modified in the late imperial period to serve as a vehicle for these strategic decisions.

Change in the imperial institution was initially a product of historical contingency. The late tenth century was a period of military chaos; as the Tang declined, proto-warlords emerged to compete with each other for control of territory and the prestige of monarchy. One group of militarists centering around Zhao Kuangyin (927–76) became dominant in the state of Later Zhou and broke away to found the Song dynasty in 969. Under the insecure military circumstances of the early Song, Zhao and his counselors accepted the notion that one leader needed to be dominant above all. Where Tang emperors were *primus inter pares*, nobles like those who surrounded them, the leaders of the Song “shared an interest in strengthening the new dynasty; the result was a new etiquette which elevated the ruler” above his court (Mote 2000, 92–104). As the dynasty progressed, the place of the emperor became institutionalized and articulated in political philosophy. The emperor came to be seen as a unique figure, and political philosophy was based on a cosmology in which belief in a “supreme ultimate implied a hierarchical society dominated by a supreme sovereign” (Mote 1963, 13). The ideological foundation was thus laid for a very powerful, nearly despotic, emperor. But in fact the Song emperors from their lofty perches interacted with officials and policy intellectuals on a regular basis. In fact, imperial sponsorship was responsible for the rise in the eleventh century of the great reformer Wang Anshi (1021–86) who sought to reshape Song institutions to meet the needs of a rapidly developing commercial economy. Wang's ideas were accepted, then rejected, and accepted and rejected again as successive monarchs took the Song throne. The Song emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1126) also interacted regularly with his court, around the collection and criticism of art and the development of Daoist religion (Ebrey 2008; 2014).

### Foreign rule

Western authors have seen the Song dynasty as militarily weak, and Chinese traditional historians have attributed the dynasty's fate to traitors and opportunists, but in truth little in the Chinese military tradition could have prepared the Song for the sorts of opponents it faced the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> The Liao and Jin dynasties, to whom the Song paid tribute and eventually lost the northern half of its territory, were founded in Manchuria, and each created a dual political order, drawing on tribal people for their military and Chinese for their civilian administrators. The Jin, which governed its base in Manchuria as well as North China after 1234, adopted many of the features of Chinese administration and society (Tillman and West 1995; Tao Jing-sheng 1977). Far more challenging were the Mongols, who destroyed the Jin in 1234, and the Southern Song in 1276 (Barfield 1989).

The gap between the emperor and his Chinese subjects inevitably widened at a time when the monarch was a foreigner who did not read or write Chinese. However, elements of Mongol statecraft enriched the repertoire of Chinese rulership. The Mongols were masters of great distances, and developed institutions to manage the vast

spaces that they had conquered. Mongol victories against the Jin and the Song reunited a Chinese empire that had divided during the Jin and Southern Song (Dardess 2003). Confronted with the need for communications over a huge empire, the Mongols developed a postal system that became a feature of all subsequent Chinese empires. The Mongols also introduced an intermediate administrative level, the province, between the court and county that proved critical to the Ming and Qing dynasties and still exists as a central unit in the People's Republic (Guy 2010). To maintain control of their state, the Yuan transformed by gradual stages a traditional ombudsman-like institution, the Censorate, into an organ for the systematic surveillance of officials and their activities (Hucker 1966). Where Mongols made an economic difference in East Asian commerce was in their opening of a trade route from Europe, through the Middle East to China, a route known today as the Silk Road. The goods that reached China through the monks, merchants, and religions that passed through Central Asia were legendary (Cameron 1970).

The Chinese elite were unimpressed. Few learned the multiple languages in which Yuan administration was conducted, or evinced any interest in the foreign religions or goods brought to China through Central Asia. Marco Polo reported that the Chinese detested the Mongols and the Muslim merchants and tax farmers who represented them. However, frustrated as they were at foreign control and the limited opportunity for political service, the elite originated few efforts to overthrow the Mongols. Patriotic twentieth-century Chinese historians, living in an age of modern nationalism, have been horrified by this fact, labeling Chinese behavior "pathological." Perhaps in compensation, they have developed the notion of Sinicization, the idea that foreign conquerors eventually become so Chinese that they no longer require opposition. There may have been some of this. But it has proven difficult to conceptualize and measure cultural change using this yardstick. Chinese institutions and the Chinese language were the most sophisticated available for governing agrarian society, and the fact that Mongols employed them hardly made them any less Mongols, or their Manchu successors any less Manchu (Crossley 1990; 1999). Rather than accept Yuan rule because the Mongols became Sinicized, it seems likely that Chinese elite during the Yuan, faced with a daunting military occupation, continued to do what many had done in the Southern Song: cultivate their estates, and devote themselves to their communities and the preservation of the Chinese intellectual heritage.

In two significant respects, however, the intellectual world of the Chinese elite changed during the period of foreign rule. The first was the adoption by the Jin and Yuan dynasties of Song Neo-Confucian commentaries on the Chinese classics as the basis for the civil service examinations. This was the work of Xu Heng (1209–81), a rural schoolteacher from North China. Xu was an ardent believer in Neo-Confucianism, but his recommendation may have had more practical purposes. Written in simple ancient text prose, the Neo-Confucian commentaries formed a useful introduction to the classical heritage for rulers who were not scholars (Lau 2001). A second change in the world of ideas developed in the Jinhua prefecture of Zhejiang province, where intellectuals became convinced that lack of law, or failure to enforce it, had led to poor government. Such a perception probably made a great deal of sense under chaotic foreign rule, when established law and procedure might be seen to protect the scholar from the capriciousness of a distant and unpredictable ruler. One historian has gone so far as to label this development a Confucian "professionalism" (Dardess 1983).

## The Ming

The force for China's release from foreign rule came from an unexpected quarter. After the reign of Khubilai (Qubilai), the Yuan declined rapidly, having, like dynasties that rely on charismatic rulers, no clear mechanism for succession. The post-Khubilai Yuan dynasty became apparent to the Chinese only in a series of engineering projects, like the extension of the Grand Canal to the Yuan capital of Beijing, and engineering failures, like the collapse to the earthworks along the Yellow River as the river changed from an outlet north of the Shandong peninsula to one south of the peninsula. The burdens on the peasantry were enormous, and were compounded by a plague that resembled the Black Death, then occurring in Europe. In this time of trial, it was a peasant from the north of Anhui, Zhu Yuanzhang, who founded a new Chinese dynasty. The late Frederick W. Mote of Princeton has largely drawn the picture the English-speaking world has of this monarch (Mote 1961; 1988; 2000, 517–82). In Mote's accounts, Zhu emerges as a gifted strategist and organizer who clawed and scraped his way to the top of a heap of bandit gangs, until he became the most credible military force in central China, whereupon he founded the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

But how would he rule? Not all Chinese emperors have been wealthy aristocrats prior to assuming the throne, but few have suffered the grinding poverty Zhu had endured or been illiterate for as many of their pre-monarchical years. To a degree, Zhu's reign affords a picture of how a Chinese peasant would organize the Chinese state, and perhaps for this reason Mao Zedong was said to read the history of the Ming as a bedtime habit. Mote emphasizes his reliance on elite advisors, and his commitment to reestablishing the proper order of a Chinese dynasty. But much of the peasant remained in the emperor. Having achieved a kind of security for himself, and as he imagined, for China, he set out a series of laws and instructions deigned to bring order and stability to peasant life (Farmer 1995). In his law-giving role, he was quite possibly influenced by the work of Jinhua Confucians, but the content of his laws suggested his own perspectives. In the "Placard of People's Instructions" he averred that for some time the officials had been corrupt and unreliable, so that the people needed to govern themselves with as little official interference as possible. Villages were to select suitable elders to adjudicate disputes, observe each other's abilities and character, and hold village wine-drinking ceremonies to celebrate their unity and community. Throughout his reign he remained suspicious of those who had received elite education, imagining them plotting against him. In his later years, as he became increasingly prey to paranoia, he instituted a series of purges involving tens of thousand of officials who he felt were endangering his rule (Dreyer 1982). Zhu Yuanzhang's son, who ruled as the Yongle emperor (1402–24), completed the domestic structure of the Ming and sought to expand its foreign influence. He campaigned in Mongolia and Vietnam, and sent the eunuch Zheng He across the Indian Ocean to display the Ming flag and investigate possibilities for trade (Dreyer 2007). He replaced the civil officials whom his father had purged with eunuchs. The Yongle reign saw some recognition of the civilian scholars' role in the state, in the appointment of bureaucratic officials, and the compilation of a great compendium of Chinese learning, *The Great Encyclopedia of the Yongle Period* (*Yongle dadian*), but the reign was dominated as the first Ming emperor's reign had been by the figure and concerns of the emperor (Tsai 1996; 2001).

Although there are several solid accounts of Ming political history, scholarship has concentrated on the first two reigns of the dynasty, and on moments in the later history

of the dynasty when the monarchy appeared dysfunctional, such as the abduction of the Xuanzong emperor in 1449, the great ritual crisis of the Shizong reign (1522–67), and most spectacularly the Wanli reign (1572–1620), when it is said that the emperor, having fallen into a dispute with his outer court advisers, refused to communicate with his bureaucracy during a reign of nearly 40 years (Mote 1974; Fisher 1990; Huang 1981). The picture that has emerged from these accounts is one of a monarchy largely inaccessible to its subjects, ineffectual in its actions, and largely irrelevant to its surroundings. Recent scholarship has called for a reassessment of the Ming monarchy, and recognition of its agency in managing the state (Robinson 2008a).

Eliminating Mongol warlord armies and Muslim merchants and repairing roads, bridges, and canals, the early Ming monarchy restored China's commercial economy. By the mid-Ming, markets and commerce thrived, and the growing textile industry rested on inter-regional trade. The greatest step toward prosperity in the Ming came with the introduction of silver into the Chinese economy at the end of the sixteenth century (von Glahn 1996). This silver initially came from Japan, and then from the New World mines in Mexico, and was transported to China and exchanged for luxury items like porcelains and silks exported to Europe. The silver may have had some impact on Chinese prices, but its greatest impact was in the expansion of the volume and value of Chinese trade. A prosperous merchant class arose, capable of moving goods, storing wealth, and living lives of some comfort in the great cities of eastern China. China's economy was monetized, for although silver was never an official currency of the Ming, it came to be used as the medium of exchange in formal and informal transactions. An ethos of prosperity replaced the rather austere puritanism of the Ming founder (Brook 1998). China was incorporated into the early modern world economy, on extremely favorable terms.

The Ming elite benefited from this economic growth, but was also challenged by it. Initially, the Chinese elite was excited by the prospect of having the imperial throne in Chinese hands, but they were soon disillusioned by the biases and intellectual emphases of the new rulers. Although the first Ming emperor restored the examination system, it was not until the middle of the fifteenth century that the examination quotas were large enough to produce significant numbers of officials. Growing wealth permitted more people to study and take the civil examinations, but as more people sat for the tests, more failed. If one was lucky enough to pass, the wait for appointment could be significant, filled with a required apprenticeship and then a long wait at home (Guy 2012). Once in office, particularly in the capital, one was likely to encounter that great bane of Ming officials, the eunuchs. It was possible for eunuchs and regular officials to make common cause (see Huang 1981). Early Ming emperors, distrusting the Chinese elite, found eunuchs to be convenient assistants, and once founded, eunuch agencies grew in size and importance. But when officials and eunuchs differed, only the emperor could referee the conflict, and eunuchs had the tremendous advantage of ready access to the monarch. While the gentry's political role was being challenged by eunuchs, their social role was being challenged from another direction. The respectable scholar of moderate means could easily find himself outbid and outclassed in the economic world by merchants of rapidly rising wealth and importance. Bested in politics, and no longer the wealthiest class, the Ming literati fell prey to status anxiety: Who were the true leaders of Ming society and how was their leadership made manifest (Clunas 1991)?

For many of those who retired after unpleasant encounters with eunuchs or who failed to pass at all, there could be satisfaction in a new role on the margins of the intellectual world in the rapidly developing publishing industry (Chow 2004). A new reading

population, living at home, consumed new sorts of intellectual production: prefaces, new editions, and commentary as well as novels and plays. Wang Yangming (1472–1529) also offered for some a new conception of value and action. The son of a grand secretary, Wang received the *jinsshi* degree in 1499, and embarked on a career specializing in education, justice, and military strategy. His philosophy was related to his political activism. The central problem of Chinese, or perhaps any, moral philosophy is how to determine the good. Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and his colleagues in the Song, seeking to reestablish a Chinese version of the good in the face of Buddhist challenges and changing social circumstance, urged that such a vision existed in the Chinese classics. Truth was established by reading the classics and applying them to changing circumstance. Wang Yangming proposed instead an intuitive vision, urging that each person had an innate knowledge of the good. The moral task for Wang was to clear the mind of selfishness and distraction so that the vision of the good could emerge. This notion had a resonance for many Ming intellectuals condemned to years of study of the Neo-Confucian commentarial tradition to prepare for an examination that few could hope to pass. A man of conscience could find fulfillment in a world of sordid commerce and corrupt politics. Powerful as this insight was, Wang Yangming was himself fairly conventional in his behavior: he continued to serve in office and declined to offer any challenge to Zhu Xi. His followers were more radical. If all had innate knowledge of the goods, then any man (or woman) could be a sage. Others of Wang's followers moved in another direction, focusing on how to listen to that still, small voice within, and adapting techniques of meditation borrowed from Buddhism for the purpose (de Bary 1970). There was as well a rebirth of interest in Buddhism, and a variety of syncretic doctrines in the late Ming.

The wealth, range of ideas, commercial development, and intellectual complexity of Ming society distinguished it from previous eras, and the willingness of Ming intelligentsia to experiment with new visions of value distinguished it from the period to follow. The later Ming saw one political group, the Donglin, desperately trying to defend traditional ideas, while others reflected on what directions Chinese society could move in. By the mid-seventeenth century, however, it was almost too late for debate. Banditry, unpaid soldiers, worsening weather, and famine were closing in on the Ming. The last Ming emperor, though intelligent and alert, could do little to save his dynasty, and when a band of ruffians captured the capital, he saw little to do but give in to the inevitable. As the general guarding his northern frontier was inviting Manchu troops to relieve the city, the last Ming emperor climbed Coal Hill, at the back of the Forbidden City, and, begging his ancestors' pardon, committed suicide.

### The Qing (1644–1911)

Once in the gates, there was no turning back for the Manchus, who had been a growing power in northeast Asia for 50 years (Wakeman 1985). The original Manchus were Jurchens, hunter-gatherers and traders in ginseng root, who lived on the margins of Ming society. In the late sixteenth century, Nurhaci (1559–1626), a tribal leader, began to unite his fellow Jurchens in a campaign against the Ming, motivated in part by his own grievances and in part by the economic needs of his growing following. By the 1630s, their numbers swollen with Chinese collaborators and Mongol soldiers, the group took the name "Manchu" (Crossley 1997; 1999). Their strength lay in their armies, which were hereditary units, named after the color and pattern of the flags under which they marched, an organization they retained after the conquest (Elliott 2001). In the spring

of 1644, they marched to Beijing, dispatched the bandits, and proceeded to found their own Qing dynasty, which ruled from 1644 until 1911. With the Qing, a Chinese imperial system that had been under attack in the late Ming for its cost and irrelevance by thinkers like Gu Yanwu (1613–82) and Huang Zongxi (1610–95) (de Bary 1993; Peterson 1968–69) seemed to receive a new lease on life. But the lease had a critical provision. The Qing was a Manchu, not a Chinese, creation, a fact with important implications both for its success and ultimately its failure. Three pillars supported Qing rule in China: administrative efficiency, wooing the Chinese elite, and military prowess.

Administrative efficiency and pragmatism were central concerns of the new Manchu leadership as it set about to reproduce the Chinese dynastic order. The main institutions of Ming rule, the emperorship, the capital bureaucracy, the territorial order, and the examination system, were quickly reestablished, although the bureaus and directorates associated with the eunuch presence were not recreated. As the Qing expanded their territory, they assigned responsibility for all fiscal, personnel, judicial, and public security functions within a province to a single governor (Guy 2010). They also created a secure means of communication between the emperor and territorial officials. In the 1680s, the Kangxi emperor (r. 1661–1722) began to exchange messages with officials in locked boxes, to which only the emperor and the officials had keys (Wu 1970). Streamlined, the system existed until the end of the dynasty and made possible a number of the signal political accomplishments of the dynasty. The third Qing emperor in China, the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723–36), made extensive use of the memorial system to reform the tax and personnel orders of the dynasty (Zelin 1984). One spectacular success of the dynasty was a grain storage system that substantially reduced subsistence crises, and was made possible by the exchange of memorials between the field and the center about harvests, rainfall, and grain prices (Wong and Will 1985; Will 1990). The absence of such crises contributed to the doubling of the Chinese population between 1644 and 1800.

The Qing leaders also created two new organs of central administration for the coordination of policy. One was the Grand Council, a small group of the emperor's closest advisors created during the later Yongzheng reign for the purpose of reading and drafting responses to a glut of wartime memorials. By the 1740s the Council became the nerve center of the Qing, developing staff and record-keeping capacity (Bartlett 1991). The Grand Council archives are a primary source for much of today's historical writing about the Qing. Parallel to the Grand Council was the nineteenth-century Zongli Yamen, which began as an ad hoc organization to deal with the foreign presence in Beijing and ultimately became a foreign office for the late Qing (Rudolph 2008). Qing innovations filled gaps in the imperial system, but also answered the needs of military occupiers for clear coordination and direct lines of control.

Unlike the Yuan, the Qing made it a policy to actively woo the Chinese elite. From the beginning they appointed Chinese, often former Ming, officials to important positions, and reinstated the examinations promptly. But Qing emperors, and particularly the Kangxi emperor (r. 1661–1722), lavishly patronized Chinese scholarly projects as well. Partly this was a matter of making amends. As Qing forces expanded into the lower Yangzi valley in the 1640s, the Chinese mounted resistance in some of the cities. Manchu sieges were often bloody affairs, leading to destruction and humiliating Chinese surrender (Meyer-Fong 1993; Struve 1984). Incorporated against their will into a foreign empire, many Chinese initially adopted a wait-and-see attitude, reluctant to participate in a new regime until they could be assured that the Chinese heritage would be preserved. Looking back at the Ming, many intellectuals in the early Qing became convinced that

the radicalism of late Ming thought had contributed to the fall of the dynasty. There was increased interest in the ritual texts of China's ancient past (Chow 1994). The projects that received Qing patronage were efforts to establish standard texts of the classics, write a history of the Ming, and compile collections of ritual. By 1700, the Qing had succeeded in attracting all but the most recalcitrant to their service, and the Kangxi emperor had earned a reputation as a sage unparalleled among late Qing emperors. The policy of championing Chinese scholarly interests to attract the elite was continued in the reign of the Kangxi emperor's grandson, the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–96). In 1772, the Qing court embarked on a project to collect, collate, and comment on all of the best books in China, and produced a 10,000-volume set known as the *Complete Library of the Four Treasuries* (Guy 1987). This built upon and contributed to a turn toward the philological in Chinese thought, a tendency to define intellectual problems as exercises in philology (Elman 1987; Mosca 2013).

The Qing economy has been variously assessed. After a downturn in the mid-seventeenth century, New World silver continued the flow into China, assuring continued prosperity for Chinese and Manchu elites. Heshen, a very corrupt official in the late eighteenth century, was said to be the richest man in the world of his day. The peasantry, however, benefited little from this new wealth and faced an increasingly stark and brutal competition for land and resources as the population grew. Mark Elvin, writing in the 1970s, postulated that the economy in the later Qing was stuck in a “high level equilibrium trap” where growing population consumed the economic surplus, preventing qualitative growth (Elvin 1973). Philip Huang, writing in the 1990s, saw China's class structure as the cause of what he called “involutionary growth,” in which increasing inputs of labor on strictly limited lands produced little new growth in productivity (Huang 1985; see also Huang 1990). Kenneth Pomeranz, writing in the 2000s, proposed that until the nineteenth-century “great divergence,” the Chinese peasantry lived lives comparable to their European counterparts (Pomeranz 2000). The Europeans solved this problem, he argued, by expanding into the New World, whereas the Chinese were forced to occupy ever more marginal lands on the boundaries of their productive empire. These three hypotheses have in common the notion that Chinese peasantry was severely strained at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The dimension of Qing history that has received the most attention in recent years has been the dynasty's military conquests. The Kangxi emperor spent nearly half of his reign at war, securing the far south of China for the dynasty (Dai 2009), then the southeast coast (Teng 2004), and, most spectacularly, conquering Mongols in Central Asia (Perdue 2005). Under the Yongzheng emperor there was limited fighting in central Asia, but the reign saw a concerted campaign by Ortai, an imperial bodyguard-turned-governor to enforce Chinese modes of life and government on the peoples of the southeast (Smith 1970; Herman 2007). At the end of his life, the Qianlong emperor styled himself “the old man of ten great campaigns.” This involved some rather creative counting, but armies under the Qianlong empire extended Qing control into Xinjiang and Turkestan, reinforced Chinese control of the west, including Sichuan and Tibet, and even embarked on campaigns in Burma and Nepal (Woodside 2002). The emperors' motives for these conquests were different. The Kangxi emperor sought security for the Qing's newly won Chinese empire. The Yongzheng emperor seems to have sought administrative strength and consistency, paving the way for an influx of merchants and miners whose activity would transform the southern borders (Giersch 2006). The Qianlong emperor seems to have been motivated by dynastic tradition, and the opportunity for conquests in regions

that offered little resistance, although there were (and still are) rebellions against Chinese presence in central Asia. The eighteenth-century conquests in central Asia do not seem to have benefited the dynasty financially, although the largely Manchu administrators of central Asia may have benefited personally (Millward 1998).

As a result of these conquests the Qing entered the nineteenth century an empire composed of many different peoples, a characteristically early modern political form. Like many composite empires, it faced challenges as the subordinate peoples discovered their own voice. This happened with the Miao of central China, and Tibetan people in the eighteenth century, with the Muslims and Hakkas in the nineteenth century, and ultimately with the Han Chinese themselves at the end of the century. Compounding these challenges was the fact that the British and other Europeans acquired the power in the post-Napoleonic age to change the traditional terms of trade with Asia, forcing the Chinese to buy opium rather than receive silver in return for the trade goods that European consumers demanded. Grievous but not mortal defeats were inflicted on the Chinese in the Opium Wars of 1842, and Sino-French War of 1881–83 and countless smaller diplomatic incidents (Hsu 2000a). The Qing nonetheless survived, demonstrating considerable institutional flexibility under the Empress Dowager, who was in power from 1860 to 1908. It was finally the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95, where the Qing lost not to a European but to an Asian power, that seemed to doom the Manchu dynasty in the eyes of the Chinese elite. No longer able to secure Chinese elite compliance, and no longer able to provide the military protection characteristic of earlier Manchu rule, the Qing dynasty fell in 1911.

### Notes

- 1 The Japanese scholar Naitō Torajirō first proposed this idea in 1914. See the chapter by Tackett in this volume for further discussion.
- 2 These changes are explored further in the chapter by Tackett in this volume.
- 3 See the chapter by Biran in this volume.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

- Brook, Timothy. 1998. *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Society in Ming China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mote, F.W. 2000. *Imperial China, 900–1800*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Pomeranz, Kenneth. 2000. *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# Nineteenth-Century China: The Evolution of American Historical Approaches

*PAUL A. COHEN*

A lot of things happened in (and to) China in the nineteenth century—foreign wars, domestic turmoil and rebellion, unprecedented western involvement in Chinese history, a gradual Chinese awakening to larger worlds that in an important sense China had long been a significant part of. The paradox is that the wider and deeper our understanding of China’s experience in the nineteenth century, the more precarious our confidence becomes in the appropriateness of this period as a meaningful span of time. Centuries, however convenient, are contrived units of demarcation. Real history was never confined or constrained by them.<sup>1</sup>

When I started to think about how to structure this chapter—the only one in the book that focuses on a century—I quickly realized that there was no single “nineteenth-century China.” Of course, in a literal sense, we all know exactly what period of time the term “nineteenth century” covers. But when we look at the evolution of western (mainly American) historical approaches to China’s nineteenth century, things become more complicated. How western historians have defined the century has depended, to a very considerable extent, on what we have believed was important about the developments that took place in China during these years.

Since my aim in this chapter is to identify and analyze critically the assumptions that have pervaded *American* historiography in particular, other major historiographical traditions dealing with nineteenth-century China—Chinese, Japanese, European, Soviet—are largely omitted from the discussion. This is in no way to discount the immense influence that historians working in other traditions—above all those of China and Japan—have exerted on American scholarship. This influence, however, has been filtered and shaped by American concerns and preoccupations. And it is the manner in which these latter have generated a peculiarly American historiography that is my central concern. Japanese and mainland Chinese historians, under the sway of Marxist historiography, were paying close attention to socioeconomic causation for years before American historians got around to taking such causation seriously. When they finally did, during the 1960s and 1970s,

it was a reflection of important developments taking place in the United States, not of anything new happening in China or Japan.<sup>2</sup>

One such development was the explosion of interest in social history that swept the American historical profession in the 1960s, quickly becoming a dominant tendency in the history field. Another development, in the same decade, was America's growing involvement in Vietnam and the intense feelings it aroused. In these circumstances, radical China specialists, influenced by Maoist historiography, seemed at times propelled more by the need to indict the imperialism of America and the west than by the commitment to understand China. Imperialism, for James Peck, at the time a youthful graduate student in sociology, was the key explanatory variable in the history of China in the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

### The old nineteenth century<sup>4</sup>

American interpretations of Chinese history from the Opium War (1839–42) to the Boxer uprising (1898–1900) tended, in the 1950s and 1960s, to lean heavily on the concepts “western impact” and “Chinese response.” The classic example is *A History of East Asian Civilization*, a widely used two-volume textbook coauthored by John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig. The treatment of nineteenth-century China in the second volume of this text (published in 1965 and titled *East Asia: The Modern Transformation*) was principally the responsibility of Fairbank and centered on the question “Why did China not respond to foreign encroachment earlier and more vigorously?” Because this is the key question, a number of imbalances or distortions emerge in Fairbank's account. First, on a purely quantitative level, disproportionate attention (roughly 75 percent of overall coverage) is paid to western-related facets of the history of the period. Second, because these western-related facets are seen largely through the prism of the impact–response approach, their historical import is stated in insufficiently complex terms: developments that were, in significant measure, responses to internal factors are overinterpreted as responses to the foreign impact. And third, Fairbank's need to account for China's “unresponsiveness to the Western challenge” forces him repeatedly to characterize the non-western-related aspects of nineteenth-century China (state, society, economy, thought) in terms of their “remarkable inertia” (Fairbank, Reischauer, and Craig 1965, esp. 81–82, 404–7).

Although the impact–response approach, as a framework for serious scholarly analysis, had its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, its influence on textbooks and other undergraduate teaching materials continued unabated for years after this time. As has so often happened in other fields of history, a lag persisted between the latest trends in scholarly research and the picture of Chinese history to which beginning students were exposed.<sup>5</sup>

As a corrective to the distortions fostered by the impact–response approach, it is helpful to think of Chinese history in the nineteenth century as comprising several distinct zones. The outermost zone (outermost, i.e., in a geographical and/or cultural sense) would consist of those facets of late Qing history that were most clearly and unambiguously responses to or consequences of the western presence. In this zone would be included such diverse phenomena as the unequal treaties, modern arsenals and shipyards, pioneer reformers like Wang Tao, Christian converts, institutions like the Maritime Customs Service, and the dispatch of Chinese students and envoys abroad. It is here that the conventional impact–response paradigm is most clearly applicable. But it must be applied with care even in this zone. A Chinese woman might convert to Christianity as a

result of her being convinced, on doctrinal grounds, of that religion's superior merit—a clear response to the west. But she might also convert in order to gain leverage against an adversary in a lawsuit—not so clearly a response to the west. Again, the extraterritoriality provision in the unequal treaties is generally seen as having been forced on China by the imperialist west. But, as Pär Cassel (2012) clearly demonstrates, there were ample precedents for such a provision in the pre-Opium War Qing legal order.

Next, there would be an intermediate zone embracing aspects of the period that were activated or given shape and direction, but were not actually brought into being, by the west. The Taiping movement, the Tongzhi Restoration, some self-strengthening efforts, bureaucratic and court politics, antiforeignism, and social and economic tensions between urban and rural China are the kinds of things that may be included here. Again, we have a very heterogeneous assortment. In some instances (e.g., expressions of shame-centered antiforeignism), the impact-response framework of analysis may still work tolerably well. In other instances (such as politically inspired antiforeignism or self-strengthening activity undertaken to augment personal power), modes of behavior that appear to be simple responses to the west turn out, on closer inspection, also to be responses to internal political challenges. In still other cases (the Taiping movement being the most conspicuous), even the semblance of a response to the west is largely absent: the response is to a Chinese situation, in some respects (such as population pressure) unprecedented in scale, and the west's role is largely confined to that of an influencing agent. These examples all seem to suggest that in a Chinese setting a "pure" response to the west was virtually an impossibility. It would doubtless be safer and more productive to think in terms of western-influenced responses to western-influenced situations, the degree of western influence at both ends varying from case to case.

Finally, located in the innermost zone would be those facets of late Qing culture and society that not only were not products of the western presence but were, for the longest time period and to the highest degree, left undisturbed by this presence. Alongside such slow-changing cultural attributes as language and writing, we would find in this zone indigenous forms of intellectual, religious, and aesthetic expression; the style and pattern of life in agrarian China; and long-standing social, economic, and political conventions and institutions. Once having graduated beyond the assumption that important changes in nineteenth-century China had to be directly or indirectly influenced by the west, we would also be in a position to seek out in this innermost zone patterns of secular change, largely if not completely unrecognized by contemporary westerners, that were taking place in Chinese society and culture and contributed, possibly in decisive ways, to the history of the late Qing.

The contents of these zones were fluid, and among the zones there was frequent interaction. The relative importance of any given zone, moreover, might change appreciably over time. We must be wary, however, of assuming that, as the outermost zone of western-influenced change grew in importance during the last decades of the Qing, the innermost zone of indigenous change inevitably shrank. History is not a seesaw, and there is no reason for supposing that, even if it were, western-inspired and Chinese-inspired change would necessarily be situated on the seesaw's opposite ends, equidistant from an imaginary center.<sup>6</sup>

The impact-response approach was accompanied by other perspectives that, although not entirely inconsistent with it, started from different premises. One such perspective, which attracted a good deal of attention, beginning in the late 1960s, was put forward by radical Marxist-influenced scholars such as Victor Nee and James Peck. Ironically,

although Peck was severely critical of the impact–response approach identified with Fairbank, as well as the closely allied approach of modernization theory (to be discussed below), he shared much with both approaches. He believed like them that Chinese society, prior to the full impact of western imperialism in the early nineteenth century, was both unchanging and apparently incapable of introducing major change on its own (Peck 1975, 88, 90; Nee and Peck 1975, 6). Indeed, it was only with the intrusion of the nineteenth-century west, with its unprecedented wealth and power, that true change became a genuine possibility in China. But, although the west thus created the preconditions for massive change in Chinese society, having done so, it proceeded effectively to block any and all changes that were not in its interest. The only way the Chinese could extricate themselves from this situation was therefore through revolution, which paradoxically Peck and Nee are explicit in describing as “a protracted and continuous historical process which grew out of the Chinese response to the impact of Western expansionism in the mid-nineteenth century” (Nee and Peck 1975, 3).

Another perspective that went hand in hand with the impact–response approach turned out to be far more influential than the imperialism/revolution approach in shaping western scholarship on nineteenth-century China. I refer to modernization theory, a corpus of societal analysis that first assumed explicit shape in the years following World War II and, against the backdrop of the Cold War, served the ideological need of western—primarily American—social scientists to counter the Marxist-Leninist explanation of global “backwardness” or “underdevelopment.” The aspect of the theory that cast the greatest spell over American historians of China in the 1950s and 1960s was its neat division of China’s long history into *traditional* and *modern* phases of evolution (*modern* generally referring to the period of significant contact with the modern west). Modernization theory also provided a coherent intellectual explanation of the processes whereby “traditional” societies became “modern”—or, as the editors of a series on the “modernization of traditional societies” phrased it, “the way quiet places have come alive” (Moore and Smelzer 1966, iii).

Although the proximate origins of modernization theory were the conditions of the postwar world, in its most fundamental assumptions about non-western cultures and the nature of change in such “quiet places,” it drew heavily on a constellation of ideas that had wide currency among western intellectuals of the nineteenth century. One almost invariable ingredient in such commentary was the image of China as a stationary, unchanging society. Thus, just prior to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the French mathematician-philosopher Condorcet wrote of the “human mind ... condemned to shameful stagnation in those vast empires whose uninterrupted existence has dishonoured Asia for so long,” and the German philosopher Hegel, some years later, entered the judgment “We have before us the oldest state and yet no past ... a state which exists today as we know it to have been in ancient times. To that extent China has no history.”<sup>7</sup>

The view of China as unchanging was nothing new. It had enjoyed wide currency prior to the nineteenth century also. What was new was the negative judgment placed on China’s alleged immobility. For many writers prior to the French Revolution, the stable, changeless quality of Chinese society had been regarded as a definite mark in its favor, a condition worthy of western admiration and respect. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, however, as the Industrial Revolution brought what appeared to be a widening gap between European and Chinese material standards and as Europeans began to identify “civilization” with a high level of material culture, China, whose technical skill and material abundance had once been the envy of the west, came to be identified as a backward society.

This new picture of China was reinforced by important intellectual shifts that were taking place in Europe: in the economic sphere, a strong reaction against mercantilist constraints and an increased tendency to embrace the principles of free trade and *laissez-faire*; in the political realm, a growing discontent with despotic rule; and, more generally, a commitment to the values of progress, dynamic movement, and change in all spheres of life. As this new worldview came more and more to be equated with being “enlightened,” China, with its annoying restrictions on trade, its autocratic government, and its apparent resistance to fundamental change, took on the aspect, for many westerners, of an obsolescent society doomed to languish in the stagnant waters of barbarism until energized and transformed by a dynamic, cosmopolitan, and cosmopolitanizing west.

The assumptions underlying the nineteenth-century western perception of China exerted a powerful shaping influence on American historiography in the period from World War II to the late 1960s. No one exemplified this nineteenth-century drag effect more clearly than Joseph Levenson. In Levenson’s perspective, modern society, as embodied in the culture of the west, acted upon Chinese culture in two ways concurrently: first, as a solvent, against which the old culture stood defenseless; and second, as a model on which a new Chinese culture was increasingly patterned. The picture of China’s transformation that emerged from this perspective was one that was shaped, from start to finish, by problems posed for China by the modern west. It was, to use Levenson’s own language, a revolution against the west (seen as imperialism) to join the west (seen as the embodiment of modernity). There was little room in this picture for a conception of the revolution as a response, in significant measure, to indigenous problems of long standing—problems that might be aggravated by the west but were not its exclusive, or even in all instances its primary, creations. Even less was there room in Levenson’s picture for the possibility that past Chinese culture might contain significant features that, far from acting as barriers to China’s modern transformation, might actually assist in this transformation and take an important part in directing it (Cohen 2010, 61–79).

### The new nineteenth century

In his assumption that Confucianism and modernity were fundamentally incompatible and that the traditional order had to be torn down before a new modern order could be established in China, Levenson was joined by many other scholars of the fifties and sixties, among the more prominent being Mary Wright (1965, 9–10, 300) and Albert Feuerwerker (1958). Around 1970, however, the reasoning behind this pattern of thinking began to be challenged by an emerging body of scholarly opinion that, in defining the relationship between “modern” and “traditional,” questioned the implication that they were dichotomous, mutually antithetical conditions. With respect to Chinese history in particular, Benjamin Schwartz, in his critique of Levenson’s organic or holistic view of culture, insisted that “areas of experience of the past may, for good or ill, continue to have an ongoing existence in the present,” that “‘Chinese past’ and ‘modernity’ may not confront each other as impenetrable wholes” (1976, 108–9). More broadly, Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, in their illuminating 1967 study of Indian political development, *The Modernity of Tradition*, identified the problem as being rooted in the angle of vision of the observer and made the vitally important point that when modern societies alone were the focus of investigation, there was an increased tendency to stress traditional survivals, whereas when modern societies were compared with traditional

societies, the traditional features of the former often disappeared from view. The perspective of the inquirer, in other words, had a substantial impact on what she or he saw (Rudolph and Rudolph 1972, 4–6).

### *The China-centered approach*

The attack leveled by Schwartz, the Rudolphs, and a growing number of other scholars against the picture of “tradition” and “modernity” as mutually exclusive, wholly incompatible systems bore enormous potential consequences for western understanding of the recent Chinese past. The entire structure of assumptions inherited from the nineteenth century—the perception of China as barbarian and the west as civilized; of China as static (or at best cyclically changing) and the west as dynamic; of China as incapable of self-generated linear change and therefore requiring for its transformation the impact of a “force from without”; the assumption that the west alone could serve as the carrier of this force; and finally, the assumption that, in the wake of the western intrusion, “traditional” Chinese society would give way to a new and “modern” China, fashioned in the image of the west—this whole structure of assumptions was thoroughly shaken and a new and more complex model suggested for the relationship between past and present in a modernizing context.

One of the most influential efforts in this direction was Philip Kuhn’s landmark study *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China* (1970). In an introductory discussion of the “boundaries of modern history,” Kuhn notes that the prevailing view of China’s transformation in modern times defines “modern” at least by implication as “that period in which the motion of history is governed primarily by forces exogenous to Chinese society and Chinese tradition.” Uncomfortable with this definition, Kuhn makes the crucial point that, before we can dispense with it, we must free ourselves of the old picture of an unchanging or cyclically changing China. The central question to which he addresses himself in his introduction is, therefore, that of the nature of the changes taking place in Chinese society just *prior* to the full western onslaught. After noting the “phenomenal population rise (from 150 to 300 million during the eighteenth century); the inflation of prices (perhaps as much as 300 percent over the same period); the increasing monetization of the economy and the aggravation of economic competition in rural society,” Kuhn (1970, 1–2, 5–6) expresses doubt as to whether changes of such character and magnitude can be viewed as cyclical.<sup>8</sup>

What Kuhn began to do here was offer a sharply altered picture of the role of the past in recent Chinese history, and in the process redefine the issue of what was important about the changes taking place in nineteenth-century China. The upshot of this fresh approach was that the past century and a half of Chinese history regained some of its lost autonomy and the way was paved for a less inflated, more cautious portrayal of the part taken by the west in this history. It is no coincidence that precisely as this new understanding of the relationship between “tradition” and “modernity” was taking shape (it can be dated roughly to the mid- to late 1960s), studies began to appear that clearly reflected it.

These studies were marked by a number of characteristics. Their main identifying feature was that they began with Chinese phenomena set in a Chinese context. These problems might be influenced, even generated, by the west. Or they might have no western connection at all. But either way they were *Chinese* problems, in the double sense that they were experienced in China by Chinese and that the measure of their historical

importance was a Chinese, rather than a western, measure. The conventional paradigms of the past, all of which began history in the west and incorporated a western measure of significance, were thus explicitly or implicitly repudiated. The narrative of the most recent centuries of Chinese history did not commence in Europe with Prince Henry the Navigator and the first stirrings of western expansionism; it began in China. As more and more scholars searched for a Chinese story line, moreover, they found, magically, that there really was one, and that this story line, far from abruptly terminating in 1840 and being preempted or displaced by the west, continued to be of central, paramount importance right through the nineteenth century and beyond.

The resulting restructuring of our picture of nineteenth-century Chinese history could be seen in a number of areas. A conspicuous example was reformism, which came to be viewed by many scholars as an outgrowth of indigenous reformist traditions. Few would argue that the west was unimportant or that it did not in time have a significant shaping effect on Chinese reform thought and activity. But there was a strong reaction against the customary representation of reform as western-oriented and western-inspired and an equally strong sense of the need to redefine the entire phenomenon of reform in Chinese perspective (Cohen and Schrecker 1976, x).

A second identifying characteristic of this China-centered approach was that it attempted to cope with the complexity of the Chinese world by breaking it down into smaller, more manageable spatial units. The core assumption on which this strategy rested was that, because China encompassed a vast range of regional and local variation, the content and extent of this variation needed to be delineated if we were to gain a more differentiated, more contoured, understanding of the whole—an understanding of the whole that did more than blandly reflect the least common denominator among its several parts. One result of this new development was a mushrooming of province-level—and even some county-level—studies by western historians, which enriched our appreciation of the diversity of China.<sup>9</sup>

Sensitivity to China's diversity was also a great strength of G. William Skinner's regional systems approach, which drew attention to critical variation *within* the vast Chinese hinterland. Skinner, an anthropologist, introduced the regional approach in conjunction with an effort to determine the extent of urbanization in nineteenth-century China. Early in his research on Chinese cities, he observed that in late imperial times they formed not a single integrated national system but nine regional systems, each only tenuously linked to its neighbors. He further discovered that these regional urban systems coincided very closely with physiographic units, defined in terms of drainage basins. His approach to these units—he called them macroregions—rested primarily on two variables: *geography*, taken in the broadest sense to include physical features, resource endowment, and distance, and *technology*, particularly as it related to the relative ease and cost of transport. Although not without potential shortcomings, Skinner's analysis had a significant impact on both western and Chinese studies of Chinese history (Cohen 2010, 164–66; see also chapter 3 by May-bo Ching in this volume). It showed, for example, that even if, as many American economists and economic historians argued, the Chinese economy was so large that the economic effects of imperialism on the whole were bound to be negligible, by subdividing China into regions and asking specific questions about the impact of exogenous factors on each region and, within a given region, on core and peripheral areas, we may come up with a more complicated and textured picture than either side in the imperialism controversy provided. While the effects of shifting world market conditions on the Chinese economy as a whole might be of

little consequence, the impact on the tea growers of nineteenth-century Fujian would assume greater significance (Gardella 1976).

A third feature of the China-centered approach that became increasingly common in the 1970s and 1980s was that it envisioned Chinese society as being arranged hierarchically in several different levels. To the spatial or “horizontal” differentiation just noted a “vertical” axis of differentiation was thus added. Where American research on China prior to the 1970s often tended to focus on the view from the top—the policies and actions of the central government and of powerful provincial officials, events of national moment (such as the Opium, Boxer, and other wars fought with foreign countries), intellectual and cultural figures of more than local or regional prominence (such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao), and so forth—the new approach, influenced by the explosion of interest in social history within the American historical profession in the 1960s, concentrated on the lower reaches of Chinese society (including merchants, religious leaders and followers, lower gentry, militarists, and even bandits and bullies) and thereby, among other things, opened the door to a richer understanding of the previously neglected popular history of China in the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

A fourth facet of the China-centered approach, although in itself hardly “China-centered,” is the high receptivity its practitioners have shown to the techniques and strategies of other disciplines, in particular the social sciences, and their serious commitment to incorporating these techniques and strategies into historical analysis. Not surprisingly, it was the field of anthropology, accustomed to the investigation of non-western societies and more sensitive than most social science disciplines to the perils of ethnocentric bias, that led the way.<sup>11</sup>

The China-centered approach I have outlined resulted in a very different understanding of Chinese history in the nineteenth century. The consensus of earlier American scholarship had been that the great divide between the modern period of Chinese history (presumptively a time of far-reaching change) and the traditional period (a time, it used to be thought, of little or no real change) was the Opium War. The growing consensus in more recent years has been that the true watershed event of nineteenth-century Chinese history was the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64). Philip Kuhn (1978, 264) described the rebellion as “in many respects the hinge between China’s pre-modern and modern histories.” William Rowe (2009, 198–200), after summarizing the physical and human devastation wrought by the Taiping Rebellion, judges it, along with the Nian and Muslim rebellions that arose in its wake, to have been “unquestionably much more of a watershed event for the Qing population” than the Opium War.

Yet, perhaps surprisingly, the Taiping Rebellion, although it was well known to westerners in the middle of the nineteenth century and generated a very considerable English-language literature at the time, was quickly forgotten once it ended, underscoring the west’s seeming incapacity to assign enduring importance to historical developments the impact of which was experienced largely within China.<sup>12</sup> The Taiping Rebellion remains little known even today in the United States (Cohen 1997, 14–15), not just, Stephen Platt suggests, “because our own civil war naturally occupies the center of our histories of the period but also because of a long-standing misconception that China in the nineteenth century was an essentially closed system and therefore ... a civil war in China—no matter its scale—was something with relevance only to the country in which it was waged” (2012, xxiii). Platt makes this assertion with full knowledge that although the impact of the Taiping Rebellion was unquestionably centered in China, the religious affiliation of its leadership was a version of Protestant Christianity, its founder and top

leader Hong Xiuquan believed himself to be the second son of God, and westerners were involved in various ways on both sides of the civil war (Spence 1996).

Homing in on the Taiping Rebellion not only calls attention to blind spots in the earlier perspective of American historians; it also highlights the problem of periodization by century noted at the beginning of this chapter. To be sure, we can identify proximate causes of the Taiping upheaval in the nineteenth century. But when we inquire more deeply into the factors that culminated in the rebellion, we are inevitably drawn back to the eighteenth century and the truly mammoth changes that took place at that time. The problems identified by Kuhn (above all, population explosion—as of the outbreak of the Taiping Rebellion China's population had grown to perhaps 450 million [Rowe 2009, 91]—and intensified competition for land) generated growing strains in Chinese society, which began to show in the latter decades of the eighteenth century. This socioeconomic crisis was aggravated toward the end of the century by the external impact of the expanding west (above all, the trade in opium) and the familiar marks of dynastic decline (bureaucratic corruption, internal rebellion), with the result that by the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Qing bore little resemblance to the vigorous condition characterizing the Kangxi (r. 1662–1722), Yongzheng (r. 1723–35), and early Qianlong (r. 1736–96) eras (Rowe 2009, 149–85).

The adequacy of the “nineteenth century” as a meaningful historical period is challenged not only by an event like the Taiping Rebellion but also by long-term structural changes in Chinese society. Frederic Wakeman (1975, 2) provided the classic statement of the problem. Gradually, he wrote,

social historians began to realize that the entire period from the 1550s to the 1930s constituted a coherent whole. Instead of seeing the [Qing] as a replication of the past, or 1644 and 1911 as critical terminals, scholars detected processes which stretched across the last four centuries of Chinese history into the republican period. The urbanization of the lower Yangtze region, the commutation of labor services into money payments, the development of certain kinds of regional trade, the growth of mass literacy and the increase in the size of the gentry, the commercialization of local managerial activities—all these phenomena of the late Ming set in motion administrative and political changes that continued to develop over the course of the [Qing] and in some ways culminated in the social history of the early twentieth century.

In brief, we can (and will) continue to use the “nineteenth century” as a significant period in Chinese history, just as, despite the criticisms that have long been aimed at dynastic periodization, we continue to refer to specific dynastic periods in our historical accounts. But, as we do so, we must not lose sight of the limitations of all such temporal schemes. And we must be open to the notion of multiple periodizations, each valid within a specific frame of reference.

### *Pushing the boundaries of Chinese history*

There remain today countless issues in nineteenth-century Chinese history for the probing of which a China-centered approach remains both appropriate and desirable. But there are other issues where this is plainly not the case. I have in mind a number of areas of recent scholarly endeavor that, although unquestionably *relating to* Chinese history, are best identified in other ways, either because they pose questions (for instance in addressing world historical issues) that are broadly comparative in nature,<sup>13</sup> or because

they examine China as part of an East Asian or Asian regional system, or because even while dealing with the subject matter of Chinese history they are principally concerned with issues that transcend it,<sup>14</sup> or because they focus on the behavior and thinking (including self-perception) of non-Han ethnic groups within the Chinese realm, or because their paramount interest is in the migration of Chinese to other parts of the world (see the chapter by Henry Yu). Each of these issues—and of course the list could be extended—raises questions about the boundaries of “Chinese history” in the nineteenth century and, indeed, in some instances the very meaning of the word “China.” Inevitably, therefore, each in its own way points to limitations in the China-centered approach.

Let us look at two examples, both pertaining to non-Han ethnic groups within the Chinese realm. A small but unusually talented coterie of historians have in recent years injected new life into the question of the Manchiness of the Qing empire, looking at such topics as the evolution over time of Manchu identity (cultural and/or ethnic), the special character of the Qing frontier, the multiform nature of Manchu rulership and its contributions to the functioning of the Qing imperium, important Manchu institutions (most notably the Eight Banners), the contribution of the Manchus to twentieth-century nationalism, and so on.<sup>15</sup> Often supplementing Chinese sources with those in the Manchu language and sharply contesting the old view that the Manchus were largely absorbed or assimilated into a “Chinese world order,” these scholars are in broad agreement that, as one of them has phrased it, “the notion of Manchu difference mattered throughout the [Qing] dynasty” (Elliott 2001, 34). Indeed, several of them have used such phrases as “Qing-centered” and “Manchu-centered” to highlight this very difference (Rawski 1996, 832–33; Elliott 2001, 28, 34; Millward 1998, 13–15). The argument is not that the Manchus were not, in important ways, a part of Chinese history, but rather that Chinese history during the final centuries of the imperial era looks different when seen through Manchu eyes. To view the parts taken by the Manchus in this history from a Han Chinese perspective—the conventional assimilation or Sinicization model—is therefore to invite the same kinds of distortions that result when Chinese history is depicted in Eurocentric terms (see the chapter by Michal Biran).

If Manchu difference mattered throughout the Qing, a major (although not the only) reason for its mattering was that the Qing was a conquest dynasty that brought China and eventually Inner Asia under the Manchu sway during this period (Perdue 2005). It was a quite different story in the case of other non-Han groups, such as (to cite one of the more important examples) Muslim Chinese. Muslims in China also raise questions concerning the aptness of the China-centered approach, but because their experience over the centuries has been very different from that of the Manchus, the sorts of questions they raise also are different. One difference from the Manchus is that although Muslims at various points in time (above all, during the Yuan dynasty) served as high officials, they never ruled China as a group, in the sense that the Manchus (and Mongols) did. Another difference is that Muslims were and continued to be linked, albeit to varying degrees and in widely different ways, to a religion—Islam—that is of non-Chinese origin and worldwide embrace.

As both Dru Gladney (1996) and Jonathan Lipman (1997) have insisted, Muslims in different parts of China (even in some instances within a single province) also tend to be very different from each other. Some Muslims, for example many of the Uighurs in present-day Xinjiang, although inhabiting a space that is politically part of China, speak a Turkic language and tend to identify culturally and religiously more closely with

their counterparts in the Central Asian states to the north than with Han Chinese. Other Muslims, scattered in various places throughout the Chinese realm, are descended from families that have lived in China for generations, speak one or another form of Chinese, and are indistinguishable in many aspects of their lives from non-Muslim Chinese. In recent centuries, in short, individuals in China could be both Chinese and Muslim in a range of different ways, making it hard to claim (as was done in the People's Republic in the 1950s) a "unified 'ethnic consciousness'" for Sino-Muslims (Lipman 1996, 109).

*Empire among empires: The Eurasian turn*

There was a time (certainly in the nineteenth century) when it was not uncommon for westerners to see Qing China as *sui generis*, something fundamentally different from the countries of the west. China was a static, unchanging civilization. It was a strange place, hard to understand. And it existed in a state of isolation, hermetically sealed from the rest of the world. Then, as western scholars came to understand China better, especially since the 1960s or so, the myths that had been constructed about it were upended, one by one. Most importantly, change was seen to be as much a staple of Chinese history as of the histories of other major civilizations, and it became clear that, through trade, religion, and other forms of contact, the Chinese had been closely engaged with the rest of the world for a very long time.

The principal new context in which China has come increasingly to be seen in recent decades has been that of Eurasia as a whole (Lieberman 1999). By enlarging our field of vision from the easternmost end of this landmass to the continent's entirety, we have come to see Qing China (including the nineteenth century) as only one Eurasian empire among several, including the Hapsburgs, the Ottomans, the Muscovites, the Mughals, and in time the British. As we began to compare it with these other empires—and to shed some of our earlier preconceptions—our understanding of the Qing and its place in the world evolved. This was no less true of the Chinese themselves, who from the 1750s to 1860, Matthew Mosca argues (2013), gradually developed a clearer philological sense of what, where, and who the British were, along with a more precise geopolitical appreciation of Britain's colonial relationship with India and the multifaceted importance of the subcontinent to British world power.

Illustrative of the new insights scholars have gained from placing the Qing in a comparative context is David Bello's boldly revisionist study of the whole opium question. Bello (2005) moves away from the almost exclusive focus on the southeastern coast of China and draws our attention to two other parts of the empire (both landlocked) where opium cultivation and trafficking, much of it in the hands of Muslims, were extensive, the northwest (Xinjiang) and the southwest (mainly Yunnan). He argues that in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries both the British and the Qing empires depended on control of opium production and trade for state revenue and therefore were, one no less than the other, intent upon prohibiting illicit opium growing and trafficking. Yet in both cases their efforts fell short owing to comparable problems in the exercise of local administrative control. The Qing empire's difficulties were rooted in the dramatic expansion of its territorial size and ethnic diversity during the eighteenth century without a corresponding increase in the size of its administrative structure. The British empire's problems also were directly related to territorial control issues. Malwa-producing sections of India were well beyond the British East India Company's sphere of control, and

when the dollar value of Malwa consumption in China exceeded that of Bengal opium (which was produced in the part of India that the Company had real control over), there was little the Company could do about it. Thus the standard narrative, which fixes the blame for the Qing's failure to control the opium trade on its "traditional, unmodern" character (as contrasted to the "untraditional, modern" British), fails to reflect accurately what was really taking place at the time.

More generally, as a result of the new perspectives the growing focus on Eurasia provided, scholars began to see the Qing empire not just as a victim of imperialism but as a colonial power itself, like other Eurasian empires expansionist, ruling over a sizable multiethnic realm, "maintain[ing] large military forces for domestic repression and frontier defense, collect[ing] taxes from the agrarian populace, ensur[ing] the obedience of local elites, and preserv[ing] social order with a minimal administrative apparatus" (Perdue 2004, 82–83). We also began to see the transformation of the Chinese polity from empire to nation, beginning in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, as in some respects a late iteration of a process that had already taken place in other parts of the Eurasian landmass.

Manifestly, the issues that concern scholars who have situated China within a Eurasian spatial context had a huge bearing on Chinese history in the nineteenth century. And yet, as in the case of the Taiping Rebellion discussed earlier or the different economic trajectories followed by Western Europe and China after the mid-eighteenth century or the administrative problems encountered in Qing efforts to control the opium trade, if we try to address these issues by focusing *solely* on the nineteenth century we will not get very far. It is fine to do this for highly specific historical occurrences, such as, say, the Treaty of Nanjing (1842) or the Tianjin Massacre of 1870, the causation of which was clearly defined and delimited. But in the case of other occurrences, with vast geographical embrace and roots extending deep into the past, genuine comprehension can come only when we take serious account of what was happening in China and elsewhere in the eighteenth century. For such developments, the line of demarcation between the nineteenth century and the eighteenth is a bogus one—a divide that obfuscates more than it clarifies historical understanding.

But what about the other end of the nineteenth century? Is the line of demarcation between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries equally imaginary? It depends on our frame of reference. If we focus on the long-term socioeconomic developments identified by Wakeman as beginning in the 1550s and continuing on for almost four centuries into the 1930s, then clearly there is no meaningful divide between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But if our focus is more political than socioeconomic, the century break could not be more real. The diplomatic settlement imposed on the Qing in the wake of the Boxer uprising served as the impetus for unprecedented changes in the Chinese world. The details of the Boxer Protocol signed in September 1901 by 11 foreign ministers and two Chinese plenipotentiaries were less important than the impact it had on the Chinese government and population. The severity of the indemnity—450 million taels (US \$333 million at the exchange rate of the time), to be paid in 39 annual installments along with 4 percent interest on unpaid principal—greatly intensified the already considerable grip of the foreign powers over China's governmental finances and forced the Qing, in a desperate effort to generate new revenues, to begin laying the foundations for a modern state. The draconian character of the settlement, together with the generally poor showing of the Chinese military in the summer of 1900 and the court's humiliating flight to Xi'an in August, placed the weakness of the Qing dynasty on full

view and energized the forces of both reform and revolution in Chinese society. The court also, however reluctantly, embarked after 1900 on a reform program of its own that went far beyond anything previously tried and completely reshaped the environment within which Chinese politics were carried on. The dynasty itself was unable to survive in these circumstances and the imperial era came to an unceremonious close in 1912 (Cohen 1997, 56).

### Notes

- 1 For similar commentary on the Republican period by Lloyd Eastman and Robert Kapp, see chapter 14 by Janet Chen in this volume.
- 2 Marxist influence on twentieth-century Chinese historiography is surveyed in Li 2013a; its influence on post-World War II Japanese historiography is briefly noted in the chapter by Shiba Yoshinobu.
- 3 The radical American approach represented by Peck and others is touched on only briefly in this chapter. For a more detailed account, see Cohen 2010, 97–147.
- 4 For much of this section, I have drawn on Cohen 2010, 9–12, 57–79.
- 5 Although Fairbank (Teng and Fairbank 1954, 5), to his credit, alluded to some of the basic flaws of the impact–response framework, subsequent historians (including Fairbank himself) tended to take over the framework without paying much heed to these qualifications.
- 6 For a devastating attack on the seesaw or teeter-totter theory of historical process, see Hexter 1963, 40–43. The parallel example of the tradition–modernity polarity is discussed below in the text.
- 7 Condorcet and Hegel are quoted in Dawson 1964, 14–15.
- 8 While the monetization of the Chinese economy was to some extent due to the inflow of foreign silver and was thus of partly exogenous origin, Kuhn (1970, 51) suggests that population explosion alone might have spelled “disaster of a new sort for traditional Chinese society.” Although here, too, exogenous factors were at work, a number of studies appear to place more weight on internal causation (Cohen 2010, 210 n. 59).
- 9 Pioneering province- and county-level studies are discussed in Cohen 2010, 166–69; see also the more recent work by Platt (2007).
- 10 The areas of education, literacy, and religion and rebellion at the popular level are discussed in Cohen 2010, 173–79.
- 11 See Cohen 2010, 180–83, for the influence of anthropology on the work of Philip Kuhn and Elizabeth Perry; the impact of Skinner’s analysis on Kuhn’s ideas is also clearly discernible.
- 12 For a fresh account of how deeply the rebellion was experienced within China, see Meyer-Fong 2013.
- 13 See, e.g., the writing of R. Bin Wong (1997) and Kenneth Pomeranz (2000) comparing China and Europe in connection with the thorny issue of the west’s ascendancy in the world during roughly the past two and a half centuries, summarized in Cohen 2010, xliii–xlv.
- 14 E.g., in Cohen 1997, although the Boxers are used as an extended case study, the book’s main purpose, made clear from the outset, is to explore a wide range of issues pertaining to the writing of history *in general*.
- 15 For bibliography, see Cohen 2010, lxii n. 25.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

- Bickers, Robert. 2011. *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832–1914*. London: Allen Lane. An illuminating view of foreign influence in the late imperial era.
- Cohen, Paul A. 1997. *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth*. New York: Columbia University Press. Different historiographical perspectives on the Boxer episode.

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- . 2010. *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past*. New York: Columbia University Press. An interpretive and critical look at American historical scholarship on late Qing and republican China.
- Lovell, Julia. 2011. *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China*. London: Picador. An up-to-date and readable account of the Opium War and its impact.
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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# Republican History

JANET Y. CHEN

In October 1975, when the inaugural issue of the *Chinese Republican Studies Newsletter* landed in the mailboxes of unsuspecting scholars and institutions, the field was in its infancy. Despite a modest promise of facilitating “the flow of information among students of Republican China” (for a subscription fee of \$3 per year), in the second issue the *Newsletter* posed the weighty question “What is the state of our field?” Readers found the answer in the third issue, in the form of four “think pieces”: Lloyd Eastman on political integration and disintegration (1976); Robert Kapp’s appraisal “Studying Republican China” (1976); Thomas Rawski on the Republican economy (1976); and Charles Hayford’s “Provocations to Social History” (1976).<sup>1</sup> Suggesting many new topics for historical inquiry, these essays pointed to research directions that far surpassed the corpus of existing work on warlords, the 1911 Revolution, and the vexing question “Who lost China?”

Some 40 years later, reading these exchanges and essays in the *Chinese Republican Studies Newsletter* is a humbling experience. In giving voice to an inchoate field, the early pioneers articulated expansive visions for new avenues of research, even while confronting such dilemmas as the lack of rudimentary biographical data on key historical figures. (In the spirit of exchanging information, John Israel cited the benefits of the “xerox revolution” and offered to duplicate materials from his filing cabinet of research notes; see note 1 below.) By proposing that “Republican China” could be more than an interregnum between the Qing dynasty and the People’s Republic, these scholars showed what could be accomplished through such a line of inquiry. A new arena of research opened, on an era that had heretofore been considered primarily either in the context of imperial demise and its aftermath, or as the prelude to the Communist revolution. At the same time, directing attention to the period from 1912 to 1949 did not mean disregarding connections to what came before and after.

As Eastman (1976, 2) put it, “the Republican period cannot be meaningfully comprehended as a self-contained historical period.” Likewise, Kapp (1976, 14) called on historians to “fit what we find about the Republican era into the larger vision of change and transition in modern Chinese life,” and to “leave plenty of room for linkages to other periods.”

This chapter will survey recent developments in the field of Republican history, focusing in particular on issues of periodization and the impact of archival access on shaping research agendas. In the twenty-first century, the boundaries demarcating “Republican history” have blurred, as historians increasingly telescope out from the formative decades of the Republic to explore connections to the imperial past, the successor socialist state, and current affairs. The resulting scholarship has not reprised earlier views of the early twentieth century as a dynastic interregnum, but instead strives for broader understandings of change and continuity in modern Chinese history.

### The early years

In the 1970s, the effort to define the Republican era as a discrete field of inquiry, spearheaded by historians based in the United States, coincided with research projects taking place in the People’s Republic and Taiwan. At the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, researchers at the Republican History Center (a working group within the Institute of Modern History) began to write what they hoped would be the definitive chronicle of the recent past. Responding to the challenge and seeking to write their own, equally definitive version, in Taipei historians at the Institute of Modern History and Academia Historica (with Kuomintang/Guomindang (KMT) government sponsorship) began a competing project on Republican history, shifting attention from research that had largely been defined by the KMT’s political agenda (Li Xin 1979; Eastman 1982). Spurred by political rivalry, a steady stream of publications appeared on both sides of the Taiwan Straits, ranging from biographical dictionaries and chronologies, to multivolume series of comprehensive histories and documentary collections. In 1979, through the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People’s Republic of China (CSCPRC), American students and scholars were able to conduct research in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) for the first time in 30 years.

The cumulative effect of all of these activities was a growing body of scholarship that expanded the intellectual horizons of the field. In exploring topics that were hardly imaginable even a decade earlier, studies of social movements, business history, and political economy broadened the scope and range of investigation. At the same time, newly available sources invigorated research on perennial favorites such as the Xinhai revolution and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Dueling conferences to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of 1911 (held in 1981 in Wuhan and Taipei, respectively), were accompanied by an outpouring of publications. Research on the Communist movement also benefited from the surge of published materials, continuing the debate over “peasant nationalism” ignited by Chalmers Johnson and animated by the passions of the Vietnam War.<sup>2</sup> As one indicator of the growth of the field, the *Chinese Republican Studies Newsletter* matured into *Republican China*, eventually becoming a full-fledged, peer-reviewed journal.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the long-awaited completion of two volumes of *The Cambridge History of China* gave the Republic and its history a tangible place in the long sweep of China’s past (Fairbank 1982; Fairbank and Feuerwerker 1986).

## The opening of the archives

The proliferation of publications from Taiwan and the PRC provided tantalizing previews of the vast repositories of archival materials, still out of reach of foreign scholars. In 1979, a delegation of Ming and Qing historians from the United States breached the fortress of the Second Historical Archive in Nanjing. On a tour sponsored by CSCPRC, the group was given a fleeting glimpse of an archive that would become central to the scholarly aspirations of students of Republican history. Philip Kuhn's brief summary of the visit, however, discouraged immediate hopes. The reorganization and cataloguing of the collection was just underway, after the disruption of the Cultural Revolution. With no plans to grant access to foreign researchers (until possibly "after the materials are completely catalogued"), at the end of the visit Kuhn concluded, "These archives should not be considered a realistic research source for American scholars in the near future" (1980, 62). Two years later, Diana Lary (under the auspices of the Canada-China Scholars' Exchange Program) received permission to work at the Second Historical Archive. On the basis of a research outline she submitted, the staff (and later the director) selected a small set of documents for her to read. The hopes kindled by the slight opening were soon dashed. "I never doubted while I was there that I was very close to a magnificent collection of documents," Lary reported. But the distance of 20 yards—between the reading room and the document storage facility—proved insurmountable (Lary 1981, 498–99).

Access to the Second Historical Archive evolved in fits and starts, but by the mid-1980s it was possible for foreign researchers to work there. The major constraint remained the lack of finding aids. Visiting scholars were therefore completely dependent on the willingness of the staff to identify documents deemed relevant to their research topics; when told they were "unavailable" (*meiyou*), a common response, there was no further recourse.<sup>4</sup> The situation in Taiwan was slightly better, but direct access to the major repositories (KMT Archives, Academia Historica, Academia Sinica) remained limited until the mid-1980s.<sup>5</sup> In fact, "the major works that defined the field of 'Republican China' in the West until around 1990 were based on little or no Chinese archival evidence" (Kirby 2001, 13). Instead historians relied primarily on materials held in foreign repositories—for example, British, American, and Russian intelligence; missionary archives; data collected by *Mantetsu*, the South Manchurian Railway Company.

Compared to the stronghold in Nanjing, local libraries and archives in the PRC proved comparatively easier to navigate, paving the way for a shift in research orientation, from the national to the local. Shanghai soon emerged as the star of local history, where the confluence of different factors fostered a research love affair that has persisted to the present day. Among these factors, the city's colorful cosmopolitan past (historical as well as historically reimagined), and the willingness of institutions such as the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and Fudan University to host foreign scholars, facilitated the first wave of research (Wasserstrom 2000). Most importantly, the study of Shanghai enjoys an enviable array of multilingual sources, generated from the city's 100-year history as a treaty port with tripartite administrative jurisdiction, and from the concentration of the publishing industry there in the early twentieth century. At the Shanghai Municipal Archive and the Shanghai Library, the major repositories for these materials, relatively open access policies accelerated the growth of Shanghai studies as a lively subfield of research. Abundant sources on Shanghai's history, found in London, Paris, and College Park (among many locations), contributed multiple perspectives. Meanwhile, some intrepid graduate students ventured off the beaten track in the early 1990s, and with fortitude and

patience managed to pry open the doors of archives and libraries in Beijing, Chengdu, and Tianjin (Liu and Stapleton 2006).

### Civil society and its discontents

The opening of municipal archives and libraries coincided with burgeoning interest in Chinese cities during the early reform era. As cities became engines of economic growth and social change, understanding the historical roots of urban transformation seemed more relevant than ever. The growth of urban history as a subfield in European and American history also inspired China historians to seek comparative possibilities, and to chart a different trajectory of urbanization from the “western yardstick.” These developments then intersected with an extended debate about civil society and public sphere in the post-Tiananmen Square years. Distilled down to its essence, the debate centered on the question of whether China ever had a public sphere—in the Qing dynasty, in the early Republic, or in the 1980s? Could the framework proposed by Jürgen Habermas for Western Europe in the eighteenth century apply to the Chinese experience, whether historical or contemporary? The million-dollar question, lurking behind the fervor, speculated about China’s prospects for democracy in the future. In the aftermath of June Fourth, these compelling issues spawned a debate that preoccupied historians of China in the anglophone world for the better part of a decade.<sup>6</sup> Concurrently, historians in China also took up similar questions—directly or indirectly—under the rubric of “society and state” relations (Ma 1995; Zhu Ying 1997).<sup>7</sup>

By the time the debate finally ran out of steam, civil society had grown to be a tedious topic. The controversy, however, had stimulated copious research on the Republican period, particularly in urban settings where the historical roots of a nascent public sphere might be located. Where Habermas found his ideal in English coffeehouses and French salons, historians of China looked for signs of a similar phenomenon in Beijing’s parks and Chengdu’s teahouses (Shi 1998; Wang Di 2003). The verdict was mixed, but once the arguments about Habermas faded, a solid foundation of research on urban history and culture remained. Furthermore, in the context of Paul Cohen’s proposal for a “China-centered” approach (1984), where better to “discover history in China” than on city streets and back alleys, or through the experiences of native place associations and local gangsters? Efforts to diversify the research agenda “beyond Shanghai” received the helpful guidance of *Chinese Archives: An Introductory Guide* (Ye and Esherick 1996). The editors compiled data on 597 archives in the PRC, providing students seeking to craft research plans with valuable intelligence about collections and access policies. At the same time, the volume offered a panoramic view of the immense research possibilities on the horizon. As one example of the endeavor to broaden the geographical scope of urban history, the conference volume *Remaking the Chinese City* (Esherick 2000) showcased a range of new studies—Canton’s municipal governance, building a new capital in Nanjing, Wuhan in the crucible of war. Even so, Shanghai remained the most compelling case study, with a continuing proliferation of publications enriching an already substantive body of literature (among many examples: Wakeman 1995; Hershatter 1997; Lu 1999; Laing 2004; Yeh 2008; Wasserstrom 2009; Cochran and Hsieh 2013). As a result of this preponderance, treaty port Shanghai has dominated the understanding of the Chinese urban experience of the early twentieth century. In Leo Ou-fan Lee’s captivating portrayal of the city as “a cultural matrix,” Shanghai defined “the very embodiment of Chinese modernity” (1999, xi, xiv).

The concept of modernity has been a contested and provocative framework for recent analyses of Republican history. Drawing on theoretical insights from cultural studies and the social sciences, scholars have interpreted the condition of Chinese modernity as a translingual process and looked for its alternative and pluralistic manifestations (e.g., Liu 1995; Yeh 2000). The influence of literary and cultural studies also helped to encourage a shift away from periodization based on politics, to broader considerations of cultural and economic change, moving beyond the old truism that equated the transition to modernity with the May Fourth movement. From the perspective of historiography, Prasenjit Duara's call to "rescue history from the nation" (1995) challenged the dominance of modernization theory and the teleology of the nation-state, seeking alternatives to the linear mode of historical inquiry. Although theoretical concerns influenced historians of Republican China to varying degrees, and only some took seriously the insights of postmodern theory, many of its critical methods have become embedded in our collective working assumptions. Discursive and spatial analysis, the politics of gender and representation, power and subjectivity, questions of epistemology, agency, and knowledge production—these concerns are now routinely part of the historian's toolkit. In particular, gender as a category of analysis has been one of the most productive fields of inquiry, with a voluminous bibliography of studies ranging from marriage, family, and sexuality to women's labor, suffrage, and political participation (Hershatter 2004). Often entangled with questions of modernity, women and gender have also been crucial to the study of the urban experience.

In contrast to the wealth of urban histories, the rural experience has largely receded from the spotlight. In the 1980s and through the early 1990s, a spirited debate between economic historians measured the degree of peasant immiseration, considered its causal effects on the Communist revolution, and weighed the applicability of social science theories. Two sets of empirical questions framed the research agenda: Did living conditions for peasants decline, stagnate, or improve in the early twentieth century? What role did imperialism, global capitalism, and domestic forces play in either destroying or developing the rural economy (Myers 1970; Huang 1985; Rawski 1989; Pomeranz 1993)? In the absence of comparable cross-regional data, however, the debate ultimately proved inconclusive. In more recent years, as the imperative to understand the agrarian origins of the Communist revolution diminished, some historians have turned to local and micro-history methods to understand "Peasant China" (Harrison 2005; 2013; Vandervan 2012). But for the most part, and especially in contrast to the energetic output of research on cities, rural life has been a largely neglected area of research.

### **The Nationalist regime reborn**

The portrayal of Chinese cities as dynamic and cosmopolitan, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, also had the ancillary effect of generating a more positive appraisal of the Republican period in general. Whereas James Sheridan (1975) once portrayed the era as one of "China in disintegration," historians now discovered redeeming qualities and laudable attributes (e.g., Lean 2007). At the same time, new scholarship prompted a gradual reversal of the damning portrayal of the Nationalist government, as most forcefully articulated by Lloyd Eastman (1974; 1984). As scholars began to forge a different evaluation of the Nanjing Decade (1927–37, the period when the Republic of China capital was in Nanjing), this marked a sea change from the conventional wisdom about the myriad ways in which the regime's corrosive features had destroyed its chances for

winning the military and political battle against the Chinese Communist Party. New studies put forward a “cautiously positive view” (Mitter and Moore 2011, 229), taking much more seriously the state-building aspirations of the Nationalist government, in arenas ranging from agricultural production and international diplomacy, to industrial planning, religious policy and law (Wakeman and Edmonds 1997; Strauss 1998; Iechika 2002; Nedostup 2009; Kuo 2012). Far from being hopelessly corrupt, inept, and/or callously indifferent to the welfare of the people, “the Nationalist state that is emerging from the new social history is an intriguing counterfactual, a non-Communist developmental state that bears more than a passing resemblance to the Chinese state of today” (Mitter and Moore 2011, 229).

In parallel, Chiang Kai-shek has also been rehabilitated from historical infamy. Long disparaged as “the man who lost China” (in western scholarship) and “the enemy of the people” (in the PRC), recent studies now recast Chiang as a patriot who deserves more credit for his contributions to modern China. His diaries, deposited at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution in 2004 in a flurry of controversy, have fueled a bull market in Chiang Kai-shek biographies (Taylor and Huang 2012, quoting Mirsky 2009). In the midst of a “Chiang Kai-shek studies fever” (Jiang Jieshi *yanjiu re*) that has gripped both academia and popular culture, much of this scholarship portrays the Generalissimo in a decidedly sympathetic light—downplaying his anticommunism while emphasizing the common ground and shared aspirations between the former archenemies (Yang Tianshi 2008b; Chen, Zhao and Han 2010; Wang Chaoguang 2011a; Chen Hongmin 2013).<sup>8</sup>

In the new narrative, the War of Resistance against Japan (1937–45) marked a critical turning point for both Chiang and the KMT. The crisis cut short the trajectory of the Nationalist government’s state-building efforts and derailed its ambitions, but it also launched the regime on a different path of national mobilization and reconstruction in exile. Since 2000, studies of the war against Japan, initially prompted by the controversy over the Nanjing Massacre, have mushroomed from a cottage industry into a significant subfield of research. *The Journal of Studies of China’s Resistance War Against Japan* (*Kangri zhanzheng yanjiu*), launched in 1991, provided an influential forum for publication of Chinese scholarship. Important conference volumes appeared in sequence, highlighting the fruits of collaborative efforts among historians from China, Japan, and the west (MacKinnon and Lary 2001; Henriot and Yeh 2004; MacKinnon, Lary, and Vogel 2007; Peattie, Drea, and Van de Ven 2011). As Ezra Vogel wrote, when he convened a multiyear research program at Harvard’s Asia Center in 2000, it was with the hope of providing a “more neutral setting” for Chinese and Japanese scholars to work together, “to contribute not only to scholarship but also to the healing of historical wounds” (2007, xiv). Despite such hopes, the political voltage surrounding the study of the Sino-Japanese War has hardly dimmed, aggravated by the rivalry between the governments of the PRC and Japan over territorial claims, regional hegemony, as well as continued acrimony over wartime conduct and responsibility. The enduring political controversies have also provoked and sustained further research, introducing many new topics for investigation. The most recent cohort of studies shifts our attention to the experiences of refugees, the border regions during the war years, and the intersection between history and historical memory (e.g., Fogel 2000; Lin 2006; Yoshida 2006; Yang et al. 2012). Chongqing, the temporary wartime capital, has emerged as a new epicenter of historical importance—notable for the mobilization of labor and women, as well as being the site of the Nationalist regime’s heroic stand, against all odds, in the face of Japan’s aggression (Howard 2004; Li Danke 2010a; Schneider 2013).

Most recently, Rana Mitter's *Forgotten Ally* (2013b), a gripping narrative of China's World War II experience, has penetrated the academic bubble to reach popular audiences. In contesting the conventional wisdom about the KMT's military ineptitude, Mitter follows the trail first blazed by Hans Van de Ven (2003), who convincingly demolished the longstanding indictment of the Nationalist army's incompetence and corruption, first put forward by General Joseph Stilwell and journalist Theodore White, and replicated in several generations of scholarship. Instead, Van de Ven explained how the constraints imposed by Allied strategies and the Japanese embargo—not Chiang's obsession with the Communists or refusal to fight the Japanese—undermined the KMT's military position. In particular, after 1941 the crisis of military provisioning escalated to debilitate the economy, transportation, and marketing networks, to the regime's fatal detriment. On the sensitive issue of collaborators, recent works have moved the conversation beyond the dichotomy of resistance versus collaboration, to a more complex view of life under Japanese occupation (e.g., Coble 2003; Brook 2005; Pan 2006; Zanasi 2008). Even the frequently mocked New Life Movement has been resuscitated from historical purgatory, given a fresh interpretation and a new relevance (Ferlanti 2012). The cumulative picture thus breathes new life into Chiang Kai-shek's regime, and reinterprets the Sino-Japanese War years as equally significant for the Nationalists and the Communists, in their respective bids to control China. R. Keith Schoppa (2011) sounds a note of dissent, however, in his book on the refugee crisis in Zhejiang, where the failings of the Nationalist regime added immeasurably to the suffering of the civilian population.

As the stock of the Nationalist regime has risen in the estimation of (most) historians in the west, interest in the early history of the Communist movement has fallen precipitously, from its former position of critical importance in the political history of the twentieth century. The 1990s saw the appearance of an extensive corpus of English-language monographs on Communist base-areas during the Sino-Japanese War, with detailed case studies that expanded the geography of our understanding beyond the earlier preoccupation with Yan'an (e.g., Benton 1992; Wou 1994; Goodman 2000). Collectively, these works provided deep perspectives on local and regional variations of social ecology, mass mobilization, and the CCP's organizational strategies. But in the twenty-first century, even as the Communist Party reinvents itself as the custodian of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," the origins of its revolution have receded from the research agenda, supplanted in large part by interest in the post-1949 PRC regime. A noteworthy exception is Elizabeth Perry's recent study of Anyuan in the 1920s (2012). In the Jiangxi mining town known as "Little Moscow," Perry shows how the trio of Li Lisan, Liu Shaoqi, and Mao Zedong used a repertoire of cultural resources to pursue a moderate course (a successful non-violent strike, a workers' club) in making revolution. Later, in the turbulent 1950s and 1960s, Anyuan was repeatedly reconfigured as a symbol of legitimation to serve shifting political purposes.

Meanwhile, in the PRC the early history of the Communist Party remains a critically important field of research, enlivened by newly declassified archival sources and a proliferation of memoirs. Whereas orthodox Party history has long insisted that the Revolution succeeded because of the wisdom of Mao Zedong and the leadership of the CCP, scholars now underscore the importance of the global context; some even venture to chart the intertwined trajectories of the CCP and the KMT as "national history" (Yang Kuisong 1992; 2010a; Wang Qisheng 2006a). From Japan, Yoshihiro Ishikawa provoked controversy when he proposed a competing account of the founding of the CCP, one that emphasized the international dimensions of the early Communist movement, particularly

Japanese and American influence (Ishikawa 2001; 2013).<sup>9</sup> Even more provocative works, critical of Mao Zedong and Party leaders, have been censored in the PRC but find publication outlets in Hong Kong and Taiwan (e.g., Dai Qing 1991; Gao Hua 2000; Li Rui 2013c).

### Decentering the Republic, from the late Qing to post-1949

Whereas the first generation of research on Republican history set out to affirm its significance as a distinctive period, one of the most notable trends in recent scholarship has been the move to emphasize linkages to “the before” and “the after,” connecting the Republican period to late Qing precedents and post-1949 developments. In 1997, the editorial board of *Republican China*, led by editor Stephen Averill, renamed the journal *Twentieth-Century China*, both reflecting and encouraging the evolution of the field towards a longer temporal framework. As Averill (1997, 1) observed, “for many topics of current scholarly interest, dates such as 1911 and 1949 now appear to be not so much rigid boundaries or barriers as useful signposts marking stages in complex, ongoing patterns of continuity and change.”

In studies of the late Qing, the emphasis on continuity now depicts the final two decades of the imperial era (1890s to 1910s) as a time of bold experimentation, instead of the last gasp of a dying empire. Indeed, recent scholarship has persuasively demonstrated how late Qing engagement with reforms across a broad range of political and intellectual pursuits laid the groundwork for the dramatic transformations of the twentieth century. Douglas Reynolds was one of the first to develop this argument—his book on the New Policies (1993, 2) interpreted the reforms initiated from 1901 to 1910 as a “quiet revolution,” and underscored the central role Japanese models played in setting the “intellectual foundation of post-imperial China.” Many scholars expanded this line of inquiry—for instance, to the political press (Judge 1996), intellectual currents (Zarrow and Fogel 1997; Luo 2003), or urban transformation and institutional reforms (Stapleton 2000; Guan 2000; Liu Haiyan 2003a; Rogaski 2004). Pushing the argument further back, Rebecca Karl and Peter Zarrow’s important volume argued for *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period*. Contributors to the volume assessed the “Hundred Days” of 1898 not as a failed political movement, but as an “extended moment” of salient changes in education, gender politics, and intellectual thought, which “contributed to the creation of new concepts of the political and the social in China at the turn of the twentieth century” (Karl and Zarrow 2002, 1–2). Furthermore, an energetic subfield of research on print culture has moved the parameters of late Qing innovation back by several more decades. Among many notable examples, Christopher Reed’s study of print technology and the textbook industry (2004), Barbara Mittler’s survey of *Shenbao*, the largest Chinese daily (2004), and Li Jiaju’s monograph on the Commercial Press (2005) explore the intersection of print capitalism with political and social change starting in the middle of the nineteenth century. Overall, historians now see the late Qing (whether broadly or narrowly defined) as a pivotal period imbued with new significance, particularly as the contemporary repudiation of the revolutionary paradigm elevates the importance of historical precedents for reform. Yet even as the iconic May Fourth movement has been dethroned as the pivotal turning point of modern Chinese history (Chow et al. 2008), in Chinese-language scholarship New Culture continues to be a subject of intense interest, with anniversary conferences and frequent reappraisals of its chief protagonists (e.g., Chen Pingyuan 2005; Zhu and Ouyang 2010; Q. Edward Wang 2010).

Moving in the other direction, historians of the Republican period also increasingly look to connect the early twentieth century to the 1950s and beyond—terrain previously considered the turf of social scientists and beyond our purview. Twenty-five years ago, in the *Journal of Asian Studies* Paul Cohen had advocated for breaking through “the 1949 barrier” (1988, 519). William Kirby (1990) was among the first to take up the challenge, with an essay comparing economic planning in the PRC and Taiwan in the 1940s and 1950s. Soon others attempted to breach what had been a formidable divide, as historians joined historically minded social scientists to investigate patterns of continuity and change across the chasm of “Liberation” (Wasserstrom and Perry 1992; Clausen and Thøgersen 1995; Perry and Lü 1997). In 1999 John Fitzgerald optimistically proclaimed, “The year 1949 no longer marks an insuperable divide separating one field of history from another. ... The time for peaceful reunification between the two histories is now upon us” (1999, 1). But few at the time (or since) heeded Kirby’s observation that the fate of the Nationalist regime in the 1950s merited comparative consideration: “The study of ‘Republican China’ generally ends in 1949, even though the Republic of China still flies a flag” (1990, 3). Indeed as the wall of 1949 began to crumble, the formative years of the PRC’s regime consolidation attracted far more interest than the fate of Chiang Kai-shek’s government across the Taiwan Straits.<sup>10</sup> Integrating the history of the Republic across boundaries of regime change and academic discipline proved “more easily espoused than done” (Kirby 1999, 40). But as restrictions on post-1949 archives gradually loosened in the twenty-first century, in tandem with an enormous output of publications from China (in the form of gazetteers, documentary collections, *wenshi ziliao* memoirs), it became possible to imagine and do “PRC history.” And as political passions attenuated with the passage of time, the Mao era could (more or less) be consigned to “the past” (Strauss 2006, 856–57). By the early 2000s, PRC history had become an emerging subfield attracting new talent.

For historians of the Republican period, traversing the 1949 divide could take many forms. In his study of Wuhan, for instance, Stephen MacKinnon (2008) focuses on 1938 and uses the conclusion to point toward postwar legacies in both China and Taiwan, in the arenas of education, public health, child welfare, and economic reconstruction. The argument about prewar–postwar continuity is suggestive rather than conclusive. Other scholars make more explicit and closely argued claims about continuity. Susan Glosser (2003) traces the history of family reform from New Culture intellectuals to the early PRC state, confirming the enduring ideal of the nuclear family (*xiao jiating*) as fundamental to the state-building goals of both the Nationalist and Communist regimes. In his research on the state enterprise system, Morris Bian (2005) demonstrates that the CCP adopted and expanded institutions that the Nationalists had established during the Sino-Japanese War. Still other historians have tackled longer-durée processes of change, from the late Qing through the Mao-era (Mühlhahn 2009; Mullaney 2011), or spanning the better part of the twentieth century (Eyferth 2009). One of the most important new works providing a long view of the revolutionary process is Gail Hershatter’s *The Gender of Memory* (2011). Drawing on interviews with women in rural Shaanxi conducted over a 10-year period, Hershatter’s masterful study narrates the history of the revolution from the perspectives of midwives, labor models, mothers, and Party activists, providing a view of 1949—both before and after—that looks startlingly different. Complementing these longer sweep analyses are studies focused directly on the 1950s. Meanwhile, politically “sensitive” topics such as the Great Leap famine and the Cultural

Revolution are also being revisited, with new source materials revising debates over their interpretation (see Smith's chapter in this volume).

### Conclusion

The ease with which scholars now hopscotch across 1949, comparing the 1930s to the 1980s, or the late Qing to developments in the new millennium, must be astonishing to the pioneers who launched the field in the 1970s. Kindled by the effects of globalization, renewed interest in China's historical relationship to East Asia and the world has opened all fields of its history to transnational questions. Studying the movement of people, ideas, and things across national boundaries is very much in vogue, and graduate students jaunt from archives in Asia to libraries in Europe in search of new "connected histories." Much of this scholarship has yet to mature, but it is certainly the wave of the future. Yet for all the openness of contemporary Chinese society, signs of new restrictions on historical archives are emerging. As of this writing, access to the two major national archives (Qing and Republican) has been severely curtailed, while the small opening at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives has slammed shut. The PRC government's Central Archives, where secrets of Party history are closely guarded, remain off-limits. Many archives at the municipal and county levels have increased access, but, depending on the time, place, and person, "unavailable" (*meiyou*), "not allowed" (*buxing*), "in preparation" (*zai zhengli*) are common refrains once again. Ongoing digitization projects, featuring keyword search capabilities, promise to ease the research process. But despite the hope and appearance of greater transparency and access, digitization may also enable finer levels of censorship. Meanwhile, the fashion for all things Republican in contemporary popular culture ("Republican fever" [*Minguo re*]) and nostalgia for "Old [*Lao*] Shanghai" and "Old Beijing" bring new visibility to the field. As those who specialize in "Republican history" increasingly venture back into the late Qing and well into the later decades of the twentieth century, Robert Kapp's prediction (1976, 15) some 40 years ago seems prescient: "In work of this kind, Republican China may not fare too well as a 'field' but the meaning of China's early twentieth-century history may be much enhanced."

### Notes

- 1 *Chinese Republican Studies Newsletter*, 1.1 (October 1975), 1.2 (February 1976), 1.3 (April 1976).
- 2 Suzanne Pepper's useful essay (2004) charts the heated arguments over the Johnson thesis and the subsequent search for answers to explain the rise of Communism. The central questions in the debate fixated on identifying the chief cause(s) of the CCP's victory: Was it the mobilization of the peasantry to fight the Japanese (à la Johnson), the ideological appeal of a class-based social revolution, both, or something else?
- 3 The journal *Modern China*, launched in 1975, did not focus exclusively on the Republican period but provided another important forum for publication.
- 4 Edward McCord, personal correspondence, October 2014. Early visitors to other libraries and archives also reported a similar situation.
- 5 The major exception was an extensive collection of materials on the Communist movement, held at the Bureau of Investigation in Taipei (Donovan, Dorris, and Sullivan 1976).
- 6 For an overview, see Huang 1993b.
- 7 Essays in Deng Zhenglai 2011 discuss the civil society debates among PRC and Taiwan historians, as well as applied to contemporary society.

- 8 Taylor and Huang (2012) discuss in detail how fluctuating cross-Straits relations have shaped historical research in the current Chiang Kai-shek revival.
- 9 Reviews in *Guangming ribao* following the publication of the Chinese edition (2006) accused Ishikawa of plagiarism (2013, x).
- 10 The major exceptions are Phillips 2003 and Greene 2008.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

- Eastman, Lloyd. 1984. *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937–1949*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# Rethinking the History of Maoist China

*S.A. SMITH*

Western scholars who began to write the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC) from the 1960s onwards did so mainly from a position of broad but not uncritical sympathy towards the regime, seeing it as having a legitimacy that derived from the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) having led a popular revolution against Japanese occupation and a corrupt Guomindang government. The dominant narrative in the years when Mao Zedong was still in power stressed the social and economic advancement of the Chinese people brought about by the authoritarian government. The CCP was credited with establishing stable rule after decades of war and political turmoil, with carrying out a successful land reform, embarking on the First Five-Year Plan and overseeing the rapid and nonviolent collectivization of agriculture from 1955. The turning point that came with the Great Leap Forward of 1958 was seen as an effort to break away from the Soviet model and to create a specifically Chinese model of balanced urban and rural development. Its partial failure was recognized, not least for precipitating the "struggle between two lines" in the early 1960s in which a more pragmatic wing of the party leadership sidelined Mao Zedong, who grew increasingly despondent about the direction that the revolution was taking. The Cultural Revolution, launched in 1966, was seen as his attempt to revitalize the revolution and undermine "those in power taking the capitalist road." As the PRC embarked on the era of reform from the late 1970s, the massive destructiveness of the Cultural Revolution decade was fully recognized, but the period from 1949 to 1957 continued to be seen as something of a "golden age" compared with what would come later.

In the PRC itself there was no serious historiography of the Mao era prior to the era of reform. From the 1980s, as the regime rushed to privatize state assets and encourage private enterprise, however, scholarly interest turned away from the theme of revolution with its associated struggles against feudalism and imperialism towards studying the top-down efforts of enlightened elites to modernize China's economy and society. There was new interest in, for example, the "gentry merchants," intellectual elites, and

urban self-governing bodies that had struggled to modernize China from the nineteenth century on. This led to a decline of interest in the peasantry and the revolutionary tradition in general: between 1956 and 1965, 58 percent of articles in *Lishi yanjiu* (Historical research), China's flagship historical journal, were about revolutionary history, whereas this proportion fell to 14 percent between 1984 and 1989 (Ping 2002, 166). This, obviously, raised the question of why, if the country had been set on a path of modernization, a communist revolution had been necessary in the first place. More Marxist-oriented historians continued to emphasize the impediments to modernization represented by landlordism, autocracy, and semicolonialism but were generally critical of the leftist excesses of the Mao regime (Li 2013a). By the turn of the twenty-first century, the revolutionary narrative was in steep decline, with historians such as Hu Sheng, once the epitome of official orthodoxy, arguing that the decision to move from "new democracy" to socialism in the mid-1950s had been wrong-headed since China needed more capitalist development, not less. At the same time, the often crude appropriation of modernization theory typical of the 1980s was increasingly marginalized.

Today little remains either of the generally positive narrative that once appertained in western historiography or of the modernization narrative of the reform-era PRC. In the west, the suppression of the Tiananmen protests of 1989 was critical in engendering a bleaker perception of the PRC, while in the PRC itself turbo-charged economic growth threw into relief the economic, political, and social damage to China's modern development that had been wreaked by events such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Necessarily, given the paucity of source-material, in both the west and the PRC the historiography of the Mao era had up to this point remained a top-down one, focused on political and ideological conflict among CCP leaders and, insofar as it touched on society, on the implementation and consequences of mass campaigns. With the rapid growth in the volume of documentation, however, which began in the 1980s and grew apace following the opening of archives in the 1990s, western and Chinese historians began to research grassroots society during the Mao era, looking at how top-level conflicts and mass campaigns affected the lives of ordinary people, looking at regional and local diversity and, not least, at the gap between official rhetoric and quotidian reality.

This chapter begins by reviewing the growth of new documentation in the last two decades, the variety and scope of which make possible the writing of a broader, more critical, more "bottom up," and less ideologically constrained history of the many ways in which the lives of different groups in Chinese society were transformed in the 27 years that constitute the Mao era. The chapter goes on to suggest how scholarly understanding of the key events between 1949 and 1976—and of the profound economic, political, and social changes induced by the Mao regime—has changed as scholars in the PRC and the west have begun to utilize new sources, and to use the advantages of hindsight to put the Mao era into a longer historical perspective. Constraints of word length mean that the discussion concentrates on work produced since the onset of the twenty-first century and more on books than on articles. The chapter ends with a brief reflection on the significance of recent historiography for understanding the significance of the Mao era for China's subsequent history.

### Archives and new sources

The big story about the historiography of the PRC since the 1990s has been the partial opening of archives on the mainland. In September 1987, a rather liberal law was passed on archival access, which was modified three years later when archivists were told to take

into consideration issues of national defence and state security. Archival records are subject to a 30-year rule, so materials from the early 1980s are in theory now becoming available. In fact, access, especially for foreign scholars, is much more restricted than this might suggest. The Central Archives, which house the archive of the Central Committee of the CCP and of central government, are firmly off limits; and the Foreign Ministry archive, which opened its doors in 2004, has recently curtailed access for foreign scholars. The policy has been to allow scholars access to county and (less consistently) to provincial archives, but to ensure that archivists control what may be seen (Wagner 2006). Despite many restrictions, however, access to archives has massively widened the terrain of historical investigation. The focus on the county level allows historians to investigate how central policy directives were implemented by provincial, prefectural, or city administrations, and such documents as the work reports produced by different government organs allow us to investigate the problems of implementing policy in very varied local circumstances. (Books that engage with grassroots developments on the basis of archival research include Diamant 2000; 2009; Brown and Johnson 2015.) Material on a particular topic is often scattered across the reports of different state agencies, such as provincial party committees, the Public Security Bureau (PSB), trade unions, or the Women's Federation. Archives often hold confidential material from party organs and the PSB, although it is not present in any predictable or systematic fashion (and archive staff will often refuse foreigners permission to copy such documents). Some of the most illuminating material is that which takes the form of "investigations" (*diaocha*), "inspections" (*jiancha*), or "situation reports" (*qingkuang baogao*), since these often report popular responses to policies such as the Marriage Law, grain requisitioning, collectivization, or efforts to curb popular religion. Such reports pose obvious problems of typicality, ideological stereotyping, and political tendentiousness, yet they disclose the resilience of grassroots society, notwithstanding state coercion and censorship. Moreover, despite restrictions, the opening of archives has allowed detailed research on even such politically sensitive topics as the famine caused by the Great Leap Forward. Another source that has become available to historians in recent years are the commercially produced datasets produced by the Chinese University of Hong Kong. These include the *Chinese Cultural Revolution Database, 1966–76* (2002–6); the *Chinese Anti-Rightist Campaign Database* (2010); the *Chinese Great Leap Forward Great Famine Database, 1958–62* (2012); another on political campaigns from 1949 to 1956 is planned for 2015. These contain some archival material, along with relevant central directives, bulletins, internal reports, speeches, and media commentaries.

Since the 1980s, the CCP Central Committee, the Central Archive, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences have been busy publishing volumes of historical documents. By 1998, the Central Documentary Research Institute, one of the two principal organs of public research (the other being the Central Research Institute in Party History), had published 20 volumes of policy documents covering the period from 1949 to 1966 (*Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi 1993–98*). The Institute of Contemporary China Studies of the Chinese Academy of Sciences is in the process of publishing a massive chronicle of the history of the PRC with a volume devoted to each year. Each volume consists of a day-by-day description of the main events, supplemented by government directives, leaders' speeches, and media articles (*Dangdai Zhongguo yanjiusuo 2006–*). Collections of the writings and speeches of major party leaders—including Liu Shaoqi, Zhu De, Chen Yun, Deng Xiaoping, Peng Zhen, Li Fuchun and Peng Dehuai—have been published, the major exception being Lin Biao, and chronological biographies of

the lives of several are also available (e.g., Li and Ma 1997; Wang 1998b). The manuscripts of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai have been published—which include orders, proposals, draft speeches, statements, and articles—as well as their military writings. (For a full survey of new sources on political history, see Domenach and Xiao-Planes 2011.) There has been a boom in publication of memoirs, many by leaders who wish to vindicate their record of service to the revolution, after the factional infighting of the Mao era and the calumnies of the Cultural Revolution. Although these are self-exculpatory they often provide rich detail on the lives of middle-ranking officials in the military and party.

Documentation more useful to the social and cultural historian can be found in the 10,000 or so volumes of reminiscences on local history—the materials on “culture and history” (*wenshi ziliao*)—which are published at county or city level. These fall under the umbrella of the united-front organ, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, and have flourished since their resumption in 1980. Similarly vigorous has been the stream of “county annals” (*xianzhi*)—almost 2,000 to date—which, to a varying extent, contain useful local material. Valuable are the volumes in the China Contemporary Popular Documents Series, published by East China Normal University, which consist of material discarded by different state institutions following the onset of the reform era. Two of the volumes, for example, allow us to see how the Hundred Flowers and anti-rightist campaigns were carried out in two work units, the General Bureau for the Supply of Raw Materials and a Beijing tea factory (Dangdai Zhongguo yanjiu suo 2011a; Dangdai Zhongguo yanjiu suo 2011b). Such documentation was literally dumped on the garbage heap by institutions saying farewell to the Mao era; and Michael Schoenhals deserves particular mention for recognizing the value of and rescuing such material. Other materials to which historians now have access include the periodical *Neibu cankao*, or Internal Reference Materials, which was assembled by the Xinhua News Agency for circulation among high-ranking officials (around 3,000 of them by the end of the 1950s). Inter alia, this published reports on the “popular mood” (*shengqing*) in different areas, with a view to informing officials about ordinary people’s responses to government policies and to major domestic and international events.

In addition to the abovementioned memoirs by officials, many ordinary individuals have published memoirs, diaries, and autobiographies (Gao Hua 2014). Indicative are the diaries kept by a party secretary in a Shanxi village from 1940 to 2000 and that kept by the eminent literary critic Wu Mi (Hou 2006; Wu 2006). Since the 1990s, systematic oral histories have been undertaken by western scholars seeking to investigate daily life at the grassroots, not least during the years of the famine (Wemheuer 2007; Zhou 2014). Gail Hershatter has used interviews with women in rural counties of Shaanxi to show how the revolution took women out of domestic confinement, only to see their contributions to the family economy and to rural construction systematically devalued (Hershatter 2011). The category of ego-documents might be extended to include some evocative anthologies of photographs (Li 2003; Jin 2009; 2012). Other types of sources include data generated by Geographic Information Systems, which, for China, include county-level census data from 1953 to 1990, the regional systems datasets developed by G.W. Skinner, and web maps on topics as diverse as transportation, river systems, GDP, higher education, ethnic minorities, and Buddhist sites (“China GIS Data” 2014).

In the PRC a minority of historians is beginning to use this new documentary material to publish novel and critical work. Historians such as Cao Shuji and Yang Kuisong, moreover, in addition to producing excellent research have been active in compiling sizeable bodies of documentation. Advances in PRC scholarship have been facilitated by

contact with historians in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the overseas diaspora. Noteworthy is the series on the history of the PRC published by the Institute of Chinese Culture of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shi* 2008–9). Also of interest, though less innovative, is the “long series” published by Tianjin People’s Publishing House (Liu 2010).

### How the new historiography is changing our view of the Mao era

One of the striking trends in historiography, connected to the currently more positive assessment of the Republican era discussed in Janet Chen’s chapter, is to stress the extent to which the PRC continued developments initiated by the Guomindang government, notwithstanding its excoriation of the “old society.” This can be seen in the continuing penetration of the party-state into local society, the increased extraction of revenue from the population, state-led industrial growth, and the continuity of administrative personnel across various state agencies. Even in areas where Soviet influence was most apparent, such as economic planning and the organization of industry, continuities across the 1949 divide are visible, with historians pointing to the maintenance of management structures, incentive schemes and welfare services in the state-owned enterprises that had come to dominate the Nationalist economy (Frazier 2002).

In contrast to the Bolsheviks after October 1917, the CCP came to power having won victory in civil war: it had 4.48 million party members, an army of 3.57 million and 720,000 civilian cadres. It also enjoyed considerable popular support. Yet recent work highlights the insecurity of the new regime. Between 1949 and 1951, there were serious outbreaks of armed resistance, especially in the southwest; and in Taiwan efforts by the Nationalist government to overthrow the new regime continued into the 1960s (Brown 2007). Moreover, it took three years before administrations were functioning at “township” (*xiang*) level. New research highlights the limited extent to which Mao’s theory of new democracy, with its emphasis on united-front policies, toleration of non-communist parties, and cooperation with “national” capitalists, inspired policy. From the first, class struggle and state-initiated violence were vital means of securing party control (Yang 2009c). In 1950–51 in the campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries, for example, 2,620,000 were arrested and at least 712,000 executed (Yang 2008a, 120). There was almost certainly some danger of counterrevolution, but the issuing of quotas to provinces and counties for the numbers to be tried as counterrevolutionaries, as Mao ordered in spring 1951, does not suggest that the threat to security was precisely identified. The involvement of the “masses” in this campaign was sometimes ugly, and distinguished the campaign from similar purges in Soviet Russia, which were conducted by the security organs. It was the combination of top-down direction, mass campaigns—between 1949 and 1976 there were no fewer than 60 nation-wide campaigns—and incitement to class struggle that proved to be the key to state-building, extending the power of party and government into local society, striking fear into enemies, and reconfiguring the beliefs and norms of the populace (Strauss 2002).

As early as 1946, land reform had begun in the “old liberated areas” of North China, and seems to have proceeded fairly smoothly, albeit with considerable violence. Land reform south of the Yangzi river was carried out from 1950 to 1952 and was much less popular (Wang 2006b; Li 2013b). In the highly commercialized Jiangnan region, for example, only a fraction of the land belonged to landlords, most landlords were absentee, and the majority of peasants worked only part-time in agriculture (Zhang 2009; Mo

2010). Work teams from the cities came into the villages to whip up class struggle, coaching the most oppressed individuals in the community to “speak bitterness,” often against “evil bullies” rather than landlords as such (Perry 2002). The significance of land reform now looks to be far more political than economic, not only because of the swiftness with which private ownership of land was superseded by collectivization, but also because it marked an important stage in local state-building and because its most lasting effect was to assign class labels to every household—labels that would determine the life chances of their members for the next 30 years (Luo 2005; Ruf 1998; Li 2002).

Since the resources necessary to invest in industrialization could be provided only by the agricultural sector, state and peasant quickly became locked in a battle for control of the agricultural surplus. This was a thread that was to run through the entire Mao era, with peasants passively resisting every attempt on the part of government to squeeze more grain from them, and taking advantage of any opportunity to revive private trade and local markets. The establishment of the system of “unified procurement and supply” in 1953–54 enabled the state to ramp up the amount of agricultural produce it controlled, but this caused peasants to cut back on production and local cadres to underreport output (Tian 2006; Wang 2006b). Despite its success, by spring 1955 the government was increasingly worried about its ability to feed the expanding urban population, spurring Mao to call for the acceleration of cooperativization on a “gradual and voluntary” basis. In the event, the process was far from voluntary (although it had some support from those who had benefited least from land reform), and there was widespread resentment at the loss of control over land, restraints on marketing, and compulsory procurement quotas (Li 2009b; Luo 2004). Despite the image of the Chinese Revolution as a peasant revolution, it is now beyond doubt that the CCP vigorously subordinated the needs of the peasants to those of urban dwellers, with the result that the gap between town and countryside steadily widened between 1949 and 1976 (Brown 2012).

The speed with which the CCP broke the crippling cycle of inflation, restored monetary stability, reduced unemployment, and brought levels of industrial output back to pre-1949 levels is still astonishing (Naughton 2007). Some historians, however, point to the persistence of industrial stagnation, inflation, price fluctuation, and low government revenues (Dikötter 2013). This may have been a factor persuading party leaders to abandon “new democracy” sooner than they had originally intended, since they moved in 1953 towards creating a centralized, state-controlled industrial economy. Recent historiography has done much to advance understanding of how Soviet institutions and practices were adopted in the PRC, not least in industry (Bernstein and Li 2010; Li 2006; Kaple 2015). Yet it is also clear that the period of the First Five-Year Plan (1953–57) continued to be dogged by contention over the degree of economic centralization appropriate to China and the balance between the state, collective, and private sectors. Whereas the Great Leap Forward was once interpreted as a misguided attempt to turn away from the Soviet model and create an indigenous model of balanced urban and rural development—“walking on two legs”—it is now clear that vastly more was invested in heavy industry during the Leap than was the case with the First and Second Five-Year Plans in the Soviet Union (Yang 1996). If the Leap did not create as much havoc in industry as it did in agriculture, breakneck expansion, “backyard steel-making,” and the abolition of material incentives nevertheless wrought great disruption, forcing Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping to impose financial cutbacks and scrap major construction projects between 1961 and 1964.

Recent work on industrial workers suggests that official rhetoric about the leading role of the proletariat was not mere verbiage. In 1949 there were 4.48 million party members, but the proportion of lower-level members who were workers was only 5.87 percent; by 1956 there were 10.73 million members of the party and the proportion of workers had more than doubled to 14 percent. This was an attempt to transform the party from one overwhelmingly of peasants to a “proletarian” party. Compared with peasants, the lot of workers improved, although employees in the state sector were considerably more advantaged in terms of wages, working conditions, and job security than those in the collective sector, and both were much better off than workers on temporary contracts. Such disparities were one factor that predisposed workers to protest. They proved able—whether from political conviction or opportunism—to use campaigns such as Three- and Five-Antis (1951; 1952) to advance their interests against enterprise managers and trade unions (Howard 2004). And efforts by managers and planners to improve productivity during the First Five-Year Plan fueled conflict on the shop floor to the point that strikes occasionally erupted, especially in 1957 (Perry 2007; Sheehan 1998).

In the sphere of cultural policy, always a high priority for the CCP, the new regime opposed “bourgeois” influences in novels, films, cartoons, and spoken drama along with “feudal” influences in traditional cultural forms. At the same time, it displayed ingenuity in adapting vernacular forms, notably certain styles of opera and storytelling, as vehicles to disseminate socialist values (Hung 2010b). If the ruthlessness with which it imposed its will on art and literature is well known, recent work suggests that audiences could display a surprising independence in the way they consumed cultural products, sometimes to the dismay of officials (Kraus 2004). In respect of the model operas promoted by Jiang Qing, Paul Clark argues that the diversity of audience response was in part produced by their unstable combination of vernacular and elitist forms (Clark 2008). Elizabeth Perry has suggested that the CCP became so skilled in deploying the symbolic resources of indigenous rhetoric, ritual, dress, and drama that this should be seen as a major cause of its longevity (Perry 2012). More generally, the success of the PRC in projecting itself as an agent of moral regulation resonated with the Confucian tradition, bolstering its claim to legitimacy (Thornton 2007).

Since so many “intellectuals”—a vague social category in 1950s China—hailed from landlord, bourgeois, or petty-bourgeois backgrounds, they were viewed with suspicion by the regime. Despite the fact that many had worked for the Guomindang or lived in areas occupied by the Japanese, the PRC had no option but to use them to staff administrative and educational structures (U 2007). Tens of thousands, however, were subject to “thought reform” in 1950–51, although recent research work shows that “thought reform” was by no means confined to them, extending to lumpen sections of the population, such as prisoners, prostitutes, beggars, and petty thieves (Kiely 2004; Smith 2013). In spite of “thought reform” and “rectification,” Mao felt too many intellectuals still displayed an unhealthy independence of mind, and this inspired a vicious campaign against the writer Hu Feng in 1955 (Mei 2013). A year later, whether out of a cunning desire to “entice the snakes out of their caves” or (more probably) a concern that intellectuals had now become too cowed, Mao launched the Hundred Flowers movement to encourage intellectuals to speak their minds. For five weeks in May and June 1956 an unprecedented period of “blooming and contending” ensued, in which they raised questions about the rule of law and the relationship of the CCP to government, only to confirm Mao’s suspicions that the intelligentsia was mired in bourgeois liberalism (Shen 2008). In the clampdown of 1957–58 that followed, some 1.1 million people

were branded “rightists,” including many government and military officials as well as intellectuals (Ding 2006). We now know much about the experience of those sent off for long stints of labour reform, thanks to memoirs and the Laogai Research Foundation (Gao 2009; Yang 2010b).

What has changed most in the last two decades in the historiography of the Mao era, however, is that the famine caused by the Great Leap Forward now stands at the apex of its narrative arc. As Frank Dikötter writes, “tens of millions of people would be worked, starved or beaten to death in the greatest man-made catastrophe the country had ever seen” (Dikötter 2010, 295). The formation of the giant people’s communes, intended to institute a form of collective living that would adumbrate full-blown communism, led in practice to barrack-style collectivism (Zhang 1998b; Manning and Wemheuer 2011; for a positive evaluation of rural industrialization, Bramall 2007). In the Hebei-Shandong-Henan border area, the Leap instituted what Ralph Thaxton calls a “regime of forced labour” that created lasting mistrust between the CCP and the peasantry (Thaxton 2008). Between 1957 and 1960, the number formally subjected to labour reeducation rose by a factor of 13 and, though this was a punishment intended for the so-called five elements, that is, “bad” class categories, its victims were often poor and lower-middle peasants who had been rash enough to challenge the orders of local officials (Li 2013d). The role played by cadres in general, and during the famine in particular, has been the subject of debate, with some scholars stressing their role as defenders of their local communities and others seeing them as obedient enforcers of directives coming from above. Team and brigade cadres in the new communes were usually inclined to seek to protect local interests—though this was less true of commune-level officials—but during the Great Leap, especially following the denunciation of “rightism” at the Lushan plenum in July 1959, they resorted to all manner of arbitrariness to meet the appallingly high procurement targets (Cheng 2008, 68–78).

The Great Leap Forward was entirely the expression of Mao’s utopian belief that the enthusiasm and will-power of the masses could be mobilized to overcome economic and social backwardness (Teiwes and Sun 1999). In the words of Alfred Chan, “Mao single-handedly switched the country onto a totally different development course, browbeat his colleagues into submission, seized the running of the economy away from planners, and aroused every citizen into mobilizational frenzy” (Chan 2001, 8). It has become a clinching piece of evidence in the case against Mao that by late 1958 he knew that famine was occurring in parts of China and was minded to curb excesses that were occurring. However, stung by Peng Dehuai’s criticism of “petty-bourgeois fanaticism” at the Lushan plenum, he ordered a “second leap” to proceed (Bernstein 2006). It is now widely accepted that the Leap led to the worst famine in human history in terms of absolute numbers, with an estimated 30 million deaths. Dikötter reckons that 45 million people perished (2.5 million as a result of political terror)—higher than the careful calculation of Cao Shuji, who puts the death toll at 32.5 million (Dikötter 2010, 333; Cao 2005). Most historians agree that excessive grain procurement was the major cause of the catastrophe and they lay partial blame on local cadres who exaggerated output in response to the fervid calls from on high to “overcome reactionary conservatism.” In his courageous book, Yang Jisheng identifies a deeper cause: “The problem lay in arbitrary and dictatorial decision-making at the expense of good practice, and coercive implementation that deprived people of their rights and property” (Yang 2009b, 125). Yang’s book, banned in mainland China, has been crucial in opening up new issues for scholarly investigation, including the mortality of specific social groups, the variations in mortality

between provinces, and the survival strategies of the starving. The scale of the tragedy is clear, yet much remains to be done by way of sober investigation into the timing and geography of the famine and the role played by provincial leaders (Garnaut 2013; for some regional studies of the famine Dong 2008; Qiao 2009).

The famine occurred at the same time as Sino-Soviet relations were deteriorating rapidly. In the wake of the opening of archives in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, much revisionist history of China's role in the Cold War has appeared (Chen 2001; Szonyi 2008), the lion's share devoted to the Sino-Soviet split. From the outset the relationship between the two great communist powers was troubled—not least because of Stalin's mistrust of Mao and the CCP—but it firmed up with the Korean war (Shen 2003b; Kulik 2000). Following Stalin's death, the Soviet Union delivered its largest program of economic and military assistance ever to another country, a package that included some 20,000 Soviet experts (Shen 2003a; for reports from experts see *Kitaiskaia narodnaia respublika* 2009). New research suggests that the alliance was far more dynamic than once assumed, which makes the rapidity of its collapse harder to explain (Westad 1998). There is no consensus concerning the relative determinacy of economic, military, ideological, and personality factors in bringing about the breakdown. Chen Jian argues that Mao behaved recklessly, provoking the split, while others depict him as acting cautiously (Shen and Li 2006). Lorenz Lüthi sees the major cause as lying in the coincidence of Mao's ideological radicalization with Khrushchev's growing pragmatism (Lüthi 2008). Others see the key as lying in China's frustration with the continuing "great power chauvinism" of the Soviet Union (something at which East European satellites also balked) (Jersild 2014). Finally, the conclusive breakdown of the alliance now seems to come later—at around 1963—than used to be thought, and after that the CCP sought for a time to maintain good relations with the Eastern Bloc.

In the wake of the famine Mao bridled at the pragmatic course pursued by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, with its eight-grade wage system, material incentives, private plots, and rural markets (MacFarquhar 1997). In September 1962 he urged his comrades "never to forget class struggle." The response was the Socialist Education Movement, which entailed the dispatch of 1.5 to 1.6 million cadres down to the communes to expose corruption and backsliding by local officials and thus, indirectly, to pin the blame on them for the famine. In the countryside the "Four Cleanups" mainly targeted brigade and team level officials, while in the towns the "Five Antis" targeted officials involved in state purchasing and supply (Lü 2000). The work teams were appalled to discover how far village life had slipped the anchor of party control, with peasants rushing to revive free trade and gambling, rebuild temples, revive spirit mediumship, stage traditional opera, and hold "extravagant" weddings and funerals (Smith 2015). The work teams soon extended their scope beyond official corruption, engaging in struggle meetings and mass education to combat the revival of "feudal superstition" and religion more widely (Guo and Lin 2005; Lin 2005). Hundreds of thousands of educated youngsters were sent into villages to teach peasants to memorize Mao's "three constantly read articles," which dealt, respectively, with serving the people, communist internationalism, and perseverance in the face of hardship.

The Socialist Education Movement segued into the Cultural Revolution, which was launched in summer 1966 in response to Mao's conviction that there were powerful elements in the party and state who were taking the "capitalist road" and that urban youth must be mobilized to resist them. What began as a bid to shake up the bureaucracy set in train a chaotic mass movement that shattered the central party and state administration

and, ultimately, compelled the army to reestablish order. Recent studies implicitly query the earlier periodization of the Cultural Revolution by western scholars that saw it as coming to an end in 1968. Certainly, the dust began to settle in that year, but it is now clear that subsequent campaigns such as that waged by the new revolutionary committees to “cleanse class ranks” in 1968–69 and the “One Hit, Three Antis” campaign of 1970–71, which sought to unmask imaginary opponents of Zhou Enlai and the PLA, were savagely destabilizing (Teiwes and Sun 2007).

The opening of archives has not resolved rival interpretations of the Cultural Revolution: historians continue to debate how far its course was determined by machinations at the top, and how far by social conflict from below; how far it was a struggle for the soul of the revolution, and how far a naked power grab by factions at different levels of the party-state. The definitive study by MacFarquhar and Schoenhals offers a detailed analysis of “politics at the court of Mao,” and reaffirms the view that while Mao feared for his own position, his fear that Soviet “revisionism” was in the ascendant was genuine (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006). Recent work has challenged an earlier assumption that the Cultural Revolution had little impact in the countryside. Some 27 million rural dwellers were put through struggle sessions, torture, and imprisonment, the vast majority being victims not of rampaging Red Guards or armed factions, but of repression by military and political organs bent on restoring political order (Yang 2011b; Zheng 2006). Regional studies of the Cultural Revolution continue to multiply, including ones of the non-Han areas (Esherick, Pickowicz, and Walder 2006; Liu 2006; Brown 2004; Goldstein, Jiao, and Lhundrup 2009), as well as studies of particular institutions (Ma 2004). Walder’s study of the Red Guards in Beijing’s universities (Walder 2009) contests earlier views that factionalism was a reflection of social fissures, arguing that it was the events of spring and summer 1966 that shaped factional alignments. In a study of Qinghua University, Joel Andreas reasserts the older interpretation of the first Red Guards as children of cadres and of the later rebel organizations as drawing on less privileged groups, including some from “bad” class backgrounds (Andreas 2009). Walder downplays ideology as a basis of Red Guard factionalism, whereas Yin Hongbiao explores the dissident ideas that blossomed among the different factions (Yin 2009). Finally, workers, battling against one another in rival factions, appear as a far more important force in the Cultural Revolution than was once appreciated (Perry and Li 1997).

Finally we turn to the man who inspired everything described above. During the 1960s and 1970s, historians viewed Mao Zedong as a man of vision, determination, and energy, a talented military and political leader, and a not inconsiderable theorist and philosopher. In recent years the stock of the Great Helmsman has taken a hard knock. Interest has been much less in his ideas than in his personality and behaviour. The blockbuster by Jung Chang and Halliday presents Mao as a callous, power-hungry monster, responsible for more deaths than Hitler or Stalin (Chang and Halliday 2005). The book received plaudits from the media, but was less well received by the academy (Benton and Lin 2009). More measured but equally grand in conception is the biography by Alain Roux, which concludes that he was sincere in his struggle to realise a “populist version of Soviet state-socialism” but indifferent to the devastating human costs (Roux 2009). The biography by Pantsov and Levine makes full use of Russian archives, and concludes that Mao was a “a faithful follower of Stalin ... who dared to deviate from the Soviet model only after Stalin’s death” (Pantsov and Levine 2007). Always a capricious character who would brook no opposition to his will, he strove from the 1960s to secure absolute supremacy in the party. If the mass adulation of Mao took on quasi-religious forms,

it was also motivated by fear and political uncertainty and proved difficult to control (Leese 2011). The tendency of these and many other works is clear: it is to reduce the stature of Mao by emphasizing his indifference to human suffering. It is important to note that perhaps a majority of citizens today in China have a far more positive picture of Mao—based, of course, largely on a highly controlled mass media—seeing him as reviving China’s power after a century of national humiliation and instituting socioeconomic equality and industrial progress. It remains to be seen how far a future generation of historians will reincorporate these aspects into their narrative.

### Reflections

It is striking how rapidly the Mao era became “history” following the onset of the reform era. If one looks to politics, this is paradoxical since it was the might of the one-party state, built up since 1949, that allowed Deng Xiaoping to push through rapid economic and social reforms (once, of course, his opponents had been vanquished). But if the institutions created in the Mao era have been enduring, the political culture forged by Maoism—with its distinctive accents of collectivism, class struggle, contradiction, and self-sacrifice—has not. The Maoist state invested vast resources into transforming the values and identities of its citizens, using coercion, mass campaigns, and unremitting propaganda—by the mid-1970s 141 million loudspeakers reached 95 percent of production brigades and teams—yet the effects seem to have been fairly transient. The historiography reviewed above helps make sense of this paradox. On the one hand, we see a state that penetrated into local society in a historically unprecedented fashion, as can be seen, for example, in the success of the one-child policy that the Deng government quickly implemented. On the other, we see a surprising resilience at the level of society—evident, for example, in the alacrity with which peasants seized on any opportunity for private enterprise. This makes it difficult to capture the dynamic between state and society, since the border between the two was constantly up for negotiation, with local officials under different degrees of pressure from above and below at different times. Nor is it easy to map the relationship between politically induced transformations, which were dramatic, and continuities in social relations and traditional culture, especially if one factors in gender and generation (by the late 1960s there were tens of millions of people who had had no experience of the “old society”). And we should not assume that the failure of Maoist political culture to endure means that this extraordinary effort had no effect in the short and medium term, for there is plentiful evidence of workers, peasants, soldiers, and students using the language of the regime to carry forward the revolution, whether out of conviction or self-interest. That said, one of the revelations of the archive has been to show how resilient were the inherited resources of local cultures—whether religious, folkloric, or magical—and how they were constantly utilized to sustain relationships of community and kinship that the regime threatened, or to engage with existential issues beyond the purview of official ideology. One can see this, for example, in the meticulous reports of rumors that were in circulation. Rumors were rife, especially at times when conflict and chaos were most intense, and millions of people entered their opinions and sentiments into public discourse, using rumor in order to sustain networks of communication and solidarity (Smith 2006b).

This resilience of local society should not be equated with resistance to the regime. Certainly, there were outbreaks of large-scale resistance, but they were concentrated mainly in ethnic minority regions, notably in Tibet and Qinghai in 1959 and in Xinjiang in 1962. Yet despite the unpopularity of the procurement system and collectivization,

there was nothing akin to the wave of violent resistance to collectivization that occurred in the Soviet Union between 1928 and 1932. Moreover the costs of resistance were high: during the Great Leap Forward, actions as trivial as eating grain sprouts or stealing from a granary would warrant hard labour or worse. Ordinary people had a keen sense that the balance of power was very much against them. That said, it would be wrong to imagine that the populace was cowed and fearful. Leaving aside the minority that was enthused by the drama of revolution, millions more were not afraid to speak their minds, to grumble, to evade authority as far as they could, to practice “feudal superstition” and other activities they knew were frowned upon by local officials but with which they felt they could get away. This resilience of society seems to be the key to understanding why, despite institutional continuities, the political culture of Maoism was cast aside rather easily. This does not mean that one cannot see its traces in, for example, the evocation of class as an identity in today’s widespread social protests, yet, given the scale of the ideological project of Maoism, its effects have not been long-lasting.

Finally, if the chapter has presented a broadly positive picture of the development of historiography since the turn of the century, there is no reason for complacency. On April 22, 2013, the Central Committee, under its new General Secretary Xi Jinping, issued a communiqué that condemned “historical nihilism,” which it defined as

Rejecting the revolution; claiming that the revolution led by the Chinese Communist Party resulted only in destruction; denying the historical inevitability in China’s choice of the Socialist road, calling it the wrong path, and the Party’s and new China’s history a “continuous series of mistakes”; rejecting the accepted conclusions on historical events and figures, disparaging our Revolutionary precursors, and vilifying the Party’s leaders. (China Copyright and Media 2014)

This intervention comes at a moment when a growing minority of historians in the PRC is freeing itself from the trammels of dogmatic party history. As yet, it does not seem to indicate that the government is out to suppress more critical voices, but it reminds us that the substantial progress being made could easily be stalled.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

- Brown, Jeremy, and Matthew D. Johnson, eds. 2015. *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China’s Era of High Socialism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Brown, Jeremy, and Paul Pickowicz, eds. 2007. *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press
- Diamant, Neil J. 2000. *Revolutionizing the Family: Politics, Love, and Divorce in Urban and Rural China, 1949–1968*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dikötter, Frank. 2010. *Mao’s Great Famine: The History of China’s Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–1962*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Esherick, Joseph W., Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder, eds. 2006. *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Hershatter, Gail. 2011. *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China’s Collective Past*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- MacFarquhar, Roderick, and Michael Schoenhals. 2006. *Mao’s Last Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Walder, Andrew G. 2015. *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

# The Reform Era as History

*TIMOTHY CHEEK*

The reform era in modern China is generally considered to have started in the late 1970s following the death of Mao Zedong. In broad strokes a China largely cut off from western nations and spouting revolutionary rhetoric in 1975 came to be replaced by a burgeoning market for the world, revealing startling social changes and astonishing economic growth. Now we hear that China's economy will outpace that of the US in the next few years. This period has been important not only for people living in China but also globally as this period coincides with the greater integration of economies across the old Cold War divides of "socialist" and "free" worlds. In this new world order China has become the manufacturer of the world and an increasing global economic powerhouse. This new order has changed China and it is changing the world. What China thinks today matters—economically, culturally, and militarily. China has changed in economics and culture, but not in politics. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is still firmly in control and China's leaders increasingly trumpet a "China Model" distinct from the liberal economies of the west. From a historical perspective, the contemporary political, economic, and social changes are neither unprecedented nor are they a simple reversal of the revolutions of the previous period (see Stephen Smith's chapter). Nonetheless, life in China and China's role in the world in 2015 is very different from 1975.

### **Three narratives of reform, experimentation, and rejuvenation**

We can identify three narratives for this most recent period of Chinese history. Together they help make sense of the changes we observe today, but at the same time they remind us that this "story" is neither simple nor unitary. The standard story, given in most accounts, is Deng Xiaoping's reform starting with the famous meeting in December 1978 of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh CCP Central Committee. That story line follows growing "reform and opening" in struggle with authoritarian political traditions that have produced the economic openness and political control that continue to today.

It highlights 1978 (Deng's return to secure power), 1989 (Tiananmen demonstrations and repression), and 2008 (Beijing Olympics). This is a story of China as a whole, a story largely told by western observers, journalists, politicians, and some academics.

Another story that can be told is of the search for a new order following the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution (which, in fact, officially ended in 1969). This story begins much earlier in the 1970s with the reinstatement of the Party bureaucracy as early as 1972 (notionally under the leadership of Zhou Enlai), and tracks adjustments across the 1970s, the dismantling of the communes in the early 1980s, and further administrative reforms through the decade. The key dates in this story stretch back to the first effort at the Four Modernizations in 1964, their tentative revival in the mid-1970s, and earnest application from 1978. The turning points of this story turn out to be the 1987 setback to reform, Deng Xiaoping's 1992 "Southern Tour" that gave political authority to the shift from the Plan to markets, and 1998 when Zhu Rongji's reform of the tax system guaranteed the central government would have the financial capacity to drive change. The counter-narrative in this story is of societal responses to these Party reform efforts—popular anger at inflation and corruption that culminated (along with leadership stalemate) in the famous demonstrations in Tiananmen in 1989 and the popular exposés of the SARS epidemic in 2003 on the Internet, demonstrating the end of any hope by the Party to control the public sphere in the old way. This is a story of response to disasters and continual experimentation, of a fraught dance between Party and various social groups with no one actor fully in charge. This is the story told by some academics (inside and outside of China).

There is a third story to tell across these decades: "restoration" (*fixing*). In this story the revival of the fortunes of the Chinese economy and national position in the international community is tied to the rejuvenation of the CCP itself and its ability to make good on its promise to create a new China. In this story, Party leaders are the protagonists and Party reforms mark the chronology, from sorting out national leadership in the wake of the fall of Lin Biao in late 1971 to the coup that toppled "The Gang of Four" in 1976, to the official verdict on Mao and the Cultural Revolution in the 1981 Central Committee "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of the Party Since the Founding of the PRC," to the stalemate between different visions of reform in the leadership from the dismissal of Hu Yaobang in 1987 to the crisis of 1989 that was resolved by bringing in Jiang Zemin and was cemented in 1992 by Deng Xiaoping's "Southern Tour" and Prime Minister Zhu Rongji's budget in 1998, with the successful development of a streamlined State-Owned Enterprise (SOE) sector and a directed public sphere to harness market forces to Party ideological needs. Party leaders call the shots in this story, with Deng Xiaoping's formula of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" spelling the end of the planned economy, Jiang's "Three Represents" providing an orthodox explanation of why capitalists can be Party members (as representatives of advanced productive forces) and why the Party should leave most of citizens' private lives alone (no longer enforcing one class worldview on everyone else but instead "serving the interests of all Chinese people"). Now Hu Jintao's "Harmonious Society," "Scientific Outlook on Development," and Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" enforce the new status quo. Each leader's thought represents a development of policy platforms to maintain and restore Party power while accommodating economic and social changes. The denouement of this story is happening today in Xi Jinping's astonishing mass line campaigns and purge of corrupt officials since his rise to top power in 2012. This story is told by the CCP itself with increasing sophistication and with the help of articulate establishment intellectuals

and a robust international propaganda campaign including Confucius Institutes and even glossy volumes in multiple languages, such as *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* (2014b), that set out to show how the CCP has brought China to a new “Prosperous Age” (*shengshi*). As with the experimentation narrative, the restoration narrative has its own counter-narratives in the hundreds of thousands of local “mass incidents” (usually farmers attacking the offices of corrupt local officials and citizens both rural and urban protesting local pollution) and a churning series of debates on the Chinese Internet driven by investigative journalists and engaged intellectuals—some looking to return to the “purity” of the Mao period and others pushing for constitutional empowerment of citizens and yet others seeking simply to live with dignity—as non-Han, as religious, as gay, or female and unmarried. The powerful Propaganda Department attempts to manage these social voices through manipulating and censoring the media. While the propaganda state of Mao’s time is gone, a robust directed public sphere exists in China, which allows some steam to escape but imprisons irritating rights lawyers and keeps Liu Xiaobo and other democratic activists in jail.

The point of narratives, of course, is to make sense of experience and to make that experience relevant to our lives today: why things are the way they are and what we can expect of the future. They are the public form of historiography. At their most basic level these three stories offer conflicting messages. The first reflects the hopes of most westerners and some Chinese that China will become like other modern nations characterized by liberal democratic governance and capitalist market economies. It suggests that the CCP will have to go before there can be a good society and that more free markets and global capitalism will surely do this peacefully. The second is a story favored by scholars who find grand narratives unconvincing and consider the messiness and contingency of actual events to be more believable and interesting, both as a description of the past and as a model for the contemporary muddle we see not only in China but also in the US Congress or in the management of the Euro. This story offers no satisfying grand narrative and suggests, rather, that only more modest and incremental efforts are likely to work. It is unattractive to most westerners because it suggests that the CCP will be with us for a good long while, or if not, a post-CCP China is more likely to resemble Putin’s Russia or the states of the Arab Spring than a Germany or an America. The third story is, again, a grand narrative. It is part of a counter-reformation asserted by the Party against the first story of globalization-convergence and dismissive of the second for its modest goals. In this story only the Party can save China and, today, only Xi Jinping can lead the Party to the rejuvenation of its traditions of discipline and public service that will allow it to fulfill its historical mission to make China a great power. Each story reflects a reality in China since Mao’s time, but to some degree tells us as much about the storytellers as about China. This is hard to avoid. We all see things from where we stand. The best we can offer by way of a richer understanding of the reform period is to keep these multiple story lines in mind so as not to “fall for” just one of them, or worse, to project our preferred narrative on what we see to the exclusion of inconvenient truths that do not fit our hopes.

### **Ideological moments: Viewing the reform period in segments**

Another way to present the history of the reform period is by focusing on specific moments or contexts within this 40-year span. Historical study is most fundamentally about recovering human experience and explaining change in terms of context—inherited

ideas and institutions, contingent events, social structures, and the agency of individual and group actors. Ideological moments are one way to think about the concatenation of circumstances and human efforts to make sense of one's situation and to do something about it at any given time. This perspective takes ideology as the worldview a human adopts to understand one's world and to motivate action—incorporating both intellect and affect (Geertz 1973). We are not using ideology as a particular political or social doctrine, but rather as a category. Thus the application of “ideological moments” asks, What were the questions of the day and how did major actors choose to respond? Ideological moments cut up the narrative arc of the three stories we reviewed earlier, as all three voices (and more) are the subject of each period (Cheek 2015). In this sense we can identify any number of ideological moments across the decades and up and down the social ladder from elites to an alienated underclass. However, four major ideological moments help make sense of the broader activities of the reform period. First, recovery or “not the Cultural Revolution” that drove Party elite and locals alike from the early-1970s. Second, the new revolution of reform in the 1980s that thrilled or frightened people across the social spectrum and came to a crisis in 1989. Third, a version of “getting on with life” as Party elites figured out how to benefit from the new economic order and ordinary citizens sought out the pleasures of the new economy while enduring continued Party control. Fourth, today, we see the effort to address the unresolved tensions of this accommodation—particularly sclerotic corruption in the Party, increased social resentment between rich and poor, and a poisoned natural environment. The question of this ideological moment is, How does one make China a truly great power? This is the object of Xi Jinping's mass campaign, China Dream, and New Great Power Diplomacy, and it is the driving question of Chinese dissent.

### *Not the Cultural Revolution (1974–81)*

The beginnings of the current wave of reform in China were cast in terms of the Cultural Revolution. It had shown the fatal flaws of Maoism. When the charismatic leader demanded unreasonable and, indeed, immoral acts, the CCP turned out to be unable to stop the abuses. We can track the responses to the crisis of the Cultural Revolution by Party elite, China's middle or urban educated classes, and the working poor. A number of Party leaders set about putting international and national politics back on a more stable footing (including Mao's own diplomatic coup with US President Richard Nixon in 1972) and to reinvigorate the economy (covered in Stephen Smith's chapter). Zhou Enlai, the premier, is credited with orchestrating the efforts of this reform during what is now considered part of the “Cultural Revolution decade.” Deng Xiaoping was returned to power in 1974 by Mao to bring the state administration back into order. However, the radical faction (later, “The Gang of Four”) engineered Deng's second purge in spring 1976. The “Gang,” in turn, was purged in October 1976 and a compromise leader, the unprepossessing Hua Guofeng, became the next Party chairman and, for good measure, declared the Cultural Revolution over (i.e., “a victory”) for a second time in 1977. Hua announced a new version of the Four Modernizations (in agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology) and a Great Leap Outward to the modern world. This was but a temporary solution to the succession to Mao that did not address the unresolved scars of political purges and charismatic leadership of the previous decade.

China's middle, its educated population, responded with relief at the end of intrusive political campaigns. Most were simply happy to go home (from rustication or factory

assignments under earlier radical policies) and go back to their professional work. Party intellectuals wrestled with how to make sense of the Cultural Revolution, ensure that its policies did not return, and how to mobilize the public in a good way. Liu Binyan (1925–2005) was a Party journalist for whom the experience of the Cultural Revolution demanded that he push Party reform further than simply as a return to the status quo of the early 1960s. Liu reflects the success of Mao's efforts to get intellectuals back into touch with the common people. "Fate brought us into intimate contact with the lowest levels of the laboring masses; our joys and worries became for a time the same as their own. Our hopes were no different from theirs." And yet, Liu assumed an elite role: "This experience allowed us to see, to hear, and to feel for ourselves things that others have been unable to see, hear, or feel." Liu was confident that if writers had been allowed to speak the truth of their experiences "they would have helped the Party to see its mistakes while there was still time to make changes" (Liu 1983, 30–31). It was a call to let intellectuals and professionals do their work without political blinders in exchange for supporting the Party.

From among the Red Guards and students who had been rusticated (the "educated youth" [*zhìqīng*]), some took the daring activism they had learned in the Cultural Revolution and applied it the CCP itself. The issue of democracy became one of the first challenges to the leadership rising up from the unanticipated consequences of reform. In 1978 Democracy Wall in Beijing caught worldwide attention. For some heady weeks in December 1978 Beijing residents could stroll down to the Xidan district and read astonishing posters that talked about the (until recently) unmentionable: the abuses of the Cultural Revolution. These were the same "big character posters" that Red Guards had used in the Cultural Revolution to denounce "capitalist roaders" and "Soviet revisionists" inside the Party, but now this form of Maoist democracy was turned on the abuses and suffering the CCP itself had caused. "Democracy," declared a wall-poster by an electrician at the Beijing Zoo, Wei Jingsheng, "is the *fifth* modernization!" China seemed, in the words of one international journalist, to be "coming alive" (Garside 1982). This was grassroots democracy. And Deng Xiaoping shut it down in short order, proclaiming the Four Cardinal Principles in March 1979 (which insist that all public acts should uphold socialism and support Party leadership). Public political dissent once again became illegal (Gittings 2005, 140–63); it has been ever since.

Meanwhile, the Party set about putting its house in order. First charismatic leadership had to be rejected and Mao had to be assessed. This careful and partial de-Maoification was legislated in the June 1981 "Historical Resolution" passed by the CCP Central Committee ("Resolution" 1981). Its main purpose was to lay the Cultural Revolution to rest and to account for Mao's failings without undermining his role as the legitimization of the CCP. To discredit Mao utterly would be to make the mistake of Khrushchev, who undermined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union with his accurate denunciations of Stalin. The resolution lays down a narrative, a way to think about China's revolutionary history that begins with a litany of achievements of Party rule up to 1966—going lightly over the disasters of the Great Leap—and admitting the responsibility of Mao and the collective leadership for the errors of the Cultural Revolution. Collective leadership and Party organization are the theme of the Historical Resolution—claiming the organizational side of Maoism and laying aside the charismatic parts. This certified the rehabilitation of Party faithful who had been purged in the Cultural Revolution and returned to office in large numbers from 1979.

Putting Mao in his historical place did not mean the end of ideology. This key document for reform China is all about ideology; the issue was simply *which* sort of ideology

the CCP should follow. “Many outstanding leaders of our Party made important contributions to the formation and development of Mao Zedong Thought,” the Historical Resolution declares, “and they are synthesized in the scientific works of Comrade Mao Zedong ...” The collective nature of this body of political wisdom is emphasized in order to justify not only the relevance of Mao Zedong Thought but also to *certify the surviving leaders*: they were contributors to this ideology and thus are the legitimate leaders of China. The prophet is gone, but the Church remains (Cheek 2006, 57–58).

The heart of this first wave of reforms was decollectivization, in which the communes established in the late 1950s were broken up. This was formalized in the 1983 Production Responsibility System. Land was not returned to the individual farmer, but to the natural village, which, in turn, leased individual family farming plots for at first 15 years (and by the 1990s extended to 50 years) (Zweig 1997). In the cities, reform of the SOEs was much slower, but management authority was given to enterprise managers, along with some freedom to keep profits above the State Plan and some responsibility to cover their unit’s own debts. Party leaders could not agree on whether to adjust the centrally planned economy or give over to a market system. Piecemeal policies pushed first for more enterprise reform and then retrenched to more central planning. There was considerable confusion.

In addition to rural and industrial reform, the Party began to experiment with administrative reform. In the countryside, it replaced the administrative role of the 55,000 People’s Communes with 96,000 rural townships, making this lowest level of formal administration more effective by making each responsible for a smaller population. Administrative reform also included the promise of more citizenship participation, of some more democracy. But what this meant was not entirely clear at first. For example, there were local elections in municipal districts within Beijing in the early 1980s, but the Party got nervous and reverted to administrative appointment of local leaders.

### *Reform as revolution (1981–89)*

With the “Historical Resolution” in place, reforms could go forward. Hu Yaobang, Deng’s young protégé as General Secretary in 1982, set in force more fundamental reforms. Under Hu reform attempted to redefine the Party, Chinese culture, and the role of citizens (Meisner 1996). This was reform as revolution. It proceeded on two fronts: the economy and the political order (base and superstructure in Marxist categories).

The stars of these reforms were the Special Economic Zones (SEZs). These were export processing zones that enticed foreign investment with promises of low wages, little red tape, and tax incentives. They were modeled on Taiwan’s successful export processing zone in Kaohsiung that had opened in 1966 and spurred the island’s spectacular economic development. The first four SEZs were established in China in 1980 with Shenzhen, a sleepy village on the border of Hong Kong as the test case (the other three were Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen—all in Guangdong or neighboring Fujian). In 1984 preferential terms for foreign investment were extended to a further 14 cities—up and down the coast from Manchuria in the north to Hainan Island in the south. By 1988 trade and exports boomed. China’s foreign trade soared from US \$21 billion in 1978 to US \$166 billion in 1992. The SEZs became the home of over 5,000 companies authorized to conduct foreign trade—in 1978 under the old State Plan there had been exactly 12 authorized trading firms (Zheng 2014).

These new, globally engaged firms began to change the face of Chinese society. Private business had been banned in Mao’s China as capitalist exploitation. But Deng Xiaoping

had declared, “To get rich is glorious!” Now business people were “entrepreneurs” contributing to “socialism with Chinese characteristics” by accelerating China’s development through the necessary stage of capitalism in the Marxist order of historical change. And they were not alone. Domestically, plucky farmers and workers set up their own small businesses as street vendors, petty traders, and curbside repair services. Known as *getihu* these small-scale independent business operators quickly filled the consumer and service needs of urban populations tired of the limited offerings, long lines, and poor service of state-run retail outlets. At the same time the *getihu* were viewed with suspicion by local Party officials who resented the devolution of market access to these parvenus and with ambivalence by their customers who feared these hucksters were somehow cheating them (Gold 1989). The fabulous rise in wealth of some clever *getihu* would engender the resentment of Beijing students in the late 1980s who blamed the Party for allowing such cheaters to prosper.

Meanwhile, by 1985 the economy was in trouble. The flurry of economic energy released by rural decollectivization slowed by 1984 and the government’s abolishment of mandatory grain purchases in 1985 depressed agricultural prices. Farmers began to be squeezed by the classic scissors effect—rising costs for inputs (fertilizer and pesticides) and falling prices for produce. The incentive system for enterprises, involving relaxation of the State Plan and price controls, led to overheating of the economy and a surge of inflation. The response of the CCP leadership, under Premier Zhao Ziyang, was put forth in April 1986 as the Seventh Five-Year Plan. Barry Naughton rates it as “one of the most realistic and sound plans ever promulgated in China” (Naughton 1995, 175–76). Zhao proposed further extension of market mechanisms, in essence a gradual “growing out of the plan,” under the slogan “socialist commodity market.”

With the encouragement of reform Party leaders and the lessons of the repression of Democracy Wall in mind, intellectual agitation for change moved to the safer channels of the Party press, think tanks, and universities. Various leaders hurried to gather together their own think tanks and professors to “research” their policy preferences. In the early 1980s reform intellectuals backed by one or another Party leader pushed for a latitudinarian interpretation of Maoism that focused on the need to protect individual and collective rights against the abuses of those in power (Goldman, Cheek, and Hamrin 1987). What emerged in the Party-controlled press was startling stuff. Wang Ruoshui (1926–2002), a theorist working in the *People’s Daily*, set out to provide the ideological platform for the reforms by promising to create “Marxian humanism.” Wang wrote:

In the past, we did many stupid things in economic construction due to our lack of experience. ... And in the end we ate our own bitter fruit; this is alienation in the economic realm. ... [T]he people’s servants sometimes made indiscriminate use of the power conferred on them by the people, and turned into their masters; this is alienation in the political realm. As for alienation in the intellectual realm, the classic example is the personality cult ... (Kelly 1987, 173)

Wang’s critique of the “personality cult” pointed to Mao, of course. Wang Ruoshui was no dissident. He was part of what Peter Ludz called the “counter-elite” in Eastern Europe in the 1980s, in-house critics within Communist parties. Indeed, Wang Ruoshui and his colleagues were aware of developments in Eastern Europe and cited their writings. We often think of Communism as monolithic, but it was not.

Meanwhile, other intellectuals moved to the emerging public sphere of publishing and television. The newest generation of youth in high schools and universities and

the emerging popular culture, now somewhat freed from total direction by the Party, created a “culture craze” in the mid-1980s that sought to explore and discuss the cultural roots of China’s problems and to promote a “New Enlightenment” movement. The most widely viewed example of the 1980s culture craze was the TV program *River Elegy* (*Heshang*). It condemned China’s traditional civilization, as symbolized by the Yellow River, the Great Wall, and the dragon, for stifling China’s creativity. According to CCTV statistics, over 200 million people saw the series (Barmé and Javin 1992).

These radical reforms were startling for all concerned, and politics soon intervened. There were strong forces inside the CCP and the military that were not happy with such reform efforts. Three major groups opposed reform. First, the leaders and officials who ran the planned economy. They found their advocate in the senior leader Chen Yun. He supported a role for the market, but only in support of the Plan (Hamrin, Zhao, and Barnett 1995). Second, orthodox Party leaders such as Peng Zhen worried about the social consequences of reform for the social fabric of China. This group took seriously the moral claims of Maoism and saw in the vibrant but uncontrolled changes of the early 1980s the corrosive influence of decadent bourgeois ideology and remnant feudal ideas (Saich 2010; Potter 2003). Third, senior military leaders also held to a similar socially conservative version of Maoism. They didn’t like the “disorder” of the newly freed social life and even less did they like recent cuts in their budgets (Shambaugh 2004).

Demonstrations by students in December 1986, which Hu Yaobang failed to suppress with sufficient vigor, frightened the Party elite and provided the opportunity to dismiss him in January 1987 and to slow down reform. Nonetheless, the Thirteenth Party Congress in October 1987 recommitted to some reform under the slogan “initial stage of socialism.” The compromise did not hold, mostly because the social consequences of reform sharpened. On the one hand, Party traditionalists were increasingly worried that the Party was losing control of changes in society. And they did not like what they saw. In particular, President of China’s prestigious Science and Technology University, Dr. Fang Lizhi, made a trenchant critique of CCP science policy and, more unforgivably, a cogent rebuttal to the scientific assumptions of Frederick Engels. “Democracy,” Fang declared, “is not something bestowed” by the CCP (Fang 1992, 130). This challenged the legitimacy of the CCP’s orthodoxy. When Fang Lizhi began speaking at the student demonstrations in 1986, this contributed to the reaction by Party traditionalists, and Fang was expelled from the Party in 1987 (Williams 1990). However, by 1989 others took up Fang’s and Wang’s criticisms and, ominously for the Party traditionalists, many of those intellectuals worked for Hu’s replacement, the new general secretary, Zhao Ziyang.

These tensions culminated in the large public demonstrations led by students in Tiananmen Square and their violent repression on June 4, 1989. Socially, the two greatest unintended consequences for reform were inflation and official corruption. Resentment burned to outrage in the face of inflation that cut into the daily lives of urban residents who still lived on fixed “work unit” (*danwei*) incomes. Deadlock among the Party leadership over how to handle the demonstrations let this spark become a prairie fire. This invoked the prime directive: never tolerate “chaos” (*luan*). At great cost to his own ambitions for reform, which he knew required stable and open foreign relations, Deng Xiaoping ordered a merciless repression of the public demonstrations and hunted down and punished anyone associated with the demonstrations.

*Getting on with life (1992–2007)*

After two years of retrenchment following the Tiananmen debacle, Deng Xiaoping made a grand use of his charismatic power in 1992 to cement his reform plan and serve the new social base of independent farmers and business people. Deng's "Southern Tour" to the Special Economic Zones in South China, and particularly Shenzhen—next to Hong Kong—made it politically impossible for the next general secretary, Jiang Zemin, to turn back. There were reasons beyond Deng Xiaoping's authority for continuing reform. All leaders in the CCP were shocked by the failed coup attempt in the Soviet Union in 1991 and the quick disintegration of the Soviet empire. Enough leaders realized that the CCP faced a similar fate unless it could satisfy the material hopes of China's people. Additionally, they realized that the only way to prevent more public demonstrations that could lead to a Chinese Solidarity—or other intellectual-worker or intellectual-farmer alliances—was to provide not only basic economic growth (to absorb a growing workforce) but to make available the fruits of a globalized market, a middle class existence for energetic and talented students and workers that could distract them all from the absence of political participation. These reforms were cemented by the continuity of leadership that has maintained the model set in the 1990s—Jiang Zemin served two five-year terms until replaced in an orderly vote of the CCP Central Committee to appoint Hu Jintao (2002–12) and now Xi Jinping (2012–). With this stability has come order, but at a price. The people desired "social peace" (*wending*) but the government provided "stability maintenance" (*weimen*) through enhanced police presence and media censorship (Kelly 2011).

Reform was not the same for all people. Different people benefited, were disadvantaged, or were completely unaffected, depending on their region, urban or rural residence, social class, ethnicity, or gender. A new urban China emerged. Most of the strictures of the work unit system came apart in the 1990s, putting jobs and apartments "on the market." Media—press, books, TV, radio, and film—opened up, somewhat. Commercial glamor, and even Hollywood blockbusters, became available, but still under the watchful eye of the Propaganda Department. The glitz and energy of Pudong in Shanghai, the forest of new skyscrapers in Beijing, and the endless traffic of these cities and a dozen more from Chongqing to Guangzhou to Tianjin have grown under these reforms that have allowed the shifting of state assets in the SOEs to the market and have induced unprecedented amounts of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). At the same time as a newly entitled middle class emerged, a dispossessed class of former SOE workers who have been put out of work and denied their rightful pensions brood over their reversal of fortunes, and an underclass of migrant workers jostle in the streets of these cities (Weston 2000, 254). Meanwhile, rural China has seen the revival of lineages and patriarchal family values, echoed by a revival of Confucian learning and practices in local communities and New Confucianism among some intellectuals. This Confucian revival has been picked up and marketed by the state as part of its *weimen* policies.

Underlying both the rural and urban transitions to market socialism, or authoritarian capitalism, is a profound gender divide. The experience of women, now slightly less than half of the population, is widely different from men, and often more difficult. In rural China, the shift away from Maoist egalitarian ideology has seen a shameless resurgence of patriarchal familial norms. These are reinforced by gender demarcations in employment. In the countryside, young girls are married out to their in-laws' homes, meant to serve husband and mother-in-law, and are left on the farm to raise children, care for the aged parents of their husbands, and farm while the husband goes to town—the local township

or regional city or even Shanghai—to earn cash. The benefits of reform, such as they are, for rural residents disproportionately redound to the male members of the clan. One result of the gendered inequalities of rural life has been a marked increase in female suicide to protest arranged marriages, abusive husbands, or grinding poverty (Lee and Kleinman 2003). While the natural gender ratio at birth is 95 girls per 100 boys, China's average in 2002 was 86 girls per 100 boys. Since the introduction of the one-child policy in 1980 this has produced a shortage of women of marriageable age and, according to UNICEF, contributed to the trafficking (kidnap and sale) of some 250,000 women and children in 2003 (Donald and Benewick 2005).

Reform has not been the same for China's 100 million "national minorities." In Xinjiang, young Muslim Uighurs endure unemployment and hang out listening to tapes or MP3s of Islamic lectures, music from the Stans (what are now the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, etc.), and political comedy. In Yunnan province, some minority counties have received so much supplementary support from the government that they have developed a form of welfare dependency (Guo 2001). In Songpan county in northwest Sichuan Tibetan herders and mountain people do not so much resent the Han government officials as loathe the newly arrived Hui merchants and middlemen. Here the lines of ethnic community organize economic reform, as one, then another, ethnic group has come to dominate herding, forestry, local commerce, and the all-important new resource: tourism. Unlike the urban youth and rural poor, or working class versus middle class women, these communities know each other because they live in the same geographic and social space. Competition, rather than alienation, defines their relations (Hayes 2013).

The experience of some 17 million "sent-down youth" (*zhìqīng*) plays a central role in reform China. The experience was unpleasant for all (including, let us not forget, the rural residents who had to cope with these imported youth), traumatic for many, and fatal for some. The profound economic and social backwardness of rural China in the 1960s stunned these urban socialist youth. The experience has marked them for life. The exceptional did well and are leaders in university, government, and business life today, but they carry the memory of the poverty and ill governance in rural China. The less gifted or fortunate have become "the forgotten generation," denied an education and made superfluous in China's new knowledge-driven economy that generates in excess of 15 million high school graduates a year who have more training than these old Red Guards (Bonnin 2013). This forgotten generation forms a potential cadre of reaction to reform. Toughened by their own experience, they know how to rebel against authorities and have a keen nose for injustice. It is not a uniform group—some have become rebels, but one *zhìqīng*, Xi Jinping, has become China's leader.

### *Rejuvenation at home and abroad (2008–15)*

China today is in its "Prosperous Age" (*shèngshí*) of economic development, cultural flourishing, and international prestige. This was heralded in the celebrations of the 2008 Beijing Olympics (Barmé 2009; Wasserstrom 2013). The financial collapse that exploded in America only a few months later, and the global financial crisis that ensued, only strengthened the feeling that China's time had come and the age of western domination that had defined life in China for over a century was passing. By 2012 the newest Party leader, Xi Jinping, tapped this emerging official Chinese triumphalism by calling on everyone to pursue and achieve the "Chinese Dream"—to "dare to dream,

work assiduously to fulfill the dreams and contribute to the revitalization of the nation” (“Youth Urged” 2013).<sup>1</sup>

These changes have brought a realignment of social classes and social experience in China. In spite of its unitary status and a sense of shared nationality, China is organized into social classes that are effectively segregated from each other in many ways. There are great divides in China today that map out the geographies of winners and losers under reform: coastal provinces versus interior provinces; urban residents versus rural residents; men versus women; Han versus minority groups; and across all of these the elite classes versus the ordinary citizen versus the poor. These divides produce social tensions that run through Chinese society like fault lines in the earth—if the pressures build too much and if some “event” (such as those that triggered the Tiananmen demonstrations of 1989) should strike these faults, then the earthquake of unrest that comes will likely move along one or more of these social fault lines. It is clear that Xi Jinping and his colleagues are worried. The current anticorruption “mass campaign” is but part of their plan to address this clear and present danger to their survival and, they believe, to China’s. While it is easy to presume that all political elites look first to their own interests, from a historical perspective it would appear that Xi Jinping is right to be worried, and not only in terms of Party corruption. The challenges to any government of China today are profound.

There are at least three distinct societies within China. Richard Madsen argues that Chinese society today is “a weakly united whole bound together through codependent relationships” that make for a precarious equilibrium (Madsen 2003, 92). Madsen gives an articulate sociological analysis of three systems that define China, identifying their distinctive internal stratification system, pattern of life course, and cultural understandings of the proper relationship between self and society. His point is that what it takes to make life work in rural Third-World China contradicts what one needs to do to get ahead in urban Newly Industrializing China or to survive downsizing in rust-belt Socialist China. The value of Madsen’s careful sociology of these three Chinas is that it clarifies how Chinese political economy operates today and highlights the fragile, or what he calls the dysfunctional codependent, nature of the connections between the three systems. The capital for the dynamic export sector of Newly Industrializing China comes from the assets of Socialist China as the state-owned industries are allowed to go bankrupt and are stripped. The labor comes from Third-World China in the form of some 200 million migrant laborers from the countryside. What makes this system fragile is the wildly incompatible forms of social life and social expectations about correct behavior that the individuals who bring the capital and labor across these social horizons must cope with. It is individuals and not rational systems that link these three worlds—government officials turned entrepreneurs, rural laborers trying their luck in the city, and urban families splitting jobs between the government and market sectors. These people not only have no reliable rules to guide them or legal recourse to protect them, but they must also “translate” between the patriarchal familial values of the countryside, the Party norms of the old urban districts, and the rugged individualism of new urban China (Madsen 2003).

It is no wonder that Xi Jinping and his colleagues are worried or that China’s leaders have latched onto the integrative powers of nationalism. In the Chinese case, this integrative ideology has been a version of popular nationalism that Suisheng Zhao has identified as “[the dream] to make China rich and strong” (*qiang guo meng*) (Zhao 1997, 743). The key to such an integrative ideology is that it is both coherent enough to produce

some unity of identity and loyalty to a center and is, at the same time, flexible enough to accommodate persuasive images of diverse experience. The expression of this *qiang guo meng* nationalism today is the “Chinese Dream” (*Zhongguo meng*). It has something for everyone, providing that integrative force and distraction from social tensions that nationalism delivers—but at the cost of ignoring underlying social and environmental time bombs. For the ruling elite the Chinese Dream stands for success and redemption of China’s rightful role as a world power. For the super-elite and middle classes it dignifies and justifies their search for (and achievement of) personal material wealth. For the working class it is the goal—they take pride in the public display of China’s wealth and power from the gaudy Pearl Tower in Shanghai to China’s notable space program. When they feel they can do and are doing better, they discipline themselves to China’s new market order. When they feel cheated, then the promises of their Chinese Dream are their justification to resist or rebel. For China’s underclasses it is a distant dream. China’s media tells them that history is to blame while local norms blame the victim for being uneducated or for having “bad fate” or for lacking the “qualities” (*suzhi*) of modern citizens. While the poor suspect the agents of their immiseration are closer to hand in the form of local leaders and those very middle classes, they lack articulation and organization because they lack social capital or leadership and spend all their waking hours on survival (Whyte 2010).

### Reviewing notable events

This review of various narratives and ideological moments suggests a number of ways to make sense of notable events from the reform period. The Third Plenum in December 1978, which saw Deng Xiaoping’s return to top leadership, looks less seminal in view of a clearer sense of efforts at reform by other Party leaders and among intellectuals and some Red Guards since the early 1970s. Two turning points set the first reforms (not the Cultural Revolution) and the second (market reforms) in place—the 1981 Plenum that endorsed the “Historical Resolution” as the end to radical politics and the 1992 Party Congress that enshrined “socialism with Chinese characteristics” as a shift from Plan to market. The great trauma of 1989’s popular demonstrations and repression now appear more a symptom of the problem than a turning point. The resolution of the tensions in the Party and society that exploded in Tiananmen was achieved politically in the 1992 commitment to market reform following Deng’s “Southern Tour” and ensured administratively in Prime Minister Zhu Rongjing’s tax reforms of 1998. The national self-confidence that emerged in and since the celebration of the 2008 Beijing Olympics captures a sense of success and coming of age that is experienced both by the political leadership and urban middle class. However, it strikes a hollow note for the many “left behinds” of these reforms for whom life is hardly harmonious and the “Chinese Dream” a distant aspiration. Xi Jinping may see the current “Prosperous Age” (*shengshi*) as a new period in Chinese history, but for many citizens of China this dream has yet to come true.

### Current state of the field

As suggested by the three narratives, recent scholarship has tended to look for the diversity and complexity in the reform period. Meanwhile, some scholars, notably Ezra Vogel’s recent biography, *Deng Xiaoping* (2011), and most popular writers embrace the first

narrative of the unfolding of Deng Xiaoping's reforms. Very little scholarship outside the PRC embraces the official Party line of Rejuvenation.

Most scholarship thus adopts some version of the search for a new order story. Political science, literary studies, and other social sciences have dominated scholarship on the reform period. Political scientists such as Teiwes and Sun (2007) have questioned the simple dichotomies between Deng Xiaoping and other leaders in the early reform. Others have given careful assessments of political debates, policy changes, and the role of elites (Potter 2003; Brady 2007; Fewsmith 2008; Shambaugh 2008; Lampton 2008)—covering major interpretive issues such as what accounts for the alternating cycles of “relaxation” and “repression” (*fang/shou*) in CCP policy over the decades, the significance of the 1989 protests and repression, and the nature of political competition since the 1990s. The focus of studies on intellectuals has shifted from being predominantly on dissidents and literature to establishment intellectuals and more recently independent or citizen intellectuals (Hamrin and Cheek 1986; Goldman, Cheek, and Hamrin 1987; Barmé and Javin 1992; Goldman 1994; 2005; Davies 2001; 2007; Hao 2003; Callahan 2013). Ready access to at least some parts of local society in China has allowed excellent studies on the cultural diversity within China, the changing media, and non-elite actors (Link, Madsen, and Pickowicz 2002; Shapiro 2011; Tomba 2014; Weston and Jensen 2012; Yang Guobin 2009a; 2014a; Zhao 2008b). Chinese language scholarship has reflected this shift in focus from revolution to a China-centered historiography that explores the diversity within China. Huaiyin Li has provided an insightful review of the changing topics and politics of this Chinese-language historiography (Li 2013a).

The earlier years of reform in the 1970s and 1980s have been the subject of more formal historical studies (Meisner 1996). We should note, as well, the rise of a New Party History covering the PRC years, represented by works on the Mao years but extending into the reform period—on the transition to Communist rule (Pickowicz and Brown 2010), urban–rural relations (Brown 2012), policing (Dutton 2005; Schoenhals 2013), the 1960s (Brown and Johnson 2015), scientists in society (Schmalzer 2016), and the Cultural Revolution as history (Esherick, Pickowicz, and Walder 2006). Yiching Wu offers a compelling revisionist take on the Cultural Revolution, seeing administrative and policy continuities between it and today that subvert the “not the Cultural Revolution” narrative (Wu 2014b). These works take a distinctly social history and bottom-up approach to politics and social change and increasingly rely on archival resources. Chinese language studies share this historiographical approach, though certainly not all the same conclusions. However, political realities keep such studies focused on the pre-reform period (for details, see Smith's chapter). In short, the dividing line for traditional historical studies and social science studies has moved from 1949 to at least the end of the first phase of reform in the 1980s. Historical studies are extending further into the reform period, as in some of the essays in *Mao's Invisible Hand* that focus on historical legacies in contemporary China (Heilmann and Perry 2011).

### Note

- 1 The history and current use of the slogan “Chinese Dream” is covered by the official English language newspaper *China Daily* at <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/Chinese-dream.html>. Accessed June 14, 2016.

*Suggestions for further reading*

Good collections of articles, including further suggested readings on specific topics:

Blum, Susan Debra, and Lionel M. Jensen, eds. 2002. *China off Center: Mapping the Margins of the Middle Kingdom*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Perry, Elizabeth J., and Mark Selden, eds. 2003. *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Weston, Timothy B., and Lionel M. Jensen, eds. 2006. *China's Transformations: The Stories beyond the Headlines*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

———. 2012. *China: In and beyond the Headlines*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Chinese voices—translations from Chinese intellectuals (Wang) and ordinary folks (Sang):

Jianying Zha, *Tide Players: The Movers and Shakers of a Rising China*. 2013. New York: New Press.

Sang Ye. *China Candid: The People's Republic*. 2005. Ed. Geremie R. Barmé with Miriam Lang. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wang, Chaohua, ed. 2003. *One China, Many Paths*. London: Verso.

Well-researched and readable academic studies of key topics:

Callahan, William A. 2013. *China Dreams: 20 Visions of the Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fewsmith, Joseph. 2008. *China Since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Friedman, John. 2005. *China's Urban Transition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gladney, Dru C. 2004. *Dislocating China: Muslims, Minorities and Other Subaltern Subjects*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Goldman, Merle. 2005. *From Comrade to Citizen: The Struggle for Political Rights in China*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Lee, Ching Kwan. 2007. *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Madsen, Richard. 1995. *China and the American Dream: A Moral Inquiry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Zhao, Suisheng. 2004. *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

PART III

**Themes and Approaches**

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# Women, Gender, the Family, and Sexuality

*WEIJING LU*

Until the 1970s, the subjects under discussion in this chapter—women, gender, the family, and sexuality—either received little attention or were interpreted in uncomplicated terms. The dominant narrative about Chinese women, for example, was one about victimization, and the family was the culprit. Western missionaries led the way in formulating that characterization. Speaking of Chinese women’s conditions in the mid-nineteenth century, one missionary wrote, “[s]uffering, privation, contempt, all kinds of misery and degradation, seize on her in the cradle and accompany her pitilessly to the tomb” (cited in Ebrey 1990, 197). When national crisis deepened in the early twentieth century, the victimized Chinese Woman, epitomized in the bodily image of her bound feet, became a symbol of China’s “backward” culture as well as women’s plight. This story line, articulated most forcefully during the May Fourth movement, was accepted as fact rather than as a cultural critique through much of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

The scholarship that has emerged in the past decades marks a paradigm shift. Instead of writing about victimization, historians focused on women’s agency and subjectivity, and explored their lives as processes of negotiation between orthodox values and the cultural, socioeconomic, and localized conditions they lived in. This shift began in the 1970s, when organized efforts created the first wave of scholarly publication on Chinese women.<sup>2</sup> Margery Wolf’s work (1972) on rural Taiwan, in particular, spearheaded a new way of looking at the family with her illustration of the mother–child centered “uterine family” and women’s communities. The fledgling field grew rapidly in the 1990s, when gender as a category of analysis came to the fore and interest in the history of sexuality rose. The decade also produced some of the most influential works concerning the pre-modern period, which had not attracted as much attention as twentieth-century history.<sup>3</sup>

Broadly speaking, the new research sought to develop a nuanced understanding of the intricate gender system, reexamine the history of family from a female-centered perspective, reconstruct the history of sexuality, and integrate gender into the broad narrative about Chinese history. It evolved in two contexts. On the one hand, it was inspired by

the studies of women and gender in Euro-American history, which supplied Chinese historians with analytical frameworks, categories, and vocabularies, even though they proved to have limitations when applied to the China case. On the other hand, the discovery of late imperial women's writings, itself a result of the surging interest in women's history, allowed researchers unprecedented access to women's own voices. This intellectual environment brought fresh perspectives and raised new historical questions. What ideas informed the sex-gender system, and how did the system manifest itself in familial, social, economic, political, and cultural institutions in specific time and space? How did historical forces and conditions intersect in ways that reinforced gender performance and mediated gender roles? What impact did the twentieth century national struggle for modernity have on women, the family, and gender relations? These questions (and many more) guided historians to explore unvisited terrains including law, medicine, technology, and religion while reexamining familiar perceptions.

The knowledge generated as a result is exemplified in the revisionist history of footbinding, the quintessential symbol of women's suffering and subordination. Refuting "a 'black and white,' 'male against female,' and 'good or bad' way of understanding" (Ko 2005, 227), new research examines how meanings of footbinding were created for the women and men who participated in that tradition and its significance for women's culture, female networks, work, and creativity. In short, the past four decades have witnessed the transformation of our understanding of women's lives and their place in the making of Chinese history. They have also profoundly changed our views of Chinese history at large. The history of China looked remarkably fresh in many respects, including the role of the state, the elasticity of the patriarchal family system, changes and continuities of cultural values and social practices, and the complex interplay of all sorts of historical conditions that shaped the ways women and men experienced their lives.

### **Organizing gender and the family: Confucian discourses**

The fundamental ideas underlying the sex-gender system in imperial China were rooted in the ancient thought about yin-yang, the all-encompassing cosmic forces of the universe. Yin—female—and yang—male—were opposites of one another, yet were complementary, mutually dependent and inclusive: there was femaleness in the male and maleness in the female. Yang was superior to yin, but their relative positions were in constant flux. The balance of yin-yang forces produced a healthy and orderly natural world. Humans and human society likewise functioned in accordance with yin-yang principles. Yin-yang balance resulted in a healthy human body, just as perfectly arranged male and female roles led to a harmonious family and an orderly society.

The core principles of the Confucian gender system took hold during the Han, the first imperial court that declared Confucian philosophy to be its orthodox teaching. They were prescribed primarily in ritual classics: separation of sexes, differentiation of inner and outer spheres, and male leading female. "[Starting] at the age of seven, boys and girls should not sit on the same mat or eat together," the "Nei ze" chapter of the *Record of Rites* pronounces. Men and women occupied separate social spaces, performing different but complementary roles. Men were responsible for the "outer" sphere and women the "inner" sphere. Interactions between men and women were to be strictly governed by ritual rules. The so-called three subordinations placed a woman in a lower position all her life: she follows her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her son when widowed. She was judged by "four qualifications": womanly virtue,

words, bearing, and work. Lifelong fidelity to a husband was a virtue parallel to a minister's loyalty to a ruler and thus symbolically connected women to outsiders in the realm of politics. It must be noted that these were guiding principles for the Han court to reorganize society and gender relations. They did not describe the actual behavior of the Han people.

The "three followings" and "four womanly qualities" constitute part of the family values espoused by Confucian teaching that were based on generational and gender hierarchies. Of the five fundamental human relationships—those between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and friends—three concern the family. They call for proper behavior for each party in accordance with one's position in the family hierarchy: a father (a parent) should be benevolent; a son (child), filial; a husband, righteous; a wife, obedient; an elder brother, kind; a younger brother, respectful. While all parties are required to act responsibly, the expectation of rigid compliance was placed on the junior and female members of the family. There is, however, an internal discrepancy in these seemingly coherent values. An older woman occupied a position that simultaneously subjugated and empowered her. As a woman, she was to follow/obey her son; yet as a parent, she had authority over him.

Held as sacred, these principles defined gender roles, giving form and shape to gender performance and shaping family and social lives. The separation of sexes and the inner-outer division meant women were concealed from public view wherever possible and socialization in Chinese society was essentially homosocial. For women, heterosocial contacts were largely limited to close relatives while men's social lives revolved around all-male networks and organizations outside the home, from "fellow students" (*tongxue*) and men who earned their examination degree in the "same year" (*tongnian*) for the educated, to those of the "same occupation" (*tongye*) and "same native place" (*tongxiang*) for the lower classes. The boundaries dividing inner and outer, however, were not fixed: they changed with context and one's vantage point.

It is also important to bear in mind that, although the core Confucian gender canons remained steady through Chinese imperial history, their interpretation did not. For example, the Han period classic *Lienü zhuan* by Liu Xiang (79–8 BCE) held in high regard those who acted informally as advisors to their husbands, sons, or even kings. This type of "intellectual virtue," however, ceased to appear in late imperial biographies even though men continued to praise the discernment of their mothers and wives in their personal writings. In late imperial China, chastity and fidelity outshone all other female moral attributes, but Confucian scholars disagreed sharply about whether it was ritually legitimate for a widow to follow her husband in death or for a girl to preserve lifelong fidelity for her deceased fiancé.

Throughout imperial history, the impact of gender norms varied considerably, depending on class, locality, stage in life course, and ethnicity. In general, women of the elite class of the Han ethnicity were more restricted by the norms than their non-elite and non-Han sisters, and senior women had more control and physical mobility than younger women. Historically speaking, women enjoyed more freedom in divorce, remarriage, and property rights in early and middle dynastic periods (through the Song), but the Ming and Qing stood out to be the most fulfilling age for elite women's intellectual and cultural lives.

Imperial courts from the Han onwards consistently sought to implement Confucian gender and family ideology. Asserting that proper behavior of each individual formed the basis of an orderly realm and that the family was a building block of a good society, they

promulgated laws and regulations to punish unorthodox behaviors and pursued the “transformation of morality through education” (*jiaohua*) for positive reinforcement. The state efforts grew more ardent in the late imperial period. For example, it expanded dramatically the court testimonial system (*jingbiao*), a major mechanism of the *jiaohua*. The government regularly conferred awards on so-called loyal officials, filial children, and, in particular, chaste women to set moral examples for society. Corresponding with the governmental endeavors, lineage heads and individual moralists wrote clan rules and didactic texts, many of which were modeled after the *Lienü zhuan* and *Nüjie* (authored by the Han dynasty female scholar Ban Zhao) and aimed at a female audience.

### The family

The family in imperial China was patrilocal, patrilineal, and patriarchal. Family relations were organized on the ethics of filial piety and the five relationships. A range of normative behaviors manifested these premises: the preference for son over daughter, virilocal marriage (daughter marrying out to join her husband’s family), men and senior members holding authority over women and the junior, and family property passing on through sons, who, under China’s partible inheritance system, received an equal share. Small families were common throughout Chinese history, but the joint family undivided for generations was the ideal, which spread among the elite as early as in the medieval period. Such a family, however, was understood to be difficult to manage. Family tensions were notoriously common, and male writers laid the blame for household disharmony squarely on women, chastising them as “narrow minded” and “selfish.” Although undesirable, household division occurred regularly, typically taking place upon the death of the family head.

Driven by women’s and gender history, research on the family has taken markedly differently directions; it grew from focusing on patrilineality to women’s lived experiences and family dynamics. This shift in perspective brought to light complexities and changes in family practices previously obscured, in particular with regard to women’s property rights, marriage finance, and women’s roles in the family. It demonstrates unequivocally the centrality of women in family preservation and survival, as well as their own sense of pride and fulfillment.

Throughout imperial history, women inherited in the form of a dowry. Regardless of social class a woman was entitled to a dowry. The dowry’s importance increased with the rise of the examination elite in the Song when wealthy families used the dowry to attract desirable sons-in-law. But even modest families tried to provide a daughter with a respectable dowry, because the size of the dowry reflected the social standing of the family and affected the wife’s treatment in her marital home. An economic burden for the poor, it contributed to the infamous practice of female infanticide.

The significance of the dowry as a powerful asset at a woman’s disposal is suggested in biographical accounts where male authors routinely commended women for pawning or selling dowry items to assist their families in need. As the sole owner of her dowry, a married woman had full control over it, legally and customarily. Remarriage had no bearing on this practice until the Yuan, when a law banned women from taking their dowry into remarriage. The change, a result of the interaction of Mongol culture and neo-Confucian ideology that stressed female chastity, significantly reduced a widow’s economic autonomy and encouraged widows to choose celibacy over remarriage.

Women's legal claim to property was also weakened by another change in law. Prior to the Ming, family property could pass on to a daughter if the household did not have a surviving son, but the Ming and the Qing state required sonless couples to adopt an heir, selected among the sons of the husband's brothers or male cousins, who would inherit the entire family property. The restriction, however, did not necessarily mean lesser influence for women. A chaste widow could enjoy considerable control over the choice of an heir and wield custodial power over the property.

Understandably, the primary importance of the continuation of descent lines put great urgency on young couples to bear sons. In theory the failure to produce a son could jeopardize the wife's status—it was one of the seven grounds on which a man could divorce his wife (the other six were disobedience to in-laws, adultery, jealousy, having a malignant disease, excessive talkativeness, and theft). Women's health in this context received especial attention. "Gynecology" (*fuke*) came into existence in the Song, and infertility was a key subject that medical professionals addressed. On the other hand, the lack of effective birth control technology posed a different problem. Although condemned by the elite and local officials, the practice of infanticide persisted until the twentieth century.

Two remedies were available in the event of the wife failing to give birth to a son: adoption or for the husband to take a concubine. The law in the Ming and Qing permitted concubine-taking only if a man did not have a son by the age of 40. Few heeded the rule, however. Records indicate that men purchased concubines as status symbols or for their emotional or sexual satisfaction, at any stage of their lives. Legally a concubine's inferiority had no bearing on her children, who enjoyed the same status as those born to the wife.

An institution dating back to early Chinese history, concubinage expanded along with commercial development and the spread of entertainment culture, and the concubine's relation with her husband's (master's) family grew more stable in the late imperial period. Small in number, concubines have a disproportionately large presence in historical records because of the peculiar position they occupied: they were objects of male sexual desire and a source of family disharmony. Late imperial family instructions frequently advised against concubine acquisition other than for the purpose of procreation, and moral tracts made jealousy a central issue of female education. However, some wives saw good reasons to accept or even support the institution of concubinage. Concubines could help with household chores and management, and they could perform reproductive duty that some wives might want to avoid. Moreover, the wife's superior status allowed her to claim and raise the children born to a concubine as her own, and she ran no risk of being replaced by a concubine as her status was legally protected.

Women's pivotal role in the patrilineal and patriarchal family system has been made crystal clear in research on the "inner quarters/chambers." A wife was considered equal to her husband for purposes of ritual, and could assume full authority on major family decisions. When the husband sojourned elsewhere, a regular occurrence in late imperial times, this strengthened the position of authority for his wife. Evidence suggests that women identified their interest with those of their husbands, taking pride in their accomplishments. Memorial writings by male family members stressed the enduring hardships of wives and mothers and extolled their managerial skills and resourcefulness. Widows commanded tremendous respect for their devotion and sacrifice.

A major source of support for women falling on hard times was their natal family. Married daughters often returned to their parents for the time being, bringing their

children along. Alternatively, a married daughter could be vital for her natal family's preservation. Wealthy women paid tuition for their brothers' education, or brought parents and other close relatives into their marital homes to care for them. The revelation of these common practices challenged the perceptions that a married woman broke all ties with her natal family and held the status of "outsider" in her marital home.

## Marriage

Marriage served the foremost purpose of continuing descent lines. It was a predestined duty for every man and woman. However, while nearly all women married, poor men were often denied the opportunity to marry. The cultural preference for boys and related infanticide of baby girls seriously disrupted the natural sex ratio balance, leading to a shortage of marriageable women, a problem not helped by concubinage and the spread of widow chastity. In the nineteenth century, 20 percent of men were estimated to have never married. Called "bare sticks," they were seen as rootless elements that threatened social stability. Legally speaking, Chinese marriage was monogamous, but concubinage and the legal sanction for men to have sexual relationship with maids rendered the monogamy principle somewhat meaningless.

The different terminologies referring to marriage for women and men encapsulated the gendered meaning of the institution. For a woman, marriage was termed "marrying off" (*jia*) or "returning home" (*gui*), which suggests her natal home was a temporary residence and her marital home was her ultimate destination. With marriage she became a member of her husband's patriline and an ancestor of that lineage after death. Marriage for a man was called "taking a wife" (*qu*). It signified a major milestone toward fulfilling his duties of carrying on the ancestral sacrifice and continuing the descent line.

Because of the paramount importance of marriage, parents made every effort to ensure their children's timely marriage. Properly grooming a daughter for marriage included teaching her moral values and skills of work and household management and, in late imperial times, having her feet bound around the age of 5. The tiny feet symbolized feminine beauty and social respectability, and they improved her value on the marriage market. Girls were expected to get married within a few years of puberty. Betrothal, however, could occur as early as when both parties were just a few years old. Childhood betrothal was popularized in late imperial times. An appropriate marriage called for enactment of rituals which varied by class and locality. Regardless of class or locality, ritual required that marriage be arranged by parents through a matchmaker. Material transactions were integral to betrothal and wedding. Families negotiated the terms of betrothal gifts and dowry and drew up a contract, which could be a point of contention.

In the selection of a future son-in-law or daughter-in-law, "matching doors" was a time-honored norm. The importance placed on two families' equal standing was on display most overtly during the Tang period, when the "great families" valued pedigree to such an extent that they did not consider the Tang royal house their equal and thus not worthy of intermarriage. On the other hand, the concern over the disobedience of a bride and well-being of a daughter led some to favor hypergamy (women marrying up): marrying a daughter into a better-off family ensured her material security, while getting a daughter-in-law from a lower family status meant she would be easier to manage.

A daughter's welfare weighed heavily on parents when they made marital decisions for her. Troubled marriages and abusive mothers-in-law were not uncommon. Partly because of such worries, marriages between children of friends and relatives, including cousin

marriage, which was technically illegal, were popular. This social strategy also served to strengthen an existing relationship. In the early imperial period women had “broad leeway to leave their husbands” (Hinsch 2002, 41), but divorce grew increasingly to be a male privilege in later periods. However, although men were allowed to divorce a wife on any of the “seven grounds,” many refrained from pursuing it because of the social unpopularity of divorce.

The normative major marriage (i.e., a grown bride joining the groom’s family) notwithstanding, socioeconomic circumstances and local traditions gave rise to a range of alternative patterns, demonstrating the flexibility of the marriage system. In the late imperial period, the “little daughter-in-law marriage,” in which a young girl moved in with her future groom’s family years before the wedding, enabled families to secure a marriage at very low cost. The “delayed transfer marriage,” in which the bride joined her marital home after a few years of marriage, testified to the powerful influence of non-Han culture. In many lower Yangzi localities, uxori-local marriage (where a groom moved in with the bride’s family) was associated not only with the poor but also the elite as an upward mobility strategy.

For the majority of women who left to join their husbands’ families, the early years of transition could be traumatic. Sadness over separation formed a common theme in women’s poems, bridal laments, and “women’s script” (*nüshu*, discovered in southern Hunan). A young wife’s status improved with time, especially after she gave birth to a son. The peak of her status arrived with her old age. As a matriarch, she could enjoy enormous respect and influence. In affluent families, sons commissioned paintings and essays to commemorate their mothers’ major birthdays.

The moral discourse on the husband–wife relationship stressed hierarchy and mutual respect rather than equality and love, but literary sources provided abundant evidence that conjugal love was a cherished cultural ideal. Beginning in the seventeenth century, amid a cultural fascination with *qing* (feeling, emotion, love) and the rise of the “talented women,” companionate marriage captured the imagination of the educated elite. An affecting account of companionship and love was given in a memoir by Shen Fu (1763–ca. 1825). However, defined in terms of intellectual and artistic compatibility and emotional connectedness, the new ideal did not spread beyond the literati or shake the Confucian structure of husband–wife relationship. It did, however, serve to some degree as an equalizer in marital relations, and set in motion a different way of understanding marriage that placed attention on individual happiness within arranged marriage.

### Working and writing

Working and writing represent two aspects of gender performance with contrasting meanings. While Confucian gender norms did not judge men’s character based on their work ethic, work was one of the four “womanly qualifications” that defined women’s social worthiness. Learning and writing, on the other hand, were key qualities of refinement for a Confucian man and held the key to examination degrees and office-holding. No such purposes were relevant for women. Nevertheless, it was not rare that elite women pursued learning and writing.

In agrarian China, the classic model of the gendered division of labor for the vast majority of population was “men plough; women weave.” “Plough” and “weave” symbolically referred to the two fundamental agricultural activities, one producing food and the other cloth. The imperial state regarded agriculture as the basis of a stable polity in

which every man and woman took part: “If one man does not plough, someone may go hungry; if one woman does not weave, someone may suffer from coldness” (Ban Gu 1962, 1128). While stressing the complementary nature of the gendered division of labor, this classic model placed men and women safely in separate spaces. Upper class men were not expected to labor with their hands, but with their brains. Manual labor was a marker of social inferiority for men.

Regardless of class, every woman worked with her hands. Another classical concept, “womanly work” (*nügong*), conveyed a similar idea about the importance of work and the types of work appropriate for women. *Nügong* referred to needlework and the work that produced cloth, all of which were performed in the closure of the home. Understandably, in reality women engaged in a wide range of work other than *nügong*, and lower class women routinely worked outside the home because of economic necessity: in agriculture (such as tea picking and mulberry leaf picking), in shops and restaurants, or as domestic servants, matchmakers, and midwives.

A major contribution of the study of women’s work is its revelation of women’s tremendous economic contribution. Cloth and grain were main items of taxation for much of Chinese history and women’s textile work directly contributed to the state’s financial well-being. Local officials, such as those in the High Qing era, promoted women’s work in spinning and weaving to raise household productivity and to secure state taxation. Economic functions aside, the state and the elite saw work for women as having moral significance as well: it produced virtues—industry, frugality, and resourcefulness—in addition to objects of value. Girls were taught the importance of work and trained in the skills of *nügong* from an early age. They internalized the same value by participating in playful cultural events such as the popular “Double Seven” (held on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month). Under the moonlight of the “Double Seven,” girls competed with one another with their embroidery works and made offerings to the Weaving Maid for blessings of “refined skills” (*qiqiao*). How well a girl mastered the techniques affected her reputation and marital prospects.

If work defined a woman’s moral character, writing did not. Yet throughout history it was learning and writing that sent women to lasting fame, thanks to the entrenched cultural tradition glorifying learning, in women as well as in men. There were two contrasting models for writing women: the upright instructor erudite in classical learning, represented by Ban Zhao, and the prodigy who shines from aesthetic brilliance, represented by the poet Xie Daoyun. Both Ban and Xie came from elite backgrounds, but writing was not the monopoly of the elite. For much of imperial history the few elite women known for their literary brilliance had to share the fame with those with questionable moral qualities, namely Daoist nuns (during the Tang) and artistic courtesans.

In the late imperial period, thanks in part to the advancement of printing technologies, the number of women writers grew dramatically. Research on their writings shed unprecedented light on women’s creative energy, their emotions, and their social interactions. In fact, the phenomenon of talented female poets was so threatening for some men that they questioned whether women should be educated at all, or what were appropriate subjects for women’s learning. Women from the educated class pursued interests in a wide range of subjects, including history, literature, classics, and religious canons. While a small number devoted themselves to scholarship and fictional writing, the most popular genre of writing was poetry, a form of self-expression, intellectual and political commentary, and communication of emotions with family and friends. A major anthology of women’s poetry, *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji*, was compiled by Yun Zhu in

the early nineteenth century, after her years of efforts collecting women's poetry from across the empire in order to preserve women's literary and moral achievements from their time. Writing, critiquing, compiling, and publishing brought educated women into contact with one another and helped forge women's communities and networks. The activities eroded to some extent the rigid gender demarcation as literati men gladly participated in the promotion, circulation, and publication of women's works.

## Sexuality

Research on sexuality gained momentum in the 1990s, beginning with a critical reassessment of Robert van Gulik's 1960 classic, *Sex Life in Ancient China*. Scholars took aim at his argument that the Chinese sexual life was "normal and healthy," pointing out its Orientalist cultural assumptions. The subsequent decades saw concerted efforts seeking to understand how ideas of sexuality were constructed, represented, and played out in social and cultural lives, sometimes with a cross-cultural comparative framework.

As early as the Warring States period, the idea that human sexual desire was natural was firmly established. "The need for food and sex is innate to human nature," according to Gao Zi. Sexual attraction between male and female was seen as the manifestation of the working of the yin and yang cosmological forces, and therefore, sexual energy must not be blocked lest it bring harm to human health and cosmological harmony. This conception differs sharply from the western notion that associated sex with "sin" (Mann 2011, xvii). Similarly, the mutually complementary and inclusive nature of yin (female) and yang (male) meant that masculine and feminine traits were fluidly defined, contrasting the rigid polarity of male and female in the west. Hence, whereas in the west, physical prowess projected masculine strength, in imperial China the delicate body did not suggest masculine deficiency. The imagery of the ideal male of late imperial times—the "romantic scholar" (*caizi*)—appears feminine to our modern eyes. While the boundaries between femininity and masculinity were unstable, studies have also shown manhood was constantly articulated and defined vis-à-vis the female "other."

The belief in the naturalness of sexual needs did not give individuals free rein when it came to sexual behavior. Indeed, all major intellectual, religious, and medical traditions in China regarded sexuality as an object for management, manipulation, and control, even though they differed in rationale and approach. The Daoist "nourishing life" (*yangsheng*) theory viewed sexual union as beneficial to health and as an effective means of prolonging life. Buddhists rejected sex for spiritual salvation. Sexual pleasure was delusional, a cause of suffering that had to be transcended. The medical tradition, on the other hand, concerned itself neither with longevity nor salvation. Instead, it focused on regulating sexual intercourse for the social function of reproduction. Interacting with this range of ideas was the morality-centered sexuality espoused by Confucian teaching. Recognizing human beings' penchant for sexual pleasure and fearful of the destructive effect of transgression on social order, ritual classics prescribed strict rules to ensure the separation of sexes and fortify social codes of propriety. Sexuality was a key site of cultivating and performing Confucian masculinity. Mourning rituals, for example, required that a man withdraw from sex for 25 months during the observations after his father's death.

Since the Han, the state assumed a major role in enforcing Confucian sexual morality, making it part of its broad agenda of social control, political consolidation, and empire-building. The Qing dynasty, in particular, represents an era of governmental regulation of sexuality. Projecting an image of a legitimate, morally upright Confucian ruler, the

Manchu court aggressively purged erotic materials in fiction and theater. It outlawed adultery, prostitution, sodomy, and rape, including homosexual rape. Furthermore, it eliminated the status of the “debased” people and therefore made all its subjects conform to standard gender norms in response to a swelling population of “bare sticks” that threatened the family and social order. Local officials targeted religious pilgrimages and local festivities that brought women into public spaces where mingling of sexes was unpreventable. The government endeavors found ready assistance from lineage heads and other local elites. Clan rules and didactic literature regularly warned against sexual transgression and indulgence. Punishment and exhortation went in tandem with honoring and reward. Imperial China hailed a long history of recognizing moral exemplars through its *jingbiao* system. In the late imperial period, women of exemplary chastity—those who died from resisting rape, and who preserved lifelong chastity or killed themselves to follow their husbands/fiancés in death—became the face of the *jingbiao*. Representing the largest group of recipients, they were honored in the tens of thousands and commemorated in shrines and on stone arches financed by the state.

Paradoxically, the late imperial period witnessed not only the female chastity cult, but also a glamorous courtesan culture and the fashions of male homoeroticism. Courtesans shone for the first time during the Tang, dazzling their clients—civil examination candidates and government officials—with their beauty, wit, music, and poetry, but the seventeenth century boasted the most talented courtesans of all time. They liaised with famous members of the literati class and created astonishingly accomplished works of art—poetry, calligraphy, and painting—which became part of the lasting legacy of the late Ming high culture. The courtesans’ aura faded considerably in the next two centuries, when the talented wives of the elite class fashioned companionate marriages.

Cultural tolerance toward homosexual relationships can be traced back to early imperial history. The famous “cut-sleeve” story tells of Emperor Aidi of the Han who cut off the sleeve of his robe so he would not wake up his lover who slept by his side. It became a euphemism for male–male love with no overtly negative moral judgment attached. Male–male love occurred most frequently where men congregated, such as monasteries and schools. In the Qing, patronizing handsome young actors (female impersonators) gained attraction among some members of the literati. Although romanticized in literary representation, male homosexual relationships in China were characteristically hierarchal rather than egalitarian, making the modern category of homosexuality a questionable fit for the China case. In comparison to the rich records about male homosexual relationships, female–female love is much harder to trace and has received much less scholarly attention.

### **The twentieth century: Transformations and limitations**

Entering the last decades of the Qing, the culture that valorized women’s learning and celebrated the companionate marriage ideal came to a slow halt. The definitions of female virtue and gender roles, family and marital practices, and sexuality, discussed above, all faced disruption in the deepening of national crisis and the influx of western knowledge. In search of answers for China’s weakness, reform-minded intellectuals identified a so-called woman problem where the “uneducated” and “unproductive” women were seen to be the causes of China’s weakness. For much of the twentieth century, women and the family were major topics of the discourse on national strengthening and modernity and were major targets of social reform.

The millennium-old practice of footbinding, now seen as a sign of national shame, became the first target of reform. Leading reformers like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao established anti-footbinding societies and made the unbinding of feet a condition of admission to girls' schools. The movement to abolish footbinding and unbind the bound feet, however, was traumatic for women and encountered strong resistance in some rural areas. Outmoded, footbinding ceased to exist a few decades later.

Schooling for girls developed hand in hand with the anti-footbinding movement. The efforts were initiated by western missionaries in the 1840s, joined by reform-minded elite in the subsequent decades, and by the Qing government, which rolled out a system of public education for girls in 1907. For the reformers, the schooling of girls served to prepare them for productive domestic roles: to assist their husbands, teach their children, help their families and improve the Chinese race. The school curriculum included both practical and scientific subjects along with moral education featuring western heroines, such as Joan of Arc, as well as Chinese icons, such as Ban Zhao. To demonstrate their social respectability, schools imposed strict dress codes that emphasized modesty and simplicity.

During the New Culture Movement, new intellectuals launched an all-out assault against Confucian ideology and the family and gender practices it supported. The movement especially targeted arranged marriage, parental control, female chastity, and concubinage, and introduced new ideas about sexuality, women's rights, and free-choice marriage. Its legacy is long-lasting. It gave rise to the political activism of the "new woman," who was educated, employed, and engaged in public life, and new cultural ideals became the cornerstone for social policies of the nationalists and the Communists alike.

Amid political disunity, Japanese invasion, and civil war, the 1930s and 1940s saw initial measures taken by the Republican government and the CCP government (in its base areas) to reform family and marriage practices on principles of equality, free choice, monogamy, women's property and divorce rights, but they yielded limited results. The Nationalist government promoted the "small family" ideal. While the small family became a norm for the urban areas, the traditional family and lineage practices remained strong in the countryside. Poor families sent their daughters to work in modern factories, effectively helping to bring down inner-outer barriers and the separation of sexes.

The most consequential force in reshaping family and marital practices and gender relations was the PRC government. After its inauguration in 1949, the PRC put in place a wide range of social and economic programs, including land reform, the marriage law, and collectivization; it founded a Women's Federation, and launched literacy and public health campaigns. Although most of these initiatives did not prioritize women's issues, but rather aimed at consolidating the regime's power and transforming China into a socialist state, they incorporated to varying degrees social and economic policies that served to weaken the traditional family and gender practices. The 1950 Marriage Law was the single most far reaching and transformative initiative, designed for the purpose of reforming family and marriage and establishing gender equality. Regarded by some scholars as "one of the largest-scale and most radical experiments in the history of social reform programs" (Diamant 2000, 6), the law abolished arranged marriage, bigamy, concubinage, and child betrothal nationwide, establishing marriage as a monogamous institution based on the complete willingness of the two parties. It granted women equal rights to family property and divorce. The law on divorce, however, met strong resistance because for poor peasants, divorce from a wife meant the loss of the bridal investment as well as a dim chance to get another wife.

Another central area where the PRC government aggressively reshaped gender practice was women's labor. In line with their advocating that paid employment was crucial for women's emancipation, the state mobilized women to meet its need for an expanded workforce for economic development, honoring those who excelled as labor models. In the late 1950s, women's labor in the countryside increased sharply thanks to the collectivization of agriculture. During the Great Leap Forward movement, up to 90 percent of the female population participated in agricultural production. State efforts to bring women into the workforce contributed to the economic success of the state while fostering an affirmative social attitude about women working in public. It weakened patriarchal authority and traditional gender order.

The extent of the success of the Communist Revolution, however, has been a subject of debate. Feminist scholars criticized the state for failing to implement forcefully the Marriage Law and for prioritizing national interests over women's rights.<sup>4</sup> They noted that the government did not do enough to break the patriarchal family system, and the principle of "equal work, equal pay" often meant, in practice, tracking women into less-skilled, lower paying jobs. Others offered more positive assessments, pointing to evidence that peasants, in particular young rural women, took advantage of the marriage law for their own benefit, and collectivization created venues for women's participation in public life and for male–female interaction. Arranged marriage eroded slowly but surely. While virilocal marriage remained dominant and parents continued to arrange marriages for their children, beginning in the 1950s, consultation with children grew to be a common practice. However, traditional practice with regard to women's property rights persisted. Women's legal entitlement to family property largely failed to yield significant results. Family heads, usually male, continued to control family property, and daughters were routinely excluded from inheritance beyond the dowry.

The record of the PRC's policies to destabilize traditional family structure and elevate women's status, therefore, is mixed. In general, there were considerable rural–urban and generational gaps with regard to the impact of these policies. Changes were more rapid in cities and among the youth. For young women, public engagement of various sorts—sponsored by the collectives and Youth League, for example—and slogans such as "women can hold up half the sky" shaped powerfully their sense of self-worth. The PRC era's most radical version of gender equality emerged during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) when the "Red Guard" rebelled against parental authority and the masculine "iron girl" set a new role model for young women. Rejecting traditional female roles and attributes, the iron girl would compete with her male "comrades" in all aspects of revolutionary tasks.

For the first 30 years of its rule, the state upheld consistent, if at times ineffective, policies and programs concerning women and gender roles. But the beginning of the economic reforms in the late 1970s marked a retreat from its earlier positions. Amid backlash against the Cultural Revolution "iron girl" model, the state dropped the slogans that used to empower women. A sharp shift in discourse during the 1980s that emphasized female biological difference helped to revive gender stereotypes and even legitimize job discrimination against women. The major reform policies—the decollectivization of agriculture, relaxation of the household registration system, opening the Chinese market to foreign and private investments, and the ending of lifetime employment for state workers—provided unprecedented economic freedom and social and geographic mobility, but also created enormous challenges for women. Young women migrated in greater numbers than older women and were commonly employed in urban manufacturing and domestic work. Their improved income was achieved at the cost of enduring poor

living and working conditions and separation from their families. For urban women, the disappearing job security and equal pay protection meant they were particularly at the mercy of their employers. Deemed less valuable than male workers, they were the first to be laid off or sent home for early retirement.

In 1979, the state implemented the so-called one-child policy to control population growth, which it deemed to be undermining national development. The policy was most consequential for women in rural areas, where resistance was fierce. The perception that the mother was responsible for the sex of the child often subjected women to domestic violence, while they were being pursued by local officials to perform coerced abortion. The social consequence was revealed by the skewed sex ratios reported in parts of rural China in the following decades, males outnumbering females by ratios ranging from 119:100 to 126:100, depending on the locality (i.e., there were more men than women everywhere; in some places, 119 men per 100 women, in others, 126 per 100). The statistics suggest the practice of sex-selective abortions through the use of ultrasound technology, or even infanticide. The enforcement of the one-child rules relaxed over time. In 2015, the government officially revised the policy, allowing two children per couple.

Some of the most significant social and cultural changes took place in realms of sexuality, family relationships, and marital practice. With the fall of the Qing and the influx of western influence, Chinese attitudes about sex and homosexual love grew increasingly negative, in particular under CCP rule. Homosexuality was subjected to persecution and imprisonment. Since the economic reforms, the Mao era's rigid state control of sexuality gave way to, on the one hand, a resurgence of prostitution and other forms of commodification of the female body, and on the other hand, eased social acceptance of individual choices by young urban residents, including homosexuality.

Parental control over children had begun weakening since the 1950s and, at the turn of the twenty-first century, seems to have nearly disappeared. Children ignoring the responsibility of caring for parents emerged to be a new social problem. The expansion of youth autonomy and power was enabled by the reform policies that allowed young villagers unprecedented mobility and earning opportunities in major cities. In the meantime, the influx of global pop culture exposed the younger generation to fresh ideas of romantic courtship and marital intimacy. Displays of love were no longer a taboo in public and premarital sex gradually gained social acceptance. The notion that marriage was a lifetime commitment seems to be eroding as evidenced by the steady climb in the divorce rate over the past several decades.

## Conclusion

Research on women, gender, the family, and sexuality has been exceptionally fruitful with a multifaceted impact. It demonstrates that, contrary to the long-standing assertion about Chinese women's subjugation, women played crucial roles in the family system. It brings to the surface the centrality of gender and sexuality to the imperial polity and governance. It reveals the elastic nature of the gender system: a system in which women found meaning, fulfillment, and satisfaction. It sheds light on women's intellectuality and inner worlds, brought into view through their own writings. It makes clear that by placing women and gender at the center of historical inquiry we are able to gain fresh appreciation for the dynamics of the family system, role of the state, shape and texture of social, economic, and cultural changes, and, finally, the extent of China's modern transformation in the twentieth century.

Given China's long history and vast regional variations, it is not surprising that there remains considerable unevenness in terms of the issues, periods, or geographical areas in which historians have worked in a short period of four decades. Taking the imperial period as an example, more research has been done on the late imperial period, the lower Yangzi region, and the elite; while research on women thrived, men's studies have not gained adequate attention. Moreover, there have been very few disagreements and debates, a reflection of the relatively young state of the field. Moving forward, historians are delving into new territories on all fronts while expanding the use of sources to include visual and material objects. Historians on the modern period, on the other hand, have increasingly turned to oral history while taking advantage of newly available archival materials, making it possible to construct PRC history in a much more complex and personalized way. As historians engage in new sources and march into new territories, it can be expected that the scope of research will continue to grow and diversify, enriching our understanding of Chinese history.

### Notes

- 1 It should be noted that, from the early twentieth century to the 1960s, historians in China produced some of the most influential academic works on women, including Hu 1985 and Chen 1959. But these publications did not have much impact on changing the general discourse on women's suppression.
- 2 They include the three volumes edited by Marilyn Young (1973), Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (1975), and Richard Guisso and Stanley Johannesen (1981).
- 3 They include Ebrey 1993, Ko 1994, and Mann 1997. For a detailed review on western scholarship through the mid-1990s, see Teng 1996.
- 4 See, e.g., Johnson 1983 and Stacy 1983.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

# History of Premodern Chinese Literature

GRAHAM SANDERS

### Introduction

More than 40 percent of the 3,471 titles included in the Qing dynasty imperial collection *Complete Library of the Four Branches* (*Siku quanshu*, 1781) are classified under the “Literature” branch (*ji*)—the other branches being “Classics” (*jing*) at 20 percent, “Histories” (*shi*) at 13 percent, and “Philosophy” (*zi*) at 27 percent—a rough indication of the importance of literature in the history of China (Wilkinson 2015, ch. 72). There was always a tension between the idea of literature as having a moral, didactic purpose versus being a form of self-expression, or even entertainment, that might be set apart from the polity. Competence in reading, writing, and explaining texts was necessary for educated men wishing to serve in government (especially under the imperial examination system). But it was also a means for any literate man or woman to participate in a community of letters in their own time, and to connect to a textual tradition that transcended their historical moment. Literary texts are invaluable for the study of Chinese history as primary documentation of social connections, as evidence of the circumstances of daily life, and as inscriptions of people’s views on topics not normally covered in orthodox historical sources.

In this chapter, the term “Premodern” ranges from inscriptions on bone and bronze in the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–ca. 1046 BCE) to printed novels of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Periodizing literary history solely by dynasty tends to sever continuities between dynasties and to elide discontinuities within them; there are sources of difference and similarity among texts—genre, region, register, audience—that can be more profound than dynastic provenance. This summary of literary history is thus divided into three long eras—Early (1500 BCE–317 CE), Middle (317–1260), and Late (1260–1900)—according to trends in the technology of producing texts, and the extent of literacy in various populations. The result is a periodization that emerges from developments *within* literature, with dynastic transition as just one of many drivers of change.

The term “Chinese” can refer to people, place, and language, each category being mutable in turn. Modern attempts to invent a literary tradition often project seemingly stable notions of these categories onto the premodern, to delimit its ethnic, geographic, and linguistic diversity for the purpose of nation-building. However, there is continuity to be found in the written language: characters were used as early as the thirteenth century BCE in the Yellow River basin, were codified during the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE), and have persisted until the present. The syntax and vocabulary of the written language changed unevenly over time in relation to the spoken languages surrounding it, leading to a divergence between classical and vernacular linguistic registers. Yet it remained stable enough to define “Chinese” texts as those produced, preserved, and transmitted with these characters, even as the people using this writing system, and the places they occupied, were often in flux—the Chinese writing system even spread beyond the boundaries of modern China and was widely used throughout East Asia. A definition of “Chinese” based on writing may be biased toward sources produced by the literate classes, but it does encompass textual traces of oral literatures and written accounts of oral performances.

The term “literature” is difficult to define taxonomically, for a narrow definition excludes too many texts, while a broad definition can become meaningless. Rather than approaching literature as a classification of received texts, one can view it as the ongoing interaction between production and reception of the written word over time. People wrote for particular purposes, and their rhetorical innovations were grouped into patterns that came to be known as genres, which were then represented through the selection and transmission of canonical texts for appreciation and imitation. Such an approach attempts to recapitulate the development of Chinese literature in its emergent complexity, rather than retrospectively drawing static dividing lines through received texts.

Scholarship on Chinese literature since the fifteenth century—whether it be in Chinese, Japanese, or European languages—tended to adhere to a canonical narrative of each dynasty as the pinnacle of certain genres of writing: Zhou (classics), Warring States (philosophy), Chu kingdom (Chu songs), Han-Wei (*yuefu*, rhapsodies, and old poems and prose), Six Dynasties (parallel prose), Tang (*shi* poetry), Song (lyrics), Yuan (vernacular drama and songs), Ming-Qing (vernacular novels). It has only been in the last few decades that scholars have delved extensively into such factors as regionalism, economic conditions, gender, the materiality of textual transmission, orality, and anthology-making to produce a more complex picture of the development of Chinese literature as a multivoiced, multilayered conversation, shaped by local conditions as much as received tradition. The discovery of a large cache of texts at Dunhuang in the early twentieth century, for example, has caused a reevaluation of the importance of vernacular literature on the periphery of the Chinese empire, as these texts were not represented in received anthologies of literature in the classical language.

### Early Era (1500 BCE–317 CE)

The Early Era (1500 BCE–317 CE) includes major advances in writing technology, accompanied by a proliferation of purposes for writing, an enrichment in rhetorical resources, and the emergence of many genres, which gradually coalesced into a canon (see the chapter by Puett). Over the course of this long era “writing and its interpretation passed from the special competence of a very small scribal class attached to royalty” in the pre-Qin era “to the defining characteristic of the elite of a large empire” in the

Han dynasty (Chang and Owen 2010, I, xxix). The purposes of writing in this era were largely concerned with the formation, maintenance, and expression of political power—along with responses to it, and critiques of it.

The oldest forms of writing survive as inscriptions on ox scapulae and turtle plastrons dating from the latter half of the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–ca. 1046 BCE). This “oracle bone script” (*jiaguwen*) was a means of divination, and was joined later in the Shang dynasty, and in the Western Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–771 BCE), by “metal script” (*jinwen*), which was used to inscribe bronze ritual vessels for use at court, and for burial with important family members. Texts preserved on bone and bronze are an extant specialized subset of a broader range of texts that were likely inscribed on less durable media. Neither do they record oral songs, stories, or speeches that were never written down. But they do indicate some of the early purposes of writing (divination, commemoration, persuasion), and its rhetorical gestures (interrogation, declaration, command). Thus Chinese writing was involved from earliest times with expressing the political power of ruling elites, who wielded the writing technology directly or through scribes.

The advent of writing with ink on vertical bamboo or wooden “slips” (*jian*) fastened together into “sections” (*pian*) provided a medium for recording much longer texts. The earliest examples of these “bamboo books” have been found in tombs from the E. Zhou (770–256 BCE), but purport to record texts from the W. Zhou and earlier. The degree of difference among texts with the same title suggests that the notion of a stable written text is anachronistic. These were bodies of knowledge that circulated and developed largely in oral form, and were occasionally (often partially) written down in different places and times. A small group of texts, claiming to record knowledge stretching back to the beginnings of the W. Zhou, were reportedly praised by Confucius (551–479 BCE) in the E. Zhou as an essential rhetorical resource for any man with aspirations to serve in government. They were a divination manual called the *Changes* (*Yi*); a collection of historical speeches called the *Documents* (*Shu*); an anthology of 305 verses in four-syllable lines known as the *Songs* (*Shi*); a group of texts on ritual matters called the *Rites* (*Li*); and a terse yearly chronicle of Confucius’s home state of Lu known as the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*). This early canon (later called the Five Classics) did not arise from carefully curated written texts, but from memorization and application of practical knowledge in a political context.

The *Songs*, a relatively stable corpus by 600 BCE, were the exemplars for all later Chinese classical “poetry” (*shi*). Over half of the collection—160 poems known as “Airs of the Domains” (*Guofeng*)—are folk songs gathered from different kingdoms, and polished for performance at the Zhou court; they speak from the point of view of different social classes, and men and women alike. An early citation in the *Documents* says, “A poem articulates what is on the mind intently; song makes language last long” (Owen 1996, 63), which sums up expectations for all later Chinese poetry: that it be a persistent external verbal representation of the interior mind in patterned language for enduring performance (which was not always linked to music in later ages). The *Songs* were used by envoys in the E. Zhou as a shared repertoire of persuasive pieces for “offering” (*fu*) through musical performance, and for “citation” (*yin*) in speeches during diplomatic missions between kingdoms.

Such accounts of canonical knowledge being put to political use by the educated elite are recorded in a collection of narratives known as the *Commentary of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan*), which describes events occurring between 722 and 468 BCE. Its long accounts were appended to the highly terse entries in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* as an illustrative

commentary on moral principles in action. Its sophisticated narrative techniques and its tacit insistence on discovering a moral order in the unfolding events of history provided a template for later forms of Chinese narrative.

Other texts attributed to the E. Zhou indicate various bodies of knowledge circulated alongside the canonical works praised by Confucius, at turns intermingling with them or arguing against them. These include collections of narratives such as *Schemes of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce*) and *Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu*), as well as more discursive works of political philosophy that were later called the Hundred Schools (*zhuzi baijia*): Mozi, Zhuangzi, Laozi, Liezi, Han Feizi, Shangjun shu, Guanzi, Gongsun Longzi, Sunzi bingfa, among others. These repositories of useful knowledge for practicing the art of government (or critiquing it, or escaping it) developed over time and were shaped by many hands—using rhetorical devices such as historical citation, parables and dialogues, and genres of argumentation, such as the treatise or essay. They are replete with ideas, figures, anecdotes, and turns of phrase that echo across the history of Chinese literature.

During the Warring States era (475–221 BCE) the powerful kingdom of Chu, on the southern margins of the central kingdoms, produced a corpus of poems known as the *Songs of Chu* (*Chuci*). Its prosody is based on flexible line lengths punctuated with an explicit caesura character (*xi*), rather than the rigid four-syllable line of the *Songs*. Chu themes and imagery are prominent in the early stratum of the collection called the “Nine Songs” (*Jiuge*), ritual texts describing encounters between male and female deities and human shamans who commune with them, often with sexual overtones. The trope of the male shaman who proclaims his worth and sets out on a fruitless journey to meet the goddess sets a precedent for later figurations of male desire in Chinese literature. An early example of the “frustrated man” appears in the most famous piece in the *Songs of Chu*, “Encountering Sorrow” (*Lisao*). This long farewell poem was attributed to Qu Yuan (ca. 340–278 BCE), a Chu official who reportedly drowned himself after being banished by the king. The Qu Yuan figure in the poem speaks in turns as a beautiful woman slandered by jealous rivals, and as a male shaman in search of a fickle deity. The poem melds imagery from a religious ritual context with a secular political one, similar to when tropes from another Chu piece, “Calling Back the Soul” (*Zhaohun*), reappear in later poetry summoning recluses into government service.

The violent unification of the Warring States into one empire under the Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE), and its subsequent rapid downfall, destroyed many texts and scholars. The establishment of the W. Han dynasty (206 BCE–9 CE) by Emperor Gaozu (r. 202–195 BCE), and expansion of the empire under Emperor Wu (r. 114–87 BCE), ushered in a wholesale systematization, classification, and integration of past textual knowledge, partially preserved in pre-Qin “old script” (*guwen*) texts, but mostly transcribed in the standardized “new script” (*jinwen*) of the Han. Writing on wooden or bamboo slips persisted, but the advent of writing on silk meant texts could be composed, transcribed, stored, and transported more efficiently.

W. Han scholars sought to legitimate the Han dynasty by integrating and synthesizing various bodies of knowledge from the Warring States era. At the court of Emperor Wu, the Grand Astrologer Sima Qian (ca. 145–ca. 85 BCE) realized this ambition in the 130 scrolls of his *Records of the Scribe* (*Shiji*), a project inherited from his father Sima Tan (190–110 BCE), in which he provides a comprehensive record of events and people from earliest times to his age. While Sima Qian uses some oral sources for his accounts, his weaving of written texts into a comprehensive picture of the past indicates a general trend of knowledge transitioning from oral to written. *Records of the Scribe* became the

template for later dynastic histories, and its accounts of notable people (*zhuan*) were the model for later biographical narratives.

Emperor Wu's court also had a Music Bureau (Yuefu) that consolidated music experts to collect folk songs, compose new songs, and perform music for court functions. Few texts from this time have survived, but a repertoire of melody titles did persist that spawned later literary imitations of these folk songs, which gradually emerged as a distinct poetic genre known as *yuefu* poems (*yuefu shi*). The meter of these songs is largely irregular, but tends toward a five-syllable line, which eventually supplanted the four-syllable line as the predominant poetic meter in the E. Han. *Yuefu* poems employ a range of adopted voices (soldiers on the frontier, women waiting at home, farmers, etc.), feature animal imagery juxtaposed with human situations, and were admired and imitated for having a rough-hewn, genuine quality. The earliest strata of anonymous *yuefu* poetry joined the *Songs* and the *Songs of Chu* to form a storehouse of language for the composition of poetry in later ages.

Emperor Wu was fond of a form of showy, epideictic rhyming-prose known as the "rhapsody" (*fu*), which uses ornate language and a meter reminiscent of the *Songs of Chu* recast in the form of long persuasive speeches or dialogues. He invited its most famous practitioner, Sima Xiangru (179–117 BCE), to join his court, where Sima produced "Fu on Shanglin Park" (*Shanglin fu*), an expansive piece using erudite vocabulary to admonish the emperor not to waste time in his hunting grounds. Rhapsodies—in both long and short forms—continued to be a popular means of displaying literary ability for centuries afterward.

In the E. Han (25–220 CE), Ban Gu (32–92) and his sister Ban Zhao (ca. 44–116)—who completed their father's *History of the Han* (*Hanshu*) after the model of *Records of the Scribe*—also wrote rhapsodies, as did Zhang Heng (78–139), who took ten years to write his masterpiece "Rhapsody on the Two Metropolises" (*Erjing fu*). The genre of discursive prose known as "discourses" (*lun*) continued in collections such as *New Treatise* (*Xinlun*) by Huan Tan (23 BCE–56 CE) and *Discourses Weighed* (*Lunheng*) by Wang Chong (27–ca. 100). The use of paper as a writing medium in the second century facilitated the production and reproduction of written manuscripts.

The "Nineteen Old Poems" (*Gushi shijiu shou*), which are preserved in the *Selections of Refined Literature* (*Wenxuan*) anthology of the sixth century, seem to be of late E. Han origins. These unattributed songs are canonical examples of "old poems" (*gushi*), a genre that differs from its *yuefu* precursor in consistently using a five-syllable line not associated with particular melodies, and in smoothly subsuming the disjointed themes and imagery of *yuefu* poetry. These poems circulated both orally and in writing among an itinerant population away from the court, and were used on social occasions such as farewells and banquets to express the anxieties of travel and the desire to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of life.

The Jian'an reign (196–219) at the close of the E. Han provided a chaotic political stage on which a variety of historical figures used poetry to represent themselves and negotiate their relationships with others. The general Cao Cao (155–220), and his sons Cao Pi (187–226) and Cao Zhi (192–232), concentrated political power at Ye (in modern Hebei) as the seat of the Wei kingdom (220–265). Cao Pi identified "Seven Masters of Jian'an" (*Jian'an qizi*) as notable literary figures of the age: Wang Can (177–217), Chen Lin (d. 271), Ruan Yu, Liu Zhen (d. 217), Xu Gan (171–218), Ying Chang, and Kong Rong (153–208). Representative works from this era include Cao Cao's "Short Song" (*Duangexing*), a banquet *yuefu* poem repurposed to build solidarity among his

supporters; Wang Can's "Seven Sorrows" poems (*Qiai shi*) lamenting the state of the war-torn Han capital; and Cao Zhi's "Presented to Cao Biao, Prince of Bai-ma" (*Zeng Baimawang Biao*), a lengthy, thinly veiled protest against mistreatment at the hands of his suspicious brother Cao Pi. These men managed to forge distinct poetic voices drawing upon a literary repertoire of the *Songs*, the *Songs of Chu*, *yuefu*, and "old poems." An early work of literary criticism is Cao Pi's chapter "On Literature" (*Lunwen*), in which he refers to literature as a "grand project" in governing a state resulting in "immortal splendor," an explicit acknowledgment that literary practice was at once political and a bid for remembrance.

Continual invasions and rebellions during the ensuing W. Jin (265–316) dynasty led many educated men to withdraw from government service. One group of would-be recluses—who allegedly engaged in abstruse "pure talk" (*qingtan*), drugs, and unorthodox sexual practices—was dubbed the "Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove" (*Zhulin qixian*): Ji Kang (223–62), Liu Ling (221–300), Ruan Ji (210–63), Ruan Xian (fl. third century CE), Xiang Xiu (fl. third century CE), Wang Rong (234–305), and Shan Tao (205–83). Ruan Ji's series of poems "Songs of My Cares" (*Yonghuai shi*) were read as cryptic criticisms of the Jin dynasty. Later poetry of the W. Jin, by Zuo Si (ca. 253–ca. 307) and Lu Ji (261–303), continues this explicit turn away from the political in favor of finding new means of self-definition in the wilds of nature. Throughout this time, W. Jin poetic diction became increasingly sophisticated as the last vestiges of the *yuefu* and "old poems" were absorbed into a polished poetic lexicon. Lu Ji composed a lengthy "Rhapsody on Literature" (*Wenfu*), in which he made the radical move of divorcing literature from its political context, arguing that it should proceed directly from the interior landscape of the mind, and declaring that "poetry follows from the emotions" (*shi yuan qing*). The stage was set for literary expression to emerge in contexts of production and reception much smaller than the kingdoms and empires of the Early Era.

### Middle Era (317–1260)

The Middle Era (317–1260) saw profoundly changed attitudes and cultural practices resulting from huge shifts in population (from north to south, and from rural areas to urban centers), the transformative effects of the spread of Buddhism to all levels of society, the growth of imperial and private libraries, the compilation of massive anthologies, and the invention of printing (see the chapters by Holcombe and Tackett). Textual production in this era continued as a means to constitute political legitimacy, but was also used by an emerging class of "literati" (*wenren*) to take ownership of culture apart from centers of political power.

In 317 the ruling families of the W. Jin capital region of Luoyang fled rebellions and incursions by non-Chinese tribes and established a new capital of the E. Jin (317–420) at Jiankang (modern Nanjing). While untold numbers of texts were lost in the turmoil north of the Yangzi river, the courts of the E. Jin and Southern Dynasties (420–589) managed to preserve, anthologize, and transmit texts from the Han dynasty and before, thus fashioning the canon of the Early Era of Chinese literature in the first centuries of the Middle Era.

Officials at the southern courts soon turned their compilation skills onto fresh subject matter found in their new locale. The court historian Gan Bao (286–ca. 336) collected "accounts of the strange" (*zhiguai*) describing supernatural occurrences involving ghosts, immortals, omens, and the like. His *Records of Searching for Spirits* (*Soushen ji*)

expanded the scope of orthodox historical writing to heterodox topics, opening up possibilities for this form of narrative to be used as a means of social story-making among the educated classes.

The royal courts continued to be the major sites of preservation, production, judgment, selection, and circulation of texts. Tao Qian (365–427), however, cultivated a pointedly uncourtly style in his writing, turning traditional genres obsessively inward to convince his readers (and perhaps himself) that he was successful in escaping officialdom by “Returning to Dwell in Gardens and Fields” (*Guiyuantian ju*), the title of his most famous series of poems. Xie Lingyun (385–433), who was forced into exile, sought solace in writing exquisitely crafted poetry that celebrated the tranquility of contemplating nature. Many of his poems are read as evidence of the importance that Buddhism played in his life, just as Tao Qian’s poems are sometimes read in a Daoist light.

A collection of short narratives called *Stories of the Ages and Recent Anecdotes* (*Shishuo xinyu*) was compiled by Liu Yiqing (403–44), a prince at the court of the Liu-Song dynasty (420–79). Its 1,130 entries under 36 categories of human behavior depict educated men (and occasionally women and children) using wit and verbal facility to negotiate their relationships with one another, often displaying disdain for politics at court in favor of more refined activities such as music, poetry, wine, and abstruse conversations on literature and philosophy.

The literary salons of the southern courts were still the main sites of lively social exchange and competition through poetry and prose, spurring on sophisticated rhetorical techniques, the classification and canonization of exemplary works of literature, and the emergence of new genres. Shen Yue (441–513), who became aware of the tonal qualities of spoken Chinese from translating Buddhist sutras, formulated explicit rules of tonal prosody. Four-line folk song quatrains were imitated as a new type of Southern *yuefu*, the “Ziye Songs” (*Ziye ge*) being a prime example. A highly polished form of “palace style poetry” (*gongtishi*) arose, which placed emphasis on capturing surface appearances in carefully crafted parallel couplets. Practitioners included Xie Tiao (464–99), He Xun (d. ca. 518), Emperor Jianwen Xiao Gang (503–51), and Yu Xin (513–81). Later critics faulted this poetry for being superficial despite its technical achievements, but its emphasis on the illusory qualities of sensory experience is in keeping with prevailing Buddhist attitudes. The euphonious poetic line appeared in prose writing with the practice of “parallel prose” (*pianwen*), an ornate prose style used alongside poetry and rhapsodies as a vehicle for displaying literary talent.

Southern courts sponsored the compilation of encyclopedias, anthologies, and book catalogs to preserve and classify literature. In the Liang dynasty (502–57), *Selections of Refined Literature* (*Wenxuan*), compiled by Prince Zhaoming Xiao Tong (501–31), collected and defined multiple genres of prose and poetry from the Warring States onward, and became the authoritative canon of pre-Tang literature thereafter. *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (*Yutai xinyong*), compiled by Xu Ling (507–84), collected contemporary palace style poetry often written in a voice marked as female. Works of literary criticism include Zhong Rong’s (ca. 468–518) *Grades of Poets* (*Shipin*), which evaluates writers of poetry and situates them in a literary lineage; and a comprehensive work of literary criticism called *The Literary Mind and Carving of Dragons* (*Wenxin diaolong*) by Liu Xie (ca. 465–522), which outlines a systematic general theory of literature, followed with discussions of various genres, and criteria for judgment of specific texts.

When the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties reunited the north and south, their courts at Chang’an and Luoyang absorbed the literary legacy left by the

Southern Dynasties, including rhapsodies, parallel prose, *yuefu* and classical poems. The Tang emperors relied on a bureaucracy staffed by members of aristocratic families who took examinations to qualify for service. These imperial examinations emphasized knowledge of Confucian learning, but Empress Wu (r. 690–705), who sought to dilute the power of the aristocratic families, recruited candidates from less powerful families through the “Presented Scholar” (*jinshi*) examination, which tested skills in literary composition such as essays and rhapsodies, and then classical *shi* poetry at the Empress’ behest.

By the time of Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–56), the ability to compose *shi* poetry was a requisite skill among all educated men with aspirations to government service, who formed a literati class larger than the cohort of active officials and aristocratic families dominant in the early Tang. Soon poetry was heard and seen everywhere during social occasions, such as banquets, drinking parties in the entertainment quarters, traveling, visiting friends, gift-giving, sight-seeing, letter-writing, and so on. It was chanted aloud or sung to music, was memorized, and written down on paper or as graffiti on the white-washed walls of public places. People used five-syllable and seven-syllable lines to compose eight-line “regulated poems” (*lishi*) and four-line “quatrains” (*jueju*) that adhered to patterns of rhyme and tonal balancing, as well as unregulated “old poems,” and *yuefu* poems set to received and current melodies. Collections of poetry and technical manuals on how to write it were compiled and circulated in manuscript form (woodblock printing had been invented but was not yet widespread). The explosion in the number of poetic texts produced in the Tang led later scholars to divide it into High Tang (eighth century), Mid-Tang (turn of the ninth century), and Late Tang (mid-ninth century) eras, each with its canonical writers.

The High Tang includes Meng Haoran (ca. 689–740), Wang Wei (ca. 699–761), Li Bai (701–62), and Du Fu (712–70). Meng Haoran continued the tradition of elegant crafted poetic lines so popular at the southern courts and in the early Tang. Wang Wei broke away from the courtly style with poetry that harkened back to Tao Qian in the simplicity of its language and its concern with nature. Wang’s poetry frames the natural world in lucid parallel couplets that balance sensory pairs such as sight/sound, and stasis/motion, pointing to an ultimate emptiness behind reality; later critics read it as being inflected by his devotion to Buddhism. This philosophical stance contrasts with the poetry of Li Bai, a marginal autodidact from an obscure family in the region of Shu (modern Sichuan), who became the most famous poet of his time through the bravado of his verse, his unremitting self-promotion, and his love of playing roles derived from earlier poetry, myth, history, and Daoist lore. The greatness of Du Fu, however, was not recognized until after his death; his work reads as a sober effort to imbue his life with moral significance, stemming from the Confucian concept of poetry as witnessing the world.

The Mid-Tang era follows the near downfall of the dynasty during the An Lushan Rebellion, which shocked the literati into a sense of cultural crisis. Han Yu (768–824) emerged as a countercultural figure who eschewed the prevailing rigid style of parallel prose for the free-flowing style of “old prose” (*guwen*) exemplars such as Mencius and Sima Qian. Han Yu’s poems grapple with how they might interpret and give meaning to the world rather than simply reflect it. He gathered men of talent around him, including the older Meng Jiao (751–814), who cast himself as an unappreciated “ancient man” (*guren*) spurned by a corrupt present, and the younger Li He (791–817), who was known as the “ghostly genius” (*guicai*) for his supernatural imagery. Liu Zongyuan

(773–819) adopted Han Yu’s “old prose” style to turn the mundane “travel account” (*youji*) into a vehicle for philosophical introspection.

Unlike the marginal Han Yu, Bai Juyi (772–846) was a successful official famous for his widely accessible poems. He wrote across several genres—including social criticism in what he called “New Yuefu” (*xin yuefu*)—but was renowned for his long narrative poems, such as “The Mandolin Ballad” (*Pipa xing*) and “Song of Lasting Pain” (*Changhen ge*). A highly self-conscious writer, Bai Juyi compiled and edited his own collected works. His literary circle included his close friend Yuan Zhen (779–831), the author of “Yingying’s Story” (*Yingying zhuan*), a famous example of tales of “transmitting the marvelous” (*chuanqi*): polished written versions of mutable narratives that circulated both orally and in writing as part of casual storytelling practiced among literati during their leisure time.

The Late Tang era in literature includes Du Mu (803–52), a powerful official who perfected the quatrain form as a means of projecting an image of himself as an unconventional hedonist at play in the taverns and temples of the south, which he describes with a temporal and spatial flexibility possible only in a world depicted through poetry. Such a poetic world is pushed to its extremes by Li Shangyin (813–58), whose works are cryptic and fragmentary to the point of unintelligibility, and were interpreted as an admixture of political and romantic allegory.

It is important to contrast how women are often portrayed as mute objects and sources of desire in poetry by men such as Du Mu and Li Shangyin with poetry by actual women of the Tang, such as Li Ye (d. 784), Xue Tao (ca. 770–832), and Yu Xuanji (ca. 842–ca. 868). These women occupied social positions, such as courtesan or nun, which allowed them to participate in literati circles dominated by men. Although Li Ye’s poems are largely regulated verse (only 18 survive), she skillfully violates the rules of prosody to speak with a genuine voice. Xue Tao was famous in her own time and had a *Brocade River Collection* (*Jinjiang ji*) of 450 poems; the 100 or so that survive show that she was a widely read and gifted poet. Yu Xuanji’s extant poems (almost 50 across several genres) are striking to the modern reader for the forthright manner in which she protests the strictures placed upon her as a woman.

By the eighth century a new type of poetry had emerged out of popular songs, with uneven lines and an irregular rhyme scheme. This nascent genre—known first as “song lyrics” (*guzici*), and later simply as “lyrics” (*ci*)—differed from *yuefu* in the degree of its diversity and in the origin of many of its melodies from Central Asia via Silk Road trade routes. Anonymous lyrics from the eighth to tenth centuries were found among a cache of texts discovered at Dunhuang, which also included Buddhist proselytization stories in vernacular language known as “transformation texts” (*bianwen*). Many extant lyrics from before the eleventh century deal with eroticized visions of female desire and were composed by men for women to sing at parties and banquets. Early known composers include Wen Tingyun (d. 870), Wei Zhuang (ca. 836–910), and Li Yu (937–78), the last emperor of the Southern Tang dynasty.

The Tang range of literary genres continued in the Northern Song (960–1127) and Southern Song (1127–79) dynasties, but major disruptive shifts occurred in terms of printing technology, population migration, and social structure. Emperor Taizong (r. 976–97), in an effort to establish his cultural legitimacy during the Taiping era (976–84), ordered the compilation of three massive collectanea: *Taiping Imperial Digest* (*Taiping yulan*) of canonical texts, *Taiping Extensive Records* (*Taiping guangji*) of tales, and a literary anthology called *Finest Flowers from the World of Letters* (*Wenyuan yinghua*).

Much extant Tang dynasty literature in the classical language was preserved in these compendia, just as pre-Tang literature was preserved in Southern Dynasties anthologies.

Printing technology became more advanced and widespread in the Song, which resulted in literature being more accessible, portable, and affordable than ever before. Private libraries and book catalogs began to emerge. The examination system was made as impartial as possible, creating demand for books from empowered literati who saw themselves as the custodians of a culture of connoisseurship independent of the court. They would gather to practice and appreciate poetry, painting, and calligraphy in the concentrated urban populations of Kaifeng and Hangzhou, which were also sites of a thriving popular culture of music, acrobatics, theater, and storytelling. Contemporary accounts tell of stories and plays performed on every topic: ghosts, romance, crime, martial heroes, Buddhism, and history.

Ouyang Xiu (1007–72) was the dominant figure in literati culture of the early Song. He advocated the “old prose” style of Han Yu and used this plainer, flowing style (achieved through meticulous craft) in his classical poetry, setting the tone for Song *shi* poetry as being more subdued, conversational, and reflective than Tang poetry. He published his pithy observations as *Remarks on Poetry (Shihua)*, which became a genre of literary criticism unto itself. Ouyang was also a master of lyrics, which became the preferred poetic genre among literati for expressing passionate feelings. Su Shi (1037–1101) was the other major figure of the age, a flamboyant and outspoken official, poet, lyricist, painter, calligrapher, rhapsodist, and prose writer. In exile, his stature grew until he became a culture hero, admired for his playful yet committed stance. He also developed a new masculine “heroic” (*haofang*) style of song lyric in contrast with the prevalent feminine “graceful” (*wanyue*) style.

By the eleventh century the lyric genre had a repertoire of tune patterns that could be “filled in” (*tianci*) without melodies, which were often lost because of the lack of a musical notation system. Other composers of lyrics aside from Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi are Liu Yong (987–1053), Yan Shu (991–1055), Yan Jidao (1030–1106), and Zhou Bangyan (1056–1121), who completed the transition of lyrics from popular songs into a literary art form. In her critical treatise “Discourse on Lyrics” (*Cilun*), Li Qingzhao (1084–ca. 1151) identifies them as a mature genre distinct from classical poetry. She was an accomplished lyricist herself, capturing delicate nuances of emotion in words, and she was a witness to the fall of the Northern Song dynasty, the backdrop to an intimate autobiographical account in her “Epilogue” to *Records on Metal and Stone (Jinshilu houxu)*.

Literary output continued apace after the retreat of the Song court to Hangzhou in the south. Writers of classical poetry include Lu You (1125–1210), who left behind ten thousand poems, forming a daily chronicle of his later life; Fan Chengda (1126–91), also known for his travel accounts; and Yang Wanli (1127–1206), who was fond of using incongruous juxtaposition to enliven poetry with the Chan Buddhist concept of “vitalism” (*huofa*). Writers of lyrics include Lu You, Xin Qiji (1140–1207), Jiang Kui (ca. 1155–1221), and Wu Wenying (ca. 1200–ca. 1260), who all treated the lyric as a polished literary genre; Jiang Kui stands out as an accomplished composer and lyricist who eschewed official life by relying on patrons to support his craft.

Song literati wrote parallel prose or “old prose” for formal occasions, but classical prose was also used for informal writing known as “brush jottings” (*biji*) or “random jottings” (*suibi*), which aimed to record interesting anecdotes or passing thoughts. Compilations of stories (from oral and written sources) of extraordinary occurrences include Hong Mai’s (1123–1202) *Stories of Yijian (Yijian zhi)*, which is also an excellent

source for knowledge of daily life. Wen Tianxiang (1236–82), a Song official who refused to serve the Mongols of the ascendant Yuan dynasty, uses prose and poetry to record his struggles in his “Account of the Compass” (*Zhinan lu*). By the end of the Song dynasty, a full range of literary genres in poetry and prose in the classical register was formulated and represented in book form.

### Late Era (1260–1900)

The Late Era of Chinese literature (1260–1900) saw explosive growth in book publishing, and a spread of literacy beyond the literati, who were transformed by repeated social and political upheavals (see the chapters by Biran, Guy, and Cohen). Classical literary genres were still practiced and published through the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, but they were joined by a rising tide of songs, plays, short stories, and full-length novels written in a vernacular register. Many of these works were collected, edited, revised, and written by the literati, who came to view vernacular literature as worthy of preservation and critical attention alongside classical literature.

The Mongol conquest of China in the Yuan dynasty (1260–1368) meant literati suddenly found themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The northern capital Dadu (modern Beijing) developed a thriving urban culture infused by the language and manners of the nomadic peoples who now made it their home. The south continued culturally much as it had during the Song, but Chinese literati of both regions found the usual path to officialdom cut off when empire-wide examinations were disestablished. This freed many of them to take traditional literati practices such as poetry, painting, and calligraphy in new directions, but they also turned their attention to the vernacular songs, plays, and stories that had been the staples of oral popular culture in the Song.

The “Four Great Poets of the Yuan”—Yang Zai (1271–1323), Fan Peng (1272–1330), Jie Xisi (1274–1344), and Yu Ji (1272–1348)—were known for their classical poetry, but the famous names of the age are associated with vernacular plays and songs. Guan Hanqing, a native of Dadu in the late thirteenth century, was a master of both. The “variety play” (*zaju*) is a short four-act dramatic form, with each act containing a suite of songs sung by the main character, interspersed with dialogue. The plays feature set character types (the evil merchant vs. the ineffectual scholar was a popular combination) in plots derived from history, classical tales, and vernacular stories. Guan’s 15 extant plays feature the vivid slang of Dadu, and frank portrayals of urban life that ironically undercut Confucian platitudes and romantic niceties (West and Idema 2010). The “southern drama” (*nanxi*), by contrast, was longer and less rigidly structured, with more characters and singers using the language and music of that region.

Guan Hanqing was also known for brash, often humorous, “independent songs” (*sangqu*), so-called because they circulated apart from plays. The genre is akin to the lyric form, but inflected with the colloquial tone, earthy topics, and lively melodies current in the Yuan. These colloquial songs were taken up as a genre by disenfranchised literati, such as Zhong Sicheng and Xu Zaisi, to shape a new identity in a world that no longer prized their classical erudition. Ma Zhiyuan (ca. 1260–1325) made the form more literary by restricting its topics and using refined language. While printed texts from the Yuan are rare, enough have survived to suggest that vernacular songs, plays, and even vernacular stories (*huaben*) were already making the transition from stage to page as genres for reading, although many extant texts of Yuan provenance are Ming recreations.

The Ming dynasty (1368–1644) placed Chinese literati back near the top of the social hierarchy, but early emperors were highly suspicious of them, ruthlessly purging any officials suspected of disloyalty. Imperial examinations were reinstated with a simplified corpus of Confucian classics and a rigid “eight-legged essay” (*baguwen*) form that emphasized technique over content. The disaffected literati continued their enthusiastic engagement with vernacular literature—joining a flourishing commercial publishing industry in the Ming—but they also organized a canon of exemplary works in classical literature. The “Archaists” (*fugupai*) of the fifteenth century were the ones who first codified the genre-per-dynasty model that is still influential today.

Examination manuals and literary anthologies were a mainstay of the publishing industry during the Ming, but it was vernacular stories, plays, and particularly novels—often in illustrated editions—that were the most lucrative sources of revenue. *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Plaks 1987) are books of 100 chapters or more published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in various editions. They were not unitary novels written by one author, but complex tapestries of narrative and verse woven from diverse sources such as histories, classical poems, tales, lyrics, vernacular stories, songs, drama, and oral storytelling cycles—true cases of heteroglossia. *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi*)—attributed to Luo Guanzhong (ca. 1330–1400), published in 1522, based on a Yuan text—deals with the struggle for supremacy among three military leaders after the fall of the Han dynasty. *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*), also known as *Outlaws of the Marsh*—attributed to Shi Nai’an (ca. 1296–1372), published in its 100 chapter edition in 1550—is a sprawling tale of 108 martial heroes at Mt. Liang who take up arms against corrupt government officials in the Song. *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*)—attributed to Wu Cheng’en (ca. 1506–82), published in 1592—is based on accounts of the Tang dynasty monk Xuanzang’s (ca. 602–44) 17-year overland journey to India to retrieve Buddhist sutras; in the fantastical novel version, the monk is protected by three fractious guardians exiled from Heaven: Monkey, Pigsy, and Sandy (in Arthur Waley’s rendering). The *Plum in the Golden Vase* (*Jinpingmei*)—by an unknown author, published in 1617—is a detailed account of machinations involving money, power, sex, and violence that unfold with lethal results in the household of a rich merchant named Ximen Qing. Its tightly woven plot and pointed ironic tone suggest that, unlike the other three novels, it may have been the work of one author writing social satire. All four novels were published repeatedly and gained literati admirers, who produced critical editions with meticulous annotations explaining their complex structural principles, aesthetic dimensions, and moral significance.

The elaborate southern drama form (known as *chuanqi* in the Ming) reached new heights of sophistication with works such as *The Lute* (*Pipa ji*) by Gao Ming (1305–ca. 1370) at the beginning of the dynasty, and Tang Xianzu’s (1550–1617) *Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting*) near the end, which were part of a large repertoire of plays performed (often as excerpts) in urban entertainment quarters and wealthy households. Plays were also published with illustrations and commentary in deluxe printed editions for reading.

Feng Menglong (1574–1646) was a commercial success as an author and publisher with three anthologies of vernacular stories—known as the “Three Word” (*sanyan*) collections—each containing 40 stories adapted from classical tales, oral storytelling, and his own invention. Feng collected and published all forms of vernacular literature, espousing its unabashed emphasis on *qing* (emotion, passion, or feeling) as the source of its authenticity. The problem of authenticity had become acute by the late Ming, as writers chafed under the strictures placed upon them by the Archaists. Claims by the

philosopher Wang Yangming (1472–1529) that Confucian values were found in one's innate knowledge and practice, and by the iconoclastic essayist Li Zhi (1527–1602) who repudiated classical learning in favor of following the “childlike mind” (*tongxin*), inspired late Ming literati such as Feng Menglong and Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610), who even praised naive errors in prosody as a virtue.

An emphasis on *qing* as an alternative literary value, coupled with increased literacy among newly wealthy families in the South, led to a surge in literature by and for women: publishers realized that educated women were reading more than the moral tracts explicitly aimed at them, and that they were writing poetry that expressed *qing* unsullied by the concerns of examinations and public office. *Selections of Poems by Famous Ladies* (*Mingyuan shigui*), published in 1620, was one of the earliest anthologies of poems by women. Writing women included courtesans educated in the literary arts, such as the prolific Liang Xiaoyu, and the distaff side of elite official families, such as Shen Yixiu (1590–1635) and her daughters, who preferred to circulate their writing through informal networks (Idema and Grant 2004).

The Qing dynasty inherited a complex and diverse range of classical and vernacular literary genres. Manchu rulers respected Chinese culture and sponsored compilation projects such as the *Complete Tang Poems* (*Quan Tangshi*, 1705), and the *Complete Library of the Four Branches* (1781), an attempt to amass a copy of every important book in the imperial library. But they were highly sensitive to perceived criticism from Ming loyalists, whom they subjected to literary inquisitions and brutal censorship. Literature dealing directly with the Ming's collapse, such as the Kong Shangren's (1648–1718) historical drama *Peach Blossom Fan* (*Taohua shan*, 1699), became rare as the interest of literati shifted to the safer ground of “evidential studies” (*kaozhengxue*), which generated philological exegesis from empirical observation of linguistic change over centuries, and ultimately subverted the notion of stable meaning in the Classics. Many accomplished writers emerged over the course of the Qing dynasty, writing in a variety of genres with a sophistication that came from a deep awareness of literary history. In the seventeenth century, Li Yu (1610–80) was a singularly successful commercial writer, able to finance a lavish lifestyle with plays (which he staged and published), a picaresque novel, and short story collections. His risqué writing broached unconventional themes such as homosexuality and gender role reversal, and was so popular that he complained of piracy by unscrupulous publishers.

Classical poetry was widely practiced among groups of writers in various “schools” (*pai*) and “clubs” (*she*)—the Banana Garden Poetry Club (Jiaoyuan shishe) organized by Chai Jingyi (d. 1680) was one of many women's poetry groups. While it is difficult for individuals to stand out in such a crowded field, the official and bibliophile Wang Shizhen (1634–1711) published 20 collections of his own poetry, edited poetry anthologies, and wrote theoretical treatises. Nara Singde (1655–85), a Manchu bannerman, was known for haunting lyrics. Pu Songling (1640–1715) revitalized the classical tale form with his *Liaozhai's Record of Wonders* (*Liaozhai zhiyi*), a collection of accounts at the intersection between the supernatural and the domestic, written in a lapidary style. Among dramatists, Kong Shangren was joined by Hong Sheng (1645–1704), whose *Palace of Lasting Life* (*Changsheng dian*) weaves divergent points of view on historical events into a literary masterpiece.

The eighteenth century was the high-water mark of vernacular novels by known writers in sole command of narrative form and language, unlike the compilation novels of the Ming. In his *Unofficial History of the Scholars* (*Rulin waishi*), Wu Jingzi (1701–54)

produced a devastating satire of ineffectual officials in thrall to an examination system and Confucian rites they no longer took seriously. *Story of the Stone* (*Shitouji*), or *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng*)—written by Cao Xueqin (1715–63), and supplemented by Gao E (ca. 1740–ca. 1815)—is the most famous novel in the history of Chinese literature. It narrates the twilight years of a wealthy and powerful Qing family in sumptuous detail and elegant language, describing the relationships among the male scion of the clan, Baoyu (Precious Jade), and his female sisters, cousins, matriarchs, and servants, who while away their days in Grand Prospect Garden with games, poetry, drinking, and gossip, oblivious to the implacable forces that will destroy their cloistered world.

Women continued to be prominent in literature, with male literati such as Yuan Mei (1715–97) mentoring and publishing the work of his female disciple Qu Bingyun (1767–1810) among others. Li Ruzhen (1763–1830), in his vernacular novel *Flowers in the Mirror* (*Jinghua yuan*), even envisions an alternate world in which women can sit for examinations and wield political power. Shen Fu's (1763–ca. 1825) brief classical language memoir, *Six Records of a Life Adrift* (*Fusheng liuji*), is really a tribute to his wife and closest companion Chen Yun (1763–1803).

In the nineteenth century, writers were grappling with China finding its place on the world stage. Huang Zunxian (1848–1905) uses classical poetry to capture his experiences abroad; and the revolutionary martyr Qiu Jin (1879–1907) uses her poetry to lament humiliation by foreign aggressors at home. The early twentieth century vernacular novel *Sea of Regret* (*Henhai*) by Wu Jianren (1866–1910) is an intimate account of a traditional marriage floundering in a rapidly changing social order. An acute awareness of the inability of China's traditional culture to meet the demands placed upon it led to calls during the May Fourth movement of 1919 to abandon classical Chinese literature in favor of an exclusively vernacular literature based on “modern” genres from Europe and Japan. Classical literature continued to be explicitly repudiated during the Communist era in favor of a “literature of the common people,” but some of its genres, especially classical poetry, are still practiced today through newspapers, poetry journals, and online media. Even now the mainland Chinese government is encouraging renewed interest in classical literature in the name of national pride and “Chinese values”—yet another example of establishing political legitimacy through literature, an exercise that stretches back to its very beginnings.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

- Chang, Kang-i, and Stephen Owen, eds. 2010. *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

# Modern Chinese Literature

*DAVID DER-WEI WANG*

Modern Chinese literary history, as it is treated in this chapter, refers to the dynamics that happened to Chinese literature from the mid-nineteenth century to the new millennium. During this period, China was in constant turmoil, wracked by political upheaval—from the Opium War to the First and Second Sino-Japanese Wars, from the Boxer Rebellion to the Cultural Revolution, and from the cession of Taiwan in 1895 to the return of Hong Kong in 1997—on one hand, and by social changes running the gamut from technological and commercial advancement to epistemological renovation on the other.

This was also a period that saw literature conceived, practiced, circulated, and assessed in ways without precedent in Chinese history. Imported printing technology, innovative marketing tactics, increased literacy, widening readership, the boom in diverse forms of media and translation, and the advent of professional writers all created fields of literary production and consumption that in the preceding decades would hardly have been imaginable. Along with these changes, literature—as aesthetic vocation, scholarly discipline, and cultural institution—underwent drastic, often vehemently contested, experimentation to become “literature” as we understand the word today. The transformation of literature was indeed one of the most acute symptoms of a burgeoning Chinese modernity.

We need to ask, What makes Chinese literature since the mid-nineteenth century “modern”? One way to answer this is to address the historical context in which this inquiry is grounded. Following the story line drawn by political scientists and (literary) historians, one can describe China’s literary initiation into the modern as a process of inscribing and being inscribed by developments such as the call for constitutional democracy, the discovery of psychologized and gendered subjectivity, the industrialization of military, economic, and cultural production, the rise of an urban landscape, and, above all, the valorization of time as evolutionary sequence. These factors first gained hold in Europe, but, emerging in non-western civilizations such as China, they took on both global relevance and local urgency.

This chapter proposes to view Chinese literary modernization as a long and sprawling process traceable to the last decades of the nineteenth century. Literary modernization, at both global and local levels, will not be treated as a monolithic process, each stage leading inevitably toward a higher one in accordance with a certain timetable. Instead, I will argue, one must acknowledge the arrival of the modern at any given historical juncture as a fierce competition of new possibilities, where the result does not necessarily reflect the best or even any one of the possibilities. Many innovations, whatever their capacity for generating more positive outcomes, do not withstand the contingency of time.

To say this, however, does not mean that literary modernization as a concept is senseless, devoid of any meaningful pattern. Rather, no outcome can be predicted from the outset or seen in retrospect to follow a singular path of evolution; indeed, no actual constituent of the process could ever be replicated, because any pathway to the realization of the modern proceeds through countless mutable and amorphous stages.

Loosely based on a chronological order, the chapter will call attention to four aspects of modern Chinese literature, where mutual implications of historical dynamics and literary practice became evident: the advent of modern Chinese literature in response to the making of national imaginary; the intertwined relationships between revolution and “involution”; the continued attempt to rewrite (literary) history in response to the incessant social and political metamorphoses; the opening up of literary horizons in light of the surfacing Sinophone spheres.

### Obsession with China

The last decade of the nineteenth century saw China in the grip of political and social crisis. In the wake of the Chinese defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), China signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki, declaring Korea independent and ceding Taiwan, the Pescadores, and the Liaodong peninsula to Japan. This diplomatic humiliation was only the prelude to a cluster of calamities and perturbations in the next few decades. China was to undergo great challenges as it entered the modern age (see the chapters by Cohen and Wills).

Among the thousands of Chinese intellectuals shocked by the outcome of the Sino-Japanese War was Liang Qichao (1873–1929). Liang played a crucial part in the Hundred Days Reform in 1898 next to his mentor Kang Youwei (1858–1927). After the Reform failed, Liang fled to Japan, where he came to learn the power of literature in relation to national rejuvenation. He set out to promote poetry, prose, and fiction revolutions, thus igniting the politics of literature in modern China. In 1902, Liang founded the magazine *New Fiction* (*Xin xiaoshuo*). In the inaugural essay “On the Relation between Fiction and Ruling the Public,” he argues:

To renovate the people of a nation, the traditional literature of that nation must first be renovated. Thus to renovate morality, we must first renovate fiction; to renovate religion, we must first renovate fiction; to renovate manners, we must first renovate fiction; to renovate learning and the arts, we must first renovate fiction; and even to renew people’s hearts and remold their character, we must first renovate fiction. Why? It is because fiction exercises a power of incalculable magnitude over mankind. (Liang 2001, 758)

Fiction had traditionally ranked the lowest in the literary canon. The way Liang Qichao granted fiction an insurmountable position as opposed to the tradition was in itself a

revolutionary engagement. Meanwhile, Liang tried his hand at writing a utopian novel, *The Future of New China* (*Xinzhongguo weilaiji*, 1902), which describes the prosperity of a new Republic of Great China in 2062, 50 years after its founding in 2012. Arguably the “origin” of modern Chinese literature, the novel not only dramatizes Liang’s political thoughts but also encapsulates the contested temporalities embedded in China’s search for modernity.

But the literary reform promoted by Liang Qichao and his followers is only part of the story of the late Qing boom. Ever since the first decades of the nineteenth century, Chinese literati had already engaged in rethinking the relationship between literature and history. Whereas Li Ruzhen (1763–1830) wrote *Flowers in the Mirror* (*Jinghua yuan*, 1827), projecting a fantastic adventure overseas and promoting causes from language innovation to gendered power, Gong Zizhen (1792–1841) produced a cornucopia of poetry and prose to inscribe his trepidations about the fall of the dynasty. Gong was born in 1792, the year of Lord George Macartney’s (1737–1806) historic voyage to pay tribute to Emperor Qianlong; he died just as the Opium War forced China to open her doors to the world. In many ways, Gong’s life and works can be seen as a nexus around which early modern Chinese literature developed its most distinctive characteristics. Gong’s poetry is best characterized by an inclination to affective subjectivity, an imaginary historical dynamism, and a political agency underlain by an apocalyptic vision. He left his imprint on the thoughts and works of many intellectuals and politicians, from Liang Qichao to Mao Zedong.

Equally noticeable is the increasing demand of the vernacular as a form for public communication throughout the nineteenth century. The vernacular, to be sure, had always been part of popular discourse since ancient times. But it gained unprecedented value during this period, thanks to at least three factors. First, reform-minded intellectuals, such as Huang Zunxian (1848–1905) and Liang Qichao found in the vernacular a pedagogical tool and a conceptual stimulus through which to rejuvenate the decaying tradition. Second, disenfranchised literati, who were finding new bases in the cities, sought to make a living by producing vernacular literature. By the end of the nineteenth century, they had constituted the prototype of the modern professional writer, churning out writings to cater to the popular taste. Third, foreign missionaries from Robert Morrison (1782–1834) to Karl Gützlaff (1803–51) and many others treated the vernacular as a viable communicative vehicle through which to disseminate new beliefs and worldviews. Their engagement with the translation, circulation, and even creation of materials related to Christianity paved the way for the “translated modernity” of Chinese literature.

Above all, the emergence of cities and urban culture, the burgeoning of a printing industry, the mushrooming of public media such as newspapers and magazines, and the increasing demand for a literature for public entertainment, all contributed to a new popular reading culture. Without these material factors by which the cultural and social environment had been conditioned, Liang’s advocacy of a new form of literature would not have had such an overwhelming effect.

What Liang Qichao and his followers promoted at the turn of the twentieth century was nothing less than narrating the nation: to construct the national imaginary—from the national spirit to the national sovereignty—in terms of renewing fictional discourse. Almost at the same as Liang Qichao was campaigning for “new fiction,” Wang Guowei (1873–1927) set out to ponder historical crisis and the viability of poetic subjectivity. Having consummated his passion for Western philosophers from Kant to Schopenhauer,

Wang sought to resuscitate in his work both the format and argument of Chinese poetics, along the lines of lyrical evocation. His research led to a series of treatises, on the tragic potential of the Chinese classic and the modern meaning of lyrical aesthetics. Having witnessed a succession of political crises in the Qing, Wang was haunted by a pessimistic outlook on Chinese civilization, such that he took *ci*—or the song lyric, a unique genre of Chinese poetry known for its delicate taste and exquisite imagery—as not a confirmation of but a farewell to his cherished cultural legacy. Wang committed suicide in 1927 by drowning.

In the meantime, Lingfei, a young overseas Chinese student in Japan, was engaged with a series of writings regarding literature and nationhood. In an essay, “The Power of the Mara Poet” (1908), he calls for a “spiritual warrior” who would be able to “pluck people’s hearts.” Lord Byron, with his recalcitrant passion and heroic deeds, personifies the true model of the modern poet, the Mara Poet, which in its Sanskrit origin means devil. Lingfei was the penname of Zhou Shuren (1881–1936), who was later known as Lu Xun, or the founding father of modern Chinese literature. Lu Xun’s call for a new literature as the way to reinvigorate China resonated with many other reform-minded intellectuals of his time, including Liang Qichao and Wang Guowei. While these intellectuals were pursuing radical changes for China, the way they conceptualized the linkage between political reform and literary reform bespoke a poetics of contested motivations. “Literature” meant to them both an exercise of belles lettres prescribed by recently imported Western aesthetics and a manifestation of the Way as conceived in traditional Chinese thought, both an expression of individual sentiments and testimony to national collectivity.

Thus the stage was set for the arrival of New Literature. On May 4, 1919, thousands of students in Beijing took to the streets to protest the resolution taken by the Peace Conference in Paris that concluded World War I. Though China had been on the side of the Allies against Germany, the Treaty of Versailles arranged for the German-held concessions in China to be handed over to Japan, another supporter of the Allies, on the basis of a secret agreement between China and Japan dating back to 1915. The Allies’ disregard of China’s sovereignty and the Chinese government’s weak response aroused nationwide indignation. Patriotic protests soon spread to all the major cities, culminating in a national campaign for sociopolitical reform and cultural renovation.

For most of the twentieth century, the May Fourth Movement was celebrated as the harbinger of modern China in almost all domains. It almost took on a mythic dimension, one that signals the magical beginning of Chinese modernity. This approach has been reexamined in recent years. Scholars now suggest that the conception, production, and dissemination of literature during the last decades of the Qing manifested a vigor and variety that can hardly be fitted into the narrow confines prescribed by May Fourth discourse. Meanwhile, questions have been raised as to the “repressed modernities”—genres, figures, movements that have been obscured or even denigrated as a result of the May Fourth calls for revolution and enlightenment.

Of the forerunners of modern Chinese literature, the “Mara” voice uttered by Lu Xun and his followers no doubt demonstrated the most powerful impact. Lu Xun created a gallery of unforgettable figures in his fiction, from the schizophrenic madman to the country hooligan consumed by a “method of spiritual victory” and the lower class woman driven to insanity and death by feudalism. His purpose was none other than exposing the paralysis of Chinese civilization. As the Madman in “The Diary of a Madman” (1918) cries, for four thousand years the Chinese people had been attending

a spectacular banquet that was nothing but “cannibalism.” There is nevertheless a darker Lu Xun behind his façade of a trumpeter for revolution. At the height of his skepticism and self-doubt, Lu Xun turned his national critique inward, invoking the ghostly indulgence in self-cannibalization.

The style as demonstrated by Lu Xun and his followers dominated the post-May Fourth era, in the name of critical realism. However, most of Lu Xun’s followers lack the kind of diacritical rigor and poetic subtlety that distinguished the masters. Insofar as they all express a heightened anxiety about China’s fate as reflected in literature, May Fourth writers show what C.T. Hsia terms an “obsession with China” (Hsia 1971, 536). For Hsia, while Chinese writers share with their western colleagues a general disgust with the consequences of modern civilization, they are preoccupied by their national crisis and historical malaise to such an extent that they are unable, or unwilling, to expound the moral and political relevance of the fate of the Chinese people to “the state of man in the modern world.” At their best, Hsia argues, Chinese writers feel compelled to display in their works a high moral integrity rarely found among contemporary western writers, but the price they pay for such an “obsession with China” is “a certain patriotic provinciality and a naïveté of faith with regard to better conditions elsewhere.”

“Obsession with China” has been a contentious concept since it was first made known in the 1960s. To come to terms with Hsia’s critique either positively or negatively, however, a more viable strategy may be to rediscover the vitality and variety of Chinese literature beyond the narrowly defined “obsession with China.” For instance, for all his inquiry into the Chinese national character in crisis, there is one dimension Lu Xun remained reticent about, namely the romantic and erotic dynamic in modern, psychologized subjectivity. It is in the fiction and poetry of Yu Dafu (1896–1945) that one finds modern Chinese male subjects tortured by symptoms from thwarted patriotism to unfulfilled sexual desire, hypochondria, and an inferiority complex.

The rise of women writers demands attention too. From Qiu Jin (1875–1907) to Bing Xin (1900–1999), from Ding Ling (1904–86) to Xiao Hong (1911–42), and Eileen Chang (1920–95), these women writers were exposed to more physical and psychological trials at a challenging time, and, as a result, their vulnerability and resilience testify to a gendered polemic of writing. Their writing may well be streamlined into an “obsession with China,” but a more sensate approach to their engagement leads to a very different understanding of history at both national and personal level. Thus Ding Ling’s confession of her bohemian life, Xiao Hong’s reminiscence about her romantic and revolutionary odyssey from Manchuria to the hinterland, and Eileen Chang’s portrait of urban decadence present us a distinct story line as to how modern China came into existence.

Alongside the realist campaign, there existed a parallel discourse of lyricism in poetry, prose, fiction, and theory. Traditional literary historians have downplayed this lyrical discourse, regarding it as either irrelevant to the “historical consciousness” of the time or secondary to the canon of realism. Nevertheless, lyricism, as a generic attribute, an aesthetic vision, a lifestyle, and even a polemic platform, should be recognized as an important resource for Chinese literati and intellectuals in coping with reality and configuring an alternative modern vision. Shen Congwen (1902–88) is a case in point. In his writing, his hometown region, West Hunan, always appears in a double image, one that embraces such thematic polarities as geographical locus versus imaginary landscape, reality versus memory, and history versus myth. The author plays with these polarities, showing how they infiltrate each other’s domains and thus implement their affinities beneath surface oppositions.

With experimental style and idiosyncratic mannerism, the modernists wrote against the grain of realism, offering a drastically different glimpse of China beset by consumer culture and cosmopolitan whims. Thus the Neo-Sensationalists depicted dangerous liaisons and libertine romances in 1930s Shanghai in such a way as to implicate a society deeply devoted to the twin sports of desiring and being desired. For all their apparent interest in urban material culture, these works communicate something else: frenzy in quest of bodily satisfaction; fatigue with quotidian existence, glamorous or not; and an unfathomable thirst for anomaly that transcends ordinary sensuality. Underneath their slick style, however, these writers convey a mixture of excitement and melancholy, haunted by the “historical disquiet” of 1930s China.

Beyond the mainstream literature lies a corpus of literature that has been excluded from the canon despite its popularity in the Republican era: the “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School.” The term points to the sentimental inclination of the school, which is associated with premodern romantic sensibilities. In practice, however, Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies was never a unified movement. It comprised a huge variety of subjects, such as romance, chivalric fantasy, social exposé, detective novels, and comic writings, as well as genres such as the short story, narrative cycle, essay, anecdotal sketch, translation, and script. In the current paradigm of literary history, the school has been treated as a negative example vis-à-vis the May Fourth writers. But the formal and thematic ambiguity of these writings may best be said to reflect the psychological ambivalence of the Chinese public as they confronted the changes of their time. They embody a sentimental yearning for the affirmation of enduring truth and the “moral occult” beneath the spectacle of modern change. At their best, Butterfly fiction writers are observant historians of the quotidian materialism arising from the Chinese encounter with the modern.

By the mid-thirties, Chinese literature had experienced dynamic growth in multiple directions, in which different streams—literature of engagement and Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies writings, modernism and classicism, the discourse of “humor and laughter,” and the discourse of “tears and blood”—crisscrossed and interacted. This vitality was made possible only by the ironic fact of historical uncertainty, and was destined to dissipate once it encountered the brutal force of violence, such as the Second Sino-Japanese War and the subsequent Civil War. In view of what modern Chinese writers had already accomplished since the turn of the twentieth century, there is good reason to imagine a more diversified and creative literature had the wars not broken out. As it was, literature had now to subject itself to a different and, arguably, more tendentious and rigid set of conditions of “obsession with China.”

### **Revolution and involution**

Revolution is arguably the most powerful trope that affected the conception and production of Chinese literature throughout most of the twentieth century. The literary discourse of revolution can be traced back to 1899, when Liang Qichao became acquainted with Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), the founding father of modern China, in Japan. Both Liang and Sun were in exile at the time. Despite his allegiance to the reformist agenda, Liang was so impressed by Sun’s iconoclastic thoughts that he began to rethink his reformist stance. In the following five years, the term “revolution” appeared with increasing frequency in Liang’s writing, as evinced by his invocation of the “poetry revolution,” “prose revolution,” and particularly “fiction revolution” as discussed above.

The Chinese expression of revolution, *geming*, has its own etymological lineage, traceable as far back as the classic *The Book of Changes* (*Yijing*). In that context, revolution refers to change that takes place in accordance with both the Mandate of Heaven and the will of the people; more importantly, it indicates a cyclical program of time comparable to seasonal change. Liang Qichao and his peers drew their inspiration of revolution from the Japanese model, which implied not so much a total, violent breakup with the status quo as a progressive reform. Meanwhile, Liang was exposed to other revolutionary models, including at least the French, American, Hungarian, Italian, Russian, and British versions. But Liang did not jettison all at once the legacy of its Chinese equivalent, *geming*, particularly its deterministic, cyclical connotation.

Such a contested nature of “revolution,” as an ideology, a historical undertaking, and a cultural imaginary, in the Chinese context leaves a remarkable impact on the subsequent decades, from the May Fourth Literary Revolution to the Revolutionary Literature of the 1930s, and from Mao’s Yan’an Talks in 1942 to the Great Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. This revolutionary poetics manifests itself in a belief in the immediate link between literary rhetoric and national policy, in a Promethean symbolism of rebellion and sacrifice, and in an apocalyptic vision of national rejuvenation through revolution. At its most polemical, writing was transformed into political action, and became a vocation that regularly demanded as much blood as ink.

Nevertheless, instead of saying that revolution informed the state of Chinese literature, perhaps *involution* can better describe the circular paths that modern literature had taken. If revolution denotes an overcoming, by means of extreme measures, of that which is established, involution points to a tendency toward introversion, a movement that expands in such a way as to turn inward upon itself. Though often associated with a regressive action, in contrast with the extroverted direction of revolution, involution cannot be equated with reaction, since it does not seek to return to the point of origin, any more than revolution does; it differs from revolution only in that its trajectory is not perceived as pointing ahead, in an optimistically linear direction.

No sooner was Liang Qichao’s “new fiction” made public than it gave rise to counter-voices. Liang hardly finished his composition of *The Future of New China* when, instead, the campaign for “new fiction” underwent an “involutionary” turn. There arose fictional genres Liang would have least expected to see, from the courtesan novel to chivalric romance. Of the various genres, the exposé has left the deepest impression on readers. Aimed at revealing social abuses and indicting political corruption, the exposé is characterized by its topical urgency, vigorous cynicism, and the compulsive need to laugh at everything high and low. The self-proclaimed attitude of writers of satirical exposés may have echoed the tenor of “new fiction” and, to that extent, anticipated the moral bearing of the May Fourth writers. However, behind their intent to indict and chastise, ambiguous laughter can be heard, laughter that undermines serious intentions and earnest claims.

In 1917, Hu Shi (1891–1962) came up with the idea of “literary reform,” arguing that, in order to overhaul the outmoded circumstances of Chinese literature, one had to adopt vernacular Chinese as the vehicle of true creativity. This was nothing new, as there had long been a vernacular tradition in premodern literature, and what distinguishes Hu Shi’s provocation lies in his vision of the relation of the vernacular to a total literary and cultural renewal. The radical intellectual Chen Duxiu (1879–1942) took up where Hu Shi left off when he declared three principles of literary revolution in 1919: (1) overthrow the artificial literature of the artistic few in order to create a plain, simple literature of the people; (2) overthrow the ornamented literature of classicism in order to create a fresh

literature of realism; (3) overthrow the pedantic literature of the hermit in order to create the popular literature of society in general.

By the early thirties, the cause of “literary revolution” had taken a radical turn, becoming “revolutionary literature.” The avant-garde image of a writer is someone dedicated to both revolutionary action and revolutionary writing, a risky role given the massive governmental crackdown and censorship. For instance, Mao Dun (1896–1981) and Jiang Guangci (1900–1930), both leftist activists, turned to fiction writing after the fiasco of the First Chinese Communist Revolution in 1927. Whereas the former’s *Eclipse* (*Shi*) looks into the vacillation of disillusioned young urban leftists, the latter’s *Les Sansculottes* (*Duankudang*) commemorates those who dedicated themselves unconditionally to the noble cause. Ba Jin’s (1904–2005) *Family* (*Jia*), the bestseller of the thirties, addresses emphatically the anarchist vision of youth confronting the tradition, with an ending that marks the beginning of revolutionary action.

The late 1930s saw the founding of the League of Leftist Writers. Under its aegis, numerous publications came out, only to be banned by the Nationalist censors, while these short-lived publications had successfully created a new logic of writing and reading literature: literature was a worthy cause insofar as it could reproduce itself by reiterating the same revolutionary doctrine. More importantly, the League provided a forum by means of which the Party line could be debated and Party discipline reinforced. It is in this sense that the League can be said to have provided Mao Zedong and his cohort with the basic guidelines—ideological correctness, organizational discipline, pedagogical means—for using literature for revolutionary purposes in the forties.

During the Second-Sino Japanese War, the Communist base in Yan’an drew hundreds of politically enlightened writers and intellectuals to join the cause. In May 1942, Mao Zedong gave three talks at Yan’an. In the talks, he described culture workers’ mission as intertwining discipline and blessing, asceticism and aestheticism, self-denunciation and self-fulfillment, this-worldly travail and the coming utopia. Mao’s delivery was as pragmatic as it was spellbinding; it sounds surprisingly familiar if judged by conventional utilitarianism, and yet it exerts a fresh pressure on readers. Mao manages to arouse among his followers a kind of political craving comparable to poetic euphoria. His talks, nevertheless, would impose grave pressure on Chinese literati and bring incessant disasters to Chinese literature in the following decades.

By the end of the Yan’an era, one can already discern at least three themes arising from revolutionary literature: the dialectic of revolution and history, the fashioning of an enlightened, progressive subjectivity, and the projection of a utopian vision. The fact is, however, that 1949 marked the beginning of a rapid degradation of literature in both vitality and variety. What followed is a by now all-too-familiar sequence of purges and campaigns: the rectification movement, the “Blooming and Contending” movement, the “Anti-rightist” movement, and the Great Cultural Revolution. One still witnessed a large number of works in production, but most of them were carefully concocted in accordance with the Party line. Socialist realism and socialist romanticism were mandated as the guideline for all literary and artistic creations.

Numerous accounts have been written about these campaigns and their consequences. Yet one question remains to be asked. If censorship, incarceration, and death had never kept writers from churning out provocative works before 1949, what made the majority of writers so reticent and obedient after the revolution was accomplished? Beyond the obvious reason of Maoist hegemony, one pays attention to the involutory turn of the revolutionary poetics. If revolutionary literature is supposed to see to the arrival of an

apocalyptic moment that reveals the final truth of History, creative writing—for the late Qing, May Fourth, the wartime, and Mao eras—means a yearning for that imminent revelatory moment, or an act of anticipation. On the other hand, however, writing can also be an act of procrastination, since through anticipating the revolution it also implies the prolonged duration of the “present”—the moment of waiting for the desired revolution to come—which should have receded into the past. As a result, revolutionary writers may end up in a negative dialectic, that is, the more they write, the more they articulate the unavailability of the revolution at the moment of their writing, and their incapacity to reach the ideal state of revolution through writing.

This fact, however, does not mean that we should overlook the significance of literature during the Mao era. Instead, we try to engage its “negative dialectic” and ponder the agency of literature or the lack thereof. Take “revolutionary history fiction” for example. It seeks to valorize the power of revolution by chronicling the “prehistory” of the founding of the People’s Republic. It points to a well-orchestrated temporal scheme that advocates the inevitable triumph of the communist future over the past and the eternal return of justice. Millions of readers were moved by the ordeals the revolutionaries suffered in Yang Mo’s (1914–96) *Song of the Youth* (*Qingchun zhige*) and Yang Yiyuan (b. 1925) and Luo Guangbin’s (1924–67) *Red Rock* (*Hongyan*). The hidden irony is nevertheless that the readers were directed to embrace an involutory agenda, that is, these works really enacted the temporal logic of “back to the future.” Despite the accomplishment of the 1949 revolution, more enemies were supposed to be identified, and more revolutionary actions were in demand. Literature became a testimony to a communist Sisyphean task. Both novels were banned and their authors brutally persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, when history moved to the next stage and revolution demanded a renewed form of representation.

The socialist revolutionary poetics found the most poignant manifestation in the “model theater” during the Cultural Revolution. Masterminded by Madame Mao, Jiang Qing (1914–91), eight plays, in the forms of either Peking opera or ballet, were featured during the period. They were quickly disseminated in multiple genres from stage performance to cinema and narrative fiction. A mixture of resources of Beijing opera and western symphonic music, formulaic plot and stylized dramaturgy, the model plays all tell of the heroic engagements of the Party’s revolutionary history. They were produced to inculcate Chinese citizens with Chairman Mao’s agenda, in such a way as to blur the line between the theatrics of the stage and the practice of everyday life.

Coming to mind is Liang Qichao’s dream of a literature that infiltrates into every layer of public and private life at the turn of the modern century. In an uncanny way Mao pushed Liang Qichao’s theory to the extreme, turning it into a pedagogical, ideological, and behavioral mandate. At its most utopian, Maoist literature is said to be able to bridge the gap between the elite writers and the illiterate audience, the sublime visions and the quotidian existence, individual talents and dogmatic tradition, deplorable past and irresistible future. Writing and revolution, ink and blood, are mixed to produce a most powerful, and most devastating, literary agency.

### History after “History”

Chinese literature underwent a drastic transformation in the last quarter of the twentieth century. It is no exaggeration to say that during the New Era, between the death of Mao and the outbreak of the Tiananmen Incident, literature served as one of the most important venues where different thoughts, styles, and political forces were brought into play.

In 1978, the publication of a short story “Scar” (*Shanghen*) by Lu Xinhua (b. 1953) became a national event. The story depicts a family tragedy resulting from the decade of the Cultural Revolution. Though crude in style and plotting, it touches on a wide range of issues, such as political commitment versus familial ties, communal hysteria versus individual pain, and abused trust versus wasted youth, and moved millions of Chinese readers. It triggered a phenomenal trend to do soul-searching by writing about the atrocities of the revolution.

By invoking the physical scar as a testimonial of a bygone experience of misery, “Scar” lends itself to a reading grounded on the politics of body. The “scar” serves as an emblem through which the past can be remembered and the lost memory restored. But one must question, Is the scar a sign of rehabilitation, indicating the alleviation of the pain of the past? Or is it a reminder of injury, pointing to a past which, once lacerated, can no longer be fully healed? Does writing about scars let the author and reader face the past, or merely represent the “unrepresentability” of the past, which can be recovered only as a trace?

Perhaps with similar questions in mind, a group of young poets sought to decipher the typology of the scar in a different manner. Instead of a literature that evokes regrets and lamentations, they wrote poems which are obscure in imagery and experimental in language. To make sense of these poems, readers had to dislodge themselves from the socialist convention of exegesis. Echoing the poem written by Gu Cheng (1956–93) during the Cultural Revolution,

The dark nights gave me my dark eyes;  
I, however, use them to look for light,

the poets called for a rhetoric that defies socialist realist logic and mimetic representation. The result was the rise of the Misty Poetry movement, one that aimed to not only inscribe the “unrepresentable” trauma but also question the legitimacy of “Mao discourse”—the linguistic system that had dominated the thought and behavior of the People’s Republic.

It is against such a background that we come to the contemporary scene. Much has been discussed about the literature of the 1980s, when fiction, poetry, and theater commanded enormous attention in terms of both formal experimentation and conceptual interrogation. Whereas the “root-seeking” movement impelled writers to reexamine the “roots” of Chinese civilization and its discontent by looking “downward,” “inward,” and “backward,” the “avant-garde” movement called for a bold break with anything established. The two movements interplayed with each other, giving rise to the golden moment of post-Mao literature. Writing at a time when “History” has collapsed and “Revolution” has lost its legitimacy, writers cannot take up the two subjects without pondering their inherent intelligibility. Thus Ge Fei’s (b. 1964) “Misty Boat” (*Mizhou*, 1987) envisions revolution as a labyrinthine game of desires, whims, and mishaps that ends up nowhere; Mo Yan’s *Red Sorghum Family* (*Honggaoliang jiazu*, 1986) depicts revolutionary history as a regressive rather than progressive sequence of national and family memory; Yu Hua’s “1986” (1986) simply likens the consequence of revolution to a gory theater of corporal mutilation and insanity. Whereas peasants had once been hailed as the foundation of the new Republic, Gao Xiaosheng (1928–99) tells us in his *Chen Huansheng* series that the peasants are as sly and self-interested as they are persevering and vulnerable. Su Tong (b. 1962) further depicts in “The Exile of 1934” (*Yijiu sansi nian de taowang*, 1986) peasants eternally condemned to the fate of decay and diaspora.

This is an era of post-history, an era in which “history,” be it as an ideology, an episteme, an institution, or a narrative form, is thrown into question. My definition of “post-history” is derived from, but not confined to, the following threads. Aesthetically, it refers to A.C. Danto’s observation of modern arts since the 1960s in terms of the decomposition of realist formulas and dissipation of “aura.” Ideologically, it has to do with Francis Fukuyama’s announcement of the end of (the Hegelian brand of) History in the aftermath of the meltdown of the East European communist bloc in the late eighties, followed by leftist critics’ rebuttal that, instead of demise, History is in effect about to be born again. And intellectually, it concerns Jacques Derrida’s proposal that “hauntology” arises where the ontological versions of history are coming to an end.

In the context of Chinese literary criticism, “post-history” finds its subtle manifestation in campaigns such as Liu Zaifu and Li Zehou’s “farewell to revolution” and Chen Sihe and Wang Xiaoming’s call to “rewrite literary history” in the late eighties. Although what is at stake here is nothing but “literary” history, these campaigns prompt one to consider that at a time when revolution has lost its legitimacy, revolutionary history cannot but betray its metaphorical nature. If so, to bid farewell to revolution and to rewrite literary history must point to a subversive interplay with Maoist ontology. After all, by mortgaging the socialist utopia in the “future perfect” mode, Maoist history is by nature a post-history since it proposes a definitive version of the past while preemptively consuming the desired future, thus emptying out the lived experience between past and future.

As argued above, literature rather than political discourse or historiography serves as a more persuasive testimony to the arrival of post-history in China. Yu Hua’s short story “Life is Like Smoke” (*Shishi ruyan*, 1987) is a case in point. By comparing things in life to smoke, the story captures the “structure of feeling” of the post-Cultural Revolution era. Gone is both the sublime figure that had once permeated China as well as all sensory data that informs the intelligibility of everyday life. No sooner was trauma invoked than it was dissolved by irony. Amid the ruins of memory roam phantoms of nihilism. With the smoke-like infiltration of memories into everyday life, haunting becomes the affective and ideological trope of Mao’s legacy.

The outburst of the Tiananmen Incident brought the New Era to a sudden halt. To date, the Incident still remains a forbidden subject in literature. The last decade of the twentieth century saw China’s turn toward the direction of marketization, the rapid growth of the media industry as well as Internet culture, and most importantly, the dissipation of the “aura” of literature that had permeated the Chinese imaginary in the preceding decades. More than 20 years after the movements that shook “Maoist discourse” and unleashed waves of creative energy, questions can be asked: How have the writers of the New Era come along in the aftermath of market economy and media explosion throughout the end of the last century? What concerns them now with regard to their creative capacity as well as social agency? More importantly, how do they come to terms with the “obsession with China” that once dominated the conception, production, and consumption of literature?

Thus we see the following phenomena. First, Chinese writers make *familiarization of the uncanny* a new politics of depicting the real. Precisely because reality is too bizarre and repressed, writers’ greatest challenge lies in how to make it more plausible rather than more bizarre. If, according to the Freudian model, the uncanny means something familiar and long-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression, there is an additional dimension to the Chinese uncanny. The horrors and unpredictabilities of ordinary life are legitimated in the

first place; the temptation to see and depict the extraordinary nature of these “everyday” events is repressed again as they call for expression.

Second, contemporary Chinese literature is marked by a “lyrical” approach to history. Modern Chinese had been motivated by the twin goals of revolution and enlightenment since Liang Qichao’s time, and preoccupied by epic themes from nation building to revolutionary commitment. Writing at a time when the master narrative of history is already fragmented, Chinese writers seek to approximate rather than authenticate historical meaning though personal, figurative invocation; they transform the epic evocation into its lyrical other.

The third phenomenon can be described as a defiant laughter in protest against the emotional posture known as “obsession with China.” As the title of Wang Shuo’s (b. 1958) novel *Playing for Thrills* (*Wande jiushi xintiao*, 1989; Wang 1998a) suggests, writing has become a facetious gesture that titillates rather than teaches, flirts rather than indicts. Instead of “obsession with China,” welcome to an age of “flirtation with China.”

Finally, Chinese literature since the late eighties has seen writers’ forays into a world of disreputable romance and sophistication. Writers reveal aspects of modern Chinese people rarely touched on by their predecessors: their insatiable curiosity to probe the labyrinth of desire, their indulgence in the aesthetic as well as erotic spectacles of the decadent, and their posture of nonchalance. Coming to mind are works such as Jia Pingwa’s (b. 1952) erotic exposé *Abandoned Capital* (*Fei du*, 1993) and Wang Anyi’s (b. 1954) nostalgic account of amorous adventures in Shanghai from the forties to the eighties, *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (*Changheng*, 1996).

These phenomena pointed to an intriguing sign at the turn of the new millennium. Although Chinese writers and intellectuals suffered a grave setback after the Tiananmen Incident, they were compelled to think hard about and reflect on both the politics and aesthetics of modern literature anew. If modern literature up to 1989 has demonstrated a pendulum effect of aestheticizing politics versus politicizing aesthetics—from the sublime to the ironic; from a surplus of meaning to a hollowing out of meaning—writers of the fin-de-siècle appeared ready to open up the dialectic between aesthetics and politics, paying more attention to the *ethics* of viewing and writing reality and history. This “ethics” does not refer to moral schemata in the traditional sense any more than it is an archaeological inquiry into the terms with which human relationships in the socialist regime are lived out and therefore become meaningful. Gone was the inquisitive but nihilist syndrome of post-history that had once prevailed in the New Era. One can talk about the rise of a new historical consciousness: history after post-history.

This renewed historical awareness is demonstrated by writers who are not afraid of looking into the tangled relationships between ideological imperatives, empirical contingencies, and narrative representations in the memory machine of Communist China. They pay attention to the phantasmal nature of literature, seeing it as a force propelling the dialectic of time and memory in Red Legacy. And they are prone to imagine the “future of new China” with a utopian or dystopian vigor reminiscent of late Qing science fantasy. Most important, where governmental organs and intellectuals are still manufacturing one new discourse after another, writers, in a manner more (self-) reflective than ever before, are chronicling the treacherous terms in which history can be denounced as fiction while fiction can be sublimated into history.

I argue that compared with Chinese scholars, contemporary Chinese writers are more sensitive in teasing out the complex traces underneath historical dynamics, and more daring in describing the unnamable “Real” embedded in sociopolitical reality. For

instance, for those who are critical of the liberal marketization of contemporary China, Yu Hua's *Brothers* (*Xiongdi*, 2006) comes across as the darkest exposé of the post-Socialist "Vanity Fair"; for those who question leftist communal solidarity, the same novel reads like a chilling indictment of revolutionary "bad faith." In view of the emergent Neo-Leftist trend to justify the cause and effect of the Cultural Revolution, novels such as Yan Lianke's (b. 1956) *As Hard as Water* (*Jianying rushui*, 2000) teach us why one should think twice before hurrying to rehabilitate Maoist "politics." At a time when the rural economy demands more and more attention, Nobel laureate Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* (*Shengsi pilao*, 2007) provides a poignant observation that can hardly be emulated by scholars' lip service.

Still, literature is more than a replica of reality; it encourages imagination and helps open up multiple representational strategies. Thus, where euphonic tunes are being played by the State, cacophony resounds in the world of Jia Pingwa's *Qin Tune* (*Qinqiang*, 2005) and Lin Bai's (b. 1958) *Women's Idle Talk* (*Funü xianliaolu*, 2008). Beyond the tiring calls for nationalism and sovereignty, scientific fantasies such as Liu Cixin's (b. 1963) *Chronicles of the Earth* (*Diqiu wangshi*, 2008–11) trilogy brings us to ponder the dynamics in outer space and their scientific and ethical implications. And speaking of "the future of new China," can any scholarly projection sound more compelling or controversial than Chan Koon-chung's (b. 1952) *Fat Years* (*Shengshi*, 2010) or Han Song's *2066: Red Star over America* (2066: *Xixing manji*, 2000)?

### Toward Sinophone spheres

We have so far discussed literary undertakings that happened on the Chinese mainland since the end of the nineteenth century. In view of the fact that Chinese literary modernity took place as China was pushed to the global arena, we cannot overlook the impacts from non-Chinese sources. Foreign literature exerted an enormous impact on Chinese writers as early as the turn of the twentieth century. Liang Qichao's "new fiction" was inspired by the Japanese political novel which was in turn influenced by its European counterpart. Whereas Lu Xun derived his notion of literary rejuvenation from East European models, Xu Zhimo, the leading romantic poet of early modern China, owed his poetic imaginary to Anglo-American romanticism and modernism. Whereas Charles Dickens and Joseph Conrad left imprints on Lao She's writings, Soviet writers from Konstantin Mayakovski to Nikolai Ostrovski inspired their Chinese admirers from Qu Qiubai to Liu Binyan. When Communist China opened her doors to the world, writers and readers fervently embraced models from Kafka to Hemingway, from Gabriel García Márquez to Haruki Murakami.

Modern Chinese literature has to be understood as a configuration of transcultural and translingual trajectories, a subject in need of a treatment on its own terms. At stake is an equally important subject, about overseas Chinese literary articulations. As argued above, a considerable number of Chinese writers came to literary awakening thanks to their foreign experience, through either imaginary encounter via reading translated works or actual adventure overseas. Their "obsession with China" was always already imbued with their fantasies of, as well as anxieties about, the terrains outside China. But there are more complex cases. Lin Yutang (1895–1976), for example, spent an extended period of time overseas. His experience as a long-term expatriate sojourner as well as his bilingual training enabled him to inscribe Chinese experience in a continuously shifting perspective. Another case is Eileen Chang, who was welcome in wartime Shanghai for her sarcastic, decadent portraits of life. After 1949, Chang fled to Hong Kong, and then

emigrated to the United States, where she tried to reorient her career by writing in English. So is the case of Gao Xingjian (b. 1940), the Nobel Laureate of 2000, who wrote in both Chinese and French after he self-exiled to France in the late 1980s.

Even more polemical is what has been described as “Sinophone literature” in recent years: Chinese language literature produced in the regions of the greater China, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese communities in countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, as well as by Chinese speaking subjects in diaspora. In contrast to the term “overseas Chinese literature,” which connotes a geopolitically peripheral position with regard to literature centered on the Chinese mainland, Sinophone literature refers to a heterogeneous body of articulations related, but not necessarily subjected, to the dominant discourse of China. The Han language, the predominant language of the Chinese people, serves as the common denominator of Sinophone literature. Nevertheless, one recognizes the fact that this language comprises numerous dialectical articulations, and constitutes only one branch of the Sinitic language family.

Literature from Taiwan occupies a particularly contested position in Sinophone literature. Two hundred miles southeast of mainland China and sparsely populated before the sixteenth century, the island had traditionally been regarded as on the margin of the margins of Chinese politics and humanities. It would nevertheless serve as an unlikely pathway through which China entered a succession of global modernities. In 1895 Taiwan was ceded to Japan, as a result of a Chinese defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War. The cession of Taiwan generated an enormous furor among intellectuals, igniting a cluster of reforms, including literary renovation. Over the next five decades, Taiwan became Japan’s most treasured colony and a testing ground for Japanese cultural and political assimilation. In 1945, at the end of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Taiwan was returned to China; but then, reverting to its traditional role, Taiwan became the refuge of the Nationalist government after the Chinese Communists took over the mainland in 1949.

Thanks to these experiences, modern Taiwan literature is rich in conflicting legacies, impulses, and ideological forces. Taiwan literature was first forced into its “modern” existence at the turn of the twentieth century, when Japan initiated its colonial regime. The next five decades were to see, in both writing and reading, strenuous conflict and compromise between colonial discourse and indigenous consciousness; between modern viewpoints achieved via Japanese mediation and revolutionary thoughts brought back from China; between fascination with the novelty of a colonizer’s culture and loyalty to Chinese tradition. Taiwan was both the “Island of Beauty,” or *Formosa*, as early foreign explorers saw it, and the “Orphan of Asia,” as viewed by Wu Zhuoliu (1900–1976), the pioneer of post-1945 Taiwan literature.

For all the ideological antagonism between the two regimes, there are striking similarities between Nationalist and Communist ways of administering literary activities in the 1950s. The Nationalist Party, after all, was structured on the Soviet model, its literary policy schooled by the same Leninist concepts that inspired the Chinese Communists. Learning from the painful experiences of the past, the Nationalist government tried hard after its retreat to Taiwan to enhance the pedagogical and military function of literature. The most extreme measure was the total ban on Chinese literature written between 1919 and 1949. But the Nationalist regime after all had never been as apt as its Communist counterpart at policing popular imagination and literary activities; it had neither the technology nor the determination to totally eliminate creative activities. Thanks to this new Nationalist “failure,” limited though it was, a different kind of literature took root in 1950s Taiwan.

In 1956, when People's Republic of China (PRC) writers enjoyed Mao's false promise of literary freedom under the slogan of "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom," the Modernist Poetry Society was founded by Ji Xian (1913–2013), an avant-garde poet who had first emerged in Shanghai in the 1940s. This represented a revival of the modernist movement that had once thrived throughout China in the 1930s. Modernism would find many followers on the island in the next decade. Western masters, including Kafka, Joyce, Sartre, and Camus were all introduced to young, enthusiastic Taiwan writers and readers. It provided a channel for experimental and nonconformist voices when official literature was still in the high-strung language of anti-Communism. Thus, in *People of Taipei* (*Taipei ren*, 1970), Bai Xianyong (b. 1937) combines western psychoanalytical insights and classical Chinese symbolism, rendering a series of touching portraits of mainland émigrés who find themselves trapped in Taiwan. In Wang Wenxing's (b. 1939) short stories, history is dissolved into fragmentary pieces of fantasies and eccentricities, while the view of reality is ever more estranged and desolate.

Critics from both the left and the right have denigrated the modernist literature of 1960s Taiwan as a pale mimicry of trendy foreign styles, and a selfish indulgence in thought ranging from nihilism to existentialism. Looking back, these charges very well summarize the merits of the movement. Remarkable in a time of stifling political oppression and ideological fanaticism, the modernist movement in Taiwan should be hailed as an unexpected achievement, particularly because it filled the void in PRC literature resulting from incessant political turmoil and the suppression of much of the inheritance of mainland modernism.

No survey of the Taiwan modernist movement is complete without looking into its counterpart, the nativist movement. Ever since its retreat in 1949, the Nationalist government had made it a policy to promote literature for "fighting the Communists and recovering the homeland." The government's continued invocation of a native land located on the other side of the Straits even gave rise to a genre, *huaixiang wenxue*, or nostalgic literature. But as time passed and the hope of recovering the lost land became ever dimmer, the image of a "new" homeland—Taiwan—surfaced and commanded more and more attention. The result was a sudden blossoming of Taiwanese native writers in the late 1960s. Writers such as Huang Chunming (b. 1939) and Wang Zhenhe (1940–90) fascinated readers with portraits of local color and provincial figures. In the 1970s, nativism took on an ideological dimension when it was hailed as the remedy to the "morbid" trend of modernism and a signal to the emergent political dissident movement.

The death of Chiang Kai-shek in 1975 triggered a cluster of cultural and political shakeups, starting with the highly politicized debate between nativism and modernism and culminating in the United States' recognition of mainland China in 1979, and the governmental crackdown on the mass demonstrations for independence in the same year. Faced with the rise of the indigenous movement on the island and the reentry of China into the arena of world politics, Taiwan writers had to renegotiate their position by answering certain questions: How could they address their Chinese experience when the other China had emerged to reclaim its cultural and literary authenticity?

But Taiwan literature prevailed not merely because it played out the politics of ideologies. It was equally provocative in exploring a wide range of issues in the personal sphere. Li Ang's *The Butcher's Wife* (*Shafu*, 1983) scandalized the island with a hard-core revelation of sexual violence within wedlock and its horrific results of madness and murder, and Bai Xiangyong's *Crystal Boys* (*Niezi*, 1984), was the first full-length modern Chinese gay novel, starting a trend toward homoerotic subjects in the next decade.

Writers at the turn of the new millennium have impressed with a wide spectrum of works, from parading “textual” transvestitism to imagining nuclear apocalypse, from engaging the postmodernist exercise of metafiction to rethinking diaspora at a global rather than national scale.

Despite its colonial status, Hong Kong has served as an unlikely base for Chinese literary production. Ever since the early fifties, Hong Kong has provided shelter for émigré writers, dissident critics, and exiled scholars, whose voices would otherwise have been muffled by either the Nationalist or the Communist regime. Hong Kong must be credited for its role in mediating cultural politics and cultural consumerism. The polyphonic nature of Hong Kong is also reflected by its capacity to beget both avant-garde and popular literature.

The historical and literary configuration of Hong Kong is closely related to its amorphous status as *city*. Thanks to, and in spite of, historical contingencies over the past century, Hong Kong has become a unique urban space where forces of politics and commerce, colonialism and nationalism, and modernity and historicity have been brought into play. Amid ever-changing political, economic, and cultural factors, what has remained unchanged in Hong Kong is, paradoxically, its “changeability.” Be it called island, ex-colony, or special administrative region, Hong Kong must first be appreciated as a city of its own kind—a metropolis that continually renegotiates its functionality and nationality. Writers from Liu Yichang (b. 1918) to Yesi (1949–2013), from Xixi (b. 1938) to Dong Qizhang (b. 1967), have inscribed Hong Kong in terms of multiple perspectives and styles, truly demonstrating the kaleidoscopic nature of the city.

In 1955, a 31-year-old journalist-cum-writer, Jin Yong (b. 1924), started newspaper serialization of *A Romance of the Pen and the Sword* (*Shujian enchou lu*). A mixture of chivalric fantasy and historical saga, enchanting romance and adventurer escapade, the novel immediately captivated Hong Kong readers’ hearts. In the next 15 years, Jin Yong would produce 16 other novels, all best-sellers, first in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities, and then—since the 1980s—in mainland China. While elite critics may have reservations about his popularity, the fact that Jin Yong was allegedly the most widely read author across all Chinese communities in the second half of the twentieth century bespeaks his literary talent and managerial ability at promoting his reputation. Mid-century Chinese literature was permeated with sound and fury, but few works, perhaps even fewer writers’ names, are still remembered by readers five decades later. After all the furor about the incredible power of “serious literature” over the Chinese people, it is Jin Yong, an author from the margins of China and a practitioner of an unlikely genre, who has the last laugh.

Finally, we come to Sinophone literature in Southeast Asia. More than 30 million people of Chinese descent live in the area, demonstrating a variety and vitality of Sinophone cultures that can hardly be homogenized by the conventional paradigm of “overseas Chinese heritage.” Particularly in Malaysia, a nation in which Chinese descendants constitute at least 25 percent of the total population, Sinophone language and writing have long represented Chinese ethnic solidarity. Malaysian Chinese-language authors have long had to negotiate between a Chinese identification—fostered by language and the inevitably powerful influence of the Chinese literary tradition—and a sense of belonging to their local environment of Malaysia. From linguistic sovereignty to enunciative subjectivity, from nativist allegiance to diasporic imaginary, Sinophone Malaysian writers have again and again proven the alternative modernity of Chinese literature outside the geopolitical boundaries of China.

We call attention to the transformative power of multiculturalism and multilingualism by placing Sinophone cultures at the crossroads of multiple regions in Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia and Singapore, as well as by examining the place-based cultural and social practices of Sinitic-language communities in their historical contexts beyond “China proper.” For instance, Jin Zhimang (1912–98), a Chinese leftist writer who spent three decades in Malaya and ended up becoming a powerful chronicler of the communist activities in mid-twentieth-century communist engagements on the Malay Peninsula. Both Li Yongping (b. 1947) and Huang Jinshu (b. 1967) immigrated to Taiwan, but whereas Li treats China as his dreamland, Huang makes Malaysia the site of both his trauma and desire. Li Zishu (b. 1971) depicts a gendered version of diasporic adventure, and Li Tianbao (b. 1969) inscribes everyday life in recourse to an imaginary nostalgia about Sinophone popular culture.

The twentieth century saw China constantly shifting among political, historical, and literary entities, each reciting its own self-narrative and pursuing its own idea of (post) modernity. Thanks to this historical fact of fragmentation and dispersal, writers have been made to interpret the Chinese experience in ways that were difficult to marshal into a stifling unity. Today, critics have been enabled to read modern Chinese literature and history with a multiplicity of global tools and theories. Yet is it not a paradox that critics can subscribe to a “politics of marginality” and a “polemics of intervention,” or seek “global contextualization” with “local articulation,” while rigidly marginalizing all forms of Chinese modernity (and historicity) that did not emerge within some preconceived mainstream, and resolutely refusing to articulate the local contexts of modern Chinese creativity? In this sense, the familiar exhortation “always historicize!” can at best be understood as one of self-parody, saying “always historicize as we Europeans (or Americans) do!” If one of the most important lessons one can learn from modern Chinese literature and history is the tortuous nature of Chinese writers’ attempt to grapple with polymorphous reality, then this knowledge can be appreciated in full only by a criticism equally exempt from formulaic dogma and ideological blindness. One has to genuinely believe that Chinese writers have been and still are capable of complex and creative thought even at moments of political suppression and personal humility. I argue that any critical endeavor in the name of “modernity” must look unafraid at this historical reality, which seems to be that of *contested modernities*.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY

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# The Environmental History of China: Past, Present, and Future

PETER C. PERDUE

### Introduction

The field of Chinese environmental history began in the 1990s, but has grown rapidly. *Sediments of Time*, the conference volume published by Mark Elvin and Liu Ts'ui-jung, defined the field and introduced the work of many scholars on this topic (Elvin and Liu 1995). In the 2000s, Mark Elvin's *Retreat of the Elephants* and Robert Marks's textbook *China* gave synthetic overviews and translated an abundance of fascinating primary sources (Elvin 2004; Marks 2012).

Now, in China as well, quite a few scholars have begun to use the terms “environmental history” (*huanjingshi*) or “ecological history” (*shengtaishi*), including those at the Center for Ecological History at People's University in Beijing and the Institute of Historical Geography at Fudan University in Shanghai.

The growing environmental crisis in China today has certainly stimulated interest in the field. American historians, however, particularly historians of the Western United States, still dominate the field of environmental history as a whole. In this sense, the recent arrival of environmental history of China may appear to be a derivative discourse, following themes first broached by scholars of Europe and America.

Chinese environmental history, however, has deeper origins. Historians of modern China often recognized the importance of disasters, water flows, and agrarian production, even if they did not explicitly call themselves environmental historians. They derived their perspectives from older traditions of agrarian history and the study of imperial expansion.

Speaking personally, my own book *Exhausting the Earth* drew on the work of Fernand Braudel and the Annales school and on the frontier studies represented by Owen Lattimore and Joseph Fletcher (Lattimore 1962). Keith Schoppa's book on Xiang lake also took a *longue durée* perspective (Schoppa 2002). Schoppa brilliantly wove together the writings of literati and officials who tried to save the lake from destruction by

commercial and political interests, and he also connected the fate of the lake with the larger fate of the Chinese nation. These two long-term regional studies relied on rich information found in Chinese local gazetteers.

Environmental history, like economic history of China, has addressed questions derived from contemporary debates (see von Glahn's chapter in this volume). But it does not have a single unifying paradigm. Its authors do not follow a single theoretical model, and they do not depend as heavily on European theoretical perspectives. Yet the field itself has its own dynamic, derived both from scholarly traditions in classical China and from the interactions of perceptive western historians with China in the early twentieth century. In sum, the explicit birth of Chinese environmental history occurred in the 1990s, but it has a much longer gestation period.

### Classical writers on the environment

Classical Chinese writers have long paid serious attention to the processes of the natural world. They recognized that humans created civilization by transforming animals, plants, minerals, and by shaping the natural forces of wind, water, and soil. The survival of states and societies depended on close attention to the weather and harvest. Even in the earliest Chinese texts, the oracle bone inscriptions from around 1000 BCE, one of the most significant questions asked by the diviners was "Will it rain?" The size of the harvest significantly determined the answer to the kings' second most favorite question: Will I succeed in my military expedition?

Ancient writings on nature encompassed philosophy, art, culture, and strategy. Mencius knew that no ruler would listen to his lectures on morality unless he also offered practical strategic advice. His argument for benevolent rule depended on convincing the warring kings that it was in their interest to feed their subjects. Large populations depended on abundant agricultural production, which in turn required lower taxes and attention to the farmer's welfare. Mencius also invoked the regenerative powers of nature to make a moral argument: even if men appeared to be selfish, like a denuded landscape, they could restore their natural moral instincts under proper conditions of cultivation.

Besides moral philosophers like Mencius, Daoists and Buddhists, of course, frequently linked Man, Nature, and the cosmos. The audacious philosopher Zhuangzi invoked the incomprehensibly vast powers of the natural world to demonstrate the insignificance of human concerns, but he praised sages who knew how to master nature by simply following it:

The Great Clod belches out breath and its name is wind. ... In the mountain forests that lash and sway, there are huge trees a hundred spans around with hollows and openings like noses, like mouths, like ears, like jugs, like cups, like mortars, like rifts, like ruts. They roar like waves, whistle like arrows, screech, gasp, cry, wail, moan, and howl. ... Have you never seen the tossing and trembling that goes on? (Chuang Tzu 1968, 31–32)

The Han dynasty writer Jia Yi (200—168 BCE), in despair after being exiled to the distant region of Hunan, heard consoling words from an owl:

[The owl spoke]:  
All things of this world move in change  
with never a moment's pause or rest;

They flow past swirling and away,  
 sometimes forge forward in and return,  
 form and force in endless revolutions,  
 moving through change as if shedding husks.

...

The average man is filled with misgivings  
 his loves and hates collect in millions.  
 The Genuine Man is indifferent and calm  
 is alone in reposing with the Way. (Owen 1996, 110–113)

While Mencius invoked natural processes to justify moral education, Jia Yi and Zhuangzi outlined a Stoicist philosophy based on understanding natural forces. Contemporary philosophers like John Gray advocate a similar post-humanist perspective (Owen 1996; Gray 2002). Ancient Chinese writers, generally speaking, had a more developed sense of the interrelationships of state security, social order, human moral behavior, and natural conditions than their counterparts in ancient Greece and Rome.

Yet the Chinese not only evoked visions of harmony between humans and nature; they also destroyed nature at an astonishing rate. Farmers had deforested almost all of the North China plain by 100 BCE. They pushed settlement frontiers inexorably southward and westward until by 1800 CE they had covered nearly all of contemporary interior China's cultivable area. The contrast between lofty visions of harmony and destructive practice underlies the melancholic tone of nearly all surveys of Chinese environmental history.

Confucian scholar-officials encouraged more intensive agrarian and commercial production. Like John Locke, they believed that only productive labor of a certain kind created property rights. The Confucians regarded pastoralists, swidden cultivators, lake and river fishermen, or forest peoples as indolent, since they failed to "exhaust the earth" (*jindili*). Only a few expressed reservations about the ultimate impact of this Malthusian juggernaut. On the other hand, because of the great concern of state officials with agriculture, forestry, and mining, we have abundant evidence of the loss of natural resources and unavailing efforts to preserve them. Environmental historians have by no means exhausted this massive documentary record.

This quick sketch indicates that some classical writers were proto-environmentalists. Some of them promoted radical transformation of the landscape through the manipulation of water and land. Others invoked ideals of harmony in order to preserve small pieces for aesthetic enjoyment. Each of them understood the fundamental importance of "transformation" (*hua*): changes in nature driven both by human action and by processes beyond human control.

Officials also had to study the impact of human activity on nature for practical reasons. "Water conservancy" (*shuili*), or the control of rivers, lakes, and coastlines, has a long history, going back to the legend of Yu, the great sage who constructed a large water control system in the Sichuan basin (Lewis 2006). Ever since his time, writers on water conservancy debated the value of *laissez-faire*, or Daoist approaches, letting rivers follow their natural course, compared to Legalist approaches directing major rivers to protect human settlements.

Officials also needed to understand nature to carry out famine relief. Since the harvest depended crucially on water, weather, and soil, effective famine relief required not only immediate provisioning for hungry people, but advance planning and restoration of

productivity after the crisis. Modern environmental histories have used this rich material to evaluate the successes and limitations of relief policies of imperial states (Will 1990).

### Modern reflections

In the modern era, the remarkable expansion of states across the continent inspired reflection on the ecological consequences of frontier settlement in China and the United States. Owen Lattimore forged a remarkable link between the two worlds. After traveling from Pennsylvania to the Chinese northwest he discovered frontier dynamics that inverted F.J. Turner's thesis: instead of the frontier forming humans, he said, humans created the frontier (Lattimore 1962).

The Marxist Sinologist Karl Wittfogel also investigated natural structures underlying the formation of imperial Chinese states. Wittfogel, in his pioneering work on the Liao dynasty done in collaboration with Feng Jiasheng, described in great detail the adaptations of a nomadic regime centered in Manchuria to the demands of ruling both Han settlers and pastoralists. In his German book on Chinese agriculture, *Economy and Society in China*, he examined multiple factors shaping the evolution of the Chinese agrarian system, especially the small scale of farming which led to "garden agriculture," the predominance of human over animal labor, and the heavy dependence on water conservancy. Both books still stand as classic studies of their subjects (Wittfogel and Feng 1949; Wittfogel 1931).

Ji Chaoding (1903–63), the Chinese counterpart of Wittfogel and Lattimore, wrote the first classic economic geography of China (Chi 1936). His book showed how river systems determined the major macroregions of China, anticipating the physiographic macroregions of G. William Skinner. Owen Lattimore delivered a eulogy for Ji at his death.

In the 1930s, Gu Jiegang and others, writing in the geographical journal *Yugong*, espoused "territorial nationalism," which asserted that geographical factors created imperial and nationalist China's boundaries (Dabringhaus 2006). These writers used historical geography to support national unification. They endorsed aggressive Han settlement of the borders by the Qing and Republican states, but neglected the views of non-Han people.

The Communist Party in 1949 introduced a radical transformative vision, based on the Stalinist ideology of universal historical stages and the determination to create a wealthy and powerful state. They launched a "War on Nature," which aimed to wring greater surpluses out of China's resistant landscape (Shapiro 2001). Historians, however, wrote about peasant rebellions and resistance to imperialism without taking account of ecological and regional causes.

One historian, however, stands out for his effort to link imperial practice with contemporary affairs. Deng Tuo (aka Deng Yunte) (1912–66), a Communist Party member since his youth, published in 1937 a study of famine relief since ancient times (Deng 1970). The book, completed while he was in jail, implicitly criticized the Nationalist regime for its failure to conduct adequate relief. It recognized the role of imperial states in mobilizing grain supplies to relieve the people.

Later Deng, as a high-ranking cadre under the Maoist regime, put forward heterodox opinions about Mao's responsibility for the famine following the Great Leap Forward. Under attack from Jiang Qing and her allies, he committed suicide in 1966. Like Wu Han, the Ming historian who became the primary target of the Cultural Revolution, Deng Tuo carried out research that provided him with an independent judgment on the

Maoist regime. The book on famine relief gave him a benchmark for exposing disastrous failures of the Maoist program of economic development. The bold journalist Yang Jisheng, who has researched the post-leap famine in massive detail in his book *Tombstone*, follows the path blazed by Deng Tuo (Yang 2012b).

### The basic story

Turning from the pioneers to recent research, this section surveys the main themes of modern Chinese environmental history. To begin at the beginning: about 50 million years ago the South Asian tectonic plate smashed into the Eurasian plate, creating the Himalayan mountains and the Tibetan plateau. This recent geological event fundamentally shaped the environment of Asia. Moisture dropped by westerly winds blowing across the Indian Ocean and hitting the mountains produces heavy monsoon rains from June through September. Likewise, winds from Southeast Asia blowing into the Chinese mountains produce the East Asian monsoon. Cold winds from Siberia pick up and deposit grains of desert soil from Mongolia across north and northwest China, building the deep loess deposits of the North China plain. Arid north and northwest China receive heavy rains only in one or two months of the summer, but the spongelike texture of the loess soil holds the moisture in the ground. In addition, snowfall on the Tibetan plateau provides the water for the Brahmaputra, the Mekong, the Salween, the Yangzi, and the Yellow rivers. China's agricultural production depends fundamentally on the water supply of the Yellow and Yangzi. Nearly all of these rivers originate in a small region in the high plateau known as China's "water tower" (*shuita*). Today, China heavily exploits them for hydropower, inflicting severe ecological consequences on all the countries downstream.

Agriculture originated in China nearly 8,000 years ago, about 1,000 years after Mesopotamia, in two forms: the dry field agriculture of the north, and the wet rice cultivation of the south. In the north, where the Yellow River descends from the hills of the northwest into the plains of the east, the first farming settlements appeared up to 7,500 years ago. These large villages included small houses with plastered floors, storage pits, pottery and agricultural tools. The farmers planted sturdy, drought-resistant millet crops, and they domesticated pigs, chickens, and water buffaloes. In South China, rice agriculture developed in the central Yangzi basin (modern Hubei province) and at the Yangzi's mouth, near modern Hangzhou. Shallow ponds along the river banks allowed hunter-gatherers to transplant wild rice varieties and cultivate them intensively. As early as 8,000 years ago, these settlements also included domesticated animals, agricultural tools, and wooden houses raised on pillars above the flood waters.

Beginning around 6,800 years ago, 1,000 settlements of the distinctive Yangshao farming and ceramic culture spread across North China. At the same time, wet rice cultivation spread throughout the Yangzi and Huai river basins in the south. These two distinct agrarian cultivation systems supported the densely populated Chinese core for many millennia. Both of them allowed farmers to cultivate the same soils intensively year after year, while using small amounts of fallow fields, allowing less space for livestock.

During the next three millennia, from around 5000 BCE to 2000 BCE, the settlements expanded in both regions, creating what archaeologists call a Chinese "interaction sphere." But there was as yet no Chinese state, and the overall environmental effect of settlement was small. The introduction of bronze technology, however, made possible much more radical transformation, the emergence of walled cities, and China's first

attested dynasty, the Shang. (Many Chinese archaeologists believe in the existence of a Xia dynasty lasting from 2400 to 1200 BCE, but aside from very late, probably mythical textual evidence, there is no material proof of its existence.) During the Shang period, from around 1500 BCE to 1000 BCE, many walled city-states arose, containing tens of thousands of inhabitants, specializing in warfare and ritual activities, including animal and human sacrifice. Large-scale foundries based on forced labor were near the modern city of Luoyang in the north and in the south in Jiangxi. The huge amount of bronze casting for vessels, chariots, weapons, and ritual objects clearly accelerated deforestation, and required extensive mining of copper and tin, and their transport over long distances. As mentioned above, the first written documents, dated to 1200 BCE, focused on forecasting natural events. The elites could feed on game animals, fish, turtles, and exotic meats, while the ordinary people mainly had nothing much beyond a millet or rice porridge with a few seasonings and vegetables. On the borders of the Shang interaction sphere lived other peoples beyond the reach of stable agriculture. They were sheep herders and forest and fishing peoples, whom the Shang often enslaved as war captives.

The Shang states shaped the environment by separating sharply the city and the countryside, building large walls, forcing rural laborers to work for the kings, demanding huge supplies of timber and minerals. The elites consumed thousands of cattle, and bred sheep, horses, pigs, and water buffalo. Deforestation accelerated, but there were still many trees left. “Culture,” in Chinese terms, meant the realm of the city-state and its dependent fields; “nature” was the wilderness, human and non-human, beyond its bounds, the realm of forests, pastoralists, animals, mobile beasts and birds.

A shift to a colder, drier climate in the first millennium marked a new era in China’s political and environmental history. The Zhou dynasty rulers, coming from the west, conquered the Shang around 1050 BCE. During the next millennium, intensive agriculture, state extraction, and warfare continued until China’s unification under the Qin dynasty in the third century BCE. Deforestation accelerated in the North China central plain, removing not only trees, but the habitat of large animals. Elephants used to roam North China, but by 500 CE they had disappeared from the north and most of the Yangzi basin. In this sense, the Zhou followed Shang patterns at a more rapid pace.

During this period, true nomadic pastoralism arose in northwest China and Central Eurasia. Humans had domesticated the horse to pull chariots in western steppe lands since 4000 BCE. By 2000 BCE, the invention of the compound bow allowed mounted archers to travel large distances across the grasslands, herding goats, sheep, and horses in a region extending from Ukraine to the Altai mountains. Pastoral nomads constructed an ecosystem very distinct from agriculture. Grasses supported mobile herds of animals, who provided sustenance to mobile human beings. They had little need of settled agriculture except in times of crisis. Nomadic warrior elites spent most of their time raiding each other, but occasionally formed large confederations dedicated to extracting resources from the settled empires around them. The states of China’s central plain called them “barbarians,” as they rejected agriculture, stability, and servility. But the alliance of the Zhou with some of these powerful warriors made possible their conquest of the Shang. Alliances between militarized pastoralists and Chinese frontiersmen would continue through the Qing conquest in the seventeenth century.

After the Zhou conquest, competing states, mobilizing as many resources as they could for warfare and defense, promoted even more rapid land clearance, deforestation, and colonization. By 500 BCE wide use of the iron plow enabled greatly increased

agricultural yields and a larger population. As forest resources declined, and the competing states battled over settled fields, they proceeded to conquer nature as they conquered humans. Humans, that is, settled agriculturalists and city dwellers, in order to create civilization, had to drive out dangerous animals and barbarian peoples, cut down trees, and maximize the resources of the land.

War plus iron plus population growth put great pressure on the North Chinese environment. Writers of the period commented frequently on the loss of abundant forests, marshes, lakes, and sources of fish and animals. But grain was the ruler's primary responsibility, the "key link" as Mao would put it, in supporting the people, the state, and the army. Competitive warfare drove farmers to clear more land, work harder on their family farms, and provide the surplus above subsistence to the elites in the city states.

The unification of the empire under the Qin in 221 BCE, and its successor Han dynasties, however, did not slow down intensive exploitation of the land. The Qin emperor destroyed the forests of entire mountains in Inner Mongolia to build his palace and tomb. The Han emperors ended civil war within the Chinese core, but devoted immense efforts to expansion into the Central Eurasian steppe, against the resistance of the long-lived nomadic confederation known as the Xiongnu. The Han needed to clear land to support its soldiers, and it needed to breed large numbers of horses. Military soldier-farmers pioneered the large-scale colonization of Gansu in the northwest, plowing under grasslands and forests, extending agrarian cultivation, and bringing the upper reaches of the Yellow River into the settled realm. This clearance, however, generated the soil erosion which gave the Yellow River the large silt load for which it has become famous. Before the Han, it was called only "the river"; now it acquired the name "Yellow" (i.e., brown). The silt raised the river bed, requiring constant effort to build dikes, which eventually broke, flooding the lower China plain. When the dynasty weakened, the abandoned military colonies left former grasslands as deserts, whose sands blew further into North China. China's expansion into Central Eurasia defeated the nomadic empires, but at huge environmental and human cost. Later dynasties like the Tang and Qing would repeat the process.

By the dawn of the Common Era, an imperial census counted 60 million Han Chinese, densely concentrated in the North China plain, with small outlying core regions in Sichuan and the lower Yangzi. Few original forests remained. The huge plain had turned into a giant agrarian ecosystem managed by farmers and officials to produce the maximum possible grain output, in the face of drought, river floods, and military attacks. The Han dynasties, which lasted for 400 years, despite their costs, created the agrarian China that has lasted until the twenty-first century.

During the next 1,000 years, from around 300 CE to 1300 CE, Chinese extended the agrarian system to the south, a region with much more productive soils, abundant rainfall, extensive forests, and cheap transportation networks. By 1400, 70 percent of China's population lived in the south, centered on the three basins of the Yangzi River. The settlement of South China had to overcome the natural barriers of endemic tropical diseases, frequent flooding, and the high labor demands of wet rice cultivation. Chinese farmers and officials did not volunteer to settle these dangerous regions: they had to be forced to move there. Warfare in the north, including 400 years of civil war, the collapse of the Tang dynasty in the eighth century, the division of the empire from the tenth through twelfth century, and the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century, drove refugees to the marshlands of the Yangzi, where wealthy landlords and monasteries forced them to clear land as bonded laborers.

These massive migrations from the north made the Yangzi into the basis of the world's most densely populated agrarian region. Rice paddies are really large scale aquariums, whose plants depend on nutrients from water more than soil. With proper management, they in fact increase their fertility after cultivation. The water itself, properly regulated, removes the tedious work of weeding, but rice paddies still require intense labor: first to create the embankments, second, to plant and transplant the seedlings, third, to manage the water supplies, and finally to harvest and thresh the grain. Men and women toiling on minuscule plots for over 300 days per year, the highest labor input of any crop, generated the high, stable yields that supported huge populations. They died from tropical diseases like malaria, cholera, and schistosomiasis until they finally developed immunities. But the population kept growing, and new technologies, like early-ripening rice seeds from southern Vietnam, increased yields in step. Under the Song dynasties (960–1279), state intervention in building dikes, diverting rivers, and creating ponds with military colonies aided the southern move. At the same time, Song military policies devastated the North China plain. In the eleventh century, rulers using the Yellow River as a weapon broke its dike to direct it against enemies in the north. This tactic failed to secure the plain, but the disaster increased the economic gap between north and south. Even so, the Song population rose to over 100 million, because the southern fields could support a much larger population while per capita acreage declined. By 1800, China's population had grown to over 400 million, four times the Song level, but its cultivated land area had only doubled. The food supply grew both because of land clearance and productivity growth, but farmers and officials raced to ensure that agricultural output kept up with population growth.

The creation of the delta of the Pearl River, the third largest of China's rivers, demonstrates once again the combined forces of war, migration, erosion, and land clearance. The Mongol invasion drove settlers south into Guangdong and Guangxi; these settlers cleared uplands, creating eroded hillsides; the silt from the hills flowed downstream, creating a huge delta, with new lands to support later waves of settlers. They built polders as in the middle Yangzi, capturing lands from the sea. Then the settlers kept on moving into the seas and forests of Southeast Asia. Today's bustling cities of Hong Kong and Guangzhou rely on the foundations of wet-rice agriculture carefully constructed over many centuries.

Could this race continue forever? The Chinese made one more agrarian leap forward before the industrial age. As before, imperial expansion followed by land clearance, and increased agrarian productivity based on trade, new crops, and new technology, made the leap possible. In the eighteenth century, after conquering a powerful Mongol state, the Qing expanded imperial territory to an unprecedented size, incorporating Taiwan, Manchuria, Mongolia, and Xinjiang. Then, with some ambivalence, it promoted aggressive land clearance and migration into these regions, as well as into the hills of southwest China. New World crops like maize, sweet potatoes, and tobacco, which grew well on hillsides, helped the settlers to gain a foothold. Emigrants poured out in all directions, clashing with native peoples, but the Qing state supported this juggernaut with campaigns against "rebels." By the early nineteenth century, China's population had reached a new plateau of 350 to 400 million people, up to four times the Ming level of 1500, and its territory had expanded threefold. China's Central Eurasian and southwestern frontiers, the sites of ecological "hot spots" of great natural diversity, turned into much more homogeneous sites. Now their settlers raised the basic crops and animals of the Han Chinese diet.

By the early nineteenth century, the empire seemed to have reached its ecological and political limits. Treaties with Russia fixed the border in the north. In the southwest, the emperors suffered defeat in expensive wars against Burma and Vietnam. Vast lands in Tibet and Qinghai remained inaccessible to Chinese farmers because of their remoteness, cold, and high altitude. In 1793, anticipating Malthus, the imperial official Hong Liangji predicted a demographic crisis. The story of the rest of the nineteenth century, and much of the twentieth, is one of relentless ecological degradation, amid the turmoil of internal upheavals, foreign invasions, extensive engagement in global trade, accompanied by significant, but ultimately unavailing movements for political reform. Chinese exports of silk, tea, and porcelain boomed, putting heavy pressure on the hill country. Voracious Chinese consumers scooped up the natural products not only of China but of the Southeast Asian islands, the fur-bearing animals of Mongolia and Manchuria, and forest products ranging from indigo to ginseng. Opium, of course, the most prominent Chinese import of the nineteenth century, was a product of British plantations in India, but smugglers exchanged it for silk, tea, and porcelain, encouraging further clearance of eroded hillsides. Soon, opium developed rapidly as a Chinese domestic crop.

Political crisis and aggregate population size alone, however, did not cause environmental degradation. Nature played its part. The complex hydraulic system linking the Yangzi River, the Grand Canal, the Huai River, and the Yellow River silted up and fell into chaos. Ultimately the Yellow River shifted its bed once again from the south to the north of the Shandong peninsula, inundating a huge area. Floods, droughts, and locusts constantly struck the heartland areas of the North China plain. Erosion filled in lakes in the central Yangzi, aggravating flooding, and in South China deforestation continued.

During the twentieth century, national crises of state disintegration, civil war, and foreign invasion overwhelmed even these major regional environmental crises. Yet as before, both natural and human interventions caused environmental transformation. The “ecology of war” demanded the mobilization of huge amounts of human and natural energy (Muscolino 2015). Chiang Kai-shek shifted the course of the Yellow River once again in a failed effort to stop the Japanese invasion; he also resettled refugees of North China in remote, denuded regions. Meanwhile, refugees by the millions fled war zones into the highlands and the interior. At the same time, China established sophisticated research institutions in hydrology, soil science, mineralogy, and many other fields. These scientists insightfully diagnosed the nation’s ecological crises, even if the political will to resolve the crises was lacking.

The People’s Republic of China, inheriting this highly degraded environment, made it its mission both to solve China’s millennial agrarian crises and promote rapid industrialization, through radical transformation of agrarian production methods and heavy support of the industrial working class. After one decade, this high ambition caused the biggest man-made disaster in China’s history, the post–Great Leap famine of 1959–61, accompanied by even more rapid degradation of soils, water, forests, and natural resources. Ecologically speaking, the “bad engineering” of the command economy, which destroyed markets and ecological diversity, aimed to maximize only one variable—industrial growth—in an interlocked system. Making “grain the key link,” extracting it by force from bonded peasants to feed the working class, deprived China’s rural people of a diverse diet, and only barely supported the industrial workers. The population continued to grow as long as Mao defied the lessons of Hong Liangji and Malthus, in his misguided belief that more people meant simply more productive labor, unconstrained by natural forces.

Only in the 1980s, after the death of Mao, did these constraints begin to lift. Rigorous enforcement of the one child per family policy cut the population growth rate by half in the next two decades. Western chemical fertilizer plants raised agricultural productivity. Market reforms launched an explosion of exports, stimulating China's most fundamental social transformation: the world's largest wave of internal migration. Hundreds of millions of rural people left for coastal cities, and a breakneck wave of urbanization ensued. Now China is at least 60 percent urban, when in the imperial period it was 80 percent rural.

The new China has resolved many of imperial China's environmental crises—flood, famine, and disease—through application of industrial technology, large dams, and imports from world markets. Its GDP has grown continuously at a rapid rate for nearly 30 years. The Chinese people are no longer among the poorest in the world, and China can rightly claim to be one of the world's great powers, with one of its largest economies. But the question of the sustainability of China's economic growth persists. Solving old crises has, once again, generated new ones, this time on a global scale. China's degraded water and soils still have to support the world's largest population, where a growing urban class wants to consume more ecologically demanding foods, like meat and fish. Chinese factories spew toxic fumes, which cause the deaths of up to 1.6 million people per year, 17 percent of China's mortality rate. China's new environmental crises, like air pollution, afflict urban residents directly with new diseases, while the hidden impact of pollution of soil and water, and damage to fish, forests, grasslands, and consumer food products affect everyone.

On top of this, global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions threatens to increase storm and flood damage along the coast, exacerbate the long-term drought of North China, and melt completely the snows of the Tibetan plateau, the source of Asia's biggest rivers.

To their credit, the government and scientists have recognized the severity of these environmental crises. They have strengthened the power of the State Environmental Protection Agency and passed many regulations. But official and private interests have usually blocked their implementation. On the other hand, serious environmental movements have now challenged the local abuses of power and begun to transform public opinion.

The documentary "Under the Dome," a devastating indictment of the failure of the Chinese state to control urban air pollution, had an astonishing success. Over 150 million viewers saw this YouTube documentary within weeks of its release, and despite government efforts to suppress discussion, it has sparked intense interest. The explosion of chemical materials stored illegally in Tianjin in August 2015 showed that lax regulations endanger many lives.

Some commentators compare the current moment to 1962 in the United States, when Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*. No two countries ever follow exactly the same path, of course, but historians familiar with the activist movements that flourished in the US in the 1960s, in the 1970s in Japan, and later on in Taiwan and other developing countries, have good reason to predict that environmental activism will increase in China in the near future.

### **Environmental history in China today and tomorrow**

Until recently, western historians have taken the lead in applying perspectives of environmental history to the history of imperial and modern China. They have focused mainly on the high Qing. This long period, from the mid-seventeenth through mid-nineteenth

centuries, saw dramatic territorial expansion, population growth, rapid land clearance, the replacement of pastoralists and hill peoples by settled cultivators, and the extension of commercial networks across the empire. Major regional monographs have investigated the long term trends of frontier settlement and commercialization in border areas like Yunnan, Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Manchuria (Millward 1998; Giersch 2006; Schlesinger 2012). China's experience parallels the increased exploitation of resources by state power and commercialization around the globe (Richards 2003).

Recently, new research has extended this framework into the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it has incorporated the influence of global economic competition, modern technology, and military mobilization by the Nationalist state (Muscolino 2015). For the twentieth century, we have seen a turn away from regional agrarian studies toward recognition of the environmental impact of modern technology, energy resources, and professional engineering directed at strengthening the nation.

Environmental history now extends from the study of imperial management of agrarian resources of land, water, and forests into the modern era of coal, oil, urban life, and pollution. Where are the most interesting new directions for research?

I will address two possible directions here:

1. Questioning conventional boundaries of China and Asia through expanded spatial and linguistic frameworks and comparative perspectives.
2. Closing the gap between contemporary studies and history by using natural and social scientific data.

1. We have abundant documentation, especially from the Qing period, on the relationship between the bureaucratic state and settled farming. On all its frontiers, the Qing state and the commercial networks of regional systems promoted continual penetration of imperial peripheries and borders. The "New Qing History," focusing on the Manchu character of the Qing state, has illuminated frontier environmental change as part of ethnic and border relationships. Most of these studies remain within the boundaries of the Qing empire, using primarily Chinese sources, but some intrepid researchers have now pushed beyond the frontiers and have begun to exploit non-Chinese sources. These studies follow a new trend to question existing boundaries of Asian space. James Scott has made an impressive argument for the concept of "Zomia," a region that crosses boundaries of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia (Scott 2009). Zomia is a hill region, defined by its vertical not horizontal extent. Its peoples developed distinctive institutions, such as mobile "escape agriculture," oral traditions, and flexible kinship systems, in order to conceal their resources from intrusive lowland states. In contrast to Qing and modern views of these peoples as primitive, Scott finds that Zomian people's creative shaping of their environment offers lessons on how to live beyond state power.

Scott's model should inspire us to reexamine the relationship of the hill people of South China to the imperial state. We may also look at nomadic pastoralists and inhabitants of marshlands and coastal islands differently: not merely as sources of piracy or raiding, but as independent peoples who constructed alternative social formations. Study of these mobile, non-agrarian formations should lead scholars to broaden their perspectives on resistance to imperial expansion and the limitations of the agrarian ideal underpinning state power.

Looking across borders, up to the hills and across the grasslands, should also inspire more research comparing China with its near neighbors. Historians of Russia, for their

part, have developed a field of environmental history which offers many parallels to Qing trends. As the Tsarist empire expanded eastward from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, Russian scholars studied the “small peoples” of Siberia, the settled Muslims of Central Asia, and the Mongols and Manchus (Slezkine 1994). Few scholars of China, alas, are familiar with this Russian literature, but the interests of the two empires in borderland development deserve comparative attention. Similarly, on the empire’s southern border, we can learn much from the related policies of the Vietnamese state, as it fended off Qing expansion to the north and promoted its own aggressive expansion to the south.

The island of Taiwan also followed a distinct path of agrarian development, both before the Qing conquest in 1683 and during its occupation by Japan from 1895 to 1945. Historians of Taiwan have investigated in great detail land holding patterns and the relationship between Han settlers and native peoples during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Others have stressed the achievements of the Zheng regime during its rule over the island from 1661 to 1683 (Andrade 2008). The Zheng confederation relied both on Taiwan’s agrarian resources and on profits from trade all along the maritime region to fight its wars with the Dutch and the Qing. After the fall of Zheng rule, Kangxi’s policy of evacuating the southwest coast devastated this region for a century. The Kangxi evacuation, a deliberately destructive environmental policy for strategic purposes, prefigured the Nationalist breaking of the dikes of the Yellow River in 1937.

A global perspective on these regions can show how states engaged in international war and competition damaged or promoted domestic agrarian and commercial development. Environmental change is not just a product of local agency; like all other historical processes, it responds to global developments from the sixteenth century forward.

2. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have introduced new elements into the relationship of humans and the environment, and intensified the traditional ones. This is why John McNeill singles out the twentieth century as a time of unprecedented environmental change (McNeill 2000). Military demands have driven energy exploitation ever since the era of the Warring States, but the extremely intense militarization during the twentieth century altered the landscape far more radically than any previous conflicts. Urbanization and industrialization strained food supplies even further. Finally, the prominence of issues like air and water pollution since 2005 indicates a new stage of environmental crisis. China’s contribution to greenhouse gases, now #1 in the world, indicates that China must play a leading role in resolving not only its own environmental crises, but those of the entire world.

What can historians contribute to understanding these issues? First, we need to close the gap between the critical analyses of journalists, natural scientists, and social scientists who focus on the environmental crises since the late 1990s, and the long-term historical analyses. The two fields have not engaged in enough dialogue with each other. Some writers refer to uniquely Chinese forms of environmental management, but show little awareness of the practices of the imperial states. Most discussions of environmental solutions to China’s current crises rely almost exclusively on narrow technological and economic perspectives. We historians, for our part, have not done enough to address directly the implications of environmental history for current issues. Historians limit their impact if they focus only on the nation-state and neglect quantitative or scientific research. In order to engage more directly with current issues, historians need to become more conversant with the very *longue durée* expressed in scientific studies of climate change, and the short-term factors of culture, politics, and economy seen in the daily media.

Today, the Chinese people have mobilized in remarkably creative ways around environmental issues, severely challenging the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party regime. Historians can also contribute to these rapidly developing issues by looking at mobilizations around critical issues of people's livelihood in the past. Subjects of the imperial Chinese state expected it to ensure their survival. As Mencius argued, a state which failed to feed its people would not last long. In times of famine, local officials had to conduct prayers for rain in full view of the population, to show that they responded to the people's needs (Snyder-Reinke 2009). Today, the Chinese people demand a healthy quality of life, like the other advanced countries of the world. Their government will have to respond with much more than rain prayers to ensure its existence.

### *Suggestions for further reading*

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

# Science, Technology, and Medicine

CARLA NAPPI

### A Portrait of the Discipline as a Young Field

First translated into Chinese in 1975, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* presented readers with an early page that situated the young hero of the story within increasingly expansive localities that collectively shaped his identity:

Stephen Dedalus  
Class of Elements  
Clongowes Wood College  
Sallins  
County Kildare  
Ireland  
Europe  
The World  
The Universe

In Joyce's hands, Stephen Dedalus was a figure who, in name and journey, evoked the classic Greek tale of Daedalus and Icarus, the father and son whose fate epitomized the dangers of ambition and—in a way—the risks accompanying innovation in the history of technology. Framed with an epigram from Ovid,<sup>1</sup> a writer who might be considered a kind of poet laureate of metamorphosis, Joyce's story recounted the journey of Dedalus as he grew into a man, into the future, and into the unknown.

When translators Li Wenbin and Li Dengxin translated Joyce's story into Chinese in 1975 as *Yi wei nianqing yishujia de huaxiang* (Li and Li 1975), they rendered not just a coming-of-age story about the growth of a boy into a man, or the world that Dedalus mapped on the flyleaf of his school geography book, but also the categories that mapped the identity of a youth coming into his own as a self-conscious and self-reflexive individual.

These categories began at the level of the self and zoomed outward into increasingly encompassing communities: class, school, town, county, nation, planet, universe. This attention to the scales and localities that create individual identity is also a productive way to map the history of science, technology, and medicine as they have come to be characterized in the field of Chinese history, and the growth of their collective study as a coherent field of inquiry. Contemporary scholarship on the history of science in China has changed how we understand and articulate the scales of production and practices of knowledge of the natural world. Tracing the relationships produced at the level of some of the scales that have proven especially significant in characterizing and transforming the history of science in China—field, period, body, nation-state, empire—is one way to appreciate the past and possible futures of this exciting area of scholarly inquiry. It is also a way to appreciate how the documentary archive of the history of science and the stories emerging from it have been variously translated by scholars of Chinese history.

### The field

There was a time when it was possible to think about the history of science, technology, and medicine in China as if that field named a coherent, easily identifiable thing. We thought we knew what “Chinese science” was: it was something that created a written archive—or was equivalent to that archive itself—in the Chinese language. (Indeed, we imagined, at least insofar as the assumption helped define the nature of our practice, what texts we counted as relevant and how we looked for and read them, that there was something like a singular “Chinese language.”) It had occurred and was possibly still occurring within a location roughly coextensive with today’s People’s Republic of China. It constituted part of a larger entity we might refer to as “Chinese thought” or “Chinese culture.” It was undertaken by people we would identify as “Chinese.” And it was roughly comparable with (and in fact was defined in terms of its comparability to) the history of science in western Europe and the anglophone world (or, “the west”). In the last decade, all of these assumptions have been challenged, and the result has been an increasingly lively body of work that has begun transforming not only how we understand the histories of science, technology, and medicine in China, but also how we conceptualize these practices in broader global terms. In the rest of this chapter I introduce some of the major questions and problems animating the field, highlight some of the most promising ways that those questions have been explored and attended to, and suggest some of the concepts and products we may look forward to in the future.

In order to do that, we first need to understand what is meant by “the field.”<sup>2</sup> One challenge of conceptualizing the triad “science, technology, and medicine” is the lack of consensus on whether they collectively constitute a single area of disciplinary inquiry, or instead name three related but distinct and separate fields of study.<sup>3</sup> Historians of science and technology in China write from disparate disciplinary homes that include departments of history, science studies, area studies, and history and philosophy of science, among others. Some are based in university settings, some are writing from research institutes, and some are independent scholars, a distinction that is important, in part, insofar as the institutional context in which a scholar works often importantly shapes the nature of her scholarly contributions to a field. Historians of medicine write from all of these contexts, as well as anthropology and sociology departments, medical schools, and offices of clinical practice. From these different intellectual habitats emerge varying ways of manipulating some of the basic tools of the historian’s craft: evidence, narrative,

archive. This multiplicity has helped generate a tremendously interdisciplinary and polyvocal literature that tends to cohere, when it does do so, around key documents, interlocutors, and historiographical questions. For our purposes, those three components act as a kind of glue that holds the works under consideration here together in something that we might identify as a field.

The archive of documents comprising the raw material of the historian of science, technology, and medicine in China has transformed in recent years. What used to constitute the body of materials considered relevant to the task included texts that looked something like, or were otherwise directly comparable to, the texts constituting the scholarly archive of the history of science in the European context—alchemical treatises, canonical texts on medical theory and pharmaceutical practice, work on the invention and use of technologies like clocks and astrolabes, among others. As the historiography has turned to encompass a broader range of the social, cultural, and epistemological history of knowledge-making in China, the documentary archive has broadened to include the kinds of texts that situate science, technology, and medicine within a wider range of human practices. As more scholars have incorporated attention to non-elite actors in shaping this history, the archive has further expanded to include documents produced in household spaces and traces citizen participation in science. And as we break down the boundaries that had previously been accepted as separating spheres of human activity like religion and medicine, popular fiction and technology, language learning and science, that archive has grown in increasingly interesting ways.

This growth has brought challenges to the field in addition to the opportunities described above. As the documentary archive expands and transforms scholarly notions of what is relevant to the study of science, medicine, and technology in China, there are increasingly many ways of identifying practices and literatures that constitute part of the genealogy of “science,” “medicine,” and “technology.” This is true across the temporal span of the field—and it is not a problem or opportunity that is local only to scholarship on China—but it has been especially vexing or interesting (depending on one’s perspective) in the case of scholarship on premodern science. The broadening archive has helped spur a diversity of ways of thinking about and producing the kind of work that might fall under the rubric of the history of science, and as a result it is not necessarily clear which disciplinary organs (including journals and societies), academic jobs, or institutional frames for work in the field of the history of science scholars of premodern China may find a home in. In general this has been embraced as an opportunity rather than an impediment to scholarship, and it has produced an increasingly expansive bent that has moved work in the history of science in China beyond a strictly disciplinary frame. Indeed, the study of science, technology, and medicine in China’s history has become a deeply transdisciplinary and translocal endeavor. It is transdisciplinary insofar as the disciplinary and departmental homes of historians who self-identify as working in this field span the arts, humanities, and sciences. It is translocal in that these historians (even if we limit ourselves to historians working at least in part in written and spoken English) are spread across the globe in a wide variety of institutions and spaces. For both sets of reasons, the kinds of questions and modes of enacting the historian’s craft—including identifying relevant interlocutors—can vary dramatically. Sometimes that historiographical variance is a matter of the institutional or geographical home of the historian. Sometimes it is based in the primary discipline in which a historian has been trained, has chosen to work within, and/or prefers to speak to (Nappi 2013). In any case, this plurality of methodologies and approaches has both enriched the study of science,

medicine, and technology in China and offered challenges for those readers interested in gaining an encompassing view of the major trends and threads of discourse within this plural ecology.

Recent work that traverses this terrain tends to be animated by one or more key questions, and it is the nature of those questions, more than anything else, that draws historians of science, technology, and medicine in China together as a field. Early work on the history of science in China grew out of an explicit conversation with the historiography of European science, and its major approaches to scholarly inquiry were shaped accordingly. The work of Joseph Needham pioneered a field that constellated around questions that took the explicit form of comparisons with “Western” science and the historical study thereof (Needham 1954–2004; Needham and Yates 1994; Brook 1996; Multhauf 1996; Needham and Lu 2000). Some explicitly approached the study of China as a study of lack or absence: Why did the Scientific Revolution not take place in China (Sivin 1982)? Why did modern science not develop in China (Huff 2011)? Some of the historiography of science is still animated by questions that grow out of this early literature but locate it with respect to (and in conversation with) different fields of inquiry: Can we identify features of the ecology, economy, and/or political structures of historical China that contributed to a “Great Divergence” that set it on a path markedly different from that of Western Europe (Pomeranz 2000)? In what ways have phenomena or conditions on a global scale constrained the possibilities of scientific development in China? These sorts of questions, often at least implicitly defined by an implied counterfactual that asks why something did *not* happen and posits what might have occurred if it had, tied together a generation of historiography on Chinese science.

The generation that followed was largely (though not entirely) devoted to undermining a previous tendency to write the historiography of science in China as a story of absence, failure, or lack. Some scholars accomplished this by abstracting general characteristics of a “Chinese science” or “Chinese medicine” out of careful textual work and by placing the resulting history of a Chinese scientific or medical culture into dialogue with that of other scientific cultures (Kuriyama 1999; Lloyd and Sivin 2002). This explicitly comparative work transformed a narrative of lack into one instead of difference and divergence. Other scholars turned toward a finer-grained analysis of the technologies of knowledge-making in premodern China (Bray 1997; Nappi 2009; Schäfer 2011). Those technologies included language and translation, and an important body of work looked explicitly at the ways that the translation of science and medicine shaped the terms of conversation in China since at least the sixteenth century, most often conceived as a process of rendering terms, ideas, and texts from European languages and English into Chinese and sometimes paying careful attention to the agency of the Japanese language as a mediator of that process (Liu 1995; Hart 2000; Wright 2000; Lackner, Amelung, and Kurtz 2001; Elman 2005). Some of these scholars took on the task of illuminating that history of science and its translations within China by approaching the history of scientific and medical practitioners “on their own terms,” in the words of one scholar, paying careful attention to how translated knowledge practices were naturalized and embedded within the larger frame of an explicitly “Chinese” history of texts and ideas (Elman 2005). Thus historians of science have studied the transformations of knowledge cultures in situ as they have moved from philosophy to philology (Elman 2001), from dynasty to dynasty (Unschuld 1985), from text to experience (Sivin 1995), and from something we might call “tradition” to something we might call “modernity” (Sivin 1987; Hsu 2001; Scheid 2002). Landmark studies in the history of Chinese medicine

charted transformations in the institutional, political, and cultural contexts of illness and healing across dynasties.

The questions animating contemporary work in the field tend to move even further from the roots of the field as described above. Recent authors have begun moving away from questions about “Chinese science” and toward questions about science in China, understanding “China” to mean very different things in different historical and local contexts and integrating an attention to that plurality into the fabric of their studies. Locating ourselves in some of those contexts can help us understand where the field is now and where it may be going.

### The period

If the field is one locality in which to situate an understanding of the nature and growth of the history of science in China, the temporal period is another. The kinds of documents produced and preserved in the context of scientific, technological, and medical practices in Chinese history have been substantially different in different times, and often the most provocative and illuminating recent work acknowledges the materiality and situatedness of its documentary archive.

Scholars working on early China have been particularly concerned with the opportunities and challenges posed by excavated texts—which often survive in fragments of partial legibility—and have benefited from close engagement with the work of archaeologists. Studies of healing and medicine in early China have highlighted the diversity of kinds of sources that constitute the archive of early healing, which included divination, classical studies, and various forms of ritual practice (Harper 1998). Excavation of the Mawangdui site has proven especially important to understanding not only early medical texts, but also early foodways. Indeed, the study of early work on food and eating in China has been a fruitful field for historians of science and medicine, who have considered the intertwined histories of *materia medica*, dietetics, ritual, and eating (Sterckx 2005). Scholars taking a fresh look at received texts alongside excavated documents have shown that early Chinese work on human bodies brought together what may today be considered disparate areas into a common conversation, including music, medicine, politics, and cosmology (Brindley 2012). This work—alongside scholarship on planetary, mathematical, and other types of bodies—has been useful in showing how early Chinese texts can help challenge the notion that early fields of inquiry mapped unproblematically onto modern fields or disciplines: individual texts often describe practices that straddle what may be described today as mathematics, astronomy, health, and agriculture. Scholars of early China have also reminded us that it is sometimes not at all clear how to identify and define a stable text and associate it with an author or authors (Cullen 1996).

The historiography of the science, medicine, and technology of earliest China has not tended to problematize the name of the temporal scale under inquiry: referring to the relevant period as “early” or “ancient” is fairly unproblematic. As we move later into the history of China, however, scholars tend increasingly to diverge in their approaches to carving Chinese history into distinct periods, and in articulating what the implications of those decisions are for how historians tell their stories. Scholarship on what is sometimes termed a “medieval” period of Chinese history is a case in point. Historical work on manuscripts collected in Dunhuang epitomizes an approach to “medieval” science, medicine, and technology that tends toward narratives of cosmopolitanism or cross-cultural exchange in China. Benefiting from archaeological excavations in shaping their material

documentary archive, and paying special attention to the materiality of that archive in terms of inclusion of documents written on bamboo and wood, these scholars have offered a fascinating glimpse of the range of practices available in the medical marketplace of the medieval silk routes, spanning divinatory arts, pharmacology, love charms, moxibustion, and various forms of self-cultivation (Lo and Cullen 2005). The description of these practices and documents as explicitly “medieval” tends to integrate the resulting analyses within a larger history of a medieval globe shaped by the circulations and itineraries of objects, people, and ideas: in this way, the periodization of this period of the history of science tends to direct particular ways of reading and working with the documentary archive, and of asking questions of it.

Other scholars have tended to embrace a mode of reading and analyzing their documentary archive in terms that lead away from a more globally situated story and instead toward a story that is firmly grounded in the unit of the dynasty. In contrast to the medieval example described above, a more dynastically focused approach to understanding the science, technology, and medicine of “Song” China (a period that may alternately be incorporated into a “medieval” story along the lines described above) has yielded work more centrally concerned with the specific kinds of intellectual, political, and social phenomena germane to a specific period of imperial rule. Taking a dynastic perspective, for example, helps to illuminate the importance of print culture and imperial patronage in driving the history of science, medicine, or technology (Goldschmidt 2009), and to analyze the kinds of changes in scientific and medical personae that have accompanied dynastic change (Hymes 1987). This approach to understanding the history of science in China has tended to locate its questions and analyses within the spaces of dynastic rule, and in relation to the imperial court.

Historians of the science, technology, and medicine of the period extending roughly from the fourteenth through the eighteenth centuries in China have shown a particularly marked diversity in their approaches to periodizing their work. A voluminous literature chronicles ongoing debates over how to describe this era of Chinese history. Is it late imperial? Early modern? Ming/Qing? What if the Qing is not properly considered “Chinese” history at all? How should a consideration of these issues be informed by how we understand the Qing, or the Ming, in the context of global empire? Though these debates have not yet explicitly shaped discussions by historians of science, technology, and medicine, the interested reader can find traces of them in the character of the narratives that have recently emerged about this stretch of China’s past.

For as long as the Ming and Qing dynasties have featured in the historiography of science, they have collectively been understood according to the rubric of late imperial history. Recalling the dynastic approach described above in the case of Song science, one central concern of scholars who have situated the production of science and knowledge in Ming and Qing China within an explicitly imperial frame has been the relationship between knowledge practices and the particular locality of the court. Recalling an important body of recent work by scholars of early modern history (Raj 2007; Subrahmanyam 2012), some of these scholars have focused on the importance of court patronage in producing a space in which the practices of sciences were embedded within a broader context of political interests and relationships. Prominently featured in this historiography is a concern with translation and translators in moving texts, terms, and ideas into and out of Chinese- (and, to a lesser extent, Manchu-) language contexts in late imperial China. This has been particularly salient in work on the reign of the Kangxi emperor, whose relationships with Jesuit scholars generated a fascinating documentary archive in languages

that include Latin, French, Chinese, and Manchu (Jami, Engelfriet, and Blue 2001; Elman 2005; Hsia 2009; Hart 2011; 2013; Jami 2012). Science and technology at the Qianlong court—understood especially in the context of the emperor as central figure motivating and supporting the making of knowledge and its traces—has also become an important topic of interest for historians of the eighteenth century (Kleutghen 2015).

An increasing number of Ming and Qing historians are writing histories that move away from a late imperial periodization and instead situate science, technology, and medicine from the fourteenth or fifteenth century through the eighteenth century in an early modern frame (Hostetler 2001; Nappi 2009; Schäfer 2011). This approach can take a number of forms and is motivated by different aims and agendas: some historians are aiming to integrate Chinese science within a comprehensive story of global changes in economy, politics, and knowledge, while others are simply interested in using the concept of early modernity as an instrument to create a conversation with non-China specialists without taking on a broader global history agenda. In either case, the resulting literature has enmeshed the study of China more firmly within a multi-sited history of knowledge, materials, practices, and their circulations in the premodern world. As they are explicitly engaging with problems and concepts that tend to be rooted in the historical literature on early modern Europe and the Americas, these studies tend to echo and speak to the historiographical language of that literature, whether it is by exploring the significance of cartography and ethnography to the making of empire (Hostetler 2001), studying exotica and marvels in early modern Chinese discourse (Zhang 2015), or locating a practice of natural history in early modern China (Nappi 2009).

Despite the sizable and growing literature on premodern science, technology, and medicine, much of the contemporary scholarship in the field is firmly focused on modernity. This has tended to concentrate on a handful of centers of attraction, including a nineteenth-century engagement with modern science and translation of English- and European-language materials (Tsu and Elman 2014; Wu 2015), a twentieth-century constellation of concerns with science, modernization, politics, and the nation-state, and a twenty-first century story that moves further away from understanding China in civilizational terms and toward appreciating science, medicine, and technology in China as it is already part of a plural global story (Zhan 2009).

What all of these modes of periodizing the history of science, technology, and medicine in China have in common is a turn toward attending to the problem of “tradition” and its discontents. By and large, historians have moved away from an approach to Chinese science that takes for granted a stable tradition that can be firmly located in time or space, instead conceptualizing Chinese “tradition” as a notion that has constantly been made and remade to suit the purposes of particular groups or individuals. Much of the most innovative work along these lines has emerged out of the study of another important locality for the history of Chinese sciences: the body.

### The body

A great deal of recent work on science, technology, and medicine in Chinese history has focused on the body as a site and instrument for knowledge and practice. The best of this work has eschewed past tendencies to characterize a singular “Chinese body” (be it medical, traditional, social, or otherwise) in favor of an approach that looks carefully at the plurality of bodies, body concepts, and bodily experience that have characterized Chinese history.

Much of the historical work along these lines has been inspired by anthropologists of Chinese medicine who have paid critical attention to what, where, and how bodily experience comes to matter in China, especially as that experience is and has been shaped by particular kinds of relationships (Lock and Farquhar 2007). The relationship between patient and physician is one important space for generating bodily knowledge, often in the context of some sort of a clinical encounter (Farquhar 1994; Scheid 2002; Hsu 2010). The relationship between teacher and student in the context of health-related practices—sometimes but not always in the context of familial relationships—also produces particular modes of understanding and experiencing bodies (Sivin 1995; Hsu 1999; Scheid 2007). The relationship between physical and mental health and the practices of daily life that sustain it also motivate and shape bodily experience (Farquhar 2002; Farquhar and Zhang 2012). From relationships of sex and gender come important ways of thinking and being bodies, and this has characterized our understanding of bodily health in China for as long as there have been records of practices devoted to it (Furth 1999; Chiang 2008; Rocha 2010; Wu 2010). Movement and mobility have also created particular relationships—between self and other, home and abroad, local and global—that continue to shape bodily experience and generate new ways of thinking about bodies as sites of knowing and practice (Heinrich 2008; Zhan 2009).

Institutions have also produced particular ways of conceiving the body as a space in Chinese history, and several historians of science, technology, and medicine have explored particular kinds of organizational structures and practices that have disciplined bodies in various ways. We can see some of the ways that legal institutions have accomplished this by looking at forensic practices (Song and McKnight 1981; Needham and Lu 2000; Furth, Zeitlin, and Hsiung 2007; Asen 2012). Ritual practices of various sorts also institutionally discipline and produce the body as a space, and scholars of Daoism and alchemy have been particularly active in exploring the ways that has happened in Chinese history (Sivin 1976; Schipper 1993; Strickmann 2002; Pregadio 2005; Kohn 2010). Imaging practices of various sorts were also means of disciplining bodies, whether those bodies were human, heavenly, or technological (Bray, Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, and Métaillie 2007; Heinrich 2008; Kleutghen 2015). In all of these cases and more, the institutionally disciplined body has been an important locality for understanding the history of science, technology, and medicine in China. This issue has taken on particular salience in studies focused on the emergence of another conceptual locality in China, a literature so robust and substantial that it deserves its own discussion: the nation-state.

### **The nation-state**

Scholars of modern China have produced a great deal of work on the mutual co-constitution of science and modernity. This work on modern science and Chinese history has tended to cohere around a set of issues that take the nation-state as a foundational space, and that consequently put the history of science, technology, and medicine into dialogue with historical and area studies work on the emergence of the nation-state in China.

The making of modern science in China has gone hand in hand with efforts to translate various sorts of textual materials from Japanese, European languages, and English into the Chinese language and context. Translation was crucial to projects devoted to

reforming the Chinese state by, among other things, engaging meaningfully with ideas and technologies from what was conceptualized as the “west.” Scholars have looked closely at the ways that the work of Darwin and other scholars of evolution and society have been translated and taken up by modern makers of Chinese nationhood (Schwartz 1964; Pusey 1983; Jones 2011; Hill 2013). This resulted not only in transformations and translations of notions of nationhood itself, but also of related ideas like “nature” (Fan 2004b).

The emergence of the modern nation went hand in hand with the growth of a new notion of population and practices of disciplining and controlling it. Public health—especially in growing urban areas—was a key concept that both shaped and was produced by these practices, and the relationship among hygiene, public health, and modernity in China has been emphasized by scholars of science, technology, and medicine (Farquhar and Hanson 1998; Rogaski 2004; Leung 2009; Leung and Furth 2011). The history of the nation was also a history of the kinds of institutional means of classifying and categorizing its subjects—and thus of forming new ways of being a subject in modern China, and understanding how and why this happened—and has also been an important contribution of historians of modern science and technology (Lam 2011; Mullaney 2011). The mobilization of citizens in the production of scientific modernity was also an important part of the development of the modern nation-state in China (Schmalzer 2008; Fan 2012), and this was happening at a number of sites that included urban and rural environments, cities and villages (Fang 2012).

As scholars of modern history focus their work on the transformation from empire to nation-state in China, some historians of science have increasingly been looking for ways to situate their stories such that their histories do not assume the boundaries, identities, or disciplining technologies of the modern nation-state. This has generated a growing literature on science and empire.

### The empire

As global historians become more concerned with situating local practices and forms of knowledge within a world-historical frame, they have paid increasing attention to empire as a crucial technology for producing spaces of science, technology, and medicine. As a result, historians have a renewed appreciation of the empire as a space for the production of relationships that generated and sustained knowledge-making about the natural world and the place of people within it. Some historians of China are following this lead and turning their attention to the co-production of science, knowledge, and empire.

The relationship between “east” and “west”—especially as it has been perceived and articulated by historical actors—has been a particular area of interest and concern. A relatively expansive body of scholarship is devoted to understanding the work of European and American missionaries in Ming and Qing China, paying special attention to the translation and study of scientific texts by missionaries at the court, in the capital, and beyond. This literature has tended to look carefully at the ways that language and translation were wielded as instruments of empire and its conversions. Other work has explored the east–west relationship in the context of science and empire by considering how imperial and colonial practices in the late Qing and after helped shape the circulation of scientific knowledge. These historians have moved

away from relating the story of late Qing science and technology as a failure narrative that positions the Qing as a victim of foreign imperialisms, instead considering the circulations of goods, people, and ideas made possible by imperial and colonial encounters (Hostetler 2001; Fan 2004a; Mueggler 2011; Wu 2015). While not always explicitly framing the relationship in terms of east–west, other historians have focused on the relationship between forms of empire in China and beyond, comparing Mongol, Ming, Qing, Ottoman, Portuguese, French, British, German, and/or other imperial practices as they have shaped natural knowledge relating to ethnography, cartography, medicine, and other sciences.

A renewed commitment to studying the materials of empire has characterized recent work on the history of science, technology, and medicine in China. Historians have looked carefully at the relationships produced between China and elsewhere through the movements of particular material objects, commodities, or *materia medica*. Notable studies in this vein include works focusing on food and dietetics (Buell, Anderson, and Perry 2010), drugs like tobacco (Benedict 2011), opium, and other narcotics (Dikötter, Laamann, and Xun 2004; Zheng 2005; Kingsberg 2014), and materials like coal that were crucial to fueling China's transition to a modern nation-state (Wu 2015). Historians of medicine have also charted relationships between China and a larger global network in terms of the coproduction of geography, bodies, and disease, in particular by tracing the circulations and discourses of epidemics (Benedict 1996; Hanson 2011). Many scholars have also begun to pay careful attention to the relationship between politics, empire, and environment in shaping the history of science in China, paying careful attention to the ecological and environmental history of early and medieval China (Anderson 2014), tracing the historical consequences of environmental stress and climate change in the Yuan and Ming (Brook 2010), looking at the history of water and environmental management from late imperial to modern times (Pietz 2015), and considering the environmental consequences of modern political strategies (Shapiro 2001).

What most of the approaches above have in common is an approach to narrating the history of science, technology, and medicine in China in a way that treats empire as a crucial element in that story. As historians become more engaged in situating China within a more global history and broader related historiographical conversations, the approaches toward science and empire in those broader global contexts will continue to inform the way the history of China is understood and related.

### The future

The field, the period, the body, the nation-state, the empire: this chapter has charted only some of the multiple nested localities within which science, technology, and medicine in China have emerged, and has traced some of the ways that scientific practice and knowledge have in turn helped create these forms of space. The history of science in China has many possible futures, and there are several promising methodological directions that will help scholars map new and different forms of space than those discussed above.

This chapter opened by considering the importance of translation in shaping the localities of knowledge and practice in China. Indeed, as the field moves forward, paying more careful attention to the central role that translation has played in shaping the history of science in China will be a powerful way to open up new approaches in the field. While several scholars have explored the significance of translation to Chinese

science, more work remains to be done to open up the various forms and media that such translation might take.

Beyond the modes of periodizing science discussed above, the futures of the history of science in China will also situate the story within different periodic frames that integrate more meaningfully with periodization beyond the history of science and beyond Chinese history. We should expect to see histories of science, technology, and medicine in China that frame the story in terms of Cold War, long eighteenth century, and other temporalities moving further beyond dynastic, late imperial, and ancient, medieval, or early modern terms.

The potential futures of the field are likely also to move us beyond considering “China” as a stable and coherent kind of locality. The plural is important here: just as there is no single history of science, technology, and medicine, there is no single story that encompasses this history in relation to and in dialogue with that of China. Broader historiographical trends like the New Qing History have only just begun to reshape our narratives of the histories of science, technology, and medicine, and as this continues we will see more work on sciences in non-Chinese languages in China, more work on local histories of science within China, and more studies that query the notion of China as a historical space.

As we come to the end of the chapter, we may turn again to the beginning. Just as James Joyce’s artist progresses through a series of voices as readers follow him along the path of his story, so the voices of the history of science, medicine, and technology in China have deepened and transformed over time. And as Joyce’s story has itself continued to find new voices as it is translated into languages beyond English, so the field will continue to transform as more readers and writers translate its narratives into languages and terms that move beyond those encountered here. Like many portraits of young subjects, this chapter has aimed to capture a moment in the maturation of a still-growing field with a great deal of life yet to come.

### Notes

- 1 *Et ignotas animus dimittit in artes*. “And he sets his mind to work upon unknown arts.” See Joyce 1994, 1. For the list of localities above, see Joyce 1994, 7–8.
- 2 For the purposes of this chapter and given the nature and audience of the current volume, I restrict myself to scholars who are producing and engaging work in English. However, there are many scholars writing in the history of science, medicine, and technology and/in China who do not engage substantially with the anglophone scholarly world. The range of research questions and historiographies spanning different linguistic worlds is a massive topic deserving a chapter of its own.
- 3 This is not unique to these rubrics as they shape scholarly endeavor with regard to China: academics working on the histories of science, technology, and medicine in other geopolitical contexts have also been navigating this issue.

### Suggestions for further reading

For further work in the studies of science, technology, and medicine in China, the interested reader can consult a range of journals, monographic works, and edited volumes. Specialized journals devoted to the study of science, medicine, and technology in China include *East Asian Science, Technology, and Society: An International Journal (EASTS)*; *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine (EASTM, formerly Chinese Science)*; and

*Asian Medicine—Tradition and Modernity*. Relevant articles and essays can also be found in *Isis*, which can be conveniently searched via the annual *Isis Current Bibliography of the History of Science*.

The field is so broad and encompasses so many subfields and temporal scales—medicine and healing, sciences, and technologies spanning ancient, premodern, modern, and contemporary contexts—that there is not a single set of monographs or edited volumes constituting an obvious next stop for further reading. Instead, the interested reader is best served by following the works cited throughout this chapter to locate materials on particular periods or areas of interest.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

# Legal History

*WILLIAM P. ALFORD AND ERIC T. SCHLUESSEL*

“Whereas Westerners have felt it safer to be ruled by impersonal laws rather than by personally fallible judges, the Chinese, presumably following Mencius in his estimate of human nature, have felt it safer to be ruled by ethically-minded administrators rather than by impersonal and, in their estimate, purely arbitrary laws.”

(Reischauer and Fairbank 1960, 84)

An inquiry into the history of law in China raises profound questions about both China and law.<sup>1</sup> The above-quoted passage from Reischauer and Fairbank may be especially hyperbolic, but the sentiment expressed—of enduring Chinese hostility toward legal institutions—continues to inform the conventional wisdom, at least in the west, about China’s millennia-old civilization, notwithstanding growing and impressive scholarly efforts to portray a far more complex picture. The assumption within it about law in the west—that law somehow was impersonal and, by implication, removed from political, economic, and social considerations—also warrants deeper scrutiny, given developments in legal scholarship more generally.

This chapter argues for a more nuanced approach and, in particular, for endeavoring to separate the positive from the normative (mindful of the enormous difficulty of doing so) in order to develop a richer sense of law over the course of Chinese history and of popular engagement therewith. Far too much writing about Chinese legal history, particularly in the west, has projected back contemporary ideas about law and human rights that may not necessarily accurately describe even the west (Alford 2007). This is not to ignore the normative—one can critically conclude that the Chinese state may at any number of points have failed to live up to its stated ideals or that one finds these ideals to be deeply flawed. Nevertheless, one should endeavor first accurately to depict what one would assess and to be explicit about the assumptions on which that assessment is based.

This chapter proceeds in three sections. The first provides a brief overview of the principal ways in which China's law was depicted in both China and the west prior to the late twentieth century while the second examines how and why that has changed. In our third section, we discuss opportunities and challenges that confront scholarship on Chinese legal history going forward.

### The historical conventional wisdom

Prior to the late twentieth century, Chinese law was not a major field of inquiry, either among Chinese or foreign observers, notwithstanding its millennia-long provenance, with evidence of law dating as early as the Shang dynasty (ca. 2070–ca. 1600 BCE). For the most part, accounts of China's legal history were unflattering or flatly descriptive, arrayed chronologically by dynasty.

The relatively unfavorable treatment Chinese observers historically accorded law has many explanations. Perhaps most telling was the impact of the major schools of thought that emerged during the Warring States period (475–221 BCE). Confucian thinking held that internalized norms were a far better and more effective means for ordering behavior and society than external rules, as evidenced in the statement in the *Analects*, “Lead them by political maneuvers, restrain them with punishments: the people will become cunning and shameless. Lead them by virtue, restrain them with ritual; they will develop a sense of shame and a sense of participation” (Confucius 1997, Bk. II, ch. 3). To be sure, several Confucian texts, including the *Analects*, indicate an awareness of law, and although some such as Xunzi see its utility, it is more typically portrayed as an instrument of last resort to be employed when dealing with reprobates for whom invocations of morality fall on deaf ears (Chang 2016). Daoism was even less positive, with the *Laozi* indicating that “the faster laws and decrees are issued, the more bandits and thieves appear” (Lao Tzu 2015, ch. 57). Although the Legalists accorded more prominence to *fǎ* (variously translated as “law” or “method”), they applied it with such severity and intentional inattention to justice that there should be little surprise that it reinforced impressions of law as an inferior instrument among latter-day literati. Ultimately, it was a fusion of Confucianism and Legalism, usually called Huang-Lao, that provided the basis for legal development from the Han dynasty onward. The contradictions within this uneasy alliance fostered debate over the role of law for centuries thereafter. Following the introduction of Buddhism to China centuries later, imperial governments often used law to curtail the Buddhist clergy's influence in society (Dicks 2014). While Buddhist doctrine in its own way devalued state legality, it offered an alternative complex of abstract, world-ordering rules that we could accurately describe as “lawlike.”

That those holding office may have disparaged law and striven to portray themselves more as engaged in the exercise of paternal benevolence did not preclude them from using law in discharging their duties. It is important not to lose sight of the vast and sophisticated web of law developed within the imperial bureaucratic state. Yet, codification served an ideological function as well as a judicial one: throughout imperial history, a sizable portion of the statutes, including the all-important “General Principles” section, duplicated those of previous dynasties, even as the rest of the code changed. This suggests that codification itself lent legitimacy, in part by invoking respect for the past. The literati who wrote much of imperial China's legal history took up this focus on codes and dynastic continuity, contributing to the later impression of legal stasis (see Yang Honglie 1990).

Portrayals by modern Chinese scholars of their legal history prior to the late twentieth century may also have been colored by the experience of extraterritoriality, pursuant to which foreign powers, claiming that Chinese law was “barbaric,” asserted the “right” to displace Chinese jurisdiction in favor of their own officials and law in cases involving defendants of their nationality, including in many later instances plaintiffs and Chinese converts to Christianity. Even as late imperial reformers such as Shen Jiaben (1840–1913) strove to reconstruct the Chinese legal past, the larger project of “modernizing” Chinese law, whether out of conviction or the foreign-imposed requirement that China bring its law into general conformity with major western states, seems, at least by implication, to have reinforced images of indigenous legal institutions as inadequate. The subsequent depictions by Mao Zedong and other early fellow Marxist-Leninists of both extraterritoriality and pre-Communist Chinese law as no more than disguised rationales for the exercise of power contributed to disparaging images of China’s legal history. Indeed, it was not until the post-Cultural Revolution reform era that even the most sophisticated of People’s Republic of China (PRC) legal historians dispensed with the rhetoric of feudalism in describing imperial legal history (see Zhang Jinfan 1990).

While Leibniz and Voltaire depicted Chinese society as possessing qualities worthy of emulation, what they found admirable had little to do with the law. The far more typical treatment by early western observers writing from a distance was in the spirit of Montesquieu, who saw China and its law as despotic. If anything, direct contact in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries only led to sharper critiques of Chinese law for its failure to respect fundamental dignity, even as British law at the time contained appreciably more capital offenses. So it was that the British from the 1784 case of the *Lady Hughes*, in which the Chinese executed a British sailor for what his compatriots saw as no more than a regrettable accident, denounced Chinese law, declaring that henceforth their subjects would no longer be subject to it.

The rise during the nineteenth century of comparative law in the west contributed further to images of Chinese law as inferior. Depicting legal development in general along a trajectory from status (inherent qualities which one could not shake) to contract (notable for representing the exercise of individual will), the noted English scholar Henry Maine went so far as to say that “progress seems to have been arrested there [China]” with law essentially indistinguishable from religion (Maine 1861, 22). For Max Weber, Confucianism exerted such an influence that China could not move beyond substantive rationality to the higher form of ordering embodied in procedural rationality and exemplified, he believed, by some Continental legal systems (Weber 1951). These ideas proved so influential in legal circles, especially in Europe, that many others who had direct contact with China—such as the early-twentieth-century French legal scholar Jean Escarra—portrayed Chinese law as lacking in the fundamentals for a sound legal order, as compared to an idealized vision of law’s operation in the west.

The fixation of both western and Chinese scholars on dynastic codes contributed to this portrayal. Written law is known to have existed in China since at least the fifth century BCE. It was the Tang Code of 653 CE, however, that survived through the late Qing as both a textual and intellectual framework for future codes and as a symbol of authority rooted in the past. Subsequent codes retained much of the Tang Code’s structure and laws, with the result that more than a third of the “statutes” (*lii*) in the Qing (1636–1911) legal code remained unchanged from the Tang. To be sure, dynasties subsequent to the Tang kept the law current through a variety of mechanisms, including most notably the addition of “substatutes” (*li*) that took priority over the statutes and

that in practice comprised the working heart of formal law. Nonetheless, both domestic and foreign critics of the system often invoked its supposed ancientness and inflexibility as a reason for the Qing's weakness.

## The field changes

### *Rationale*

This rather flat and even demeaning portrayal of China's legal history began to change during the 1960s, at least outside of China, as scholars adopted a range of approaches. Qu Tongzu's *Law and Society in Traditional China* (1961) and *Local Government in China Under the Ch'ing* (1962) plowed new ground in exploring law's operation locally, as did the work of David Buxbaum, Chang Fu-mei, Ramon Myers, Shuzō Shiga, and others that drew richly on archival materials, notably the Danshui-Xinzhu archives in Taiwan. Derk Bodde and Clarence Morris's *Law in Imperial China* (1967) shed light on legal reasoning via annotated translations of abstracts of Qing-era cases. Japanese scholars such as Niida Noboru (1963) took a more integrative approach, proposing, alongside detailed institutional studies, that there was a common Chinese or East Asian legal consciousness. Endymion Wilkinson and Chang Wejen built foundations for the field through the former's *The History of Imperial China* (1973) and the latter's classic three-volume annotated bibliography *Zhongguo fazhishi shummu* (1976) and report on the Grand Secretariat Archives at the Academia Sinica (which Chang heroically did so much to preserve).

Commencing in the late twentieth century, approaches to Chinese legal history underwent even further change—owing to transformations in the legal academy and in scholarship about Chinese history, as well as to developments beyond the university. To be sure, noted legal scholars such as Roscoe Pound (who, after 20 years as Dean of Harvard Law School, served as legal advisor to the Nationalist government during the Civil War) published on Chinese legal history in such journals as the *Harvard Law Review* as early as the 1930s, but neither he nor others writing about China before the 1960s had training in Chinese history or language. In the late 1960s, legal scholarship in general began to expand beyond the doctrinal to examine law in a societal context or through economic and philosophical analysis. This broadening of focus, together with the unstinting support of Jerome Alan Cohen of Harvard, his generation's foremost American scholar of contemporary Chinese law, made possible the appointment to law faculties of scholars who were both trained in Chinese history and conversant with western legal theory. So it was that scholars such as William Alford, Allison Conner, Randle Edwards, James Feinerman, William Jones, Randall Peerenboom, and Hugh Scogin undertook ambitious cross-disciplinary work on Chinese legal history.

As discussed elsewhere in this volume, the late twentieth century also witnessed the rise of a new generation of historians of China, influenced importantly by broader trends in historical studies, who were determined to move beyond the top-down, "great man," and impact-response approaches that had characterized so much foreign work about China. Many such scholars took advantage of unprecedented access to archival materials on the mainland to produce a more China-centric history that did a better job of portraying dynamism, local nuance, and change driven by larger economic and societal phenomena. So historians of late imperial China at leading universities in the United States who had made their reputations first in political, intellectual,

and social history began from the late 1970s to produce ground-breaking work dealing with legal history. They include Kathryn Bernhardt, Philip Huang, William Kirby, Philip Kuhn, Jonathan Ocko, Jonathan Spence, Karen Turner, Frederic Wakeman, and Madeleine Zelin.

Perhaps the broadest changes took place in China itself. In the early 1980s, scholars began or returned to projects to produce editions of important historical sources, including codes and commentaries, that supported larger-scale collaborative scholarship on late imperial legal history (Liu Hainian and Yang Yifan 1994). Apart from the important opening of archives both central (the First Historical Archives) and local (the Baxian and Baodi archives), the post-Cultural Revolution thaw marked a beginning that Chinese scholars seized to move beyond doctrinally narrow or politically reductionist positions to embrace a range of methodological approaches. Some put to use training received outside China, while for others the rise of the motherland accompanied by the perceived decline of the west and Japan put a premium on work that identified what might be distinctively Chinese contributions to the design and operation of legal institutions (see Wu Shuchen 2003; Zhang Guohua 1998a).

This new wave of scholars brought diverse approaches to the field: legal scholars did comparative history, social historians discovered law, and Chinese scholars led the way in reviving the study of the Chinese tradition. Each advance, however, was rooted in newly available bodies of primary sources, typically in local archives. Because political and judicial power were never clearly separated in imperial China—as Chang Wejen’s work in historical preservation bore out—every archive was also to a great extent a legal archive. Scholars have tended to focus on those documents assigned to the category of “punishment” (*xing*), which usually involved violent crime, but also included a range of simple everyday disputes. In truth, disputes that a modern observer would consider legal or requiring judicial action could fall under a number of categories. Issues of marriage, adoption, education, and the disposition of corpses, for example, were filed under “rites” (*li*). It was now clear that the formal code was no longer sufficient for research on law. Instead, a legal-history approach to local archives could tease out any number of questions of society, culture, and everyday life.

### *Manifestations*

The aforementioned scholars and, subsequently, many others began to dispel misconceptions central to conventional portrayals of Chinese legal history. The most important of these were the interrelated ideas that Chinese law historically was irrational (substantively, procedurally, or both), that it was predominantly penal in character, and that, as such, it was essentially unchanging.

As suggested above, the vision of Chinese law as irrational had several different well-springs. Some scholars, such as Shuzō (1974–75) emphasized the personal and charismatic authority of the magistrate, assuming that in his efforts to be a “mother-and-father official” (*fumu-guan*), the magistrate dispensed Confucian “didactic conciliation” rather than a scrupulously analytical application of the law in resolving disputes. Others saw the law as little more than an instrument of despotism, applied by officials essentially to serve imperial interests and, hence, having little independent integrity or rationality. The latter interpretation, in particular, dove-tailed with the view that the purpose of the law was to address crime, a view buttressed by the fact that virtually every provision of the Great Qing Code specified a punishment.

Early waves of the new scholarship took issue with the characterization of the law as irrational and the concomitant treatment of the magistrate as engaged in Weberian “qadi justice.” Through their work on 190 abstracts of cases—some important, some mundane—from the *Conspectus of Judicial Cases (Xing’an huilan)* Bodde and Morris demonstrated powerfully the legal sophistication of which the late imperial state was capable. Edwards, along with Chang Fu-mei and Chang Wejen, advanced these efforts through translations of cases from the code commentary *Questions Raised while Reading the Substatutes (Duli cunyi)* as well as through probing (albeit largely unpublished) explorations of the legal reasoning of Qing magistrates. In Japan, Nakamura Shigeo issued a challenge both philological—criticizing scholars for misreading characters—and philosophical, as he sought to tear down the rhetorical distinction between an idealized western law and a demonized Chinese law (Nakamura 2004).

Other scholars sought to contribute from the ground up. Using the tools of legal, political, and social history, Alford developed the first historically accurate account of the legendary case of the lovers Yang Naiwu and Xiao Baicai in order to illustrate both the elaborate procedural checks built into the Qing system and the ways in which they failed to accomplish their stated purpose in this case (Alford 1984). Spence’s *The Death of Woman Wang* captured the importance of the magistrate as investigator and adjudicator, linking village micro-history with broader phenomena. Spence (1978) and Ocko (1988) elaborated the legal sophistication of appeals, arguing that they could constrain power. While all were quick to acknowledge the many problems in the late imperial system, their work made the case that it was inappropriate to dismiss Qing law as unrelievedly irrational.

Early waves of the new scholarship also attacked the idea that imperial Chinese law should be thought of as entirely penal. In 1974, Jones raised serious doubts about whether the division between “civil” and “criminal” that seemed so natural in the west aptly captured the essence of a Qing Code more concerned with state administration and moral education. Others took a different tack, leaving aside larger questions of categorization but demonstrating that, in the Code itself or in practice at lower levels of society, imperial China in fact had a very extensive body of civil and commercial law. Work by Myers and Chang Fu-mei (1976–78) was particularly important in showing the sophistication of thinking about the legal regulation of civil and commercial matters, as well as their local operation. It soon became apparent that Chinese subjects not only availed themselves of written contracts as early as the Han but also made extensive use of the legal system. Common people might well have “feared” the magistrate, but this was not enough to keep them from seeking recourse regarding what would today be termed civil and commercial matters. That did not necessarily mean that the strength of a contract was consistent over the course of Chinese history. Whereas during the Sui, the state instead turned to official registers to resolve disputes (Hansen 1995), by the Ming, contract reemerged as critical, given the decline in the reliability of registers. Nor did it mean that legal issues such as the tension between individual and corporate interests in property, to take one example, played out exactly as they did in the west, as is evident in such phenomena as the division of “households” (*fenjia*) (Wakefield 1998).

### *Rethinking the roots of law*

While most attention since the 1980s has been focused on the late imperial period, a wealth of new materials on pre-Qin law also came to light soon after the Cultural Revolution. Drawing on them, Karen Turner and others have argued for a counterpart

to natural law in early China that justified limits on the ruler, and that, to a degree, was embodied then and throughout later dynasties in the law and other codes of conduct (Turner 1993). Turner has endeavored to make the case that seeing the ruler as absolute autocrat may slight his role as chief ritualist and mediator between the earthly and numinous realms, navigating an uneasy path between political necessity, signs of disorder in the human and natural realm, and the looming potential for a shift in the Mandate of Heaven. In effect, there was a law beyond that of any particular ruler that the literati understood and that could be invoked in evaluating a sovereign's behavior, with the threat of Heavenly retribution. In his 2016 book *In Search of the Way*, Chang Wejen probes deeply into these and related dimensions of the thinking of eight of the great pre-imperial thinkers, and in 2011, Jiang Yonglin advanced the idea that the Ming legal system began as a project to bring about a heavenly order on Earth.

Central to these ideas and a question that has engaged several other scholars of pre-Qing legal history is the place of violence and morality in the administration of law. The debate over whether government ought to emphasize moral suasion or punitive law played out in the Qin–Han transition, when, in repudiating the harsh and only superficially rational Legalism of the Qin (221–206 BCE), Han-era (206 BCE–220 CE) Confucians sought a new moral basis for law in the Classics (Queen 1996). We may identify a thread of Confucian thought or imperial ideology across dynastic history that justified law not in terms of the need to maintain cosmic harmony, but instead as a preventative, palliative, or punitive measure of control in dialog with a theory of mind, including regard for jurisprudential questions such as determination of intent. Jerome Bourgon and Brian McKnight both identify as much evidence for amnesty and mercy as for harsh punishments. Bourgon (2007), invoking Bentham, characterizes alternating periods of “comminatory” and “reactive” practices that served a basically utilitarian function by exerting psychological pressure on subjects. McKnight (1981) argues very differently, that amnesties were a means to reintegrate offenders into the community under the authority of the sovereign, demonstrating his benevolence while also restoring the natural and cosmic order. Ultimately, we cannot know the minds of those administering such law, but we ought not assume that legal action was always governed wholly by either cosmic or earthly concerns.

### *Probing late imperial China*

More recent work in legal history has built significantly on the breakthroughs of the early post–Cultural Revolution years. Some scholars have taken particular advantage of unprecedented access to major archives to locate diversity and demonstrate agency and dynamism in state–society interactions. In these archives, it is possible to draw nearer to the voices of ordinary people, however garbled by bureaucracy, and locate the margins of state ideology, where the abstract categories of imperial ideology met local particularity across a vast empire of village culture and society. Other scholars have entered into conversation with social and literary theory. Still others have sought to combine the two—boring more deeply into China while moving further from a traditional area studies approach.

In the United States, the work of Philip Huang, Kathryn Bernhardt, Matthew Sommer, and Melissa Macaulay has been particularly influential. Huang reacted against the simple dichotomies of civil and criminal, or rational and irrational, to reevaluate Chinese law in terms of its own practices. On the basis of archival materials, Huang

developed the idea of a “third realm.” This was a conceptual space for negotiation between the formal and informal systems (which, after all, were not as divorced from each other as conventionally portrayed, sharing many of the same values and even personnel), which is to say between the “centralized minimalism” by which the Chinese state navigated between charisma and bureaucracy and the “practical moralism” that guided imperial-era officials. Macaulay pressed further, demonstrating that the “pettifoggers,” local legal specialists previously dismissed as marginal irritants, were actually important players in the operation of an intricate system of land use “rights” (Macaulay 1998). Bernhardt similarly sparked off a reconsideration of assumptions about rights and gender over the *longue durée* (Bernhardt 1999; see Lu’s chapter in this volume). Here and in Sommer’s (2000) powerful work on sexuality and law, we see the need to investigate the legal system holistically, with regard for the interaction between local knowledge, changing social norms, and imperial codification. Ultimately, these concerns were not peripheral to Chinese history. Rather, the law had a major role: the state deployed moral meanings and enforced social divisions through law. In turn, people could appeal to the authority of the formal law to shape relationships, whether economic, familial, or both.

Other scholars have chosen to approach the basic problems of gender, identity, and law as a set of conflicts playing out in text and ritual. Local archival documents show that appearances before the local magistrate and petitioning, the counterparts of which have been the object of much historical analysis in other empires, interpenetrated with a rich body of literature that would at first glance seem peripheral to legal procedure (Karasawa 2007). Gendered tropes drawn from popular culture could sway a legal decision one way or another, bringing lenience to a murderer who could be said to have acted only as gender demanded (Epstein 2007; Theiss 2007). Historians of law and culture have taken a broad view of sources for legal history, including, for example, legal proceedings recounted in novels and dramas, which affected popular understandings of the meaning and procedures of the application of the state’s writ (Hayden 1978; Hegel and Carlitz 2007). Legal discourse did not exist in a vacuum, and specialists, scribes, and deponents could draw on a world of narratives to make their cases.

Some scholars have gone so far as to interpret law primarily in terms of ritual, text, and performance. For example, Paul Katz has argued that the magistrate’s *yamen*, like today’s courtroom, served as a space for the performance of rituals not unlike those used to signal the resolution of disputes in temples (Katz 2009). Such an argument finds significant support in scholarship showing that law in imperial China was intimately related to spiritual rites and the making and remaking of community.

### *Efforts at integration*

The two different approaches to the law described above may seem irreconcilable, but they are not. One argues that the law opens up a special kind of space in time, society, and discourse. It asserts that the law is an interface between a monarchic state and a society highly oriented around the family, mediated by morally positivistic bureaucrats. Commoners and magistrates alike understand the law as an instrument for achieving particular ends. The other assumes that there is no special space, but that all action is bound in a continuum of cultural meaning. Nevertheless, those meanings may be instrumentalized. In any case, we have traveled a long way from the state-centered approaches to the law that historically dominated depictions of Chinese legal history. Clearly, law was not merely authoritarian—it had local significance.

Before the 1980s large-scale engagement of local sources facilitated by new archival accessibility and the growing prominence of social history in the west, Japanese scholars had for decades done impressive empirically grounded work on Chinese legal history (see Shiba's chapter in this volume). Later Japanese scholars have recently received heightened international attention, particularly through the English-language translations in the *International Journal of Asian Studies*. Starting in 2005, it published a series of articles demonstrating a powerful combination of legal theory with careful philological work. These empirical advances pose a number of quandaries, mostly related to the problem of "efficacy": how did officialdom ensure that law could be implemented and would serve broader social purposes?

Terada Hiroaki proposed that law served as a system to police socio-moral meanings, binding imperial ideology together with local instantiations of Confucian morality (Terada 2005–6). What is interesting about Terada's argument for understanding China and perhaps law more broadly is the significant slippage between what we might call "law" (*fa*) or "statutes" (*lii*) and "ritual" (*li*). Law appears to have taken on a quasi-religious quality, which is shockingly close to what Maine wrote in 1861: it was overwhelmingly concerned with the maintenance of proper social relations with respect to the authority of a chief ritualist who represented the natural order. Through Terada's work, we seem to be returning to the idea of the magistrate, not simply as a charismatic figure, but also as a ritualist and negotiator, a hinge between imperial law and local lawlike agreements. If imperial Chinese law was indeed a complex of texts that "bound" (*yun*) people together, was it then too nebulous to analyze systematically? One possible solution might be to place less emphasis on legal rationality as such and to think of the legal system instead as an apparatus for producing narratives—as a palliative device for negotiating disputes rather than an ultimate authority that resolved disputes pursuant to a clear universal standard.

Law in imperial China almost by definition concerned the imposition of norms upon the Other, whether in terms of ethnicity, gender, or class. Several scholars have considered state and society at the margins of empire, where Chinese law met other normative systems (Sutton 2003; Allee 1994). Here it becomes apparent not only that officialdom employed the law, but that it was actually central to state-making. Nor was the law absolute or despotic; rather, it was surprisingly flexible in response to the needs of officials and locals. This is borne out, for example, by the noted independent scholar Liang Zhiping (1996) in his study of the interface between the state and customary practice.

Research into interaction between differing groups through the legal system raises questions of legal culture. "Legal culture" is difficult to define in a single way, and its study began in the PRC as a means to address the perceived contradictions between Chinese tradition and legal modernization or deep-seated differences between Chinese and "western" legal thought (Zhang Zhongqiu 1991; Liang Linxia 1992; Fan Zhongxin 2001). More recently, PRC scholarship on legal culture has signaled a turn towards the local, as many scholars are taking advantage of newly opened archives to investigate the interplay of legal practices and beliefs between Chinese and borderland peoples (Wang Dongping 2014). Others are revisiting old texts with a new, ground-up approach to documents as inscriptions of social relations embedded in culture and everyday practice (Xu Zhongming 2012).

At the same time, an alternative approach has emerged that takes legal writing to be part of the Chinese intellectual tradition. Like Niida's thesis, it assumes a set of principles underlying a common Chinese, or even what some would term East Asian, legal culture

expressed in codified law, commentaries, and cases (Bourgon 2007; “Legalizing Space in China”). Certainly, one problem of western scholarship from the beginning has been the tendency to essentialize on the basis of poorly understood texts. As such, alongside the deep investigation of local materials, it is useful to approach the seemingly bland and static dynastic codes as living documents articulating reasoned responses to changing conditions while also seeking to preserve tradition.

The existence of reason in a system once reviled for its supposed lack of rationality does not mean it was free from other influences. Multiple communities inhabited it, from petitioners to the emperor, and between them the Board of Punishments and an extended hierarchy of bureaucrats (Dong 1995). Their interests could be served by effecting the right results in a given case, and so the system countenanced “pettifoggery” at every level—what a western jurist might call “argument”—even if it was officially frowned upon. A holistic regard for the complex interests at work in a judicial system both historicizes that system’s action and places it in its cultural and social context.

### *Law in the Republic*

Thus far we have dealt predominantly with late imperial China, as that has been the focus of the bulk of legal history scholarship. Whereas the Qing provides a wealth of archives on individual cases, which in each dynasty can be contextualized with regard to a single written code (albeit one revised over time), the Republican period (1912–1949) produces other challenges. Massive efforts were made wholly to transform the character of law, during which times enforcement was irregular and record-keeping messier than it had typically been under the empire. Moreover, modern Chinese history as a field has been greatly affected by the cultural turn, with scholars tending to put legal documents to multiple purposes, not only to examine the law per se, but to understand institutions such as the modern judiciary, legal community, and police as sites of contestation.

Many scholars have approached Republican law in terms of state attempts to enforce a new, modern normativity. Some emphasize the revolutionary character of legal reforms in the late Qing and Republic (Xu 2008). After all, it was widely thought that the reformers were abandoning a legal code that dated from the Tang, if not a conception of law that had an even longer history to it. Instead, they drew heavily on German and Japanese models. We may, however, wish to question both the extent of these changes and the depth of their effects: the Xinzheng “New Policies” legal reforms in part reflected the influence of the reformist jurist Shen Jiaben, whose research on the history of imperial law was complemented by the work of his colleague Wu Tingfang (1842–1922) on leading foreign legal systems. As Pär Cassel has demonstrated, the mixed court system, and thus the modern legal reforms that drew on it, actually originated in the legal pluralism of the Qing borderlands as much as in the encounter with European powers, even as Chen Li’s 2015 book has portrayed how the different cultural background that the Qing and westerners brought to their early legal interactions complicated mutual understanding (Cassel 2012; Chen 2015). In many places, particularly during the Warlord Era, local officials continued to operate much as they had before the end of the Qing. The persistence in the legal system of desiderata and norms that enforced traditional family structures and strategies to maintain corporate property also point to how challenging it was to effect legal change in the Republic (Kwan 2004). While some courts tried to set new standards for property rights, most preferred not to interfere with the local socioeconomic order.

Moreover, as Goodman and Lean have demonstrated in separate studies of Republican-era cases, it was not enough for the state to simply impose law—rather, the court of public opinion played a powerful role in contesting the meaning and direction of legal developments (Goodman 2005; Lean 2007). Therefore, we might understand modern Chinese legal history as an ongoing and self-conscious engagement with the notion of “legal modernity” both in institutional developments and in public consciousness. As Mühlhahn (2009), Dikötter (2002), and others have shown, while it might not have been possible to thoroughly transform the institutions of a whole country, legal reform did take hold in certain sectors and localities, especially in urban areas. Penology and criminology, however, were not simply transplanted whole stock – rather, they took on their own meanings and forms.

The evolution of the police force similarly tracks the social and institutional changes afoot during the Republic, as the initial attempt to create a civil institution to enforce law evolved into a body licensed to maintain the moral and social order that then could be turned to a range of purposes (Wakeman 1995). In prisons and police, we can discern some of the origins of contemporary Chinese judicial institutions (Dutton 2005). Simultaneously, the Republican period saw initial attempts at legal professionalization through efforts at developing a judiciary and bar associations (Conner 1994; Alford, Winston, and Kirby 2011; Ng 2011; Xu 2011b).

### The past in the present

Efforts to write “history” about any contemporary society are, by their nature, fraught with difficulty. We lack the benefit of time to discern broader trends unfolding over an extended period. We may be too much a part of the events about which we would write to have intellectual distance from them. Even in the most open of societies, key documents may not yet be publicly available or their existence even known.

These challenges are greatly amplified in endeavoring to write about the legal history of the PRC (1949-present). China’s vastness and the rapidity of change are by themselves daunting. Even with the substantial strides taken toward greater transparency regarding official legal materials over the past three decades, much remains opaque. This is especially the case if one wishes to delve into matters such as the Party’s influence on judicial process or its own internal “disciplinary process” (*shuanggui*) that some have suggested operates as a separate and sterner system for officialdom or if one hopes to explore the PRC’s myriad forms of administrative punishment that can, inter alia, lead to incarceration in the absence of judicial process.

There are serious challenges for PRC scholars wishing to write about their own legal history since 1949. PRC nationals face constraints of the type embodied in the April 2013 Party Document Number 9 warning against academic work concerning universal values, civil society, and judicial independence, even as the Party extols its version of the latter (Chinafile 2013). While many scholars push on nonetheless, the sharp criticisms made in 2014 by high-level officials against so mainstream an institution as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences on the grounds of its being “infiltrated by foreign forces” (in part because of Ford Foundation support) hardly encourage the open and bold treatment of the PRC’s legal history (Wan 2014).

Nor are foreign scholars immune from such concerns, given how close many issues in law and state administration are to Party sensitivities. There is also the complication of being involved with that about which one is writing, as, at least in the legal academy,

it seems that many foreign scholars have been involved in legal development projects in the PRC or in the provision of advice about Chinese law to foreign governments, multinational companies, law firms, foundations, and NGOs of various stripes. To note this is not to impugn such activity—indeed, it may provide rich insight—but simply to suggest potential issues in the writing of PRC legal history.

In addition, there are serious challenges of a more scholarly nature, the most salient centering around the standards by which to describe and to assess legal development. There have, for instance, been lively debates among scholars, both foreign and Chinese, over the questions of so-called “thin” versus “thick” understandings of a “rule of law” and whether it is meaningful to speak of a “rule of law with Chinese characteristics.” Proponents of the idea of a thin rule of law, notably Peerenboom (2002), argue that the essence of the rule of law lies in procedural regularity and the treatment of cases that are not politically charged. Therefore, according to this perspective, examining Chinese legal development with an expectation of democratization or an emphasis upon the cases that are politically the most challenging is not only unfair, but leads to inaccurate description, as it is inattentive to the actual project of Chinese law reform as well as the experience of nations generally at China’s stage of economic development. Proponents of a thick rule of law counter this by asking whether procedural regularity is sustainable without more robust (i.e., typically democratic) checks on the exercise of Party power. They also challenge the division between political and apolitical cases in a society suffused with the institutions and ideology of the Party-state and question whether the regular enforcement of undemocratically formed rules may be more of a rule by law than a rule of law (i.e., the use of law as an instrument to control society rather as a constraint on government). Other scholars wonder whether battling over the label “rule of law” is an exercise better left to people in the political arena, as the thick-or-thin dichotomy obscures a reality that may be appreciably more variegated.

The question of whether there may be a “rule of law with Chinese characteristics” raises related issues. To be sure, there are political invocations of this idea that may chiefly be directed toward deflecting criticisms of domestic human rights practices. Nonetheless, there is value in endeavoring to distinguish from such instrumental invocations of “culture” the scholarly question of whether societies with a strong Chinese cultural dimension aspire to and are able to promote values generally seen as central to the ideal of a rule of law, such as the attainment of justice throughout society, using institutions that may differ from those prevalent in other societies. In a sense, this is akin to the efforts of the legal historians discussed above to escape the idea that premodern Chinese legal institutions had less interest in or capability to dispense justice just because their values or institutions might have differed from those of the west—an association underscored by the vehemence with which Philip Huang has taken PRC scholars to task for not having emphasized sufficiently a distinctively Chinese dimension to legal history (Huang 2007). At the same time, endeavoring to understand Chinese practices on their own terms, historically or at the present, by no means requires that one ultimately refrain from expressing one’s views about the extent to which they may or may not live up to their own stated ideals or generally agreed upon universal values. To put it another way: even if one set of legal institutions or philosophies does not match an essentialized notion of western practices or ideas, rule of law can still arise. Nor ought one accept as an incontrovertible given statements to the effect that the rule of law has a wholly different meaning in China, or that the institutions through which it may be achieved do not and cannot bear relationship to those of other societies.

Not surprisingly, there is sharp disagreement about the idea of a rule of law with Chinese characteristics among PRC scholars, with some, notably He Weifang (2012), suggesting that it lacks intellectual coherence and others, such as Zhu Suli (1996), that a rule of law will ultimately only be viable if it is “built from the indigenous resources of China.” As we have sought to demonstrate in this chapter, there is considerable room for debate over what those “indigenous resources” may be, given the diversity and richness of historical legal practice in China since pre-dynastic times. Historians of law in China may be in a unique position to complicate the contemporary discussion by demonstrating that there is not a single, straight trajectory from Zhou dynasty thought to the ongoing project of legal construction in today’s China. Rather, China’s legal history has been one of both imminent, if not always realized, possibility and local flexibility.

### Note

- 1 The authors wish to thank Professors Chang Wejen and Yu Xingzhong for their advice as we wrote this chapter. All views and any mistakes, however, are ours.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

# Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Identity in the Study of Modern China

THOMAS S. MULLANEY

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is a nation comprising 56 ethnonational groups (*minzu*): the Han ethnic majority, which constitutes over 90 percent of the population, and 55 minority nationalities that account for the rest. This ethnic diversity is a product of two related, but distinct, histories: the *longue durée* history of empire, migration, human geography, and cultural interaction; and the history of how and why, at different moments in time, human societies choose to categorize, organize, and administer human difference in one way over another.

The first of these histories takes us to the very beginnings of Chinese civilization, through a complex process wherein human societies in the core regions of today's "China proper"—the Yellow River drainage basin of present-day northern China, the Yangzi River drainage basin of southern China, and the elevated Sichuan basin of western China—underwent differentiations and/or amalgamations with neighboring peoples along linguistic, cultural, religious, physical, and other trajectories. During the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), the imperial court engaged in persistent conflict and cooperation with their non-Chinese neighbors, over time incorporating many of them into the central polity of the empire. During the Tang dynasty (618–907), contact with Turkic and Muslim peoples in modern-day Central Asia intensified greatly, owing to vibrant economic and cultural trade along the Silk Road. In the year 1114, the ethnically Chinese Song dynasty (960–1297) lost its capital and northern territories to Jurchen invaders emanating from the region between present-day Mongolia, Korea, and China. Founding the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234), they forced the Song into retreat in the south, and ruled North China for over a century—that is, until they themselves fell in the early thirteenth century to another foreign, conquering army, the Mongols. As the most extensive territorial empire in history, the Mongol world stretched from the Korean peninsula in the east, to present-day Eastern Europe in the west; and from the Russian taiga in the north, to the northern part of the Indian subcontinent in the south. As one of the four autonomous khanates into which the empire was divided, Kublai Khan's

Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) governed present-day China proper as part of a broader, multiethnic empire. During the Ming (1368–1644), a period which witnessed the reestablishment of an ethnically Han court, colonization of the southwestern regions accelerated, with Beijing bestowing official titles upon a select group of native rulers, entrusting them with the preservation of order, the submission of tribute, and the provision of troops as part of a complex system of indirect rule.

In the closing decades of the sixteenth century, a new power base began to form in the northern steppe region around the figure of Nurhaci (1559–1626), a Jurchen chieftain. In the late 1500s, he brought together the three main Jurchen tribes in the region into a politically and militarily unified coalition. This confederation would become a powerful economic force, a formidable war machine, and an existential threat to their southern neighbors, the Ming. Following the death of Nurhaci in 1626, his son Abahai consolidated the Jurchen tribes further, renaming them *Manchu*. With the Ming descending steadily into crisis and endemic rebellion during the 1630s and 1640s, Manchu forces took advantage of a revolt led by the Chinese rebel leader Li Zicheng, which managed to capture the Ming capital of Beijing. News of the rebellion, and of the death of Ming emperor Chongzhen, afforded the Qing a rare opportunity: to pass through the boundary of the Great Wall, not as conquerors of the Ming, but as self-styled pacifiers of rebellion and protectors of Confucian civilization.

It would take the Manchus 40 years to consolidate control over the territory of the former Ming, beginning with a subjugation of loyalists in the south lasting until 1662; rebellion in the southwest, finally crushed in 1681; and maritime rebellion in Taiwan, which survived until 1683. With the territory of China proper under control, the new dynasty turned its attention to rivals to the west: most notably the Zungar Mongolian state. What ensued during the long eighteenth century were immense Eurasian land campaigns and wars of subjugation that would effectively double the size of the empire, bringing Xinjiang, Tibet, and Mongolia into the orbit of Beijing (Waley-Cohen 1998).

While deep historical accounts of Chinese history are vital to our understanding of contemporary ethnic diversity in China, no such account—however detailed—alone provides us with a definitive explanation of why China is now home to 55 minority nationalities, and one ethnic majority. For that, we must broaden our view to consider the history of ethnic taxonomy in China—a history that runs parallel to and interacts with on-the-ground realities, but has never been a mere reflection thereof. In 1911, when the Qing dynasty and its broader imperial system collapsed as a result of internal crises and a growing revolutionary movement, the founders of the new Republic of China (1911–49) struggled to reconcile Han ethnic nationalism with China's multiethnic imperial heritage. In the late Qing period, local Chinese gazetteerists had reported to the imperial center about a wide array of “barbarians” living in the frontier regions. For one province alone, Yunnan, such accounts portrayed the region as home to over 100 distinct peoples, with nearly 100 more in the neighboring province of Guizhou. In sharp contrast, the Nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-shek insisted only a few decades later that the republic was home to only one nationality, “the Chinese people” (*Zhonghua minzu*), an internally diverse but ultimately singular people descendant from a common stock. At the very same time, Chinese scholars in the newly formed disciplines of ethnology and linguistics argued that China was home to many dozens of unique ethnic groups, a taxonomy they arrived at through what they saw as the only rigorous, scientific methods available to accurately assess the ethnonational makeup of China. To compound this ethnotaxonomic complexity, the early Chinese Communists resisted Chiang Kai-shek's

mono-ethnic construction, and instead rallied around a vision of China as a composite of politically and economically equal ethnonational constituencies, patterning their view after the experience and political philosophy of the Soviet Union. After the Communists took power in 1949, the new regime of the People's Republic of China settled upon the current orthodox tally of 56 "ethnonationalities" (*minzu*), embedding this "fact" into a wide array of political, economic, and social sites throughout the country, whether in the requisite 56 displays of anthropology museums, 56 figurines of "nationalities doll sets," 56 delightfully costumed children during the 2008 Olympic ceremonies, or otherwise. Simply put, the truth of China's ethnic diversity at any given historical moment has always had as much to do with the unpredictable fortunes of political regimes and their particular ethnotaxonomic visions as with the complex sweep of Chinese history.

In this chapter, we will examine some of the core questions that have emerged in recent historiography about the interrelated question of ethnicity, nationalism, and identity in the late imperial and modern periods.

## Ethnicity and empire in the Qing

### *New Qing history and its descendants*

In China's northwest, 1,000 miles away from the capital of Beijing, lies the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. With a size of 640,000 square miles (more than three times the size of Sichuan province), it is the largest province-level administrative region in the People's Republic, accounting for 16 percent of the entire land mass of the country. To the south and west of Xinjiang sits the Tibet Autonomous Region, which itself constitutes an additional 13 percent of China's total land. And to the east of both lies the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, with an area of 457,000 square miles—or roughly 12 percent of the land mass of China. When taking into account the province of Qinghai, to the east of Tibet, these regions account for fully half of the total size of China.

Despite the constant refrain of China as a "unified multiethnic" country emanating from Beijing in the contemporary period, this immense span of territory has not formed a part of China since "time immemorial." Indeed, these regions were conquered and brought into the political orbit of Beijing only quite recently in historical terms, during the long eighteenth century. What is more, the Chinese regime responsible for bringing these territories under the administrative control of Beijing was itself not ethnically Chinese—I refer here to the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911).

The Qing is universally regarded as the most successful "conquest dynasty" in Chinese history (Rawski 1996). Circa 1644, the total population of the Manchu polity is estimated at approximately two million people—one-fiftieth the size of the former Ming, by most estimates. Nevertheless, the Qing endured for over two centuries, oversaw a period of unprecedented economic growth, and doubled the territorial expanse of the empire.

Naturally, one of the earliest and most enduring questions within Chinese historiography of the Qing has been the problem of understanding this success. The conventional answer to this question centered upon the idea of *Sinicization*: the idea that the key to Qing success was its political and cultural assimilation with the very civilization it had conquered.

A number of factors contributed to this early consensus, one of which was undoubtedly the Manchu Qing's avid self-presentation as patrons of traditional Chinese culture, and their eager deployment of Chinese political symbolologies and systems as part of their

system of rule. The Manchu court was a prodigious supporter of many of the most fundamental dimensions of what might be thought of as “traditional” Chinese politics and culture. The Qing employed the same system as the former Ming to cultivate and recruit government bureaucrats—the civil service examination—and were generous patrons of large-scale intellectual projects, such as the compilation of the *The Emperor’s Four Treasuries*, the *Kangxi Dictionary*, and more. A second major factor was a methodological one—namely, that scholars of this generation by and large did not employ Manchu-language sources, and instead concentrated their interpretive efforts upon Chinese-language materials. With the interrogation of the “Sinicization” hypothesis, and particular with extensive forays into the court’s Manchu-language records, a very different portrait of the Manchu Qing began to take shape. Most strikingly, it was soon revealed that at precisely the same time the Qing elite were fashioning themselves as proper Confucian rulers, so too were they fashioning themselves in culturally specific ways to their Tibetan, Mongolian, and Manchu subjects—a framework that one scholar has referred to as “simultaneous emperorship” (Crossley 1999). To their Mongol subjects, the Manchu court invoked the legacy of Chinggis Khan, fashioning the emperor as the “khan of khans.” To its Tibetan subjects in Lhasa, the Qianlong emperor was famously portrayed as the bodhisattva Manjusri, with the Qing court dedicating itself to a robust patronage of Tibetan Buddhism. To the Manchus themselves, the court fashioned yet another imperial face, this one placing emphasis on “traditional” Manchu virtues of frugality, martial spirit, a celebration of the Manchu homeland, and the speaking of the Manchu language. This new generation of scholars—which included scholars such as Pamela Crossley, Mark Elliott, James Millward, and Evelyn Rawksi—came to be known collectively as “New Qing History.”

Broadly speaking, one encounters categorized under the rubric of New Qing History two modes of engagement with the history of Qing empire and ethnic statecraft. At one level, works like those of Emma Teng, Mark Elliott, Laura Hostetler, and others delivered insight into the *historical practice of ethno-political theory, conceptualization, and imagination*: the historical emergence and lived experience of elite worldviews, whether those of the Manchu court, Manchu and Han sojourners in China’s borderland regions, or the cartographic imaginaries of power-holding elites. Whether we consider the “translucent mirror” through which the Qing court viewed both itself and its diverse ethno-cultural subjects, or the “Manchu way” that this same court anxiously attempted to reinforce vis-à-vis the conquest elite, a vital component of New Qing History has been concerned with the visions, imaginations, ideas, mirrors, and ways of the metropolitan elite (Crossley 1999; Elliott 2001; Teng 2004; Hostetler 2001).

A second, slightly later, subset of New Qing History has focused to a far greater extent on the regional and local level, as in the work of David Atwill and C. Patterson Giersch (Atwill 2005; Giersch 2006). Whether in navigating the complex relationships that webbed together local elites and native chieftains with centers of Siamese, Burmese, and Qing power; or in charting out the complex landscape of religious, ethnicity, territorial dispute, and violence in nineteenth-century Yunnan; this subset of New Qing History has been less concerned with the worldviews of Manchu and Han elites than with producing frame-by-frame analyses of locally situated processes of conflict, negotiation, and adaptation (Millward 1998; Perdue 2005).

A new wave of research on Chinese borderlands is set to transform and enrich our understandings of ethnicity, frontiers, and ethnic statecraft in modern China. Many of the scholars producing this new work are recently minted PhDs mentored by the pioneers

of New Qing History. It is not uncommon for this generation of scholars to boast linguistic and archival training in three or more of the languages used by the Qing empire and its neighbors—Chinese, of course, but also Manchu, Mongolian, Arabic, Tibetan, Russian, or other Eurasian tongues (Thum 2014). Whether Jonathan Schlesinger's new work on Mongolia and northeast China, Nianshen Song's work on the Qing-Choson/Sino-Korean border demarcation, new work on Xinjiang by Judd Kinzley and Kwangmin Kim, Loretta Kim's work on the Sino-Russian borderland, or fascinating new scholarship on the Sino-Tibetan borderland by Yudru Tsomu, Scott Relyea, and Benno Weiner, the breadth and depth of frontier and border studies at present is remarkable (Song 2013; Kinzley 2012; Kim 2008; Loretta Kim 2009; Schlesinger 2012; Weiner 2012; Relyea 2010).

A discernible shift is taking place, however, that marks an important difference between this new generation of historians and their forebears. In short, many of the intellectual descendants of New Qing History have charted out research programs that bear greater resemblance to the locally situated studies of Atwill and Giersch than with the court-oriented focuses of Crossley, Elliott, Hostetler, and Teng. Their driving questions, methodologies, and modes of inquiry are characterized by a commitment to social and economic histories of frontiers and non-Han peoples at the deeply local level—and to a far lesser extent by a commitment to exploring the worldviews of the court or of metropolitan elites. A necessarily concise consideration of recent scholarship helps chart out the contours of their commitments and the implications thereof.

To begin, it is perhaps advantageous to revisit the question of the Manchus themselves, examining their treatment by scholars of this new generation. Moving away from questions of the Manchu court perceptions of the Qing empire and of Manchu identity, recent scholarship has shifted to questions of Manchu identity as experienced at a distance from the metropole. As Shao Dan has examined, Manchu–Han relations in Manchuria differed profoundly from Manchu–Han relations in China proper. In China proper, where the preponderance of scholars have focused their attention in attempting to understand Manchu–Han relations, one finds systems of spatial segregation in which walled garrisons served as concrete, daily reminders to the populace regarding a wide array of differential policies; a comparatively strict enforcement of anti-intermarriage laws; and a political economic condition in which Manchu bannermen depended upon court-assigned stipends. In Manchuria, by contrast, none of these conditions existed in such stark ways. Bannermen supplemented their incomes through engagement in agriculture, which brought them into economic relations with the local Han population. Walled garrisons were fewer than in other parts of the empire, thereby removing (or never having enforced) the vivid and resentment-inspiring marker of Manchu supremacy. And laws against intermarriage were less enforced, allowing for a demographic condition in which there emerged more Manchu-Han families than in China proper. As Shao explains, these and other differences created a condition of “less tense relations between the banner and Han communities in Manchuria” (Shao 2011, 39).

Shao also captures a kind of fundamental contradiction within the way that the Qing court conceptualized and administered Manchuria. On the one hand, the Qing court began to celebrate Manchuria as a venerated “homeland,” a romantic vision that formed one piece of the broader attempt to shore up a distinct Manchu identity. At the same time, however, the court's own policies—as well as growing sentiments among Manchu elites and bannermen—pulled in precisely the opposite direction, to the point where this “homeland” came to be seen by Manchus in China proper as a “place of intolerable

hardship” (Shao 2011, 39). For one thing, the Qing court initiated policies that more or less established Manchuria as a likely destination for criminal exile. At the same time, the once regular schedule of official imperial visits to Mukden, wherein the Qing emperors performed rituals of ancestral worship, witnessed a precipitous decline from the Jiaqing emperor onward. Whereas the Kangxi emperor performed two such visits, the Qianlong emperor four, and the Jiaqing emperor two as well, the single visit by the Daoguang emperor marked the last imperial visit until 1931—under quite different political circumstances. Vividly captured by Shao, there emerged a marked antipathy to the idea of this putative “homeland,” so much so that, when the cash-strapped dynasty attempted to alleviate its financial troubles by relocating certain stipend-dependent bannermen from Beijing to Manchuria, the policy initiative was met with outcry and, in one sensational and bloody instance, suicide (Shao 2011, 42).

### *The political economy of Qing empire*

Within other recent scholarship on Qing borderlands, one detects a similar shift away from questions of elite cultural imaginaries, and towards matters of political economy and geopolitics. Whether in the scramble for Africa, or the scramble for concessions in Asia, New Imperialism set off chain reactions throughout the nineteenth-century world. The repercussions of Anglo-French rivalries could be felt, not only in those regions consolidated or newly brought under British or French rule, but also in the exacerbation of Anglo-Russian and Russo-Japanese colonial rivalries. The Qing was a full participant in the history of late nineteenth century New Imperialism, as evident in late Qing projects of territorial consolidation and border demarcation.

Examining the Tumen River region in northeast China, Nianshen Song charts out border disputes between the Qing and Chosŏn, and later between the Qing and Meiji states, which extended from the middle of the nineteenth century into the opening decades of the twentieth (Song 2013). Trajectories of state-formation in China’s northwest have also received considerable attention and reexamination of late. In contrast to the Manchurian experience, recent work on Xinjiang by Judd Kinzley has placed foremost emphasis on natural resource extraction as a driving force behind the transformation of Xinjiang from a Central Asian hinterland to its current status as a geopolitically, if not geographically, central unit within the broader Chinese nation-state (Kinzley 2012). Natural resource extraction emerged as the operative strategic posture vis-à-vis Xinjiang beginning in the late nineteenth century, when Chinese statesmen urged Beijing to draw inspiration and techniques from British, Russian, and German mining efforts in the Central Asian region specifically, and the territories of the Qing more broadly (Wu 2012; Shen 2014; Wu 2014a; 2015). The region’s ample supply of oil, gold, and ores would serve not only to help finance the immensely costly Qing effort to manage and provincialize Xinjiang, but also to prevent these strategic resources from falling into the hands of Russian and British interests.

Whether prompted by concerns over Russian imperialism, Japanese imperialism, or otherwise, the Qing initiated widespread processes of provincialization, geared towards shoring up centripetal control over the borderland area. In 1907, the Qing commenced its provincialization of Manchuria, wherein longstanding policies of differential administration were, at least in theory, replaced with those that would bring the northeast under the same systems and protocols of administration as “China proper” (Shao 2011). The timeline for this process finds its proximate starting point in the first Sino-Japanese

War of 1894–95, the suppression of the Boxer Uprising in 1900, and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5, during which the Qing court grew increasingly wary of the potential consequences that might result from their ongoing policy of special administration in Manchuria. To the extent that the northeast remained poorly integrated and comparatively less populated, it remained even more susceptible to the imperial intentions of two neighboring powers. To shore up control, this region was to be politically and demographically integrated, with the Qing court now returning to a much earlier policy of promoting Han in-migration.

### *Qing imperial legacies in Republican China and the PRC*

A repeated point of emphasis in recent borderland historiography has been the ways in which late Qing efforts at interiorizing and provincializing the frontiers bled into comparable efforts by the Republican and even PRC states. Whether in the work of Lin Hsiao-ting on the borderland policies of the Guomindang state, of Dai Yingcong on the Sichuan frontier, of Scott Relyea on the early Republican state's ongoing efforts to exert control over Tibetan areas, or of David Brophy's on (among many other topics) the first three Republican governors of Xinjiang—Yang Zengxin, Jin Shuren, and Sheng Shicai—the portrait painted of the early Republican state is one of continued crisis and engagement with this Qing imperial legacy (Lin 2006; Dai 2009; Relyea 2010; Tsomu 2012; Weiner 2012; Brophy 2011). When we move forward and reflect upon ethnicity and ethnic statecraft in the People's Republic, an emphasis on continuity is similarly pronounced. Whether in terms of enduring trends that span the 1949 divide, as examined in the history of ethnic classification (Mullaney 2011) or in the PRC state's continued negotiation with local-level non-Han minority intermediaries (Cheung 1996), we witness a Communist state endeavoring to legitimate its rule over an ethnically diverse polity, investing energetically in the cooptation of minority elites, and aggressively neutralizing perceived threats of territorial disintegration—particularly in the geopolitically precarious regions in the west (Litzinger 1995; 1998; 2000; Schein 2000; Brown 2002; Guo 2008; Weiner 2012).

Certain discontinuities are apparent as well, however. First, the ethnotaxonomic policy of the PRC, particularly in southwest China, reveals the extent to which “Qing Universalism” was not universalist at all. The “barbarians” of Yunnan, for example, did not constitute a category within the Banner System, nor were they the focus of the court's elaborate system of “simultaneous” emperorship. Unlike the famous portrait of Emperor Qianlong in which he is presented to a Tibetan audience as an emanation of the bodhisattva Manjusri, we have no evidence of parallel efforts by Qing emperors to present themselves as, for example, descendants of a Miao or “Lolo” line. On a related level, never before the present day has a Chinese regime—ethnically Chinese or otherwise—committed itself to recognizing and politically incorporating so many different groups. While scholars are careful to point out that the PRC's current identification of 56 *minzu* greatly underestimates on-the-ground realities of cultural difference, nevertheless we do not often pause to reflect on the striking contrast between this figure and the much smaller numbers of ethnic constituencies identified in the imperial worldviews of the Qing, Ming, Yuan, or indeed any preceding dynasty. This difference becomes all the more surprising when we consider that, as an adherent to ethnopolitical theories advanced within the Marxist-Leninist tradition, the Chinese Communist regime is also perhaps the first to view “ethnic diversity” as an epiphenomenal, historically temporary ideation,

leaving us with a poignant irony: that the first Chinese regime to view ethnicity as fundamentally *unreal* is also the first regime to recognize and governmentalize ethnic difference to such a profound extent.

### Ethnicity and national identity in China

In 1911, the Qing ultimately collapsed, a rapid turn of events which was something of a mixed blessing for anti-Manchu revolutionaries. On the one hand, they had achieved their stated objective: the restoration of Han control over a country that was itself predominantly Han Chinese. The flag of the 1911 revolution captured this concept visually, with 18 stars symbolizing the 18 historic provinces of “China proper”—a geographic formulation that, by excluding the territories of Xinjiang and Tibet, among others, imagined the boundaries of China as being coterminous with that of its predominant ethnonational group. At the same time, the disintegration of the Manchu regime was accompanied by a disintegration of the very “Qing universalism” which had kept intact a diverse empire for more than two centuries. In November 1912, Outer Mongolia was recognized as autonomous under the Russo-Mongolian Treaty. In 1913, the Simla Conference initiated a 20-year period in which no Chinese military or civilian authorities were permitted to reside in Tibet. In southwest China, and particularly in Yunnan, local warlords exercised *de facto* political control over the region. This disintegration, which came as the result primarily of the weakness of Republican authority, was reflective of the collapse of post-imperial legitimacy as well: by waging their revolution as a pro-Han, anti-Manchu enterprise, Republican nationalists unwittingly alienated the rest of non-Han China as well. Phrased differently: in building a China for the Chinese (read Han), they had made no place for Tibetans, Mongolians, and so forth.

Confronted with this catastrophic territorial failure, much of which was taking place in the very territories first brought into the orbit of Beijing by the Manchu Qing conquest, Republican authorities began to temper their revolutionary rhetoric, replacing it with a more catholic discourse. With the collapse of Manchu rule, Chinese leaders in the new era would have to develop their own means of reconciling the binaries of diversity and unity, plurality and singularity. Should they fail, they stood to lose vast expanses of territory. Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) harkened back to the Qing model, reconceptualizing Chinese nationhood as a “Republic of Five Peoples” (*wuzu gonghe*) comprising the Han, Tibetans, Mongolians, Manchus, and Hui (a formulation embodied in the regime’s new five-color flag). Unlike the concept of *minzu* deployed by Zhang Binglin and others, Sun no longer portrayed Tibetans, Mongolians, and others as essentially and irrevocably different, but rather emphasized both the possibility of and necessity for assimilating such groups into the Han majority. For Sun, the five peoples or lineages shared a common origin, but had fragmented along cultural lines over the centuries.

In this section, we turn our attention away from imperial configurations of ethnicity and identity, and pivot towards questions of ethnicity and identity in the age of nationalism and the nation-state. As in our earlier examination of scholarship on ethnicity and borders, a necessarily non-comprehensive overview of recent work on Chinese nationalism and national identity alerts us to two critically important pathways along which scholars have begun to reconceptualize the study of Chinese nationalism and national identity. The first pathway takes us through questions of Chinese subnationalisms and subethnicities, in terms of both non-Han and Han Chinese communities and identity categories. The second takes us into questions of Chinese transnationalisms and transethnicity.

*The question of subnationalism in modern China*

In China in the 1950s, ethnologists, linguists, and Communist authorities undertook a bureaucratic-cum-social scientific project known as the “Ethnic Classification” through which it was determined which among China’s hundreds of ethnic minority communities would and would not be officially recognized by the state (Mullaney 2011). Having merged nearly 400 minority communities into just 55 officially recognized minority categories, however, the Chinese state soon needed to determine (or fabricate) the “standard” form of each: a standard or “representative” dialect, clothing style, dance-form, folklore, historical narrative, and much more. What ensued was a deeply politicized process in which state authorities, social scientists, and ethnic minority elites struggled to determine the hierarchies that would govern sub- and intra-ethnic (as compared to inter-ethnic) relations for each group—a profound challenge when we consider that single “groups” encompassed upwards of dozens of distinct subgroups or “branches.” Those ethnic subgroups whose spoken language and cultural forms were designated as “representative” of the minority nationality at large could expect to hear their tongue broadcast over radio and television, and encounter their cultural practices in print, performance, film, pedagogy, museums exhibits, and more—to become the *primus inter pares* within their respective ethnonational categories. For those whose cultural forms were demarcated as “dialectal” or “variant,” by contrast, their potential fate stood in stark contrast: a marked absence of state investment in their identity forms, and the specter of widespread, local-level cultural extinctions.

A comparable question of subnationalism pertains to the Han Chinese as well. Indeed, some of the most fascinating recent work on Chinese ethnicity has emerged through the interrogation of the category of Han itself, along lines not dissimilar from those that have been brought to bear on non-Han *minzu*. A robust divide has long separated our thinking on questions of China’s ethnic minority populations, on the one hand, and the Han ethnonational majority. This divide separates the history of ethnicity in China, on the one hand—a term which, when deployed, more often than not references the non-Han peoples of China—and the history of “Chinese nationalism,” on the other—typically used as shorthand to refer to political movements, sentiments, and identifications within those understood as Han Chinese. To a certain extent, this division is the byproduct of the subdivision of scholarly communities and discussions wherein we have tended to compartmentalize questions of Han nationalism and ethnic minority identity in separate articles, monographs, workshops, and conferences. A scholarly division of labor exists, that is, which as Chris Vasantkumar has aptly diagnosed, reinforces the boundary between “ethnic and national understanding of Chinese-ness” (Vasantkumar 2012).

“Han Chinese” is a colossal category of identity that encompasses 94 percent of the population of mainland China, making it the largest ethnic group on earth. Whereas the origins and historical provenance of the category remain contested, with some locating its emergence in a distant past (Xu 2012), others in imperial Chinese history (Giersch 2011; Elliott 2011), and still others at the turn of the twentieth century (Chow 1995; 2001; Leibold 2011), few would disagree that, like other immense global categories of identity, Han is beset by a host of linguistic, cultural, political, and historical inconsistencies that call into question its status as a coherent community. Whether in the work of Kevin Carrico on Cantonese identity, or the work of Emily

Honig and Antonia Finnane on subethnic tensions between Subei and Jiangnan communities in Shanghai, the supposed coherent category of Han consistently reveals decidedly ethnic and even ethnonational subdivisions and internal dynamics (Honig 1992; Finnane 1993; Carrico 2011).

According to conventional narratives long advanced by scholars in China, Han identity began the process of its formation through a multi-millennium process of aggregation, or what has alternately been referred to as “Sinicization,” “integrated ethnic heterogeneity” (*heji cuozu zhi zu*) (Fei 1988), or, more recently, the “snowball theory of Han” (owing to the image of an ever-rolling, ever-expanding entity that is formed through its encounter with, and interiorization of once outsider groups). Specific terminology notwithstanding, such descriptions of Han ethnogenesis are based on the idea that Han possesses a unique magnetism whereby increasing numbers of external groups are gradually enveloped, made part of the ever-expanding Han Chinese category (Li 1967; Xu 2012).

The snowball theory of Han enjoys dominance in mainland Chinese scholarship, but serious challenges have been raised elsewhere, most notably by Kai-wing Chow. Chow argues that the Han category of today is just over one century old, having originated in the discourse of anti-dynastic revolutionaries in the late Qing. Thoroughly disillusioned with the ailing Qing state—headed by non-Han Manchu rulers who had conquered the territories of China in the first half of the seventeenth century—radicals such as Zhang Binglin and Zou Rong openly proclaimed their goal of expelling the “barbarians” and restoring China to its rightful owners: the ethnic Chinese, newly formalized under the moniker “*Hanzu*” (Chow 2001).

For Chow, the neologism “Han *minzu*” was an active ingredient in the formation of the category, not a neutral or passive descriptor by which an already-existing community was finally referenced. Chow is careful to state that earlier references to “Han” and *Hanmin* were quite unlike that of “Han *minzu*,” with the former categories being understood as highly malleable and which permitted the inclusion of members based on their ability to master certain cultural practices. By contrast, the new concept of “Han *minzu*” or *Hanzu* exhibited the sort of biological essentialism and exclusionism characteristic of racial categories. As Frank Dikötter has argued, figures such as Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei “reconfigured folk notions of patrilineal descent into a racial discourse which represented all inhabitants of China as the descendants of the Yellow Emperor” (Dikötter 1997, 15).

Chow ties this conceptual invention to the political exigencies of the time. The concept of *Hanzu* enabled anti-Manchu radicals to articulate a form of essentialized, unbridgeable difference between the Manchu ruling elite and the non-Manchu imperial subjects that was impossible to argue using the logic and terminology of either traditional, cultural notions of identity, or recently imported Social Darwinist notions of race per se. The Manchus, as discussed above, had in large part mastered the forms and vocabulary of traditional Chinese regimes, securing their legitimacy through an active patronage of Confucian ethics, the civil service exam, and so forth. As such, their rule was difficult if not impossible to delegitimize using culture-based arguments. At the same time, other available avenues of revolutionary discourse—in particular the increasingly global concept of “race war” articulated in the Social Darwinism of Huxley and others—were similarly insufficient, due to the Manchu’s and Han’s common designation as members of a single “Yellow Race” (Chow 1995). To articulate their anti-Manchu stance, Chow argues, the revolutionaries imagined into existence the novel, culturalist-cum-racial

concept of *Hanzu*, a form of “Han racism,” designed to “undermine the reformists’ ground for continual support for the Manchu regime” (Chow 1997, 39).

Outfitted with this amalgamated idea of culture-race, Liang Qichao and others were able to articulate their opposition to Manchu rule as the cultural equivalent of racial struggle (Rhoads 2000). Dru Gladney has made similar claims, arguing that, while the “notion of Han ren (Han person) has clearly existed for many centuries ... the notion of Han minzu (Han nationality) is an entirely modern phenomenon, which arose with the shift from Chinese empire to modern nation-state” (Gladney 1994, 98). Far from possessing a multi-millennium history, Gladney argues, Han was entirely a political construct of the modern period promoted by figures such as Sun Yat-sen as a “brilliant attempt to mobilize other non-Cantonese, especially northern Mandarin speakers, and the powerful Zhejiang and Shanghaiese merchants, into one overarching national group pitted against the Manchu and other foreigners threatening China during the unstable period following the Unequal Treaties” (99).

For scholars who have approached the category of Han from this vantage point, then, the question of Han ethnogenesis takes shape very differently than in the “magnetic Han” paradigm. Rather than asking “Who has been absorbed to create Han?” the question becomes “In response or contradistinction to whom was Han first articulated as a relevant category?” While scholars have proposed different answers to this question, nevertheless there exists a certain basic consensus: namely, that the category of Han has taken shape by means of a “default contrast with all other ethnic groups” (Brown 2002, 363), is a byproduct of “internal orientalism” (Schein 2000, 100), and is “a residual category comprised of all those who were not barbarians” (Ebrey 1996, 26). When analyzing Han portrayals about the Bai minority, for example, Susan Blum argues that such portrayals “represent the Han curiosity about their own past” (Blum 2001, 173), a claim that finds support in the work of Dru Gladney, who earlier proposed that the representation of non-Han minorities in China “reflects the objectivizing of a ‘majority’ nationality discourse that parallels the valorization of gender and political hierarchies” (Gladney 1994, 93). As evidenced by these quotes, one highly influential perspective derives from Edward Said’s seminal text *Orientalism*, whose analysis of the west–east binary has been applied to Han–non-Han. That is to say, in much the same way that Said’s Orientalists were, through their representations of the “Orient,” engaging in the formation of “a collection notion identifying ‘us’ Europeans as against all ‘those’ non-Europeans” (Said 1979, 7), members of the Han majority are understood here as constituting their own identity by means of representing their imagined alter-ego, the non-Han. Whereas Han stereotypes may differ depending on the particular non-Han group in question—with some groups being considered “colorful” and “harmless” (the Yi and Naxi), and others troublesome and “resistant” (Wa, Hui, and Tibetan)—nevertheless, all of these representations of minorities are, for scholars who advance this theory of Han, ultimately Han imaginings projected upon minority communities for the purpose of an inverted self-representation.

### *The question of transnationalism in modern China*

Discussions of Chinese transnationalisms and transethnicity have prompted critical reevaluations of a different sort, by expanding beyond conventional settler–sojourner frameworks of earlier scholarship on overseas and diasporic Chinese identity, and building upon more recent interventions by Aihwa Ong, Donald Nonini, and Adam

McKeown, among others (Wang 1996; Skinner 1996; Nonini and Ong 1997; McKeown 2001). Whether in Hwei-Ying Kuo's work on Chinese nationalism in the Hong Kong–Singapore corridor (Kuo 2014); Leander Seah's work on Chinese transregionalism within the Nanyang region (Seah 2011), or Richard Chu and Ruth de Llobet's work on Chinese mestizos in the Philippines (Chu 2010; de Llobet 2014), one encounters increasingly grounded, translocal, and theoretically sophisticated work whose examinations of the historical and anthropological dynamics of identity formation within Chinese communities outside of the confines of the Chinese nation-state prompt us to ask new questions about Chinese nation-formation and national identity within the boundaries of the Chinese polity. In a recent examination of Burmese Chinese communities between the 1860s and the 1940s, Yi Li uncovers historically situated oscillations within the identities of Burmese Chinese communities—in certain contexts privileging or accentuating Chinese regional origins (whether as Cantonese, Hokkienese, Hakka, or Yunnanese), while in other contexts effacing regional identities under broader rubrics of Chineseness. Oscillations of national identity along subnational and transnational valences are evident as well in the history of Sino-Mexican transnationalisms from the 1930s to the 1970s, as examined in recent work by Fredy González (González 2013). Here, questions of Chinese regional origins appear to matter less than those of political orientations, particularly the relationship between Chinese-Mexicans who lent their support to the Zhigongdang (ZGD/ZKT)—the nationalist and transnationalist Chinese political party formed in San Francisco in 1925—and those who voiced support for Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang. At the same time, however, sociopolitical trajectories connected to the historical experience of Mexico, US–Mexican relations, and the geopolitics of the region—particularly the anti-Chinese campaigns in Sonora and Sinaloa in 1931, the abortive Ensenada (Baja California) Campaign of 1934, and the 1942 decree by the Mexican government requiring Mexican-Chinese participation in military training—all contributed to countervailing trajectories of identification that reordered these diverse cultural and political situations under the singular rubric of Mexican-Chinese.

Non-Han transnationalisms are increasingly vital to our understanding of Chinese nationalism and identity as well. With mainland China being home to upwards of 30 “cross-border ethnic groups” (*kuajiang minzu*)—officially recognized non-Han Chinese nationalities who maintain cultural and sociopolitical relationships with co-ethnic communities beyond the Chinese border—non-Han ethnic transnationalisms have historically constituted both a challenge and opportunity for mainland regimes. Historically, such communities have proven challenging to render legible to the state, insofar as they easily slip between the three distinct taxonomic terrains of “national minorities,” “overseas communities,” and, increasingly, “overseas Chinese ethnic minorities.” As Chris Vasantkumar and Elena Barabantseva have both examined, the People's Republic has, from the 1990s onward, attempted to project a “multiethnic national project beyond the confines of the territorial nation-state” (Vasantkumar 2012, 443; Barabantseva 2012). The PRC state has invested in so-called patriotic tours of “overseas Chinese ethnic minorities” in South, Central, and Northeast Asia, state-sponsored initiatives designed to, among other objectives, pursue economically beneficial “co-ethnic” exchanges (e.g., between Chaoxian communities in Yanbian and Jilin, and their ethnocultural “counterparts” in South Korean), as well as to promote positive consciousness about Chinese policies in Xinjiang and Tibet. As Vasantkumar has examined, such projects have made it possible for the Chinese state

to hail “not just returned Tibetans but their kinfolk abroad as potential members of a deterritorialized, multiethnic Chinese nation” (Vasantkumar 2011, 443). As Barabantseva has argued, this strategy has been undertaken to “address ethnic problems in China through mobilization of transnational ethnic unity of the Chinese nation” (Barabantseva 2012, 86).

Our story becomes increasingly rich, and the lines between nationality and ethnicity further blurred, when we contemplate this rich panoply of sub- and transnationalisms simultaneously—particularly, considering together Han and non-Han trajectories. Here, one closing example, drawn from the contemporary period, helps alert us to the complex dynamics that must be kept in mind when examining questions of ethnic and national identity in China. Motivated by a growing sense of socioeconomic displacement, as well as a palpable yet largely *sotto voce* resentment against the Communist state’s affirmative action policies, certain subsets of urban, newly middle class Han Chinese have begun to invent, celebrate, and aggressively champion Han Chinese identity by seizing upon the very strategies and technologies of identity first used in China to classify, celebrate, and manage China’s ethnic *minority* communities (Carrico 2013). In a strange reversal, Han Chinese communities have begun to categorize and canonize their own representative forms of dress, folklore, music, dance, and more, both in a search for the lost authenticity of an archaic, Han and Tang dynasty past, but also in an effort to situate themselves within China’s official formulation as a unified multi-ethnic country made up of 56 nationalities.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

# The Religious Core of Local Social Organization

*BAREND J. TER HAAR*

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of religious life in traditional China (Goossaert 2000). After all, the traditional Chinese family was not a natural biological unit, but a group of people worshipping one or more ancestors. Kinship was a function of shared worship and shared stories of a common past. The village was a group of people collectively worshipping the local gods of Earth, rather than people who happened to be living in the same place. It might well exclude migrants from elsewhere or desperately poor people. Professional groups of craftsmen, merchants, or people studying for the examinations worshiped patron saints and devoted much of their collective resources to maintaining these cults. The human population of the All under Heaven consisted of those people recognizing their ruler's Mandate of Heaven, which was as much a religious as a political notion until the fall of the imperial system in 1911. Those who did not accept the Mandate of Heaven ideology, as expressed in a variety of homological ritual practices, were barbarians and were equated with the category of "demons."

In this chapter I focus on the agency of local groups in using religious culture to shape their lives. Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism will be referred to primarily as ritual traditions that local communities could draw upon, but will not be discussed separately (see Nadeau 2012). Everybody was incorporated in multiple religiously defined networks at the same time, even the Qing period Classicists (*ru*) who practiced ancestor worship and had invented a ritual tradition of their own, based on their reading of ancient ritual texts. Not so long ago, this religious core of local society was still largely ignored, by social historians and historians of religion alike. Most survey histories still place religious life in separate sections, focusing on the doctrinally more sophisticated aspects of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, while ignoring local society and its religious nexus (Duara 1988; Siu 1989).

The emperor and his officials, as well as Daoist priests, saw themselves as mandated with the task of carrying out the way "on behalf of Heaven" (*daitian xingdao, shuntian xingdao*). For this reason, as has been pointed out long ago, the language of Daoist ritual

is that of governance. Even rebels and criminal(ized) groups, such as the Triads, used the same language (Ter Haar 1998). Therefore, the local magistrate was the stand-in for the emperor in the performance of rituals expressing the latter's possession of the Mandate of Heaven, by carrying out the appropriate rituals for the official pantheon (and often enough simply for any deity that was really popular locally) (Snyder-Reinke 2009; Kang 2006). Work on the connections between religious life and political rule is common for the early period (Wright 1978; Loewe 1982; Chan 1984; Wechsler 1985), but surprisingly limited for the later period, despite much better sources (Cahill 1980; Ebrey 2014). Evelyn Rawski pays considerable attention to religion and also looks at legitimation in her study of the Qing emperors, but mostly within the imperial household and not as a larger political issue (Rawski 1998, esp. 197–263). This is a real lacuna, because the prominence in messianic traditions throughout Chinese history of saviours from past imperial houses such as the Liu (of the Han), Li (of the Tang), Zhao (of the Song) and Zhu (of the Ming) indicates that local people continued to see their imperial houses within a religious framework (Seidel 1969/1970; Ter Haar 1998).

Unsurprisingly, our perception of local religious culture is strongly influenced by traditional labels and derogatory views of local religious culture. At the same time, some of these labels also had, and often still have, legal consequences. The imperial state (followed by its modern successors) had a great fear of religious groups and traditions causing rebellions and generally disrupting social order. From the Yuan onwards, this fear was elaborated in a series of prohibitions (eventually unified in a single Ming law) that covered a broad scope of religious activities, far beyond new religious groups (Ter Haar 2003). The best known example is that of the label “White Lotus Teachings” (*bailian jiao*) which has been applied to cover a variety of unrelated social and religious phenomena since the mid-sixteenth century (Ter Haar 1992). Application of this label and its associated stereotypes meant repression and even bloody persecution. Similar twentieth-century labels are “superstition” (*mixin*), leading to disparagement and possibly repression, and “heretic teachings” or “false cults” (*xiejiao*), leading to violent persecution (Goossaert and Palmer 2011). Now that we are shedding this traditional discourse, we also discover that local communities had an extremely rich and meaningful religious life.

### The structure of local society

Local society before the Song period was largely made up of natural villages that were knitted together by kinship connections (with their concomitant celebrations, such as weddings and funerals) and the twice-yearly worship by the entire village of the God of the Earth, in spring to pray for a good crop and in autumn to give thanks for a bountiful harvest. An important part of these festivities was the sharing of alcoholic drinks and food, especially meat, in order to confirm and further cement existing social ties (Loewe 1982; Poo 1998; Lagerwey and Kalinowski 2009; Lagerwey and Lü 2010). One trend that picked up from the Eastern Han onwards was that of cults for real or invented historical figures, eventually replacing the more traditional Gods of the Earth. These cults were served by mediums into whom the deity could descend, allowing new forms of direct communication with divine figures (Stein 1979; Lin 1998). Mediums provided rituals for healing people of various afflictions, but also for obtaining good weather and better harvests. Before the Song, Buddhist and Daoist ritual traditions kept aloof from these local cults, resulting in polemical attacks and outright destruction (Stein 1979). How this worked out on an individual level for

people who participated in local cults as well as adopting varying degrees of Daoist and Buddhist practices is not yet well understood.

From Dunhuang we have extensive evidence of formalized socioreligious associations for the Tang period. They were connected to Buddhist monasteries and possessed extensive rules, which even prescribed fines for non-attendance (Gernet 1995, 261–77). We are still sadly unable to ascertain how representative that material is for the rest of Tang China, let alone for earlier or subsequent periods. It is by no means impossible that they were a specific local phenomenon necessitated by the much more mobile nature of Dunhuang society that required more formalized social organization and/or the fact that more local literacy simply enabled more formalized regulations.

From the Song onwards we do get more information on the bottom-up self-organization of society, especially in the Lower Yangzi region (Ter Haar 1995; McDermott 2015, 169–228). It is difficult to determine whether this is due to a larger number of sources on local society (as is the case from this period onwards) or greater regional prosperity and commercialization, with stronger self-organization as a by-product. No direct relationship has been demonstrated between the top-down creation of structures for the purpose of collecting taxes and labour duties and local self-organization around cults, although one suspects that they may have overlapped in practice.

The development of cults devoted to human figures increased greatly in speed during the Song, allowing a much stronger self-identification of local society around these cults than ever before. We see the rise of regional cults, and eventually even some nationwide cults, although the latter category remains surprisingly small in number (Hansen 1990; von Glahn 2004). Ming and later evidence indicates that the religious pantheon of northern China is more uniform, but we do not yet know why. It may have been the result of migration patterns in the aftermath of the bloody civil war which brought the Yongle emperor to power in the early fifteenth century. In most places, one or two urban cults served at the centre of local society at least since the Northern Song, one devoted to the “Emperor of the Eastern Marchmount” (*Dongyue*) and the other to the “City God” (*Chenghuang*). Around them existed hierarchical networks of local cults offering tribute to them in their urban temples. At the same time both the City God and the Eastern Marchmount had become an integral part of a new underworld structure where all people would pass through, to be interrogated and possibly punished, before being reborn. Sinners might carry instruments of punishment and torture to do penance at local festivals for both the City God and especially the Emperor of the Eastern Marchmount. At the same time these two and a few other cults served as the head office of the heavenly armies which could be summoned by ritual specialists to fight demonic creatures. Probably for this reason, temples for the Eastern Marchmount also served as the headquarters of the local Daoist priests of the Heavenly Master or Zhengyi tradition (Ter Haar 1995; Meulenbeld 2015, 168–77). Finally, the Temple of the City God was one of the preferred locations for taking a divine oath, accompanied by a malediction, that one was speaking the truth (Katz 2009). Together these two cults played an important role in integrating local urban and rural societies, ranging from social organization to religious culture.

During the late Five Dynasties and Northern Song, the dominant modes of ritual activity by Buddhist and Daoist priests were more or less laid down for the following centuries. Buddhist priests performed Water and Land Gatherings for the souls of untended dead, as well as Dispensing Food or Releasing Flaming Mouths rituals, mostly for recently deceased ancestors. In addition they provided extensive funerary services

(Stevenson 2015). Daoist priests might also provide funerary services, but more commonly performed the Cosmic Renewal rite and a variety of exorcist rituals. In other words, the Buddhist ritualists generally specialized in the world of the dead and their Daoist colleagues in the world of the living, although from an anthropological perspective both worlds are of course intimately connected. Local people would have distinguished between different types of specialists, not so much in terms of overall religious affiliation, but as parts of a larger repertoire of available services from which to choose and combine freely on the basis of custom and perceived efficacy (Ter Haar 2001). There were also alternative local ritual traditions, such as Flower and Incense Monks, Vegetarian Ladies, and others, but these are not well-documented in the available historical evidence (Tam 2005; Liu 2005). Apart from providing services to local communities and kin groups, collective rituals served the important social functions of expressing and reaffirming social values, such as those of kinship, filial piety, and neighborly support. They brought people together in sacrificial practice and communal meals. From the Song onwards, Buddhist and Daoist ritual specialists increasingly came to some form of acceptance of part of the local pantheon, for instance by means of incorporating them through rituals and moral treatises. By the late imperial period Buddhist or Daoist monks or priests even functioned regularly as temple keepers, since this provided a stable living from temple lands and the sale of incense, candles, oil, and other ritual necessities.

Next to local communities, kin groups from the lowest level of the nuclear family up to the lineage were first and foremost defined in terms of their ancestral worship. Shared meals were again an important part of any ritual event. Throughout Chinese history, creating larger descent groups than one's immediate ancestors had been the privilege of the social elite, as a corollary of the success of their male members in the examination system. In the early sixteenth century a crucial reform allowed ordinary families to create larger descent groups or lineages. This grouping shared a common ancestor, but also property, which could range from an ancestral hall and lineage registers to landed property or a lineage school. This was effectively a new type of social organization for local families that allowed them to combine resources to be invested in study for the civil service examinations, commercial enterprises, or even opening up new land. Since the ancestral hall served as the owner of this property, it was also largely exempt from taxes and labour services. The lineage became especially important in southern China, until the early twentieth century (Faure 2007; McDermott 2013).

### **Territorial and charismatic cults**

The new cults enabled a much more personal (individual or family-based) relationship with the deity, who still supported the community in its agricultural activities, but also protected it from outside attacks, whether from demons bringing illness and other disasters, or the equally destructive bandits and even regular soldiers. People could also take their deities with them when they traveled elsewhere and thus remain symbolically connected to their place of origins. The central state started to pay increasing recognition to these anthropomorphic deities in the course of the eleventh century, when local cults could apply for feudal titles for their deities with the Ministry of Rites (Hansen 1990). This large-scale practice was not continued in the same way during the Ming and Qing, although incidental enfeoffments continued to be made. A title for their deity provided the local community with prestige, vis-à-vis the state as well as neighboring villages.

Communication could take place through possession, dreams, and visions, or more simply by means of throwing moon blocks or drawing divination rods.

Local cults from the Song onwards can be divided into those with a territorial base, in which membership is primarily ascribed, and those with a charismatic base. In the latter type, membership is voluntary and more volatile, and lasts as long as the personal connection between worshipper and divine being stays intact. Most territorial cults develop from charismatic cults, but by acquiring a territorial base they lose some of the ability to help individual people or families. At this stage their mythology also becomes more conventional, confirming stable family norms. In a rural society in which more prosperity for one family is seen as lessening the prosperity of another, a cult that privileges the interests of some individuals or individual families over others is always seen as dubious. Charismatic deities are therefore notoriously deviant in one form or another, by being violent, drunk, mischievous, and sexually hungry, and by generally upsetting social and gender hierarchies. As a result they also have the power to achieve things, which they provide only if and as long as their needs are properly met, through sacrifice as well as otherwise (von Glahn 2004; Kang 2006). Charismatic deities have a following, but the integration is mostly between the medium who serves the deity and their customers/clients.

Territorial cults are the primary carriers of the kind of integrative social functions described in the previous section. On their birthdays these deities go on processions through their territory and communities, during which people bring sacrifice, perform plays, and eat and drink together. They have audiences with higher-order deities and take part in a larger network of communities. These cults are structured not through a bureaucratic metaphor, but through a feudal metaphor. Their titles range from emperors (such as the Emperor of the Eastern Marchmount and later also Guan Yu), empresses (the Heavenly Empress or Mazu), kings or princes, to dukes, marquises and others (Ter Haar 1995). In other words, local deities are seen as homologous to the emperor, rather than the local magistrate, with the exception perhaps of the City God.

The bureaucratic structure that Arthur Wolf once saw as dominating the local pantheon applies first and foremost to the world of the dead, although feudal elements can still be found in the rulers of the underworld who are called kings, rather than magistrates (Wolf 1974). These kings, such as King Yama or the City God, are assisted by a sub-bureaucracy that bears close resemblance to that of the county magistrate. Of old it is in the underworld that local government is enacted most closely, featuring interrogations that can be perfect (thanks to elaborate forms of torture, a Karma Mirror that can show misdeeds from previous lives, and the extensive bookkeeping of people's past and future lives), or completely mistaken because of judicial errors and even corruption (Eberhard 1967). Otherwise we find the closest resemblances with formal bureaucratic processes in Daoist ritual, which also increasingly shaped ordinary people's communicative practices with their local deities as access to literacy spread more widely through the later imperial period. Emily Ahern (1981) has suggested that religious ritual is a field for practicing political interactions, but I would argue that the religious and political were not separate to begin with (Ter Haar 1998).

Charismatic cults were of course entirely outside any bureaucratic framework. Unsurprisingly, local officials and ritual specialists alike greatly disapproved of the erratic and rule-breaking behavior that was ascribed to such deities. The fact that they were served by possession specialists or mediums further contributed to their gradually decreasing status throughout the imperial period. Repeated attempts were made to destroy such cults, of which the most famous one is the campaign against the Wutong

deities in the Jiangnan area in the late seventeenth century (von Glahn 2004). Since they fulfilled an important need in providing personalized support, in fighting illnesses and all sorts of threats to personal and familial happiness, such attempts were usually not effective. Or if a cult was transformed into a more palatable one, their personalized functions would be taken over by other charismatic cults.

### Creating a moral universe

Religious activities played an important role in shaping and reinforcing people's moral values as well. A good example is filial piety. This value has been claimed by Classicists (*ru*), on the basis of classical texts ascribed in one way or another to Confucius. Moreover, during the May Fourth Movement "Confucianism" was heavily criticized for advocating filial piety. Therefore, it is often seen as a uniquely Confucian value. Within local society, however, Buddhist traditions have been at least as important in propagating filial piety. It motivated sons to become Buddhist monks, because they could gather merit on behalf of their mothers (Cole 1998). Many projects for building religious institutions, but also the publication of sacred texts and the performance of rituals, were motivated by the urge to gather merit on behalf of one's deceased nearby ancestors. The Ghost Festival on and around the fifteenth day of the seventh month was inspired by the classic story of the filial monk Mulian who had pressed the Buddha for a ritual that would enable him to transform the burning of sacrificial food for his mother being punished in the lowest of all possible hells into something edible (Teiser 1988). Buddhist rituals were also an essential part of most funerary procedures, which were of course again heavily motivated by filial piety. Finally, many Buddhist (and Daoist) stories told of the merits of filial piety.

When people had conflicts with each other, they always first tried to solve these by mediation, but also by putting their grievances before the gods. The magistrate's court was generally a place to be avoided. Plaintiffs put in a complaint and asked for the assistance of the deity, or they took an oath that they were speaking the truth and the other party was lying. To accompany their complaint or request they pronounced a self-malediction, for instance beheading a cockerel and stating that they would suffer the same fate if they were lying (Katz 2009). Although we can no longer ascertain how often people had redress to this form of divine justice, this type of oath taking seems to have been very common in broad layers of society.

Oral and written stories about supernatural punishments as well as rewards for one's deeds served a similar regulatory function to divine justice (Eberhard 1967). In their original oral forms, such stories were transmitted locally within a very specific community who would have been acquainted with the protagonists, their close kin and their larger social network. This community also encompassed local elites, who often shared the same mental and religious world as local villagers. Even after the rise of an urban landlord elite in the late Ming, this elite would have known about these stories through their midwives, servants, shopkeepers, local ritual specialists, and so forth. This is also how these stories ended up in written sources. Such accounts placed illness, death, miraculous healing, and similar events in a supernatural context, in which an extra-human force caused these events as punishment for someone's moral transgressions. Telling such stories served to damn the living, including the protagonists and their surviving kin, but also functioned as a warning for the rest of society. In this way, these stories created a moral universe in which people felt bound to keep certain moral rules. From the late Ming onwards, explicit ethical tracts were added to this corpus of stories,

which were printed and reprinted in increasing numbers. These so-called “Morality Books” (*shanshu*) and “Ledgers of Merit and Demerit” (*gongguo ge*) contained religiously inspired moral treatises, but might also include ethical commentary, exemplary stories, and even illustrations (Brokaw 1991; You 2005). These efforts at moral rearmament were often linked to religious cults, such as those for Emperor Guan (the deified Guan Yu) and the literati god Wenchang (You 2010).

In the same period, we can see the growth of charitable organizations that took over the role of good works that had been carried out previously by Buddhist monastic and lay institutions (Ter Haar 1992; Gernet 1995). From the Buddhist custom of setting free “animal life” (*fangsheng*) developed a more general practice of helping human life (Smith 2009). Different activities were added to the repertoire, such as caring for widows (to discourage remarriage and suicide), caring for (mostly female) foundlings, and famine support (taken over by the state in the eighteenth century). Buddhist motivations were always essential in the early phases of these activities, after which they were reconceptualized in classicist terms. A concern that was classicist from its very inception was the burying of left-behind corpses, which became part of a general movement against the Buddhist custom of cremation, at least in the Lower Yangzi region (Kawakatsu 1999). Cremation damaged the body bequeathed by one’s parents and directly conflicted with the imperative of filial piety as the Classicists defined it. Despite such classicist rethinking of moral values, people continued to practice charity out of religious concerns, whether Buddhist or for instance the worship of the deity Emperor Guan, in combination with printing morality books and supporting charitable activities (You 2005; 2010). Generally speaking, this movement of moral rearmament was directed at addressing the growing tensions of late imperial society as a result of social and economic differentiation.

Some religious choices had very strong social consequences, especially the Buddhist practice of the vegetarian fast, which included the rejection of meat (which infringed the taboo on killing living beings), smelly foods (onions, garlic, and the like), and alcoholic draughts (since they cause one to lose self-control). Originally, these were mostly concerns of Buddhist monks and part of a much larger set of injunctions, while lay people practiced these rules only on certain days or occasions. From the Song onwards, these also became signature statements of Buddhist conviction for lay people, to be maintained on a daily basis. Rejecting meat and alcoholic drinks also meant the rejection of local sacrificial culture and with that the impossibility of normal social ties, because sharing meat and drinks was so essential in creating social bonds (Ter Haar 2001). A very different taboo was that on eating beef, which became increasingly popular among educated people from a Daoist and/or “Classicist” (*ru*) background from the ninth century onwards. It was probably inspired by the significance of the buffalo in agricultural work. Unlike the rejection of meat in general, this taboo did not have any negative social consequences, since the principal sacrificial meats in China traditionally are pork and poultry.

### New lay-religious movements

Most people were not overly interested in the precise doctrinal contents of Buddhist and Daoist traditions, but did draw on their rituals and transmitted stories about the efficacy of Buddhist or Daoist figures in rewarding or punishing people for their moral and/or religious behavior. We find a different attitude in some new religious groups, including Daoism and Buddhism in their early phases, and each time that religious innovation took place. But it is only in the case of the early Heavenly Masters in the late

Eastern Han period that we see the rise of a clearly differentiated social movement that also includes lay communities (Hendrischke 2000).

In the early twelfth century several lay religious movements came into being which were able to spread over a larger area and still retain some overall doctrinal and social cohesion. The historical White Lotus movement is probably its most prominent example. Although hard to explain precisely, it seems plausible that it was the gradual loosening of local ties with the advent of a new commercial economy that made the rise of institutionalized lay Buddhist organizations possible. Before this time, the rejection of meat and alcoholic drinks, with the resulting breakdown in social relationships, would have been much too risky for most people. Ordinary people in northern Fujian, Jiangxi, Hubei, and even the capital of Dadu (modern Beijing) adopted a consistent set of religious and social practices, calling themselves by a variant of the autonym “White Lotus” and referring to themselves as Men of the Way (or some other form of this appellation). They adapted their personal names to include the religious affiliation characters *jue* or *pu* for males and *miao* for women. The movement had a supra-local identity, with an awareness of groups elsewhere, and even started a regional Buddhist canonical project and defended their faith in the capital, Beijing, when under government attack in 1310. Their lifestyle included the explicit and systematic rejection of meat and alcoholic drinks. They aimed to be reborn in the Western Paradise of Amitabha, leading to an intense devotion towards him and his assistant Guanyin. Adherents married and their religious institutions often remained within the family. Their rejection of meat and alcohol led to criticisms from the Buddhist monastic world, maybe because it felt that this was threatening their moral monopoly. During the early Ming prohibition the movement faded away into oblivion, although similar groups would carry on their ideals in later centuries. Somewhere in the sixteenth century the name “White Lotus” became common among officials and educated elites as a label for a wide variety of religious and magical phenomena, sometimes even completely imaginary. This has caused much confusion in traditional and modern scholarship (Ter Haar 1992).

From the late sixteenth century we again see the rise of lay religious movements of varying backgrounds and institutional strength (Seiwert 2003), once more at a time of increasing socioeconomic differentiation. Charismatic figures produced their own scriptures that could serve as a focal point of ritual practice and inspiring narratives. This was also a fundamental difference with earlier lay religious movements. One such teacher was Luo Qing (fl. early sixteenth century), active to the north of Beijing. He wrote the very influential *Five Books in Six Volumes* (*Wubu liuce*). The movement that stayed closest to Luo’s work is undoubtedly the Non-Action Teachings, which emerge in the historical record in the late sixteenth century. Adherents rejected statues and ancestor worship, gave up meat and alcoholic beverages, and regularly recited the *Five Books in Six Volumes*. Some even thought explicitly about topics of ritual and doctrine, becoming critical of the dominant mode of thinking in those days (“classicism” or *ru*), and questioning conventional male–female relationships. Joining the movement was an exclusive choice, which meant leaving most of one’s former religious culture behind, including the dominant role of Buddhist institutions as overseers of doctrinal purity and ritual practice. At the same time, joining was very much a choice for a more intense way of living Buddhist norms and values, rather than any form of rejection of Buddhism as such (Ter Haar 2014). The Non-Action Teachings survived into the 1950s, when it suffered greatly under communist repression, like so many other new religious groups and networks that had been founded since the late sixteenth century.

The Non-Action Teachings had a strong sense of their right to practice their beliefs freely. To this end, they created a narrative in which Patriarch Luo had first helped out the Zhengde emperor (1505–21) against his foreign enemies (referred to as Tatars) and later against foreign monks (obliquely identified as having a Tibetan Buddhist background) who proved to be formidable debaters. The first time, the emperor became so afraid that he tried to get Luo executed, and put him in prison when this proved impossible. The second time, he bestowed freedom of religious practice on the patriarch and his followers. Unknown adherents also created an official-looking document claiming that the Kangxi emperor had granted them the right of free religious practice. The movement transmitted this document for several centuries and used it to defend their rights before local officials (Ter Haar 2014, 35–46, 182–86).

During the same period, we also see an enormous increase in the production of Precious Scrolls, a new genre of printed text which presented moralistic mythological narratives in a combination of prose and rhymed verse (Overmyer 1999; Idema 2012). They formed the basis of numerous new religious groups and networks, such as the Way of Yellow Heaven on the northern Shanxi border and the Broad Yang Teachings in Hebei and Henan (Seiwert 2003). Although the state's fear of such groups and networks caused repeated persecution, on a local level they were generally accepted as part of the overall religious repertoire for ritual services, healing, and emotional support (Naquin 1985; DuBois 2005). The Way of Yellow Heaven and the Broad Yang Teachings appear to have had a strong group identity as well, although adherents of the latter also performed rituals for non-adherents. Much looser networks also existed, such as those of the Wang and Liu families which never developed a strong sense of group identity, but remained vertical hierarchical organizations for transmitting ritual lore. Like the Broad Yang Teachings, the common late Ming-Qing narrative of the rescue of the people banished from Heaven by the Eternal Venerable Mother was a crucial part of their Precious Scrolls. What is often overlooked by modern scholars is the fact that these texts remained the monopoly of the highest level teachers. The Eternal Venerable Mother narrative expressed in them played no role among the mass of lower-level adherents, for whom simple, Daoist-inspired meditation techniques were central as tools for self-healing (Seiwert 2003). Sometimes one of their branches got involved in late Ming and Qing uprisings, although rarely in leading roles (Naquin 1976).

Most religiously inspired incidents of the Qing period were not primarily inspired by the Eternal Venerable Mother narrative, but instead by the demonological messianic paradigm. In this narrative the end of times was constructed as the advent of demonic creatures causing a whole range of disasters, which could be staved off by violent exorcist means. An imperial prince of the Zhu family—the Ming ruling house—was expected to come, assisted by heavenly generals, to protect those who chose to be his followers. This latter expectation specifically influenced the Triads, but prophecies of this type also contributed to the so-called White Lotus rebellion of 1796–1805 and the Taiping rebellion of the mid-nineteenth century (Ter Haar 1998; 2002). The Qing state usually mistook these prophecies for preparations for rebellion, which triggered a repressive response and then actual rebellion as a secondary result.

New religious movements continued to arise in the Qing and Republican periods as well. An important role was played by the rising popularity of spirit writing cults as a means of legitimating religious change. Of course, the believers themselves would see these cults as the source of innovation. An especially important cult was the spirit writing cult at the Dragon Daughter Monastery in Sichuan, whose texts would subsequently

spread all over China to inspire people. In these texts the Jade Emperor and Emperor Guan, the deified Guan Yu, played a central role, showing how misleading a rigid separation between the regular divine pantheon and messianic traditions can be (Takeuchi 1990). Twentieth-century redemptive societies were often indebted to these spirit writing cults of the nineteenth century, but unlike the older generation of new religious groups these societies were heavily involved in Confucian norms and values as well (Palmer, Katz, and Wang 2011).

One important new religious group was of course Christianity. Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in the late sixteenth century and Protestant missionaries followed from the early nineteenth century onwards. Christianity gradually succeeded in putting down roots in China among a wide variety of social groups, and Protestantism is the fastest growing religion in China today. Christianity demands complete allegiance, which led to violent conflicts, because its believers no longer contributed to communal religious rituals for rain and other purposes (Litzinger 1996). At the same time, especially in its earlier phases, Christianity could also adapt to local religious culture (Menegon 2009, 221–30, 284–300; Harrison 2013, 25–40, 51–53, 105–7). In many ways the Taiping rebellion of the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace in the mid-nineteenth century is the ultimate example of the early indigenization of Christianity (Wagner 1982; Weller 1994; Ter Haar 2002). Contrary to Buddhism and Christianity, Islam (since the thirteenth century) and Judaism (since the late tenth century) remained ethnic religions, although over time their followers Sinicized to a considerable degree as well. Nonetheless, they grew as a result of population growth, rather than through proselytization (Gladney 2008; studies in Malek 2001).

### **Repression and revival in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries**

The impact of the events of the twentieth century on local society and local religious life has been devastating. Not all of this was ideologically motivated. The late nineteenth and much of the twentieth century saw recurrent civil unrest and outright war, invasions and natural disasters, taking a tremendous toll in human life and material destruction. Had socioreligious life been able to take its course again after 1949, there would still have been change, but the case of Taiwan shows that this change could have been of a more gradual kind (Seiwert 1985; Jones 1999). But this was not to be, for on the Chinese mainland the new Communist regime saw local religious life as a threat to its own worldview and to its aim of establishing roots down to the smallest village. Social organization expressed in and maintained by religious practices were a major hindrance and therefore had to be eradicated (Goossaert and Palmer 2011).

New religious groups and networks such as the ones briefly referred to above, including new movements of the twentieth century such as the “Unity Way” (*Yiguandao*), were among the worst victims of the repression of the 1950s (Hung 2010a; Ter Haar 2014). While the repression has abated in relative terms, the existence of surviving groups is very sensitive and their precise situation unclear. The same is true of all kinds of ritual and other religious activities, especially by full- or semi-professionals. Spirit writing and other forms of spirit mediumship are tolerated as long as they remain more or less out of sight. Ritual traditions are being restored, but much knowledge and many texts have been lost. With respect to our primary concern, it is fascinating to see how local cults are still returning in many places or being established for the first time. Since there are no secular alternatives and many of the former restrictions are still in place, with

the Chinese Communist Party sticking firmly to its domination, the context within which this revival takes place is fundamentally different from the pre-1949 or even the pre-1911 past. And yet, this revival demonstrates the ongoing ability of and need for religious activities of various sorts to create and affirm social groupings (Ashiwa and Wank 2008; Yang 2012a).

*Suggestions for further reading*

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

# Beyond the Great Divergence: Current Scholarship on the Economic History of Premodern China

*RICHARD VON GLAHN*

The study of the Chinese economy, past and present, has remained in the shadow of the question of whether China was capable of achieving self-sustaining growth in the absence of some external stimulus. From the western perspective, 20 centuries of imperial rule had fostered a profound inertia in China's political and economic institutions that rendered them impervious to progress, even under foreign tutelage. R.H. Tawney (1932, 77), writing in the 1930s, famously described the Chinese farmer as "a man standing permanently up to the neck in water, so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him." As late as the 1960s it was common to categorize imperial China as a form of "oriental despotism" or "Asiatic mode of production" that defied the norms of economic behavior and economic history. Marxist historians in China readily endorsed this dismal panorama of stagnation and poverty. Only Japanese scholarship offered a more nuanced interpretation of the dynamics of economic change across the long arc of the imperial era. In particular, Japanese scholars identified the "Tang–Song transition" (750–1250) as a crucial watershed in Chinese economic history during which fundamental fiscal changes, a highly competitive market economy, and an increasingly fluid society undermined an ossified aristocracy. Since the 1970s western scholarship has reversed course, accentuating both sustained commercial growth in late imperial China, especially during the period 1550–1800, and the pervasive effects of the market on government, society, and culture. The meteoric rise of the Chinese economy since 1990 naturally has raised the question of whether the sources of economic dynamism in contemporary China can be traced to the culture and institutions of the late imperial era.

### **Paradigm shifts in the study of the Chinese economy**

Mark Elvin's seminal study (1973) was the key catalyst in dispelling the myth of imperial China as an essentially agrarian economy ensnared by a stultifying social and political order. Drawing on Shiba Yoshinobu's (1968) path-breaking research on the emergence

of a vibrant market economy during the Song dynasty (960–1276), Elvin asserted that China experienced a precocious “medieval economic revolution” driven by technological innovations in agriculture, transport, finance, metallurgy, and textile manufacture. At the same time Elvin ascertained structural and cultural constraints that inhibited a breakthrough to self-sustaining growth. Among these constraints were: (1) a knowledge system that favored investment in human capital but not in scientific experimentation or technological expertise; (2) highly integrated domestic markets that nonetheless were isolated from the global economy; and (3) steadily diminishing returns to investments in traditional technologies after the Song advances. But Elvin’s conception of a “high-level equilibrium trap” that engendered “quantitative growth, but qualitative standstill” in late imperial China was a purely abstract model, and Elvin provided little in the way of macroeconomic or microeconomic analysis to support this thesis.

Subsequently, the focus of debate returned to China’s agrarian world and the dynamics of its “peasant economy.” In his pioneering quantitative analysis of Chinese agriculture, Dwight Perkins (1969) concluded that per capita grain production stagnated from 1400 to the 1950s: increases in grain output due to expansion of cultivated land and rising yields merely kept pace with population growth. But others suggested that even this scenario was too optimistic. In Kang Chao’s (1988) assessment, from the Song onward population growth outran grain production despite increasingly intensive cultivation; the worsening labor–land ratio drove down wages and increased the price of land, thwarting any incentive to enhance productivity through labor-saving technological innovation. Chao and Philip Huang (1990) both have contended that ready access to markets for land, labor, and goods enabled households to intensify their work in farming and handicrafts to secure a subsistence income despite sharply diminishing returns (as measured by daily wages). The result was, in Huang’s words, an “involutionary” pattern of labor-intensive, small-scale farming which crowded out managerial farms that relied on capital investment, wage labor, and economies of scale. Commercialization encouraged greater exploitation of family labor and led to falling rather than rising wages. The involution model thus represented a variation of the classical Malthusian trap of diminished marginal productivity of labor and ever more dire subsistence pressures.

In contrast to this depiction of a Malthusian dilemma with Chinese characteristics, scholars anchored in the firmament of neo-classical economics such as Loren Brandt (1989) and Ramon Myers (1991) have insisted that Chinese farmers conformed to a universal pattern of profit-maximizing economic rationality. In their view, family farms in late imperial and modern China allocated resources in response to factor price movements within a competitive market economy largely free from government interference. As a result, the Chinese economy displayed a pattern of “Smithian growth” in which greater economic efficiency was achieved through the expansion of markets and specialization of labor. These arguments, however, were premised on assumptions about economic behavior that verged on tautology and rosy interpretations of the limited available quantitative evidence.

At the same time, the prodigious economic success achieved by the rising “Asian tigers” in the 1980s–1990s cast doubt on the once-prevalent view that Confucian values and China’s family system were inimical to mercantile pursuits and economic development. Revisionist scholars such as Yü Ying-shih (1987) instead argued that Neo-Confucian ideology and kinship networks nourished a striving for economic success coupled to aspirations for moral improvement analogous to Max Weber’s vaunted “Protestant ethic,” even though they made no specific claim to discover “the spirit of capitalism” in Confucian culture.

At a fundamental level the dispute between “pessimists” such as Chao and Huang and “optimists” like Brandt and Rawski hinged on the question of whether China’s path of economic development should be understood primarily as a product of China’s unique historical experience—especially the predominance of small family farms and a distinct “peasant” mentality—or, conversely, as one governed by universal laws of economic behavior in which farming households responded affirmatively to market incentives, behaving much like entrepreneurial firms.<sup>1</sup> In the 1990s, the search to transcend the apparent stalemate between these conflicting views gave rise to what has come to be known as the “California School” of Chinese economic history. Applying the analytical tools of comparative economic history to the study of China’s late imperial economy framed within a world-historical perspective, the California School group challenged staid assumptions about the inherent superiority of western institutions, culture, and government for the promotion of economic growth and insisted on greater precision and consistency in comparing economic institutions and development in Europe and Asia.<sup>2</sup> The research of the California School has documented changes in demographic behavior in response to economic conditions that call into question the Malthusian paradigm; improvements in agricultural techniques and reallocation of family labor that maintained farm productivity at a level comparable to the most advanced economic regions of Europe; integration of domestic market networks relatively free of government interference that promoted a Smithian dynamic of commercial expansion; high levels of consumption and life expectancy; and an expanding role in international commerce that had powerful effects in reconfiguring global trade networks. At the same time these scholars acknowledged that the imperial state and the Confucian elite pursued policies that diverged from those of Western European nations in their fiscal and social goals and in their economic consequences. The California School scholars also have stressed the finite limits to growth imposed by resource constraints and premodern technologies in the absence of the radical transformation of production frontiers wrought by the energy revolution (the invention of steam power to capture the potential of fossil fuels) that constituted the crucial feature of the Industrial Revolution.

Without doubt, the most influential California School scholar has been Kenneth Pomeranz, who in his book *The Great Divergence* (2000) marshaled copious new evidence to support his argument that the “Great Divergence” in productivity and living standards between the most economically advanced regions of Europe and Asia did not occur before 1800. The publication of Pomeranz’s book has had a profound impact on the economic history profession at large, and the timing, nature, and causes of the Great Divergence arguably have been the most debated issues in the field since 2000. The interpretive challenges posed by the California School have stimulated numerous efforts to refine the methodologies—especially the use of quantitative measures—for comparing economic performance in China and the west, and in other parts of the world as well. Because of its focus on quantitative measurement, this upsurge of interest in economic history largely has been confined to the period after 1800, since quantitative data is scarce and spotty for earlier periods. Nonetheless, important advances have been made, primarily by Chinese and Japanese scholars, in the study of the economic history of premodern China. Here, too, research has been spurred by new types of evidence, notably archaeological data as well as a growing archive of handwritten primary documents, to supplement our usual reliance on second-hand printed sources.

## The ancient economy

The wealth of archaeological discoveries in recent decades has substantially revised our understanding of Chinese economy and society, especially for the ancient period. For example, systematic study of ritual bronzes and their inscriptions, tomb inventories and mortuary practices, urban morphology, and settlement and workshop sites has greatly sharpened our comprehension of Bronze Age cultures, state formation, the distribution of lands and laborers, and the circulation of goods and wealth before the emergence of markets.<sup>3</sup> Numismatic evidence has been crucially important for tracing the emergence of markets and the rise of merchants—subjects scarcely brushed on in transmitted texts—as well as the evolution of the intense economic competition that accompanied the endemic political and military conflicts of the late Spring and Autumn (771–453 BCE) and Warring States (453–221 BCE) eras (Emura 2011). Archaeological excavations also have exhumed substantial corpuses of administrative texts deposited in the tombs of local officials that yield our first direct glimpse of the bureaucratic and legal edifice constructed by the first empires of Qin and Han in the third-second centuries BCE (Yang 2009d; Barbieri-Low and Yates 2015). Other excavated documents include household registers, village tax records, and censuses that reveal government record-keeping and fiscal practices at the lowest levels of the administrative hierarchy.

This new evidence has vastly enhanced our knowledge of the economy of ancient China. It is now clear that the later Bronze Age state of Zhou is better understood not in terms of the hoary paradigms of slave or feudal societies but rather as what I define as a “patrimonial state,” in which the monarch shares sovereign authority with noble houses created by royal investiture and linked to the ruling dynasty through kinship ties, ritual practices, and the circulation of prestige goods, lands, and laborers. As royal power waned during the Spring and Autumn era, however, the Zhou ecumene dissolved into a congeries of rival city-states, and a political order founded on status hierarchy and accumulation of prestige goods gave way to a more fluid and competitive world in which control of economic assets such as land and labor became the basis of political autonomy and military might. But endemic warfare among the city-states engendered mass extinction and the consolidation of conquered territories into roughly a dozen large regional states by 450 BCE. The initial experiments in population registration, land surveys, and military conscription from the early sixth century BCE onward were aimed at mobilizing men and materiel for war. Warring States rulers adopted bureaucratic forms of rule based on codified law and implemented land allocation, taxation, and statutory labor and military service policies to increase revenues and the size of their armies. These policies established the family farm as the mainstay of agricultural production and the conjugal household as the fundamental economic unit of Chinese society, laying the institutional foundations that would become hallmarks of the imperial state.

The consolidation of militarized autocratic states occurred in tandem with the introduction of coinage and industrial and commercial growth. According to Emura Haruki (2005), two distinct patterns of economic development emerged in the Warring States period. Private enterprise flourished in the agricultural and industrial heartland of the Central Plain, where mercantile cities enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy from their royal overlords. By contrast, in the larger states on the periphery of the Zhou ecumene such as Qin, Chu, and Qi, rulers exerted strong central control over trade and industry.<sup>4</sup> The military advantage lay with these peripheral states, culminating in the creation of the first universal empire by Qin in 221 BCE.

The Qin empire epitomized a command economy in which the state owned non-agricultural productive resources, managed much industrial manufacture (using mostly unfree labor), and tightly supervised markets. The Qin state adopted a military model of social organization and labor mobilization to extract and redistribute resources. Still, the Qin tolerated some measure of private trade, and the early Han government swerved back and forth between the Qin model of bureaucratic control and revenue enhancement on one hand and *laissez-faire* monetary, trade, and fiscal policies on the other. Imperial rule was closely tied to the state's capacity to tax economic activity and provide public goods. Universal statutory labor service, imposed on women as well as men, in addition to the labor supplied by convicts and government slaves enabled the state to undertake public works projects on a vast scale. Ultimately, however, the shift from military rule to bureaucratic governance resulted in the formation of a new ruling class based on political office, noble rank, and landholding.

The reign of Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BCE) marked a crucial watershed in the evolution of Han government and institutions. Determined to arrest deepening economic inequality and to eliminate the menace of nomad invasions, Wu adopted sweeping measures to reassert imperial sovereignty. But Wu's ambitious military forays in Central Asia, Korea, and Vietnam saddled the state with heavy costs, prompting the emperor to adopt an audacious strategy of state usurpation of industry and commerce, including the imposition of government monopolies on the production and sale of salt and iron. Ultimately, however, Wu's efforts to reestablish a command economy foundered. Under his successors the Han state withdrew from direct control of the economy, although the salt and iron monopolies were retained. As the state's economic leverage diminished, the stratification of private wealth intensified.<sup>5</sup> The post-Wudi era—apart from the usurper Wang Mang's bold attempt to restore a command economy under his abortive Xin dynasty (9–23 CE)—witnessed the progressive privatization of political, economic, and even military power. In the later Han period—and throughout the following centuries of political disunion as well—a manorial economy emerged in which an aristocracy of Great Clans dominated landholding and other economic resources. Yet the Zoumalou corpus of household registers and local government records from the Three Kingdoms Wu realm dating to the 230s shows that even in times of intense political turmoil the Chinese state retained substantial capability to extend its reach into local society (Yu Zhenbo 2004).

The Qin–Han empires developed intrusive systems of legal control and economic regulation to enhance their infrastructural power. Although the Han government collected nearly half of its revenue in coin, like the Qin it depended heavily on the extraction of labor—from slaves, convicts, debtors, and ordinary subjects—to fulfill its needs and functions. The burden of labor service remained a significant impediment to the efficient allocation of resources in the post-Han era as well. Over the course of the Tang–Song transition, however, capitation taxes and labor and military service were largely replaced with progressive taxation of property and money revenues. The success of the imperial state increasingly was predicated on the efficiency with which it utilized market-oriented policies to mobilize and manage resources across its vast territory. Although the Song state imposed substantial taxes on commerce and consumption, the new political economy liberated productive energies and stimulated economic growth on a scale perhaps unprecedented in world history.

### Maturation of the market economy

Apart from studies of the ancient economy, the most important recent advances in research on China's premodern economy have been concentrated in the late imperial period (1550–1911). The commercial growth of the Song was disrupted by the Mongol conquests in the thirteenth century and especially by the draconian measures adopted by the Ming founder, Zhu Yuanzhang. In contrast to Song fiscal policies, which relied heavily on taxation of commerce and consumption but also promoted domestic and foreign trade, Zhu sought to curtail what he deemed the pernicious effects of the market and restore the autarkic village economy of the idealized past envisioned by Confucian philosophers. Zhu's fiscal policies were predicated on a return to in-kind taxation of land, conscripted labor service, self-sufficient military farms, and payments to officials and soldiers in goods rather than money. The market economy did indeed contract sharply in the early Ming, but over the course of the fifteenth century the institutional infrastructure created by Zhu Yuanzhang decayed. Commerce revived, and China's partial integration into emerging global trade networks beginning in the 1540s triggered a massive inflow of silver from Japan and Spanish America that accelerated monetization of exchange, credit, and taxation (Brook 1998).

The maturation of the market economy was the signal feature of the economic history of the late imperial era. Long-distance trade networks extended to every corner of the empire, even though the circulation of commodities bypassed large swaths of rural China. Market expansion and regional specialization of production promoted new developments in economic organization and management. Most commercial enterprises were family firms, but the increasing scale of commerce demanded capital and personnel resources individual households could not provide. Entrepreneurs seeking to recruit partners and employees still looked to their kinsmen and countrymen, however. The development of the institution of the corporate lineage provided the means to transform the family firm into a quasi-corporate business enterprise. In addition, long-distance traders who sojourned or settled in distant cities formed cooperative alliances with other merchants from their home areas. These alliances based on native place association led to the creation of veritable trading empires by the two most successful groups, the Shanxi and Huizhou merchants (Terada 1972; McDermott 2013).

The economy of eighteenth-century China was remarkably free. Competitive markets existed for land, labor, and goods. The Qing state encouraged the expansion of private commerce: free markets prevailed for virtually all commodities apart from salt and copper; the state taxed domestic trade only lightly, and did not impose any tariffs on foreign imports; urban guilds exercised only limited powers; and rural industry remained entirely free of guild regulation. The growth of rural industry enabled households to make more intensive use of the underutilized labor power of women and children. This pattern—which economic historians designate “protoindustrialization”—appeared in many parts of Europe in the eighteenth century and in Japan as well. As families devoted more of their labor to production for the market, many goods they formerly produced for their own use—including foodstuffs, clothing, shoes, candles, and tools—were purchased instead.

By many standards the economic well-being of China's population in the eighteenth century was unsurpassed by any other contemporary society. Life expectancy was roughly comparable to Western European societies and Japan (Lee and Wang 1999). Income inequality was probably less severe in China than in Europe, given that ownership of land was spread much more evenly in China. A comprehensive study of household finances in

Jiangnan has estimated that the typical farming family spent 43 percent of its household budget on non-food consumption in the eighteenth century, a ratio almost identical to that (47 percent) for lower-class English families in the 1790s, and more than that of Jiangnan households in the 1930s (Huang Jingbin 2009a). Consumption of modest luxuries such as sugar, tea, and tobacco also seems to have been roughly equal in China and Western Europe. Estimated per capita consumption of sugar in China in 1800 was well behind that of England, but double the level of the rest of Europe. Of course, in contrast to Europe, sugar, tea, and tobacco were not exotic imports in China, but rather domestic goods produced by family farms and distributed through highly competitive markets that yielded little revenue for the state (Pomeranz 2000). Quantitative evidence for the consumption of durable consumer goods such as housing, furniture, and clothes is more exiguous (the earliest surveys of household consumption of such goods date from the 1920s). But given that consumption levels were no lower in the eighteenth century, Jiangnan farm families maintained standards of household consumption comparable to their counterparts in the most developed regions of Western Europe.

### **New perspectives on the late imperial economy**

The Great Divergence controversy, coupled with the “Great Convergence” engendered by China’s rapid economic growth since the 1980s, has prompted historians to give renewed attention to the role of economic institutions—for example, property rights, contracts, dispute resolution mechanisms, credit markets, corporate governance, and merchant associations—in facilitating or impeding China’s economic development. This trend also reflects the rise within the economic history profession of the “new institutional economics” and its focus on how institutions—both formal (economic, legal, and political) and informal (social norms established by custom, religion, and ethics)—influence incentives and transaction costs and thus the efficiency of markets. Although some scholars continue to emphasize the weakness of the institutional infrastructure in imperial China and the malign influence of government regulation and patronage, a growing body of research has argued that the Chinese institutional matrix had positive effects on economic performance (see, e.g., So 2000; Qiu 2008; Rosenthal and Wong 2011).

In the absence of a discrete body of civil or commercial law, private contracts assumed crucial importance in securing property rights, forming partnerships, and governing business transactions (Zelin, Ocko, and Gardella 2004). Property rights were also conditioned by a range of long-standing practices, including patrilineal partible inheritance, severely limited inheritance rights for women, and ownership inhering in the household rather than individuals. The regulatory framework of the Qing state relied heavily on intermediaries such as guilds, brokers, and lineage leaders, with the magistrates’ courts assuming a secondary (but still vital) role in enforcing property rights and adjudicating business disputes. These intermediary institutions played a key role in the creation of “fiduciary communities” by acting as informal mechanisms to establish trust among parties to business transactions.

A wide range of institutional innovations—including lineage trusts, native-place networks, joint-share partnerships, and linked-firm enterprises—to accumulate capital, share risk, disseminate information, and adjudicate disputes contributed to the growth of long-distance trade. The development of permanent partnership firms was facilitated by the emergence of share capital. Share partnerships contributed to the longevity of firms by enabling investors to enter and exit without jeopardizing the firm’s capital

assets. By the eighteenth century there is ample evidence for the buying and selling of shares. However, no stock market emerged from this trading in shares, which rested largely on personal relationships (Liu Qiugen 2007).

Family ties, personal relationships, and native place affiliations carried great weight in defining one's place within the fiduciary community. The salient place of social networks and kinship institutions such as lineage trusts in Chinese business often has been regarded as favoring a "patronage economy" that hindered the development of professional management, the adoption of modern corporations, or indeed the emergence of capitalism itself. Of course, Chinese entrepreneurs were well aware of the constraints imposed by kinship obligations. For example, native-place ties were essential to gaining employment in the Shanxi *piaobao* banks, but as a rule these firms did not hire kinsmen, to avoid nepotism and entanglements that could compromise the firm's best interests. Even family firms often entrusted decision-making to professional managers. Before the development of mechanized industry, few enterprises required the large-scale, long-term capital accumulation for which the modern corporation is well-suited. Mining was one industry that did have significant and growing capital and technical requirements. As Madeleine Zelin (2005) has shown, in the Zigong salt industry in Sichuan, diverse investors—including landowners, lineage trusts, and Shanxi merchants, often brought together by what we might call venture capitalists—commonly formed partnerships run by professional managers that integrated exploration, production, refining, and marketing. We also see that the leading industrial enterprises in early twentieth-century China typically combined features of both social networks and hierarchical corporate management. Foreign corporations operating in China flourished by developing partnerships with local agents, suppliers, and merchandising networks (Cochran 2000; Köll 2003). Although it is true that at the end of the Chinese empire many firms and business leaders staunchly resisted innovations that threatened their self-interest, others displayed openness to new modes of doing business.

Kenneth Pomeranz's bold assertion that income levels in eighteenth-century Jiangnan were on a par with the most advanced economic regions of Europe (England and Netherlands) has spurred economic historians to develop quantitative measures to test such hypotheses. The two principal measures currently favored in making such comparisons are Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and real wage rates. To be sure, there are significant theoretical and empirical problems involved in calculating GDP and real wages and in their utility as measures of comparison, and the results of such exercises must be viewed with caution.

The late Angus Maddison was the pioneer in developing GDP estimates to measure and compare long-term economic performance on a global scale. Maddison (2001) estimated that China's per capita GDP had reached a high level in 1700—slightly less than two-thirds of the level of Europe, but ahead of both Japan and India. Maddison also asserted that aggregate GDP growth in China outpaced Europe between 1700 and 1820, but strictly as a consequence of China's huge population expansion, not economic development: China's per capita GDP had stagnated since 1700, sinking by 1820 to only 55 percent of the European level.

Maddison's techniques of estimation were relatively crude. Recently scholars have attempted to refine his estimates by applying national accounting analysis. These studies have found low and stagnant levels of per capita GDP in late imperial China, in line with or even below Maddison's estimates. One recent analysis of long-term changes in China's per capita GDP (Broadberry, Guan, and Li 2014) shows a continuous decline from the

Northern Song period. Their figures indicate a steady equilibrium throughout the Ming period at roughly 80 percent of the late Northern Song level, followed by a steep plunge in the Qing period. This study concluded that population growth had sharply curtailed per capita GDP already by 1750, with a further decline by 1850 to a level half that of the Song peak.

Given the severe limitations of the data and the necessity of making very large and tentative assumptions, however, these efforts to analyze the size and structure of GDP in premodern China can only be regarded as heuristic exercises. In addition, as Pomeranz has persuasively argued, comparing the whole Chinese empire, with its vast disparities in economic development, to European countries such as Britain mixes together highly dissimilar units of analysis. Instead, Pomeranz has insisted on the necessity of comparing regions roughly equal in size and economic development, such as England, the Netherlands, Jiangnan, and the Kantō Plain in Japan. This principle is the cornerstone of the collaborative study by Li Bozhong and Jan Luiten van Zanden (2012), which compares GDP and labor productivity in the Netherlands and two counties in Songjiang in the 1820s. Both regions were characterized by high rates of urbanization and commercialization, but their economies differed in significant ways: Songjiang, the major center of handicraft cotton textile manufacture, had a much higher proportion of the workforce engaged in industry, whereas commerce and banking employed a much greater share of the Dutch population. Labor productivity in agriculture was very high in both regions, but per capita GDP in Songjiang was only half the level of the Netherlands, reflecting the predominance of low-wage women textile workers in Songjiang's labor force.

Other studies have assessed comparative economic performance and standards of living by analyzing real wages. Robert Allen (2009a) has found that wages in Ming-Qing China were substantially lower than in England and the Netherlands, although comparable to other parts of Europe such as Germany and Italy. Allen concluded that the labor productivity of Jiangnan farmers was already high in 1600 and remained unchanged in 1800 at a level comparable to the richest agricultural regions in England. But family income in Jiangnan declined by 42 percent from 1620 to 1820, largely due to falling prices for textiles and the sharp reduction in farm size. In another study, Allen and his collaborators (Allen et al. 2011) have compared the real wages of unskilled workers in Beijing, Suzhou, and Guangzhou with other European and Asian cities. They determined that real wages in Chinese cities were barely half the level of London and Amsterdam already in the first half of the eighteenth century, although on a par with central and southern European cities well into the nineteenth century. But the validity of such comparisons is questionable. A far smaller percentage of the Jiangnan workforce consisted of full-time wage laborers—perhaps 10–15 percent, in contrast to more than half in England and the Netherlands. Wage laborers in Jiangnan earned only 30–40 percent of the income of tenant farmers with security of tenure, and even less compared to smallholders (Pomeranz 2008). The earnings of such wage laborers barely sufficed for their own subsistence and could not support a family. The disparity in proletarian wages adduced by Allen and others is not incompatible with closer parity in family incomes and living standards in general.

For a long time study of China's integration into the global economy was framed by the forcible opening of China to western merchants following the Opium War and models of imperialist domination of east-west trade. But many shibboleths of the tributary paradigm of China's international relations, especially the depiction of the imperial court as inveterately hostile to foreign trade, are no longer tenable. Despite the confinement

of western merchants to the single port of Canton (Guangzhou) from 1757 to 1842, China's overseas trade grew prodigiously. The Qing state collected only modest customs duties on foreign trade, and imposed none of the tariffs or embargoes that were common in Europe at this time. Another crucial development in China's foreign commerce was the dramatic expansion of intra-Asian trade. After the Qing rescinded its ban on maritime trade and travel in 1683, merchants from Guangdong and Fujian rushed to exploit new commercial opportunities throughout Southeast Asia, especially in the Philippines, the Mekong Delta, the Gulf of Siam, and Java. Kaoru Sugihara (2009) estimates that on the eve of the Opium War intra-Asian maritime trade was roughly a third greater in value than east-west trade. Chinese ships and traders dominated maritime commerce within Southeast Asia as well as trade with China, displacing long-established merchant communities from South and West Asia (Kwee 2013). Local rulers welcomed Chinese settlers, miners, and planters. The pervasive insinuation of Chinese capital and labor into the region's political economy has prompted historians to refer to the period between 1740 and 1840 as the "Chinese Century" in Southeast Asian history (Reid 1997).

The opening of the treaty ports and growing integration into global markets created new commercial opportunities. Silk and tea exports surged, although China's tea exports fell precipitously after 1880 as Indian tea seized most of the international market. Chinese entrepreneurs expanded into East Asian markets, just as they had in Southeast Asia. The treaty port system also solidified Shanghai's position as the hub of an international trading network that dominated not only China's domestic and foreign trade, but also the flow of western manufactured goods as well as Chinese exports to Korea and Japan (Furuta 2000). Shanghai's share of foreign trade diminished as the number of treaty ports proliferated, but the city still accounted for roughly half of both imports and exports in 1900. In the early twentieth century Shanghai became the hub of modern industrial development as well.

Despite China's growing integration into global trade networks, movement toward an industrial revolution was almost wholly absent before the twentieth century. Nonetheless, significant institutional developments were underway that would lay the foundations for a relatively rapid transition toward a modern economy after 1900. New banking and credit institutions lowered the cost of credit, regulated commercial exchange, and facilitated the linkages between domestic markets and foreign trade. The merchant networks that had become a conspicuous feature of long-distance trade in China since the Ming dynasty evolved into more formal institutions, shedding some of their parochial character. Although native-place ties remained important, trade guilds and chambers of commerce increasingly displaced native-place associations in regulating commercial practices and resolving business disputes. More sophisticated forms of business organization and management emerged that enabled entrepreneurs to raise capital for long-term industrial investment. These institutional innovations certainly were stimulated by growing integration into international economy, and to a limited degree they borrowed from western precedents. But for the most part they consisted of adaptations of existing institutions to meet diverse new demands for commercial services.

The role of the state in economic development is another issue for which earlier opinions are undergoing revision. In recent years economic historians have devoted increasing attention to the impact of fiscal systems on economic growth. Scholarship on the "fiscal state" (adapted from Schumpeter's idea of the "tax state") in Europe has

mostly focused on the transition from medieval polities in which revenues largely derived from the personal domain of the prince to the early modern nation-state in which tax revenues were separated from the privy purse and legitimated within a well-defined system of property rights and legal protections. Warfare, colonization, and mercantilist policies drove efforts to rationalize tax systems in order to meet the rising costs of military expenditure. The rise of the fiscal state in Europe also occurred in tandem with a fundamental shift away from direct taxation of people and property and toward indirect taxation of commerce and consumption (O'Brien 2012; Yun-Casalilla and O'Brien 2012; Vries 2015). In China, many basic features of the fiscal state already had been established under the first empires, and it was under the Song dynasty that China's fiscal regime most closely approximated the fiscal state of early modern Europe (Liu 2015). Indeed, despite the progressive monetization of taxation in the late imperial era, the Ming-Qing states retreated from the high levels of revenue generated—especially from indirect taxes—under the Song in favor of minimal taxation derived overwhelmingly from land taxes. The weak fiscal capacity of the late imperial state generated low levels of social investment and inhibited the state's ability to mobilize resources when needs arose. The dire predicament of the Qing court following the outbreak of massive rebellions in the mid-nineteenth century forced it to abandon its economic principles and adopt expediciencies such as commercial taxes, sale of offices, deficit spending, and public debt financed by bonds and foreign loans. Although the structure of state finance was irrevocably transformed, the Qing regime ultimately failed to mobilize the fiscal resources necessary to undertake a meaningful program of economic development.<sup>6</sup>

Impressive as China's economic surge since 1990 has been, economists are even more astonished by the means through which such spectacular growth has been achieved: under the firm guiding hand of the state, and in the absence of absolute property rights, neoliberal macroeconomic policies, and political liberties. Economists in China (e.g., Lin 2012), while acknowledging the legacy of socialist planning in the economic reforms enacted by the People's Republic of China since 1979, have paid scant heed to the significance of premodern institutions for recent economic developments. Within the field of global economic history, however, scholars recognize both continuities between and departures from premodern patterns of economic enterprise. Particular emphasis has been placed on the role of human capital (investments in knowledge-intensive technologies as well as cheap labor), the "petty capitalist" entrepreneurial energies fostered by traditional values and commercial practices, the lack of barriers to domestic and international trade, the subordination of private enterprise to national interest, and the crucial importance of rural industrialization (Arrighi 2007). Kaoru Sugihara (2003) has identified a common East Asian path of development during the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries, an "industrious revolution" based on labor-absorbing institutions and labor-saving technologies, as the key to the recent "economic miracles" of such disparate societies as Japan, Singapore, and China. In Sugihara's view, this heritage of labor-intensive development (which also nurtured values of thrift, industry, and cooperation) is a distinctive feature of the East Asian tendency to concentrate on mobilizing human resources rather than material endowments, energy, and capital-intensive technologies. Other scholars concede that China's premodern economy laid some of the foundations for its recent economic success, but also stress the recurrence of unfortunate continuities—for example, in ideological commitments, the state's inability to discipline its agents, and the impact of patronage on income inequality—as well (Brandt, Ma, and Rawski 2014).

## Conclusion

The analytical challenges posed by the California School and its methodological innovations have prompted a resurgence in the study of China's premodern economy and its implications for economic development in contemporary China. The social, institutional, and fiscal infrastructure of premodern China has begun to attract unprecedented scrutiny not only from historians of China, but also from scholars engaged in comparative economic history. The rising trend toward situating historical study in global perspective undoubtedly will sustain this broad interest in Chinese economic performance and stimulate new avenues of inquiry. The archive for new research, especially from archaeological finds and the gradual accumulation of "private documents" (*minjian wenxian*), has opened up new vistas for research. Painstaking collation and study of such documents has yielded valuable insights into topics as diverse as household structure, landholding, and property transmission at the village level in the Ming dynasty (Luan 2007), capital formation, business enterprise, and market strategies in Qing maritime commerce (Chen 2009), and the financial operations and internal business structure of Shanxi *piaobao* banks in the nineteenth century (Dong and Jing 2002). At the moment, Chinese scholars are taking the initiative in expanding and deepening research in Chinese economic history. But there is reason to expect that the interest in the Chinese economy whetted by the Great Divergence debate will invigorate western scholarship as well.

## Notes

- 1 The "pessimist" and "optimist" labels were coined by Faure (1989) and adopted in Feuerwerker 1992.
- 2 The term "California School" was coined by Jack Goldstone (2000). Notable expressions of this approach (whose analyses and conclusions nonetheless diverged in many respects) include Flynn and Giráldez 1995; von Glahn 1996; Lee and Campbell 1997; Wong 1997; Frank 1998; Li Bozhong 1998; Marks 1999; Pomeranz 2000; Goldstone 2002; and Sugihara 2003.
- 3 For pioneering studies, see von Falkenhausen 2006; Li 2008.
- 4 Sahara Yasuo (2002), in contrast, contends that all of the Warring States polities conformed to a single model of centralized authoritarian rule.
- 5 The most important studies of Qin-Han fiscal policies and their economic impact are Yamada 1993 and Watanabe 2010, although these two authors differ on many points.
- 6 For a more optimistic appraisal of the potential for the Qing to create a modern fiscal state, see He 2013.

## Suggestions for further reading

- Brandt, Loren, Debin Ma, and Thomas G. Rawski. 2014. "From Divergence to Convergence: Reevaluating the History behind China's Economic Boom." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 52.1: 45–123.
- Glahn, Richard von. 2016. *The Economic History of China from Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pomeranz, Kenneth. 2000. *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Richardson, Philip. 1999. *Economic Change in China, c. 1800–1950*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenthal, Jean-Laurent, and R. Bin Wong. 2011. *Before and beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

# Taiwan: Margin, Center, Node

*SHELLEY RIGGER*

History is always written in the shadow of politics, but rarely are the ties between the two as evident as in the field of Taiwan history. Taiwan came into its own as a subject of historical study in the 1980s, when political reform ended restrictions on academic and popular discourse and new political conversations demanded information about the island's past. These abrupt and far-reaching changes influenced both the quantity and quality of historical studies of Taiwan. It is hard to overstate the speed with which new work on Taiwan history emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, but the quality of work in the rapidly expanding field was uneven, in part because many studies were aimed at supporting particular political narratives or validating the experiences of newly empowered peoples within Taiwan.

Wen-hsin Yeh describes these trends in her 2013 essay "A Quiet Revolution." She writes, "Two sets of political divisions—between the Nationalists and their opponents on Taiwan, and between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait—thus energized the writing of histories of Taiwan, producing debates and constructing competitive narratives that have opened up new vistas of understanding" (260). These narratives, in turn, inform competing quests to situate Taiwan in relation to a China that exists both actually (in the form of the People's Republic of China [PRC]) and conceptually.

The historians Yeh labels "Nationalists"—those connected to the Kuomintang (Guomindang/KMT)-led Republic of China (ROC) government that moved to Taiwan in 1945—would like to prove that Chinese have recognized Taiwan as part of their territory since antiquity. They offer ancient ties as justification for the KMT's central political claim: Taiwan's destiny is to be a launching pad for the ROC state to retake the Chinese mainland. Historians in the PRC, too, seek ancient connections between Taiwan and the mainland, but their goal is different: to support the PRC view that it is the destiny of the Chinese nation that Taiwan should be incorporated into a mainland-based Chinese nation-state.

Both the Nationalist historians and the PRC historians emphasize Taiwan's cultural, economic, and political connections to the mainland, but the Nationalists place particular

emphasis on Taiwan as an incubator of Chinese nationalism and identity. As Nationalist historian Qiao Baotai writes, “The history of Taiwan is not only an unbreakable link in the history of China but also the most important and glorious link in it. This was so in the past. This is so at the present. This will forever be so in all futures to come” (quoted in Yeh 2013, 261). PRC historians, in contrast, tend to downplay Taiwan’s modern history, which they view as a momentary interruption of an ancient norm in which Taiwan is a territory under a mainland-based Chinese state. Thus mainland historian Li Zuji identifies “insist[ing] on the principle of Taiwan history as a part of Chinese history” as one of five key principles PRC historians must follow (quoted in Liu 2012, 242).

At the other end of the political spectrum lie historians whose goal is to show precisely the opposite—that Taiwan is *not* part of China, and indeed never was. These historians disrupt narratives locating Taiwan within China in antiquity. They emphasize the island’s settlement by non-Chinese aboriginal peoples thousands of years before the first Han arrived. They also call attention to the island’s Dutch, Spanish, and Japanese colonization, reducing China to but one in a series of claimants. The path-breaking textbook *Knowing Taiwan (Renshi Taiwan)*, which was introduced in Taiwan’s schools in the 1990s, uses the concept of international competition over Taiwan to decenter China in the island’s history (Wang 2002b, 111). Such studies emphasize the relative recentness of Chinese interest in Taiwan and challenge narratives claiming Chinese political identity for early Han settlers. These histories refute the contention that history places Taiwan inescapably within Beijing’s political orbit and thus ease the way for contemporary Taiwan to claim autonomy.

Many studies that highlight non-Chinese influences in Taiwan’s history have a celebratory tone, but others fall into what Fujii calls the “chronicle of oppression ... and ... resistance” school of Taiwan history (Fujii 1980, 62). This approach, adopted by the influential pro-independence historian Shih Ming (Su Beng 1986), portrays Taiwan’s history as an uninterrupted series of colonial occupations—including by the Kuomintang government beginning in 1945. There *are* historians of Taiwan who have no particular political axes to grind, but as Yeh observes, political agendas have provided the field with much of its energy.

While the debate over Taiwan’s relationship with China dominates historical conversations, there are other trends in Taiwan historiography. A substantial literature—largely in the social sciences but including some historical studies—treats Taiwan as a microcosm of China. At a time when western academics were unable to conduct research in the PRC many looked to Taiwan as a surrogate, giving the island an outsized role in Chinese studies. The first international conference on Taiwan history, held in 1965, was devoted to this notion, and the first large-scale academic projects targeting Taiwan’s history, dating to the early 1970s, were intended to “implement the notion of Taiwan as a laboratory of Chinese studies,” although in both cases, they ended up awakening scholarly interest in Taiwan itself (Wang 2002b, 100).

Taiwan is also studied as a factor in others’ histories. The literature on Chinese border regions includes studies that use Taiwan to illuminate how Chinese imperial states managed their peripheries, and there is a large literature on what Taiwan reveals about Japanese colonialism. A similar literature exists to explore the role of Taiwan in US–China relations. None of these are studies of Taiwan *per se*, but they incorporate information about Taiwan’s past.

Recent work insists on Taiwan as a historical subject in its own right. The concept of “Taiwan subjectivity” (*zhutixing*) is related to, but distinct from, Taiwan independence.

Independence is a political project, while subjectivity is a discursive and normative choice to place Taiwan at the center of its own experience. Studies of Taiwan subjectivity (in contrast to tendentious efforts to prove that Taiwan is not Chinese) can admit complexity and ambiguity; they can acknowledge the role Chinese migration, Chinese culture, and even Chinese administration played in Taiwan's past while keeping Taiwan at the center.

Finally, it is worth considering the relationship between Taiwan history and broader historiographical trends. Q. Edward Wang contrasts the work of mainstream (mainly Nationalist) historians of the Historical Source School with that of younger, foreign-trained historians who embraced social scientific concepts and approaches. In the 1960s and 1970s, historians associated with these two schools debated the value of interpretation and multidisciplinary. Until the late 1970s scholars in both schools devoted themselves to mainland Chinese history, but the sources and methods available to social historians drew them to study Taiwan while the Historical Source School adherents remained focused on mainland history.

Bringing global historiographical trends to bear on Taiwan history often challenges theories developed in other world regions. Liao Ping-hui (2006) attributes Taiwan's under-recognition in studies of colonialism to its colonization by Japan, which differed from western imperialist states not least because it was in the throes of a controversial modernization project at home even as it was modernizing Taiwan. Nor did Taiwan's colonial experience end with decolonization—the starting point for most studies of postcolonialism—but with recolonization, leaving Taiwan an uncomfortable fit with standard paradigms of colonialism and postcolonialism.

Taiwan fits more snugly into the literature on Asia's maritime history summarized by Wills (1993). Instead of locating Taiwan at the edge of "China," this literature embeds the island within a network of maritime interactions that connected peoples from Japan to Batavia and across the Indian Ocean to Europe. This context foregrounds Taiwan's strategic and economic importance.

In sum, while the study of Taiwan history has blossomed only recently, its growth has been rapid, driven by political and historiographical agendas and supported by resources drawn from a dynamic economy, society, and state.

### **Taiwan's first human settlers**

The shadow of contemporary politics is evident even in debates about Taiwan's earliest human history. Archaeology places humans on Taiwan for at least 20,000 years. Little is known of their origins; it is unclear whether the earliest inhabitants were the ancestors of later indigenous groups. This uncertainty has contributed to the politicization of debates over Taiwan's first humans. As Michael Stainton puts it, "these contested landmarks of the distant past are used as charters for the present in Taiwan and China" (Stainton 1999, 28).

The aboriginal peoples of contemporary Taiwan are Austronesian by language, culture, and physiology. Stainton identifies three models of their origins, each with its own political "message." The oldest origin story dates to the late nineteenth century, when a Dutch scholar working out of present-day Indonesia proposed that Taiwan's aboriginal peoples came to the island from Southeast Asia. This model constructs Taiwan's aboriginal people as separate and distinct from China, and in fact as victimized by Chinese migrants since the seventeenth century (Stainton 1999).

A competing view holds that Taiwan's aboriginal peoples came from mainland Asia—today's China. While there is archaeological evidence to suggest some interchange between Taiwan and the mainland coast in the Neolithic age, some PRC historians and anthropologists draw inferences well beyond this evidence. Their goal is to use the aboriginal peoples as evidence that “in ancient times Taiwan was (geologically) linked to the continental motherland” and therefore, “Taiwan is an indivisible part of the territory of the motherland [and] the Kao-shan-tzu [the PRC term for Taiwan's aboriginal peoples] are a member of the great family of the Chinese nation” (quoted in Stainton 1999, 35).

Stainton's third model of aboriginal origins holds that while the first Taiwanese came from the Asian continent, they eventually were cut off from mainland Asia and developed independently into the progenitors of all the Austronesian peoples throughout the southern Pacific region. It also claims that Taiwan's contemporary aboriginal peoples are direct descendants of the original Austronesians. This model puts Taiwan at the beginning of its own and others' histories, making it the preferred interpretation of many aboriginal people as well as some proponents of Taiwan subjectivity and independence.

In short, while Taiwan's enigmatic ancient history is of great interest to historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists, it leaves room for interpretations that serve political argument even as they seek to establish historical certainty.

### Dutch, Spanish, and early Chinese settlement

Both the PRC and the ROC trace their claims over Taiwan to antiquity. The PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs website summarizes the Chinese position: Taiwan is part of China because (1) the Seaboard Geographic Gazetteer [Shen Ying's *Linbai shuitu zhi*] published 1,700 years ago mentions the island; (2) the State of Wu and the Sui Dynasty sent missions there; (3) the Yuan Dynasty set up administrative organs to govern it; and (4) in the seventeenth century, “the Chinese people began to step up the development of Taiwan.” The website describes European settlements as “invasions,” Zheng Chenggong as a “national hero,” and the Qing's cession of Taiwan to Japan as an “unequal treaty.”<sup>1</sup> Most of the effort devoted to the study of Taiwan by PRC historians is aimed at substantiating and deepening these claims. The goal is to strengthen the PRC's claim that Taiwan belongs within the contemporary Chinese nation-state.

Historians working outside the Chinese nationalist framework find the historical record less monolithic and linear than the PRC version implies, but historians agree that in the seventeenth century Chinese migration to Taiwan became significant for the island and for China's southeast coast, especially Fujian. Before 1600, “Taiwan was on the outer edge of Chinese consciousness and activity, with little or no permanent Chinese settlement, visited only by fishermen, smugglers, and pirates, and only dimly reflected in the discussions and records of the officials who administered and patrolled the South China coast” (Wills 1999, 85). Dutch estimates in the 1620s put the Chinese population on the island at 1,000 to 1,500, the aboriginal population at over 100,000 (Andrade 2008, 30). But between 1622 and 1700, political and economic changes redirected Taiwan's trajectory and increased its Han population 50- to 100-fold.

Chinese settlers first populated the Penghu islands, situated between Taiwan and the mainland. The Southern Song and Yuan dynasties brought Penghu into their orbit as early as the twelfth century, sending civilian settlers, military troops, and government administrators. However, the Ming court interrupted Penghu's development, recalling officials and blocking its subjects from living or traveling there.

When Ming maritime restrictions evaporated after 1550, Chinese traders joined Japanese and European ships plying China's coastline. The burst of activity highlighted the strategic value of Penghu and Taiwan and inspired exploratory activity. Meanwhile, Chinese pirates used Taiwan as a refuge. The strategic threat posed by these many actors prompted the Ming to reconsider its approach, and in the early 1600s the Ming reactivated its military presence on Penghu.

In the end, however, the Dutch, not the Ming, established the first durable political and military presence on Taiwan itself. The Dutch were eager to trade with China, and in 1622 built a fort in Penghu from which they pressed their case. The Ming court soon agreed to open trade in exchange for the Dutch moving their military operation to a less sensitive location: Taiwan. (Taiwanese nationalists cite this agreement as evidence the Ming did not claim Taiwan.) The Dutch built fortifications in southern Taiwan from which they secured the local area for trade and settlement.

Under the Dutch, Chinese settlement of Taiwan finally took off. When they first arrived, the Dutch found only a scattering of Chinese on the island, mostly traders brokering deer skin exports for aboriginal hunters. But the arrival of armed protectors made it feasible for farmers and fishermen to migrate to the island, a trend the Dutch encouraged. Significant tracts of farmland were opened, financed in part by investors looking to export sugar.

The Dutch were not the only Europeans to recognize Taiwan's strategic and economic potential. In 1626 the Spanish built a fort at the northern end of the island; in 1629 they added a second. They hoped to match the Dutch presence, but encountered resistance from aboriginal communities, and in 1642 the Dutch pushed them off the island. Still, the Dutch reign was itself disputed and brief. In 1662 forces loyal to the Zheng family forced the Dutch to pull out of Taiwan for good—which shocked Europeans, who were used to winning wars against non-European foes (Andrade 2011).

The Dutch were drawn to Taiwan by strategic and economic advantage; other powers, including China, had recognized its potential but chose not to claim it. Long-term development was never the goal, but Han settlers were attracted to the relatively stable environment Dutch rule enabled. Wills argues that the Dutch did not make nearly as much of Taiwan as they might have: "If they treated other traders sensibly, the Dutch could have made their settlement a welcome island of commercial and political stability. But ... the Taiwan commanders so mismanaged things for ten years that they made enemies for themselves and aggravated the general disorder" (Wills 1999, 89). It is a testament to the miserable conditions prevailing on the mainland that even this poorly managed colony became a magnet for Chinese migrants.

### *The Zheng interlude*

Perhaps the most disputed figure in all of Taiwan's history is the PRC "national hero" Zheng Chenggong. His heroic status comes from his construction as a Ming loyalist who expelled the Dutch and brought ("restored," in Nationalist parlance) Chinese rule to Taiwan, all while resisting the Manchu invasion of China. Taiwanese folk tradition gives Zheng divine status, as the Sage-King Who Opened Taiwan. While all agree Zheng drove out the Dutch, most other elements of his story are controversial.

Zheng Chenggong was born in 1624 in Japan to a Japanese mother and a Chinese father, Zheng Zhilong. Collaborating with the Dutch East India Company, Zheng Zhilong amassed a huge private fleet (Andrade 2008, 45). At the height of his powers he

commanded ships from Vietnam to Japan. As his powers grew, the Ming sought Dutch assistance in subduing him, but by the time the Dutch agreed the Ming had switched tactics, deciding instead to seduce the pirate king with a royal title. Zheng Zhilong accepted the deal.

Zheng Zhilong left his wife and son in Japan, and Japanese colonial officials later used Zheng Chenggong's mixed birth and upbringing to strengthen the link between the Japanese empire and its Taiwanese subjects. The Japanese historian Yosaburo Takekoshi wrote of Zheng, "Inheriting tact and talent from his father and sound judgment and daring from his mother, he was full of great ambition roused by the tendencies of the age, and proved himself to be a hero, gifted with great governing and organizing powers" (1905, quoted in Manthorpe 2008, 87).

In 1644 Manchu invaders overthrew the Ming dynasty and established the Qing. Zheng Zhilong permitted the Manchus to enter territories he controlled, but his son remained loyal to the Ming. Zheng Chenggong's forces fought the Qing up the Yangzi River, reaching Nanjing in 1659. When that venture failed, he withdrew to Taiwan, where he expelled the Dutch. Zheng descendants governed Taiwan as a Ming redoubt for two decades. In 1683, the last "Ming" remnant fell when Qing admiral Shi Lang defeated forces led by Zheng Chenggong's grandson. The Qing had won the chance to be the first mainland-based government to govern Taiwan. But first, it had to decide whether it wanted the island.

### Taiwan under the Qing

In the first century after the Zhengs' defeat, Taiwan's future was the subject of heated debate among Qing officials. Some, including Shi Lang, believed the Qing should set up an administration to exploit Taiwan's assets. Others saw Taiwan as a source of trouble to be cordoned off and neutralized. Their preference was to evacuate the Han population and leave the island to the aboriginal peoples.

In the first few years after Zheng's defeat, up to half the Han population did leave Taiwan (Shepherd 1999, 108), but Shi Lang argued that as costly as governing Taiwan might be, leaving it ungoverned was too dangerous. The island was a haven for pirates and smugglers, menaces that would thrive at the Qing's expense if left unchecked. Shi Lang's logic won out, and in 1684 the Qing made Taiwan a prefecture of Fujian province. Military garrisons were established in Taiwan and on Penghu, and the ban on maritime trade enacted during the war against the Zhengs was lifted.

The court's endorsement of Shi Lang's position was qualified. It did not encourage Han migration, in part because Han settlers tended to intrude on aboriginal villages. The court was keen to maintain the ethnic status quo on Taiwan, which meant keeping Han out of aboriginal areas (Shepherd 1999). During peaceful times, aboriginal villages provided tax revenue and corvée labor to the government, but in tumultuous times, they caused endless headaches. To keep the peace, the Qing recognized aboriginal ownership over hunting lands; Han who wished to farm there were required to pay rent. As the deer population dwindled, rent payments became an important source of aboriginal villages' income.

The court's efforts to restrict Han migration were undermined by both push and pull factors. Migrants were drawn to Taiwan by opportunities, including selling rice at a time of chronic shortages. At the same time, overcrowding in Fujian and Guangdong pushed many Han toward the island. Until the 1730s, a ban on family migration kept Taiwan "a volatile, bachelor-dominated society ... prone to brawling and rebellion" (Shepherd 1999, 113).

Rebellion is a central theme in Taiwan's Qing-era history, as a popular saying attests, "every three years a small rebellion, every five years a big rebellion." Dissatisfaction with Qing administration prompted many uprisings; clashes between Han and aboriginal people caused others. Expanding Han settlement brought migrants into contact with new aboriginal communities, including "raw" Aborigines who had not been brought under the Qing umbrella.

The third and largest source of violence was conflict among Han communities. Taiwan's Han included Hakka-speaking migrants from Guangdong as well as Minnan-speaking migrants from Zhangzhou and Quanzhou, none of whom got along. Within these communities, lineage and other distinctions created persistent animosities. Economic competition filtered through social divisions to stoke violent conflicts. Rebellions, riots and uprisings were put down only at great cost in manpower and treasure.

It was only after 1862 that Taiwan was integrated into the empire—ultimately gaining provincial status in 1885. The Qing was moved to act by external and internal forces. Taiwan was incorporated into the treaty port system and attacked by foreign forces on two occasions; "conflicts that arose essentially over other issues in other territorial settings came to involve this no longer 'solitary island'" (Gardella 1999, 165). At the same time, weak administration prompted local elites to take matters into their own hands, resulting in bloody clashes between Qing troops and private militias.

Despite political conflict and state incapacity, Taiwan's economy flourished in the eighteenth century. It exported rice, sugar, tea, indigo-dyed cloth, fish, and timber. In 1719, an investor built an irrigation project that opened a massive region of central Taiwan to agriculture, one of many such investments (DeGlopper 1995). With prosperity came a more cultivated society, including a Confucian elite capable of educating young men to pass imperial examinations.

For PRC historians, the period between the defeat of the Zhengs in 1683 and the cession of Taiwan to Japan in 1895 constitutes the strongest evidence that Taiwan was part of the Chinese cultural and political sphere long enough to justify China's political claims. Nonetheless, despite the steady increase in the Han population of Taiwan and the intensification of Qing control, the historical record provides evidence both for and against a Sinocentric reading of Taiwan's history (a reading further complicated by the Qing's own ambiguous status).

The Ming/Qing ambivalence about whether and how to incorporate Taiwan never disappeared; as Wu Rwei-ren writes, the Qing governed Taiwan "preventively, indirectly and incompletely" (Wu 2004, 16). The late appearance of Taiwanese examination candidates also calls into question the island's "Chineseness." Writes Fujii, "It was only during the last thirty years of Qing rule ... that [the examination system] resulted in a shared Chinese communal identity ... among the literati" (Fujii 1980, 69).

Historical debates over the meaning of Qing rule reflect the politicized atmosphere that pervades Taiwan studies. One illustrative exchange is the debate between Chen Qinan's "indigenization theory" and Li Guoqi's "Mainlandization" theory. In *Traditional Chinese Society in Taiwan*, Chen (1987) provides evidence that by the mid-nineteenth century, many migrants stopped tracing their lineages to mainland places and instead created lineages that originated in Taiwan. Based on that evidence, Chen argues that "the Chinese living in Taiwan had gradually severed their ties with their ancestral places in the mainland and begun to identify themselves with Taiwan" (quoted in Wang 2002b, 101).

Li interprets this evidence differently. In his view, Taiwan was so integrated into Fujian under the Qing that it “became an integral part of the mainland ... [and] once the ‘Mainlandization’ process was complete, it became unnecessary to continue paying homage and making pilgrimages to the shrines of ancestral gods and/or goddesses in the mainland” (Wang 2002b, 102). Both Chen and Li view Taiwan as a Chinese society, but for Chen, it was a Taiwanese Chinese society; for Li it was a Chinese society that happened to be located on Taiwan, and whose members had no conception of themselves as Taiwanese. Whatever their identity under the Qing, however, Taiwanese soon found themselves challenged by a new set of rulers who were anything but Chinese.

### Taiwan under Japanese rule

By the end of the nineteenth century a rapidly modernizing Japan had acquired the capacity and confidence to challenge the Qing. In 1894 competition between the two erupted into armed conflict and in 1895 Japan’s forces prevailed. The Treaty of Shimonoseki extracted hefty concessions from the Qing, including the transfer of Taiwan and Penghu to Japan. For the next five decades Taiwan was a linchpin in Japan’s expanding empire.

Tokyo’s decision to annex Taiwan was more a response to opportunity than a pre-meditated move. Still, becoming a colonial power appealed to Japanese who hoped to promote the empire’s international stature, while Taiwan itself promised economic and strategic payoffs. Like their Qing predecessors, Japanese officials posted to Taiwan soon discovered that accessing those benefits would be costly. The Han Chinese residents of the island put up stiff resistance; scattered incidents of violence continued until 1915.

For five months, militias and irregulars joined with remnants of Qing forces to block the Japanese takeover. Taiwan’s last Qing governor, seeing that the court had effectively abandoned the islanders, declared a Taiwan Republic in the hope of forestalling the Japanese occupation, but the effort failed, and the Taiwan Republic was soon snuffed out.

This inauspicious beginning fed debates about what kind of colonial power Japan should become, and whether and how Taiwanese should be assimilated into the empire (Ching 2001). In the run-up to World War II the *kōminka*, or imperialization, policy sought to transform Taiwanese into imperial subjects, complete with Japanese names and Shinto shrines in their homes. Despite those efforts, and despite nearly 100,000 Taiwanese fighting for Japan in the Pacific War, most Taiwanese retained their Han Chinese identity.

Another problem vexing the colonial government was the need for an effective administrative apparatus. It was a colony of occupation, not settlement. At first, military security was the primary concern, but priorities shifted as conditions on the island and the political winds in Tokyo changed (Lamley 1999). Grassroots administration rested on a Qing-era institution, the *baojia* (Japanese, *hokō*) system, which organized households into groups for mutual surveillance, collective responsibility, and corvée labor. Most Taiwanese interactions with the colonial state were with the police who managed the *hokō* system.

The social and economic resources—especially education—available to Taiwan’s native-born elite expanded over time. Wakabayashi (2006) argues this process changed the terms of exchange between Taiwanese elites and the government. Instead of accepting their role as collaborators implementing the colonial administration’s schemes, Taiwanese elites—especially Taiwanese students in Japan—sought to participate in the

island's governance. Japan implemented limited local elections, but activists continued to push for home rule until the 1930s.

After military pacification and administration, the colonial government's third task was extracting Taiwan's economic riches. Taiwan produced surpluses in rice and sugar, both of which Japan needed for its growing industrial workforce and (later) far-flung military. To expand production the colonial government consolidated farming and created commodity markets. Japanese firms soon gained the upper hand in sugar refining and agricultural exports, hurting Taiwan's elite. Meanwhile, though, the colonial government invested huge sums in infrastructure, technology, and human capital, including education, public health, and sanitation. In 1908, for example, residents of Taipei began receiving potable water from a public utility.

Another challenge facing the Japanese colonial administration was managing the aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal groups resisted the suppression of their cultures and exploitation of resources on their land. The costs of these wars were substantial, and they affected relations between the Han majority and the government. The expense of subduing the aboriginal peoples gave Taiwanese elites leverage to bargain with the colonial government. Some appealed directly to Tokyo, breaking down the division between locality and center and activating Taiwan and its management as an issue in Japanese domestic politics (Wakabayashi 2006).

The colonial era is a topic of debate: nationalist historians view it as a period of subjugation and humiliation, while Taiwanese nationalists emphasize economic and social progress under Japanese rule. Both schools are indebted to Japanese historians, however, for when Taiwan history was still too hot to touch in Taiwan, Japanese historians were producing detailed studies. Still, those works were part of an effort to chronicle the Japanese empire through its peripheral regions; they are studies of Taiwan *as Japanese*, not of Taiwan in its own right (Wakabayashi 2006).

The frame shifted in 1980 with the publication of a paper in which Haruyama Meitetsu (Haruyama and Wakabayashi 1980) drew connections between Japan's colonial policies and its domestic politics. Around the same time, Wakabayashi identified an officially sanctioned local elite—the “native landed bourgeoisie”—that became powerful and autonomous enough to negotiate with the government. The emergence of that group marked the beginning of Taiwanese subjectivity. Fujii, too, points to a Taiwanese subjectivity in the colonial era when he observes that print culture emerged on Taiwan during the Japanese period in a form very different from the mainland, drawing the boundaries of Taiwan's imagined community to exclude the mainland (Fujii 1980).

Chinese nationalist historians in the PRC and on Taiwan view the Japanese colonial era as an interruption of Taiwan's long-established attachment to mainland-based authority, but most Taiwanese, Japanese, and western historians believe Japanese colonialism was neither an unalloyed good nor an unmitigated disaster, but a period of rapid modernization within a repressive colonial framework. The competition between these interpretations is fierce: in the summer of 2015, officials' efforts to enshrine the nationalist positions on this and other issues in Taiwan's history textbooks touched off large-scale demonstrations and accusations of “brainwashing.”

Perhaps the most important consequence of Japanese colonialism was to separate Taiwan from the mainland during the formative era of Chinese nationalism. When the events that forged the modern Chinese nation-state—the 100 Days Reform, Xinhai Revolution, May Fourth Movement, Northern Expedition, anti-Japanese war, and so on—occurred, Taiwanese were cut off from the mainland. Many were interested in

events there, but as observers, not participants. Their estrangement from China at this critical time helps explain why the Kuomintang's efforts to inculcate Chinese nationalism in Taiwan's people failed. It also may help to explain why, as the political separation between the two persisted and deepened, Taiwan followed such a radically different trajectory from the mainland, including creating the first (indeed, to date the only) liberal democratic state in a culturally Chinese society.

### **“Retrocession” to “economic miracle”**

Japan's imperialization project ended abruptly when the emperor surrendered in 1945. In the 1943 Cairo Declaration the Allied Powers had designated Taiwan a “territory ... stolen from the Chinese,” and agreed to return it to the Republic of China. And so it was: when Japan withdrew, Taiwan came under the control of the ROC government led by Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang.

Most Taiwanese were amenable to becoming part of the Chinese nation, but there were huge gaps between Han on Taiwan and Han on the mainland. When the ROC took power on October 25, 1945, it celebrated the event as “Retrocession”—the glorious return of Taiwan to its motherland. But for Taiwanese, the moment was ambiguous, their excitement tinged with uncertainty. Meanwhile, 50 years under the ROC's bitter enemy had tainted the Taiwanese in the eyes of many mainlanders.

The tensions that haunted Retrocession were exacerbated by economic crisis. Taiwan's economy was reeling from wartime damage, and the repatriation of Japanese colonists allowed new arrivals from the mainland to slide into positions of economic and political power. The economic maladies crippling the mainland—scarcity, unemployment, inflation—soon infected Taiwan. Taiwan's Nationalist governor allowed Taiwan's economy to be pillaged for the mainland's benefit. Scuttlebutt among Taiwanese had it, “The dogs are gone; the pigs have arrived.”

These growing social tensions erupted in February 1947. A fatal police incident in the capital, Taipei, sparked protests on February 28. A second killing set off a cascade of violent uprisings across the island. Taiwanese attacked the centers of Kuomintang power: police stations, military bases, and government offices; many KMT officials and soldiers fled or went into hiding (Phillips 2003). Local elites negotiated with the KMT leadership to find a peaceful exit from the crisis. However, there was no consensus about what to ask for, and the last thing the ROC government wanted was a protracted challenge to its authority. A week after the protests began KMT soldiers landed on Taiwan's shores with orders to end the rebellion by force. Many local elites and political dissidents were arrested; at least 10,000 Taiwanese were killed in what has come to be known as the “2-28 Incident” (*er er ba shijian*).

For nearly four decades, discussion of the event was taboo, leaving little room for historical documentation or analysis. A few westerners and Taiwanese in exile wrote about the incident, and as Taiwan liberalized in the 1980s and 1990s the Incident became the topic of feverish historical excavation. Survivors, long silenced by fear, began providing oral histories and disclosing hidden documents. In 1991 Taiwan's government commissioned a definitive history of the incident, including an English version (Lai, Myers, and Wei 1991). Its authors mined government archives and popular sources and catalogued Taiwan's losses in grim detail, but their report did not satisfy everyone; many believed it obscured the question of ultimate responsibility for the violence. In 2006 the 2-28 Memorial Foundation published a report addressing the weaknesses in the 1991 account.

In the wake of 2-28 the KMT-led ROC government imposed a decades-long political repression called the “White Terror,” scooping up thousands of political prisoners and stifling the growth of organized opposition. White Terror also solidified the divide between Taiwanese whose families had migrated to the island before the Japanese colonial era—the so-called Taiwanese, or *benshengren* (people of this province) and the newcomers who had arrived after 1945, known as Mainlanders, or *waishengren* (people from other provinces).

The gulf between the two groups widened after 1949, when Communist forces drove the ROC government and military out of the mainland and onto Taiwan. By 1950, at least 1.5 million Mainlanders were residing on the island. Taiwan went from sideshow to main event in a few weeks’ time, and Chiang Kai-shek found himself reliving Zheng Chenggong’s story: holed up on Taiwan, fervently hoping to overthrow a new mainland government and revive its predecessor.

When the ROC decamped to Taiwan, its leaders claimed the move was temporary. To recover mainland China, the KMT-led government would need to remake Taiwan into the launch platform for a massive military undertaking. And that would require an equally massive overhaul of Taiwan’s economy, society, and politics. To set the stage for Taiwan’s transformation, the ROC government was determined to “enforce political conformity, inculcate nationalist zeal, rebuild economic prosperity and acquire military might” (Rigger 2011, 28).

For Mainlanders, treating Taiwan as a means to an end was natural. Nationalist ideology required restoring legitimate government to China; meanwhile their homeland—and in many cases their immediate family—was on the mainland. For Taiwanese, *Taiwan* was home. Despite the KMT’s efforts to indoctrinate Taiwanese into its unificationist ideology, many viewed the Nationalist government as an alien power imposing itself on Taiwan by force, and had little enthusiasm for unification.

The Nationalist leadership invoked emergency provisions to suspend the constitution and freeze the ROC state, creating a Mainlander-dominated, single-party regime. Lawmakers elected on the mainland in the 1940s were to keep their seats pending new elections in their home districts—after unification. Administration, too, was Mainlander-dominated by design. Taiwanese elected local officials, but only the KMT nominated candidates. Educational policies gave native speakers of Mandarin—the ROC’s official language—systematic advantages over a Taiwanese majority whose mother tongues were Minnan, Hakka, and aboriginal.

The government understood that recovering the mainland would require more than a well-controlled Taiwanese population. It committed to building the island’s economic infrastructure to support a massive expansion of Taiwan’s military power. To that end the KMT implemented an aggressive state-led development program. The first phase was a land-to-the-tiller reform that boosted agricultural productivity and rural living standards. Import substitution industrialization absorbed excess rural labor and increased the supply of consumer goods. When growth in the domestic market began to slow, the government phased in export-promotion policies. Many social scientists view Taiwan’s experience as evidence of a successful developmental state (Wade 1990); however, scholars with a neoclassical bent question whether state intervention contributed much to Taiwan’s economic success.

State-owned enterprises in upstream industries such as petrochemicals, plastics, cement, and steel ensured export-oriented manufacturers had the inputs they needed, but the downstream firms were private, and Taiwanese owned. While they started out

small, some became major players, mainly as suppliers to overseas brands. Taiwanese manufacturers moved up the value chain such that the roots of today's high-tech Taiwanese firms lie in the export-oriented manufacturing of the 1960s and 1970s.

Taiwan's economy grew rapidly in those early decades, and its economic policies sustained a relatively egalitarian distribution of wealth. The state also invested heavily in education, and by the late 1970s, Taiwan was home to a sophisticated middle class society. Many Taiwanese were willing to give the KMT-led ROC state credit for the island's economic success, but they grew increasingly skeptical of its unificationist dream. Without unification, the KMT's status as an unchallenged ruling party presiding over a government locked in place by emergency decrees became ever harder to defend.

### Democratization and the opening to China

Repression of dissent combined with a thriving economy kept Taiwan politically quiescent through the early 1970s, but resentment at the KMT's political monopoly and its insistence on an elitist version of Chinese identity far removed from the lived experience of most Taiwanese continued to simmer. The turning point came when the KMT's claim to represent China internationally collapsed. News that US president Richard Nixon would visit the PRC was a huge blow, as was losing the Chinese seat in the United Nations. Then Chiang Kai-shek died, in April 1975. He was replaced, first as party leader then as president, by his son Chiang Ching-kuo (Jiang Jingguo).

The KMT's flagging international position and waning hopes of recovering the mainland energized Taiwan's political opposition. A handful of independent politicians had challenged the KMT in local elections in the 1950s and 1960s, and in the 1970s stepped up their activity under the moniker "Dangwai," or "non-party." The KMT saw the trend and accelerated efforts to coopt more Taiwanese, but the pressure for change was irrepressible (Dickson 1998).

In December 1979 an opposition march in Kaohsiung ended in a violent confrontation with police; 44 activists were arrested on political charges. On February 28, 1980, imprisoned defendant Lin Yi-hsiung's mother and seven-year old twin daughters were murdered. The shocking crime revealed the ruthlessness of some in the regime. In the emotional atmosphere that followed, the Kaohsiung defendants' trials became a cause célèbre, including for Taiwanese-Americans who urged the US to pressure Chiang Ching-kuo to relax political controls. Candidates associated with the Dangwai, especially those linked to the Kaohsiung defendants, swept into office in the 1983 elections.

Although martial law and the ban on new political parties were still in place, the Dangwai founded the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in September 1986. Not long after, Chiang Ching-kuo lifted martial law. The result was explosive growth in new publications and political organizations—most of which failed, but all of which reinforced the trend toward opening up. Chiang selected a Taiwanese, the KMT politician Lee Teng-hui, as his vice president, paving the way for the island's first native-born chief executive to take office when Chiang died in 1988. For some scholars, these decisions make Chiang Ching-kuo the architect of Taiwan's democratization (Chao and Myers 1997); others believe Chiang opposed reform, but was forced to capitulate (Jacobs 2012).

In the same year he lifted martial law, Chiang also lifted the 40-year ban on travel to the mainland. It was billed as a humanitarian gesture—giving divided families one last chance to be reunited—but the economic effects were profound. Taiwan's export manufacturers faced rising costs and increased regulation. They had only to set foot on the

mainland to realize it could give their factories a new lease on life. The PRC was just opening to foreign investment; labor and land costs were low, and local officials were eager for manufacturing investment. Almost overnight, Taiwan's sunset industries began relocating to the mainland.

While Taiwanese entrepreneurs were opening the mainland to investment, DPP politicians were working to open Taiwan's political system to democracy. In 1990, Taiwan's constitutional court ordered all mainland-elected parliamentarians to retire; elections in 1991 and 1992 filled the national legislative bodies with representatives accountable to constituencies on Taiwan. Mainland provinces received indirect representation in the form of at-large legislators. Lee Teng-hui, facing resistance from KMT conservatives, reached out to progressive sectors including the DPP. His 1990 National Affairs Conference built consensus for thorough-going democratic reforms, and in 1996 he won Taiwan's first democratic presidential election.

In the early 1990s leaders in Taipei and Beijing opened a channel for quasi-private cross-Strait talks and reached agreements on a number of important issues. The process stabilized the relationship and created a durable channel for cross-Strait communication. Despite setbacks—including Lee's description of the relationship between the two sides as a "special state-to-state relationship" in 1999 and the election of a DPP president, Chen Shui-bian, in 2000—economic ties between the two sides have become increasingly close and their semi-official relationship increasingly routine.

### Taiwan in the twenty-first century

The turnover of power in 2000 crowned Taiwan's transition from single-party authoritarianism to democracy. Chen Shui-bian was elected in a three-person race that split the KMT and allowed the DPP candidate to slip into office with 39 percent of the vote. The election result was a thrilling breakthrough for the Democratic Progressives, but governing proved difficult. Both the KMT—which held a legislative majority—and the Chinese Communist Party were determined to prevent Chen from implementing his party's agenda.

From its founding, the DPP's success has rested on its broad appeal. It was founded to democratize the political system and end Mainlander privilege and domination. As those demands were met, identity-related issues became increasingly central. After decades in which the imperative of unification justified KMT authoritarianism, many Taiwanese believed the only way to democratize Taiwan was to abandon unification. As restrictions on speech fell away a debate erupted over how best to secure Taiwan's future. For many, declaring independence seemed the most efficient way to break the KMT's monopoly.

From its founding, the DPP hedged its position on independence, viewing it as the preferred future for the island, but acknowledging that a declaration of independence must result from a democratic process. The Democratic Progressives were chastened in the mid-1990s by Beijing's sabre rattling and by the resounding defeat of their pro-independence presidential candidate in 1996. In 1999 the party moderated its position when it passed a resolution acknowledging that "Republic of China" is the Taiwanese state's name.

The decision to treat Taiwan as independent under the ROC label obviated the need to change its status—to declare independence. Nonetheless, the KMT, CCP, and international media ignored the nuances of the DPP's position and branded the party

“pro-independence.” As such, it was anathema to both the China within Taiwan, the KMT-led ROC government bent on unification, and the China outside Taiwan, the CCP-led PRC, which is even more determined than the KMT to achieve unification (Rigger 2013). For the PRC, of course, unification means bringing Taiwan under a tent constructed by the PRC, not the restoration of the ROC on the mainland, which is the KMT’s preferred outcome.

Chen Shui-bian launched his presidency with a gesture of moderation, promising in his inaugural address to eschew policies aimed at advancing independence, but neither the PRC nor the KMT was moved. For eight years (Chen won reelection in 2004) the Kuomintang-led legislature rejected nearly every initiative from the presidential office. After multiple attempts to impeach or recall him, Chen’s presidency petered out in a snarl of scandals; soon after leaving office he was sent to prison. Meanwhile, Beijing refused to engage Chen’s representatives and cross-Strait dialogue languished. The economics of the relationship defied politics, however; the decade saw a sharp and sustained increase in cross-Strait trade and investment. It also saw the rise of two new phenomena: marriage migration into Taiwan from mainland China and Southeast Asia, and economic migration from Taiwan, mainly to the mainland, where Taiwanese entrepreneurs and workers learned to negotiate complex deterritorialized identities.

One of the many controversies during Chen’s presidency involved historical interpretation. Chen and his party were keen to reinforce and nurture a sense of Taiwanese nationhood and identity. The president used his executive authority to revise school curricula to emphasize Taiwan’s history (a process already begun under Lee Teng-hui) and rename state institutions to replace “China” with “Taiwan.” He also led an unsuccessful effort to revise or replace the ROC constitution. His critics lambasted Chen for what they called “desinification” (*qu Zhongguo hua*), but the KMT’s stonewalling gave the president little incentive to back away from initiatives that pleased his militant supporters.

One measure to which many observers of cross-Strait relations pay close attention is the proportion of Taiwan residents who choose a “Taiwanese” identity over a “Chinese” or “Taiwanese and Chinese” (dual) identity. When Chen took office, dual identity led Taiwanese-only by about 7 percentage points, according to data from the Election Studies Center at National Chengchi University. Eight years later the two groups had switched places, with Taiwanese-only holding a 5 point lead. This trend accelerated after 2008; in 2014 almost twice as many islanders claimed a Taiwanese-only identity (60 percent) as a dual identity (32 percent). Meanwhile, the percentage identifying as “Chinese” fell from just over 10 percent in 2000 to 4 percent in 2008.

President Chen’s alleged “desinification” efforts may have contributed to this trend, but it is hard to attribute the rise in Taiwanese-only identity to a single cause. In fact, dual identity was neck-and-neck with Taiwanese-only identity throughout the Chen years, but diverged sharply after 2008 when Taiwanese elected Ma Ying-jeou, a KMT politician known for his openness to cross-Strait ties, as president. Taiwanese identity may be entrenching for reasons that have little to do with the efforts Chen and others have made. Even to Taiwanese, “China” today means the PRC, not Taiwan. Meanwhile, cross-Strait interactions deepen the identity divide by giving Taiwanese a first-hand view of how the two sides differ.

Ma Ying-jeou’s challenge was to find a balance between an electorate that increasingly saw itself as distinct from China and Taipei’s need for peaceful relations with the giant next door. Both economically and politically, Taiwan could ill afford to clash with the mainland, but throughout his presidency Ma faced opposition from those who believed

his conciliatory policies put Taiwan's autonomy at risk. In the spring of 2014 he faced a profound trial when protesters—mainly students—overran and occupied the legislative chamber to protest the latest cross-strait economic agreement. In 2016, a DPP presidential candidate, Tsai Ing-wen, won the office on a moderate platform that promised to revive Taiwan's economy and maintain the status quo in cross-strait relations.

The KMT-led authoritarian state defined Taiwan as a refuge and launching pad for a particular version of Chinese nationalism. But the end of the authoritarian era brought with it a new understanding of Taiwan's past, present, and future. Today, only a handful of Taiwanese believe in the historical mission to unify China under the ROC. The vast majority have no interest in giving up their freedom and autonomy for a historical abstraction. At the same time, they are well aware of the risks of antagonizing the PRC. For all the talk of polarization, there is in fact a broad consensus that the status quo—separate but not independent, connected but not unified—is the best option for Taiwan today. Along with that realization has come a recognition that Taiwan itself is plural; it is made of cultures and stories, none of which applies or appeals to all.

In 2002, the historian Q. Edward Wang wrote, "Taiwanese national history has come of age. Activists, historians, and educators alike have discovered that no one master narrative will encompass the complexity of lived experience on Taiwan, nor will it satisfy the pedagogical and political demands of a population whose diverse class, gender, and ethnic positions defy unilinear, exclusionist historical narratives" (Wang 2002b, 114). Indeed, much of the energy in historical studies of Taiwan since 2000 has been dedicated to complicating monolithic narratives. The struggle to extract Taiwan's history from Chinese history and give it a life of its own succeeded, only to provoke an equally vigorous struggle to extricate Taiwan's *histories*—in all their multiplicity and complexity—from the totalizing grip of identity politics.

### Note

- 1 Online at [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/ljzg\\_665465/3568\\_665529/t17798.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ljzg_665465/3568_665529/t17798.shtml). Accessed June 13, 2016.

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

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# Chinese Migrations

HENRY S.N. YU

When the issue of Chinese migrations is raised, a pair of vexing questions immediately occur: What does one mean by “migration,” and what does one mean by “Chinese”? The two questions are inextricably entwined, with migration as a historical process shaping the dynamic definitions of “Chinese” identity across space and time, in particular for those tens of millions of migrants and their descendants who crossed the seas and moved outside imperial borders.

For heuristic reasons, let us begin with the first question, What is “migration”? If we adopt the perspective that the movement of people, goods, and ideas through time and across space is the fundamental historical process through which categories such as empire, race, nation, culture, and identity are conceptually remade, then the long history of China itself as an expanding incorporative empire can be seen as a continual process of migration. We may consider the movement of peoples from small agricultural societies along the Yellow and Yangzi rivers outwards across the land—ever expanding and incorporating other societies (sometimes only partially)—as a single historical migration process. In a sense, the migration of human bodies and objects, and the ideas that accompanied the movement of each—considered as the primary independent variable of history—can conceptually render all else into secondary effects dependent upon the consequences of the movement of bodies and things.

Migrating outside the borders and leaving the Chinese imperial state (“external” migrations), in contrast with migrating within the borders (“internal” migrations) may be usefully considered as related but distinct processes. As Diana Lary has shown (Lary 2012), narrating Chinese migration as an internal process within the imperial state has the utility of highlighting the ways in which the movement of peoples and the development of trade over millennia have incorporated diverse regions and frontier territories into a coherent state (Lee 1978). From this perspective, the region encompassing the modern nation of Vietnam may be considered a revealing exemplar because significant portions of that territory have historically both been within and without the formal

control of Chinese imperial states. For centuries, the region was effectively a frontier area of the empire, and so migrations from other regions may be considered an “internal” process. But even after becoming separate kingdoms, and during periods of European colonial control when the region was a part of French Indochina, migrants from the same regions and leaving the same coastal ports of Amoy (Xiamen), Swatow (Shantou), and Macau (Aomen) continued to move back and forth to urban trading clusters at places such as Cholon/Saigon, Hoi An, and Hanoi. The long continuity of migrations between these specific locations has been a crucial factor shaping the history of all of the regions connected by these migrations. In some ways, separating the migrations into “internal” and “external” processes highlights historically the role of states in trying to control the flow of migrants, as well as state interests in determining the utility and loyalty of migrants to the state. Questions of identity were often tied to processes of state formation, but the recurring process of migration itself endured through the exigencies of state formation and dissolution.

The conceptual distinction between what may be termed “internal” versus “external” migration can therefore be misleading. However, it is a useful and important distinction that has shaped both the history of migrations as well as the perspectives of scholarship. For instance, although Chinese imperial states often exercised tight control over “internal” migration within territorial boundaries, they generally could not exercise similar power over “external” migrants who had passed outside their borders. The shaping effect of state control on migrants has not been all determining, and indeed at most times (despite the aspirations of state officials) state control has been negligible or superficial at best. It may be argued that scholars taking on the outlook and interests of states (and using archives that predominantly reflect state perspectives) have generally overdetermined the power of states in shaping historical migration practices. Nevertheless, the internal–external distinction for migration has been a useful heuristic device for highlighting how such processes operate both within and outside state control.

The second question posed—What does one mean by “Chinese”?—is raised directly by how migration practices often operate both inside and outside state borders, and therefore within and without state power and control. State claims on identification, as well as migrants’ own definitions and claims of identity, have varied across time and in different locations. A proliferation of terms in various languages arose for migrants whose complex movements and engagements with each other (and with others) defy the very categorization that using such terms implied. Some terms attempted to encompass all of the “external” migrants who had left the borders of the Chinese state: the Cantonese term used in the late nineteenth and twentieth-century, *Wah Kiu* (*Huaqiao*), or the more recent term in Putonghua, *Huaren*, for instance. Other terms were specific to certain migrants who had lived in certain places but then moved on. To return to the example of Vietnam, the term *Việt Kiều* has generally been used by the descendants of migrants who identified with having originated in the southern coasts of China and spent significant enough time in Vietnam that they continued to identify themselves by their experiences in Vietnam even after leaving Vietnam. The English term “Sino-Vietnamese” approximates the term *Việt Kiều* but differs precisely because “Sino-Vietnamese” refers to both those inside and outside the nation of Vietnam who identify with having Chinese ancestry within Vietnam, whereas *Việt Kiều* refers generally to those who were exiled as refugees or “Boat People” during the 1970s and 1980s, even if they returned to Vietnam later.

Other terms such as *peranakan*—a Malay term of self-identity for those descended from mixed Chinese-Malay ancestry in the Malay archipelago—assert a specific history and lineage that is distinct from later arrivals of migrants from southern China, and point to the complicated ways in which the meaning of historical migrations have been shaped not only by the demands of state categorizations, but the complex manner in which the descendants of migrants themselves have honored—and sometimes repudiated—but almost invariably reimagined and reshaped the meaning and memory of their own familial descent.

Given these issues of epistemology, one may sketch a chronology of “Chinese migrations” over the millennia very roughly in this way: as kingdoms eventually coalesced into an imperial, dynastic state that we label “China,” migration was ever present as the results of war, famine, natural disasters, ecological changes, and state policies of moving people, especially into border regions and conquered territories. Border regions were ever changing and dynamic over time, with one moment’s frontier incorporated by migration, settlement, and changes in identity, so that centuries later peoples in that area considered themselves and were considered by the expanding state to be formally part of state control and belonging. Land migrations and the use of river waterways dominated these processes of expansion and incorporation westward and southward, and by the end of the Qin-Han era the southward expansion had reached coastal and mountainous borderlands in the south and southwest. Conquered peoples were subjugated and integrated through intermarriage and cultural change, or forced to move, and sometimes both.

Coastal maritime trade and the migration of goods and people along seaborne routes was a long-term continuity, especially back and forth through southern coastal ports, but by the early Ming dynasty a fundamental distinction had arisen between internal migrations within state controlled regions and borderlands, and external seaborne migrations along trade routes outside imperial state control. The great expeditions of Zheng He during the Ming are the exception that clarify this distinction, as these state-sponsored forays went along routes generally already familiar to merchants and traders, and when the Ming government decided after Zheng He’s expeditions not to pursue seaborne imperial expansion and to consolidate coastal borders, migrations along seaborne trade routes—in particular through ports on the Guangdong and Fujian coast—continued from the fourteenth century over the next five hundred years essentially as external processes beyond the control of the imperial state. These external, seaborne migrations over the last five centuries—and scholarly understandings of them—are the main focus of this chapter.

The subject of “Chinese migrations,” one could say, is the assertion of a scholarly object of inquiry in spite of the indeterminate quality of the category itself. This is most apparent when looking back at the way in which scholarship on migrants who originated from China (“external” migrants, as opposed to “internal” migration) developed. For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scholarly studies in European languages could be divided into (1) those that focused on Cantonese-speaking migrants who migrated mostly to British settler-colonies around the Pacific basin—the Australian colonies, the islands of Hawai‘i, the North American colonies, and the Caribbean—almost all of whom passed through the British port of Hong Kong and originated in just eight specific counties in Guangdong province, and (2) those that focused on various communities of “Chinese” in Southeast Asia, in particular within European colonies such as the Spanish Philippines, Dutch East Indies, British and Portuguese Malaya, and French Indochina.

The economic roles and social standing of self-identified “Chinese” migrants and their descendants in these colonial societies was clearly apparent to European migrants, and in particular to colonial officials who observed and engaged through policy with the ways in which these “Chinese” dominated local small trades and mercantile activity, and the movement of goods and provision of labor across long distances. Colonial officials in their reports observed the unique and important role that Chinese merchants, traders, and laborers played in colonial economies throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific basin, dating back to Portuguese traders to Malacca and the Spanish occupation of the Philippines in the sixteenth century.

Almost all of the migrants who were being observed by Europeans had originated from a small area of the southern coast of Fujian and Guangdong provinces, and they spoke regional forms of Chinese that were distinct both from each other and from the forms used by imperial officials and those who lived in northern China (a dialect that the British named Mandarin because they only encountered it being used by the “Mandarins”—the Portuguese term for imperial scholar-officials—as opposed to dialect forms of Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka, and Teochiu that dominated the Chinese communities that Europeans encountered outside China). Observing and interacting with external Chinese migrations, it could be said, shaped the very way in which European conceptions of China developed. Colonial outposts were generally the site of knowledge production for European engagement—for instance the creation of Chinese–Portuguese dictionaries and translations by missionaries in colonial ports such as Malacca. These ports were also where Europeans generally encountered the movement of goods and people outward through the trade networks created by the Cantonese-, Hokkien-, and Teochiu-speaking merchants that dominated external migrations. Before the opening of Chinese treaty ports in the mid-nineteenth century, almost all goods and knowledge from China filtered through the webs of movement created by these migrations.

The rise of two distinct forms of scholarship about Chinese migrants was refracted through the two distinct forms of European colonialism that developed in the nineteenth century. As many British colonies in the Americas and the Pacific region increasingly became settler colonies, the politics of white supremacy shaped the rise of democracy as the means of organizing ever-increasing populations of British and European labor migrants. Unionization and labor movements used white supremacy to organize workers, and on the west coasts of the new nations of the United States and Canada, as well as in the colonies of Australia and New Zealand, anti-Chinese politics undergirded the expansion and consolidation of new nations built on the foundations of white supremacy (Price 1974; Lake and Reynolds 2008) as well as ever more elaborate attempts to control the border crossings of Chinese migrants (McKeown 2008).

The dominance of Cantonese merchants and laborers in the large trade ports of Melbourne, Sydney, Honolulu, San Francisco, Victoria, and Vancouver became one of the main targets of political agitation using racial ideology. Alongside the segregation of indigenous peoples through reservation systems and culturally genocidal policies such as forced assimilation and residential schooling, the use of anti-Chinese legislation helped organize new settler societies around white supremacy, leading to the disenfranchisement of Chinese (and other Asian migrants), to segregation in housing and employment, and to systematic racial hierarchies that informed most aspects of daily life for those of Chinese ancestry around the Pacific. It is understandable that the history of white supremacist politics and its effects came to dominate scholarship on Cantonese migrations to these regions. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century studies of Chinese

immigration to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States were invariably organized around the goals and effects of racially discriminatory legislation and policy, and the migrants themselves were consistently perceived through the lenses of racial hierarchy. Even when studies portrayed the Chinese in a favorable light, the repudiation of a common stock of derogatory representations of Chinese dominated the discourse.

Even Chinese nationalism both as concept and affect was birthed and nurtured among overseas Chinese migrants out of anti-Chinese racism. A shared experience of racism in North America in the late nineteenth century, for instance, drew migrants together to form umbrella organizations such as local Chinese Benevolent Associations or revolutionary societies such as Chinese Freemasons (*zhigongtang* or *hongmen*) or the nationalist Kuomintang (Guomindang) that tied together individual migrants and provided the institutional basis for other associations built around Chinese nationalism (Armentrout-Ma 1990; Marshall 2014). Shared experiences of racism and discrimination while abroad, ironically, forged a strong awareness of the need to build a stronger China at home that could protect overseas migrants, as well as fueling Chinese chauvinism. Frank Dikötter noted the example of how poet Wen Yiduo reacted to the experience of racism while in the United States:

Some intellectuals underwent a heightening of their racial consciousness while in the West. Students abroad often complained of Western paternalism and arrogance. Although some Chinese genuinely suffered from racial discrimination, an element of self-victimization and self-humiliation often entered into the composition of such feelings. Alienation abroad could easily be compensated for by the projection of superior feelings on to the homeland ... (Dikötter 1992, 157)

Nationalist organizations such as the Kuomintang grew out of overseas Chinese communities. Sun Yat-sen, the nationalist leader and provisional President of the Republic that emerged after the fall of the Qing Dynasty, was enmeshed within broader networks of migrants from Guangdong, with village and county relatives living all around the Pacific. Much of the fundraising for the Chinese nationalist revolution came from the array of small-town Kuomintang and Chinese Freemason organizations that spread wherever Chinese migrants went, from Ipoh in Malaya to Moose Jaw in prairie Canada. They could imagine a united Chinese nation at home as they transcended the differences between themselves abroad, and a shared experience of being ethnicized and racialized abroad was a powerful element of that magical alchemy.

It was not until the late twentieth century that scholarly representations of Chinese migrants and their descendants consistently began to take on their perspectives, but these generally were filtered through the politics of national inclusion and exclusion, especially in British settler colonies that had become nations. These studies grew out of political struggles for equality as citizens and the acquisition of political rights, and the representations commonly portrayed the descendants of the original Cantonese migrants as incorporated citizens of the nation fully deserving equal treatment and respect. Contributions to the nation were often heralded as a list of “firsts”—the first elected official both locally and nationally, the first doctor or lawyer or other professional able to overcome discriminatory employment practices, the first judge or appointed official. These contribution histories tended to flatten the complex range of activities that the migrants and their descendants undertook in favor of positive representations that extolled national identity. Terms such as “Chinese American,” “Chinese Canadian,” and

“Chinese Australian” or “Canadian-born Chinese” and “American-born Chinese” emphasized Chinese descent at the same time as asserting citizenship and belonging. Chinese Americans, for instance, fought for the right for birthright citizenship, and the landmark 1898 Supreme Court decision in *United States v Wong Kim Ark* resulted in the creation of universal birthright citizenship (automatic national citizenship for any child born in the territory of the nation), an innovation in world history that changed the nature of citizenship rights for the whole of the United States, as well as nations such as Canada that followed suit in 1947.

By the end of the twentieth century, a process of national incorporation had largely reversed the predominant representation at the end of the nineteenth century of Chinese immigrants as “unassimilable,” “dirty,” “disease-ridden,” and sexually threatening to “white women.” However, the scholarship that accompanied this broader political reversal tended to leave out any aspect of historical migration processes that might undermine a positive portrayal of national belonging and loyalty. Circulation back and forth by migrants between southern China and their new “home” nations was deemphasized or narrated as temporary visits to villages of origin. Multilingualism and non-English language use, common among Cantonese migrants and their descendants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had become a favorite target for anti-Chinese agitators as a sign of a lack of assimilation into national cultures defined by the idealization of British migrants. The utility of multilingualism became a political detriment, and in a reflection of how descendants of Cantonese migrants themselves suppressed non-English language use as a response to English monolingual policies, scholarship pertaining to Chinese immigration was shaped by the dominance of English-language sources and English language use. Although there were prominent exceptions, the politics of national belonging strongly informed scholarly production within all of the settler nations for most of the twentieth century.

In comparison, scholarship on ethnic Chinese communities in Southeast Asia was affected by nationalism in a very different way. As decolonization reshaped European colonies across the globe in the mid-twentieth century, the place of communities that explicitly self-identified or had been identified by colonial and emerging postcolonial states as “Chinese” was transformed, sometimes violently. Political organizers within newly forming postcolonial nations began using anti-Chinese political rhetoric in ways that exacerbated resentment within local communities of the wealth of prominent ethnic Chinese landowners and merchants, as well as echoing broader anti-Chinese representations that had been used with such success in white settler colonies as they built national imaginaries using anti-Chinese politics.

With decolonization in regions that had small minorities of European colonial migrants who were being forced out or who already had left during the war and Japanese occupation, organizing around anti-Chinese politics was not in the service of white supremacy; but anti-Chinese rhetoric could nonetheless be used to help cement the heterogeneous societies that the arbitrary boundaries of European colonialism had produced and left behind. Scholarship in the last half of the twentieth century that focused on ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia was shaped by an interest in their economic status. They were a small minority within the newly nationalizing polities, but were often significant and dominant both numerically and financially within urban centers. For example, almost all of the major cities where most of trade and commerce took place both during the colonial period and postcolonial nationhood—Jakarta, Saigon, Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Penang, Manila, Rangoon, Phnom Penh—had either a majority of or had significant proportions of ethnic Chinese.

The concentration of Chinese merchants and traders in urban enclaves had been a feature of how regional trade had developed historically, serving as the nodes in a well-developed network where exchange and the flow of migrants and goods had taken place. Indeed, these merchants and traders were nominally “Chinese” in the eyes of colonial observers, but in practical operation were shaped by differences in dialect. Long distance networks were linguistically dependent: there were Hokkien networks and Cantonese networks and Teochiu networks—each of which spanned space in different constellations and persisted through time in relative independence. They dominated the rice trade across Southeast Asia, as well as the movement of tin, gold, rubber, tea, dried seafood, dried fruit, and most conspicuously in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as European colonial development created large-scale plantations and industrial mines, the mass movement of Chinese as laborers.

Scholars interested in the Chinese migrant communities in Southeast Asia invariably needed to explain their conspicuous control of so much of the economic activity within European colonial territories. In Thailand, which managed to stay outside European political control, the significant place of ethnic Chinese within the economy as a focus of scholarly attention yielded the “middleman minority” thesis, William Skinner’s attempt to explain the dominance of the Chinese within the economy not only of Thailand but the networks across Southeast Asia within which the merchants were embedded (Skinner 1957; 1958). The “middle” in which the Chinese existed—for Skinner and many of the scholars who followed him in studying the Chinese in Cambodia, in the Philippines, in Vietnam, in Indonesia, and in other colonial and postcolonial societies—was between the large “native” majority populations (some of whom were indigenous to the regions, with many others also being migrants), and the small groups of ruling royalty and European colonial elites who politically controlled the territories within which the ethnic Chinese lived.

The evocative, brokering role of being in the “middle” provided a sociological analysis for why the Chinese were so frequently resented. As the holders of tax licenses for the Dutch in the East Indies, for instance, Chinese became the local face of colonial exploitation—it was they who came to collect the taxes, not the Dutch, and they were blamed for the poverty and exploitation experienced by those who were now organizing “Indonesians” around a nationalism that explicitly used anti-Chinese rhetoric (Coppel 1983; Tong 2010). Within the context of decolonization and the politics of “divide and rule” that had been used in various ways both by European colonizers and postcolonial ruling elites, the ethnic Chinese communities of Southeast Asia became targeted scapegoats to bear the brunt of the hierarchies of European colonialism and the continuing existence of economic inequality even after Europeans were no longer present to be blamed. Local Chinese shopkeepers and landowners became the target of postcolonial nation builders.

In this way, anti-Chinese nationalism as a political force helped shape scholarship on ethnic Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, as it had shaped scholarship on ethnic Chinese in white settler colonies. The attention to anti-Chinese politics however, had the consequence of conceptually categorizing the “Chinese” as an “ethnic out group” in a way that gave more coherence to them as “Chinese” at the same time that it gave abstract coherence to those who were being organized as the “in group.” White supremacist nationalism used anti-Chinese politics (as well as other racial ideologies) and a categorization of “Chinese immigrants” as perpetual foreigners to create a semblance of a whole for European migrants as “Canadian” or “American” or “Australian.” Anti-Chinese

politics in Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and other postcolonial nations similarly represented “ethnic Chinese” as foreign as a way to help forge new national imaginaries.

Ironically, many of the most famous anti-colonial nationalists themselves came from educated, elite families that were of Chinese descent. The father of Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese nationalist leader, for instance, was a Chinese teacher. Emilio Aguinaldo, a nationalist leader in the Philippines, was a *Tsinoy* (Chinese *mestizo*), as were many of the *ilustrados* calling for independence. Not so subtle distinctions were often made in anti-Chinese rhetoric between those who were “too Chinese”—for instance the *totok* in Indonesia who were “recent” Chinese migrants—as opposed to those descended from earlier migrations whose Chinese ancestry was downplayed or conveniently ignored. Class resentments could be mobilized against local Chinese shopkeepers even while the Chinese ancestry of large landowning families or those with industrial or financial holdings who were important to the new national state went quietly unmentioned.

The perspectives of national formation in the wake of colonialism tended to focus scholarly attention on medium level analytical categories such as “nation” and the corollary conceptual categories such as “race” and “ethnicity” that were often taken as self-evident social scientific units of analysis. The intellectual damage wrought by the uncritical use of such abstract categories has been widespread, although not the subject of this chapter. However, the ways in which the ethnic differentiation of “Chinese” served as a racial ideology and political tool for nation building also made it possible to imagine an abstract, undifferentiated “Chineseness” that transcended space and time. The racialization processes of anti-Chinese politics lumped all “Chinese” into an undifferentiated whole, flattening the differences. Ironically this process also helped create the conditions for an imaginary that united all “Chinese” despite the significant differences between them. For instance, in Cantonese-speaking communities in North America, dialect differences and shared origins on the county level shaped networks of association and mutual aid. Although 99 percent of the migrants to North America before the 1950s were from just eight small counties, there were nevertheless distinct and separate organizations of migration networks along lines of county origin and the dialect differences between counties. These networks endured across generations of migrants because of the high utility of the networks as knowledge mobilization systems for moving good intelligence across long distances and helping new migrants become established.

The use of network analyses in Chinese migration studies, exemplified in the work of Adam McKeown (McKeown 1999; 2001) has followed the use of network theories within the field of migration studies in general; however, its deeper resonance required an earlier conceptual and historiographical shift that reshaped what had been separate fields of scholarship into a single field. The nation-based studies of Chinese immigration to the United States had for most of the late twentieth century been conducted in isolation from the study of Cantonese migrations to other parts of the Americas and to Southeast Asia. The same could be said of most studies of Chinese immigration to Canada and Australia—each conceived of immigration as a one-way movement of bodies from southern China to an individual nation, with the prevailing historical narrative shaped around the overcoming of racism and gradual acceptance and belonging.

The pioneering work of Wang Gungwu and Ling-chi Wang helped create a single field of study out of these national studies by placing them in engagement with the studies of the Chinese in Southeast Asia. In 1992, the first conference of the International Society for the Study of Chinese Overseas (ISSCO) was organized in San Francisco. Bringing together scholars who worked on Chinese migrations both to Southeast Asia

and to the Americas, the conferences helped promote the conceptualization of these migrations within a single intellectual rubric. At first, the rubric often used was “diaspora,” borrowed by analogy from popular comparisons to the Jewish diaspora, with a mythical tie to an ancestral homeland being the conceptual key for lumping together contemporary migrants with descendants of those who had left China centuries before. Both Wang Gungwu and Ling-chi Wang expressed grave reservations about the concept of diaspora, in particular noting how it could help reinforce popular anti-Chinese representations in both Southeast Asia and the Americas of a continuing and dangerous loyalty of Chinese migrants and their descendants to a “Chinese homeland.” During the 1950s–1980s, charges of “fifth column” ties to Communist China had served as a political weapon against ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia and the United States, and the continuing realities of anti-Chinese politics brought pause to many scholars (Wang and Wang 1998; Wang 1999; Ang 2001). Nevertheless, the concept of a “Chinese diaspora” helped bring into a single conversation the study of tens of millions of descendants of historical Chinese migrations all around the globe, and the resonance of such a perspective was especially evident in the popular and encyclopedic work of Lynn Pan (Pan 1990; 1998). As the People’s Republic of China increasingly began to grasp the “Overseas Chinese” as a tool of economic development in the 1980s–1990s, the conception of a broad “Chinese” diaspora tied to the homeland of China seemed self-evident. Initial capital flows into China, especially the new economic development zones in Shenzhen, were dominated by capital from ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Infrastructure development, such as the highway between Hong Kong and Guangzhou built by Princeton-trained Gordon Wu’s Hong Kong-based company Hopewell, accompanied the movement of factories and industry from Hong Kong and Taiwan and other parts of Southeast Asia into the People’s Republic of China. The “greater China,” encompassing all those of Chinese descent around the world, seemed to be rhetorically possible in a way that belied the experiences of many if not most of the 100 million people claimed to be “descendants” of the “Yellow Emperor” (Pan 1998).

Since the mid-1990s, the conceptual tools for analyzing global migrations in general have become more articulate, able to deal with trans-local connections as well as globally dispersed networks. Network analyses help us understand the endurance of networks across long distances of space and multiple generations in time. Superficial definitions of “Chineseness” somehow uniting these dispersed and diffused migration networks have generally been repudiated, but even if misapprehensions and distortions caused by nationalist perspectives and questions of loyalty and belonging have been partially mitigated, the sense of threat and unease with Chinese migrants still resonates with the rise of the Peoples Republic of China as a global economic superpower.

### **Chinese migration as migrant networks**

What is to be gained by taking a perspective that the practice of migration itself is the fundamental factor to be analyzed, and that all other factors become secondary results of this primary process? If migration as an independent variable renders other categories of historical analysis into secondary or dependent variables, how does this shape our understanding of history?

In understanding historical Chinese migrations that crossed outside the borders of the Chinese imperial state, the most important factor is that they almost all originated from a small set of sending villages and the migrants spoke a set of unique, mutually

unintelligible dialects that shaped their migration networks. The main dialect groups—Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochiu, Hakka—along with smaller groups such as Hainanese, dominated the migrations that left the Guangdong and Fujian coast to cross the seas, at first predominantly into the “South Seas” (*nanyang*) (i.e., Southeast Asia) from the fifteenth to twentieth centuries, then across the Pacific and around the globe from the eighteenth century. The total number of villages from which they began their journeys, and to which they connected their long-distance networks, was remarkably limited within the larger geography of Chinese empire. From only several dozen counties on the southern coast of China, these migrants dominated overseas migration for centuries, and only in the latter half of the twentieth century did significant numbers of migrants from any other part of China migrate abroad.

If we approach the historical process of migrations from a network perspective that highlights the relationship of migrants and their descendants to each other across space and through the passage of time, the question of what makes them “Chinese” is perhaps uninteresting. Even the English term used to describe them as “Chinese” is a challenge, since many of the migrants had terms of self-reference for themselves that were unique in their spoken language. For instance, most of those migrants who left southern China speaking various dialects of Cantonese referred to themselves as *Tongyun* (*Tangren*) or “people of the Tang dynasty” and to “China” as *Tongsan* (*Tangshan*); the term for “Chinatowns” (*Tangrenjie*—literally “the street of Tang people”) in Cantonese still retains this usage. This reference to a foundational moment of identity formation and historical memory differs from other terms for being Chinese such as *Hanren* or *Zhongguoren*. The English term “Overseas Chinese,” corollary to the term *Huaqiao*, came to be popularly used in the twentieth century to describe these migrants far flung around the globe, but such an umbrella description was a late invention.

For most of the migrants for centuries, trans-local networks connected an individual village to a variety of specific places where migrants from that village moved, and the specific networks created frames of reference for belonging that emphasized common village or county origins, or shared belonging in the same clan lineage. There was an overlap between shared origin and shared language, since the unique dialects that the migrants spoke correlated with specific regions, and the dialect groups were mutually incomprehensible despite these regions being clustered so close together on the coastline.

Although each of the dialects could be written in the same form using Chinese characters, the vast majority of the migrants were illiterate and therefore the mutual incomprehensibility of the spoken languages shaped the nature of social relations. Networks were highly dependent upon shared dialects, and therefore individual networks extended across space and through time in ways that might have overlapped in the same locations (especially nodal urban clusters such as the seventeenth-century ports of Malacca, Hoi An, Macau, Manila, Swatow, and Amoy, and nineteenth-century ports such as Singapore and Hong Kong), but each generally grew by expanding its own reach or increasing its own density of relations. The trans-local migrations could be multidirectional—back and forth within a lifetime or across the span of generations—as well as multinodal, with intermittent mobility from site to site within the specific trans-local networks created by the migrants connected to the same villages of origin.

Chinese migration networks were based upon kinship and shared origins in the clusters of villages from which the migrants came, and stretched all around Southeast

Asia and the Pacific and into the Caribbean and the Atlantic coast of the Americas (Watson 1975; Wickberg et al. 1982; Woon 1984; Sinn 1989; Suryadinata 1997). These migration networks relied on good intelligence about wages, available jobs, local economies, and the value of goods that could be moved (Reid 1996; Hsu 2000b; Williams 2002). “Chain migration,” the term coined by Charles Price (Price 1963) for the process by which an initial set of migrants creates a set of social practices across space and through time that facilitates the movement of other migrants along the same path, was a pattern that reflected the family- and village-based intelligence networks that passed along information about the opportunities available overseas, as well as providing the practical means through loans, labor contracts, and the arrangement of work and housing that made long-distance journeys possible.

When significant numbers of migrants from China began to cross the Pacific in the nineteenth century, they were extensions of the existing trade and migration networks that linked the southern Chinese coast with Southeast Asia, as well as migration links with other Chinese cities such as Shanghai. The ports of Amoy, Macao, Hong Kong, and Singapore were the major nodes of migration from Guangdong and Fujian province into the *Nanyang*; however, while Chinese transpacific migration networks were extensions of the existing networks between southern China and Southeast Asia, they extended the Cantonese-speaking network only through Hong Kong. There were virtually no Hokkien-speaking migrants who crossed the Pacific, even though Hokkien-, Cantonese-, and Teochiu-speaking migrants to Southeast Asia were proportionally split nearly evenly (along with smaller Hainanese-, Hakka-, and Hokchiu-speaking networks). As an illustration, between 1885 and 1949, there were only 9 Fujianese migrants out of the nearly 100,000 Chinese who migrated to Canada.

By anchoring transpacific routes on Hong Kong and linking it with Canton/Whampoa and the Portuguese port of Macao—the main ports for Cantonese out-migration—the British effectively cut the transpacific off to coastal ports such as Amoy that were the main out-migration ports for Hokkien- and Teochiu-speaking migrants from Fujian province. Elizabeth Sinn makes the compelling argument that the San Francisco Gold Rush in 1849 established the dominance of Hong Kong in this transpacific process of migration and trade, creating at the same time the enduring importance of the mythic “Gold Mountain”—*Gumsan* in Cantonese (*Jinshan*)—as an organizing concept for the aspirations and dreams of social and geographic mobility that motivated migrants (Hsu 2000b; Sinn 2012).

Kinship and familial relations were crucial in the endurance of these networks, but so was the importance of speaking shared local dialects. The organization of associations for mutual aid and support was usually based upon kinship connections, either family linkages at the local level in the home village, or an extension of kinship ties in overseas communities through imagining common ancestral ties, often by creating a clan association that brought together migrants from an assortment of villages who shared the same family name or the same local area of origin. Speaking a mutually intelligible dialect was important, and there was generally a separation in networks between migrants whose spoken language and county origins varied greatly.

The initial connection of transpacific migration flows from Hong Kong to San Francisco and Victoria in the 1850s was made between a relatively small number of villages in the “Four Counties” (*Siyi-Si Yup* in Cantonese) and “Three Counties” (*Sanyi-Sam Yup*) regions of Guangdong province. These seven counties—along with migrants from Heungshan county (Xiangshan, later renamed Chungshan

[Zhongshan] in honour of the founding President of the Republic of China, Sun Yat-sen [Sun Zhongshan])—became the origination site for long-distance circular networks of migrants across the Pacific for the next century.

The dominance of Si Yup (Four Counties) origins for the majority of the Cantonese in North America cannot be underestimated. Before 1949, four out of every five migrants to the United States and Canada came from the Four Counties region. In particular, migrants from Hoisan (Taishan) county (originally named Sunning [Xinning]), accounted for 45.5 percent of all migrants to Canada between 1885 and 1949, dominating clan associations and social and business institutions.

The aspirations that drew individual migrants out of rural villages in Guangdong were created out of the information that was passed back along the familial networks built along the shipping and mail routes. News about the financial success of a relative, the kinds of work that might be found, the amount of savings that could be amassed over a year in specific jobs, the relative merits of various destinations around the Pacific—all of this and more passed through word of mouth and in letters around the Pacific.

Although the concept of “chain migration” is useful to describe the phenomenon of individual migrants moving to the same places as previous migrants from the same family or local village, it only partially captures the incredible amount of infrastructure that must exist in order for these links to be maintained. Mail service must provide communication across vast geographic distances, financial mechanisms must allow for the transfer of credit and remittances across oceans, and perhaps most obviously a means of transportation must exist at a cost that allows migrants to afford passage, often through loans from those who have already established themselves in the target destination. The decision to leave, however, occurs within the context of a set of aspirations that traveled from the destination back to the home villages along the same path as remittances and loans.

“Gold Mountain dreaming,” as Madeline Hsu argued, required the creation of a network of kinship relations extended both across space and time, as well as a set of recurring social practices organized into enduring trans-local long distance institutions (Hsu 2000b). A pattern developed after Hong Kong became the jumping-off point for transoceanic voyages. Young men left small villages, inspired by stories of opportunity and success narrated in the village by wealthy returnees or in the voluminous letters that flowed back and forth across the Pacific. The stories generally focused on tales of success rather than failure, although cautionary tales also warned of the dangers of straying from the path to success by overindulging in gambling or prostitutes.

Stories of wealth and heroic success passed along gossip chains, fueling the aspirations of others. Starting with nothing as a laborer, watching and learning within a network of kin and compatriots, saving enough to get married and buy land, and then perhaps striking out on one’s own with the financial support of relatives to open a store or business—it was these kinds of desires and aspirations for social and economic mobility measured across the timescale of a life that created the mobility across geographic space. The aspirations of relentlessly upwardly mobile individual migrants might be dashed by circumstance and by their own failings, but hard work and ambition fueled long distance travels. Most migrants would never make a success, but exemplary stories traveled along the same pathways as the migrants, emboldening young men to follow. A British observer of the Chinese overseas, Harry Parkes, remarked in 1852 upon this

incredible ambition, comparing other laborers used by the British in Southeast Asia and the Americas unfavorably to the Chinese:

The absorbing aim of the Chinese emigrant is to better his condition. Of this object he never loses sight. ... Unlike the negro, who works and denies himself for a time, and with a view only to gain the means of maintaining himself for a corresponding interval in ease and idleness, the labour of the Chinese knows no cessation, and his savings are formed into a stock, which he is always endeavouring to increase, but never to exhaust. Different again from the coolie of Hindoostan, the Chinese is ignorant of the blighting effects of caste, and is as strongly bent on raising himself to a higher position as he is on acquiring wealth. It is curious, that whilst in their own land they seldom quit the particular calling they adopt in early life ... the Chinese evince, when abroad, a remarkable talent ... of adapting themselves to any circumstances, readily quitting one trade or occupation, if they find it does not yield the remuneration they had expected, for another of a wholly different nature. A strong commercial spirit rules all their proceedings. ... From husbandmen they become planters, and often change this vocation for that of the merchant, or perhaps combine the two. (Quoted in Lai 2000)

That overseas journeys were primarily a male-oriented aspiration is reflected in the male–female sex ratio of Chinese migrants in the century 1850–1950, beginning at over 25:1 for the transpacific and 15:1 for Singapore and Southeast Asia, and falling only towards the end of that century. But even if men primarily pursued the journeys across oceans, there was an interlocked set of aspirations for women as well. Marrying a successful overseas migrant meant the possibility of a house and continuous remittances from abroad that could pay for luxury goods and children’s education. For many young women, marriage to a man who returned overseas also meant raising children in the absence of a husband and living with a mother-in-law in the husband’s village.

This life cycle of upward mobility and the creation of wealth, generation after generation, had grown out of existing social practices developed by migrants from the same areas of China who had gone to Southeast Asia. They were transformed in the transpacific world, however, by the large differential between wages made in North America versus the cost of living in home villages. For most migrants to Southeast Asia, dreams of wealth were never realized, with the chances for success much higher for those who went to the white settler colonies across the Pacific.

For the Cantonese men who imagined following others across the Pacific to “Gold Mountain,” or the women who dreamed of marrying a *Gum San Hak* (literally a “Gold Mountain guest”) and returning home wealthy, the term *Gum San* named neither Canada nor the United States (each had their own names in Cantonese—equivalent to *Jianada* and *Meiguo* in Putonghua) but was synonymous with both places. Indeed, *Gum San* was used for the Australian colonies as well. *Gum San*, in other words, named a set of aspirations for a better life, creating a geographic imaginary that determined the meaning of places and journeys.

The route to wealth in “Gold Mountain” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was worth taking despite much higher initial costs. The transpacific passage to North America was more expensive than passage to Southeast Asia, and after the 1882 Exclusion Act in the United States and the passage in 1885 of the Chinese Head Tax in Canada, getting to “Gold Mountain” also included the cost created by anti-Chinese legislation, either in the direct cost of fees such as the Head Tax levied only against the Chinese, or the cost of evading exclusionary measures through smuggling and purchasing

false papers. The \$500 Head Tax imposed in Canada, for instance, added an additional cost equivalent to roughly two years' wages as a laborer. And yet the possibility of social mobility and economic opportunity in North America was still so high that despite the existence of the Head Tax, 97,123 Chinese still came to Canada between 1885 and 1923.

In the main regions where migrant networks expanded outside the Chinese late imperial state, coastal Fujian (Szonyi 2002) and Guangdong (Watson 1975), patrilineal kinship provided a flexible tool, whether for local social organization or for long distance migration. Myths of unbroken descent defined by generation after generation of male ancestors provided a flexible technology of family organization and reproduction of identity as migrants moved both within and outside the bounds of state control. For the mostly male migrants who crossed vast distances and were gone for long periods of time from local villages, family lineage ties provided a tool for creating a coherent sense of identity and descent both for those they left behind and for migrants as they dynamically organized their social relationships in the places to which they moved. Family lineages defined by patrilineal descent provided narratives of unbroken belonging into the historical past, allowing at the same time the adoption and incorporation into matrilineal descent kinship networks through marriage, for instance in many parts of the Malay archipelago as well as indigenous communities in the Pacific and on the northwest coast of the Americas.

At various moments historically, the technology of clan kinship was used to create and retain strong family networks that crossed vast distances. Family networks have been the enduring framework for the narration of the reciprocal ties of trust and obligation that sustained and energized these networks, and narratives of familial connection and descent could be used in flexible and dynamic ways to produce the desire to migrate and the affective ties that bonded individuals across space and time. By imagining shared kinship ties to each other and to ancestral places of origin, and reinforcing bonds of trust and obligation across both time and space, clan organizations and family associations created functioning long distance networks that could endure for generations. The sustainability of migration networks across time—often measured in multiple generations—is a process that requires explanation just as much as how these networks worked across great expanses of space.

Long distance migrants, most of them male, exported this organizational technology of male centered clan lineage to large areas of the globe. During various periods, migrants and their descendants were sheared off from these family networks—retaining only fragmentary narratives of family descent within subsequent generations, sometimes wholly disappearing into the historical consciousness of local populations. Across the centuries, however, some form of memory of familial descent from ancestors who left China has generally been the minimal trace of these historical migration processes, even when (as has often been the case historically) languages and social practices inherited across generations were no longer retained. Who remembered that they had “Chinese” ancestry and whether this had any meaning or function varied greatly across the vast number of places where migrants had gone.

The question of what “Chinese” means, rather than being a constitutive question for a field of study, can be a secondary effect of studying the legacies of migration networks that connected the southern coasts of China with dispersed sites around the world. The “leaking out” of migrants and their descendants into local communities through intermarriage and family formation, along with a “forgetting” in historical memory of network ties and connections, is not only conceptually possible but a necessary question for how to understand the process by which centuries of circular migration between sites

in southern China and across the seas can suddenly within a generation lead to a total transformation of identity among descendants to the point where “being Chinese” is no longer relevant.

How narratives of memory and identity shaped the marriage of the overwhelmingly male migrants of the nineteenth century into local communities, for instance indigenous communities such as those of native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, aboriginals in Australia, Maori in Aoteroa (New Zealand), First Nations in Canada, as well as centuries of family formation in Thailand, the Malay archipelago, and Vietnam and Cambodia, have become questions that do not begin with the assumption of who is Chinese and who is not, but how dynamic uses of identity and memory change over time and vary across places.

The use of network analyses helps disaggregate migrations that are often lumped together into an undifferentiated mass of “Chinese” into more discrete networks, even if these networks could overlap and coalesce. For example, understanding the shaping power of migration networks highlights why the resumed transpacific flows of Chinese migrants in the 1970s after nearly half a century of suppression were initially dominated by Cantonese who had originated from the same areas as in the nineteenth century. These migrations reemerged after decades of being curtailed by the exclusionary legislation of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand that had arisen between the 1880s and 1920s. In the decades after World War II, between the 1940s and 1970s, each of these white settler nations began to dismantle white supremacy within their immigration policies. By the 1960s and 1970s, all had replaced immigration policies built around white supremacy to ones that considered professional status, occupation, education, wealth, and family reunification as primary considerations for immigration. At the same time, decolonization and the use of anti-Chinese politics in postcolonial nation-building in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, South America, and Africa, was spurring the mass out-migration of ethnic Chinese from former European colonies, so that the descendants of centuries of Chinese migration networks from Fujian and Guangdong into Southeast Asia and other parts of the world now migrated along routes that had been dominated by Cantonese migrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Ironically, the rhythms of transpacific Chinese migration were shaped by this alternation between the use of anti-Chinese politics first in white settler nations and then in postcolonial nations. The rise of anti-Chinese politics in the decolonizing world created global migration networks that were initially grafted onto the original networks from the coasts of Fujian and Guangdong. For instance, as the descendants of Chinese migrants within Indonesia migrated to the Netherlands after the end of Dutch colonial rule, they expanded Hokkien migration networks that tied Southeast Asia to coastal regions of Fujian into global networks that now carried migrants to Europe (Pieke et al. 2004). These Hokkien (known more commonly in the twentieth century by the term Minnan) networks, along with others dominated by Cantonese-speaking migrants, shaped the reanimation and expansion in the late twentieth century of Chinese migration networks across the globe, building initially upon the colonial routes of European empire that had been the main routes for centuries.

By the beginning of the twentieth-first century, however, migrants leaving the external borders of China were coming from almost every region of China. Many of these were shaped by the massive internal migrations from rural to urban within China that marked the economic liberalization of the 1990s. The scale of these internal migrations—which were larger numerically than international cross-border migrations in the whole world during that period—reshaped China and created networks that could then

be extended externally, especially for the expansion of labor and small business networks in ways that paralleled the external migrations of earlier centuries.

Shifts in immigration policy in many nations in the late twentieth century also created new pathways, especially for the educated elite and professionals. The use of point systems and other means that measured the desirability of migrants by assessing their educational and professional status has been crucial, especially for new “educational migrants” from China to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, as well as Chinese students going to universities all around the world whose global mobility is a direct result of their desirability as an educated workforce. How the dispersion of regional origins for migrants leaving China has been shaped by the mobility of students and educated professionals needs further investigation and research, in particular on whether and how family networks initiated by the seemingly arbitrary routes of individual students have aggregated into larger patterns.

The rise of the use of the category of “refugee” migrants has also been formative and an object of scholarly attention. In the 1950s, tens of thousands of Chinese students studying in the United States were accepted as refugees from the Chinese civil war, along with professionals and wealthy Kuomintang families. They were markedly different from the Cantonese migrants who had come before, both in terms of their regional origins from different parts of China and their high educational and professional status (Hsu 2015). By the 1970s, refugees from Southeast Asia fleeing war and genocide tended as well to be over-represented by ethnic Chinese who had economic means and education, whether Sino-Vietnamese “Boat People” in the 1980s or Sino-Cambodian refugees fleeing the “killing fields” of the Khmer Rouge. Many had been targeted for persecution by Communist governments, specifically for their perceived wealth and higher education. Unlike the Chinese students allowed into the United States in the 1950s, however, these refugees tended to be descendants of the earlier migrations from Guangdong and Fujian, and like the migrations linked to decolonization and Cold War postcolonial nation-building in previous decades, they were an echo of the centuries before.

So where are we in terms of future directions in research and scholarship? As increasing numbers of migrants from all around the modern nation of China have migrated around the globe since the 1990s, joining earlier waves of refugees from the nationalist civil war in the mid-twentieth century, the overall character of Chinese migration has fundamentally changed from the enduring seaborne overseas networks of the previous half-millennium.

Beyond the myriad peripatetic routes followed by educated and professional migrants, following opportunities for advancement in almost random motions across the globe, there are new patterns arising that deserve attention. As the Chinese economy has grown, migrations have followed the movement of capital and investment, and Africa in particular has been a region affected by new Chinese migrants looking for investment opportunities and financial gain. Do these external migrants parallel the imperial migrants of nineteenth-century European colonialism, eventually bringing in long distance state power in the form of diplomatic influence? Are the tools of European colonialism—military intervention and territorial administration in the wake of mercantile adventurism—no longer a possibility? Looking backward and speculating forward, it seems that the shaping role of European colonialism in providing the routes for Chinese overseas migration for five hundred years is gone, and that the rising power of the Chinese economy and the aggregation into larger patterns of the aspirations of individual Chinese and their families for advancement will be the primary shaping mechanism for Chinese migration outward into the larger world. Whether in aggregate these migrations may create stateless forms

of economic dominance remains to be seen. Perhaps further investigation will reveal patterns that echo the seaborne Hokkien merchant networks of the fifteenth through the twentieth centuries in Southeast Asia that existed within and without state control and regulation, or new formations that have no precedents in global history.

The “Chineseness” of these migrations remains open to question. If nothing else, the identification of “Chinese migrants” in the previous centuries with the state of China has been dynamic and a matter of wide variance in interpretation, oftentimes overemphasized by observers and scholars, while at other times wholly absent among the migrants and their descendants themselves as they negotiate the perils of national belonging and citizenship (Ang 2001). Processes of national inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and not belonging, have particularly shaped the lives of Chinese migrants and their descendants in the last two centuries, but whether this continues to be a constraining factor to the same extent is an interesting question. As Aihwa Ong so astutely observed, the strategic ways in which “Chinese” migrants seem to navigate the openings that states leave for migrants with economic means speak both to their own machinations for mobility and state interests in controlling the movement of bodies across their borders (Ong 1999). White supremacy seems to have waned as a political force in national formation, but anti-Chinese rhetoric seems as relevant as ever for the shaping of belonging and identity across many societies, and studies of Chinese migrants likely will need to deal with anti-Chinese politics even as they explicate the aspirations of the migrants and the operations of their networks from their own perspectives.

#### *Suggestions for further reading*

- Hsu, Madeline. 2000. *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882–1943*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Kuhn, Philip. 2008. *Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield.
- McKeown, Adam. 2008. *Melancholy Order: Chinese Migration and the Globalization of Borders*. New York: Columbia University Press.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

# China in the World: Beyond the Tribute System

JOHN E. WILLS, JR.

Historical scholarship about the history of Chinese foreign relations has had a persistent bias toward a big and deep contrast between the multicentered relations of European polities, originating in the Middle Ages or even in the Greek city-states, and crystallized in the Westphalian order of sovereign nation-states, now the global norm, and a Chinese ideal of a single moral realm of “All under Heaven” (*tianxia*), stable only under a single ruler, the “Son of Heaven” (*tianzi*), seeking to be an “Empire without Neighbors,” minimizing contact with peoples who could not be drawn into its moral and political unity. In this big picture it became clear to the Chinese only in the 1800s that the unteachable neighbors would not go away, and China’s rulers and people struggled to find principles of mobilization and political order appropriate for a multicentered world, leading through a phase of revolutionary mobilization that in fact minimized foreign connections, and on to today’s energetically globalizing China, whose “peaceful rise” sometimes seems dysfunctionally assertive.

Scholars find it easy to show that China never was an empire without neighbors, that it always was shaped by interactions across Eurasia, beginning with bronze technology, chariots, and cavalry warfare. But still quite a few see the *tianxia* paradigm as influential. For example, the very Chinese and very cosmopolitan Wang Gungwu (2013a) shows how that paradigm remained alive but was of little use to his fellow cosmopolitan modernizers and not much more to those in China groping for a sustainable and moral model of nationhood.

Scholarly study of Chinese foreign relations offers many examples of prodigious multilingual erudition, the demands of which have sometimes gotten in the way of interpretive ambition; I thought this was true of quite a few contributions to Fairbank’s pioneer conference volume *The Chinese World Order* (Fairbank 1968), the product of a conference at which I was the youngest and least secure participant. Three themes have

persisted in our summaries of the foreign relations of China before the nineteenth century, all the way to another set of conference papers (Wills 2011a):

1. The empire without neighbors. At its end of Eurasia the center of political and cultural development on the North China plain was the only center of “civilizing” impulses and attractions. The Chinese and their neighbors experienced nothing like the relations between classical Greece and Egypt or later between Rome and Mecca.
2. The nomadic peoples to the north, largely immune to the attractions of Chinese civilization, were a source of violence and trouble, their contacts to be carefully controlled and limited, above all by building a wall or walls.
3. These defensive and civilizing imperatives were best managed by unilateral Chinese systems of bureaucratic control centered on embassies in which non-Chinese rulers paid homage to the Son of Heaven and were confirmed in their subordinate positions. As ideal and as far as possible as institutional reality, this “tribute system” shaped traditional Chinese foreign relations from the Han founding to the Opium War. Rules on frequency of embassies, numbers in an embassy party, route from border to capital, and trade in the capital and at the border, were all neatly laid out in imperial regulations. Succession to a tributary ruler position, border disputes, and so on were settled by the Son of Heaven.

Fairbank did not make these up. He found them in the nineteenth-century texts of which he was such a master. The summary histories to which he devoted so much effort contain cryptic references to the difficulties and deviations of the application of the tribute system model to earlier times. But he also was sympathetic to his students who thought our accounts of China since 1800 focused too much on foreign relations and it was time for a “China-centered turn,” which diverted research and intellectual energy from the needed rethinking of foreign relations. A somewhat isolated major contribution seemed to proclaim some conceptual revision, raising the flag even in its title, *China among Equals* (Rossabi 1983). As they appeared, volumes of the *Cambridge History of China* (Fairbank and Twitchett 1978–) and other erudite summaries of periods or dynasties, especially Harvard’s *History of Imperial China* series, offered much about foreign relations, but too often in separate sections or chapters that made it hard to see crucial interactions of domestic and foreign politics. Thus many chapters of these basic works, not just those focused on foreign relations, have been crucial resources for this chapter. The contrast between single-centered empire and multiple-polity sphere needs refinement and some deflation, but also needs to be connected with sustained attention to the *interactions* of domestic and foreign politics along this continuum. If units were small, like the city-states of Renaissance Italy or even France and Great Britain, many people visited the other and sometimes felt more at home in it, like French Protestants in England or Holland. If the units were big, like the single empires of China or even the two or three competitors discussed in the Rossabi volume, personal knowledge of the other was rare, politics and statecraft were largely within a single polity, and changes of foreign policy often were determined by domestic changes.

A roughly chronological survey of the development of the “tribute system” principles yields, for early Zhou, a picture of hierarchy under a single Son of Heaven that had little detail about peoples on or beyond the frontiers of a zone of related cultures. Mentions in texts of people who seem alien, often called Rong and Di, treat them as non-assimilable others. But closer reading of these texts and ongoing archaeology show a broad zone of

“Northern Culture,” with a great deal of livestock raising and a good deal of farming. Rong and Di seem ordinary participants in the creations of new forms of economic and political power in the Warring States period. Quite a few walls were built between hostile states. The northern frontiers of the northern states moved farther north. Some northerners opted to move out where farming was more chancy and to depend more on their herds, and on new developments learned from other herding peoples, such as mounted archery (Di Cosmo 2002).

The multistate order of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (771–221 BCE) evolved conventions for interaction among the states that could and did adjust to their various histories and the growth of the area and cultural variety involved. A leading state might be recognized as “hegemon” (*ba*), convening occasional meetings of state rulers. In the Warring States period states underwent wrenching internal changes seeking to maximize economic and military power. States in the Yangzi Valley joined the system and some even became hegemons.

The final step in these dramas was the Qin unification of 221 BCE, the most canonical date in our conventional periodization of Chinese history, closely linked to the most canonical event in the history of Chinese foreign relations, the building of the Great Wall by the huge force led north by Meng Tian in 214 that drove the Xiongnu out of the Ordos and beyond the great bend of the Yellow River (Waldron 1990). Neither milestone is entirely wrong, but both require some deflating. Meng Tian’s army did drive the Xiongnu out of the Ordos, but the walls they now sought to hold and improve had been built by the states of Qin in the west and Zhao farther east; their real innovation was a series of fortified settlements along the Yellow River; and the Xiongnu retook most of what they had lost after just three years.

The Han emerged from the collapse of the Qin, facing fewer survivals of Warring States solidarities, and were far more patient than the Qin rulers in pursuing effective unity. Princes not related to the imperial house soon were eliminated; imperial relatives holding regional power were challenged beginning in 154 and much more in the great reign of Emperor Wu, 140–87, along with energetic recruitment of aspiring young scholars as agents of the imperial center. The Qin had acted as if they could rule the whole Chinese world as a vast centrally controlled Warring State. The Han drew more on a Confucian political culture that valorized the roles of dependent but morally autonomous ministers, as appointed officials recruited in academies or in transitional forms of regional autonomy. Successive forms of this political culture were crucial to the tendency to a single very large polity that was fundamental to Chinese attitudes toward foreigners and practice of foreign relations down to modern times.

Down to the reign of Emperor Wu the Han had found it necessary to buy off the Xiongnu with gifts, princesses, and acknowledgments of equality. From that reign on, the greater power of the imperial center made possible a shift to expansion in all directions: a nearly disastrous sneak attack on the Xiongnu in 134; the surrender of a dissident Xiongnu king in 120; an enormously adventurous thrust into Inner Asia that can only partly be explained as a flanking of the Xiongnu; another thrust to the northeast that left several colonies where the people of what is now Korea began their long encounter with Chinese culture and statecraft; and campaigns to the south that brought major urban centers and trade routes as far as modern Hanoi fully under imperial jurisdiction, with magistrates and garrisons. Quite a few Xiongnu leaders and whole groups, and more from the northwestern Qiang and other peoples, chose to accept Han invitations to settle within the Han frontiers as autonomous “dependent state” (*shu guo*) enclaves,

some with walled towns of their own, the size of a Han prefecture or even commandery. They paid no taxes but provided much of the Han cavalry, and probably were less of a threat than out on the open steppe where Han armies found them so hard to pursue. It is hard to see much coherent policymaking on the Han side, but certainly the model was not a single center of civilization with all barbarians kept on the fringes. The Xiongnu and many later peoples down to the Uighurs in the late Tang preferred raiding and shakedown of a unified China to conquest and rule of densely settled Chinese territory (Barfield 1989).

The collapse of Han and the wars of the Three Kingdoms were followed by ethnic chaos in the north, separate dynasties in the south, and then the long, conflict-filled creation by the rulers of the Northern Wei of a new kind of empire that combined Chinese statecraft and the military prowess and ethnic solidarity of its Xianbei rulers in its militia and equal field systems, aspired to and sometimes achieved the deepest penetration of central power into village society before the 1950s, crushed dangerous Daoist cults, and lavishly patronized but carefully controlled a massive Buddhist presence. There was some diplomatic exchange between northern and southern rulers, not much hampered by rigidity about hierarchies of titles, sometimes facilitated by movement of Buddhist teachers, texts, and relics.

In the 600s, foreign envoys coming to pay homage at Chang'an, capital of Great Tang, were received in the most spectacular ceremonies of any period, and banqueted in the imperial presence, their tribute gifts on display. Chang'an, with its cosmopolitan markets and temples and tightly controlled residential wards, made a huge impression, still reflected today, for example, in the four-square layout of Kyoto, Japan. But the construction of foreign relations was quite different from the "tribute system" model of a civilized center limiting contact with a barbarian periphery. The rulers, at home on horseback and in at least two languages, could flaunt their superiority or, in crisis, defer to a Turk or Uighur prince. A powerful, aggressive state in Tibet and a vigorous Koryŏ on both sides of the Yalu were further complications. Even on the North China plain there were provinces, with many administrators and rulers of foreign origin, that did not heed commands from Chang'an or send revenue there. Thus both the dangers and the chances to learn about foreign peoples continued to be concentrated in the areas of the earlier "Northern Zone," but it is hard to imagine how even a more secure regime could have made coherent policy for such a turbulent environment.

The reunification of China after the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907–60) was by no means a sure thing; in premodern empires a very common process was centrifugal growth, as peace and prosperity made more resources available to breakaway ethnic and regional centers. China's avoidance of this hazard at this time was another crucial stage in the long continuity of a very large single-centered polity confronting smaller neighbors on all sides. The absorption of the southern states into the Northern Song (960–1125) was facilitated by very generous recruitment into the bureaucracy by examination and hereditary privilege and by the emergence of "Neo-Confucian" trends that valorized the actions of these new men. Many of them were from the south and west, far from the ethnic complexities of the northern border. As Chinese Buddhists developed their own sacred texts and sites, pilgrimage to India and sense of it as a real place waned (Sen 2003). The great scholar-statesmen of the eleventh century, in the midst of their searching debates on the nature of moral government and the role of the state in the economy, had to confront one of the hardest problems of interstate strategy, a triangle. To the north were the Liao, with a Khitan military and ruling house, and the Tangut Xi Xia farther

west, both of whom studied Chinese statecraft and combined it with their own warrior and ethnic solidarities and the patronage of Buddhism. The most dangerous situation would be an alliance of Liao and Xia to threaten Song. Despite much coming and going of envoys and several important reports written by them, Song understanding of their politics was erratic and suspicions of Liao-Xia collusion were easily aroused.

The Liao mounted several major invasions of Song territory, but their chances of consolidating rule over it seemed slight, and in 1004–5 they initiated negotiations that led to the Peace of Shanyuan in 1005 (Schwarz-Schilling 1959; Tao 1988), one of the few occasions in Chinese history after 221 BCE when two coherent and capable polities came to a win-win arrangement of some durability. The two rulers were recognized as equals. Embassies were exchanged every year; when ceremonies required hierarchy it was determined by generation. The Song, far richer, made an annual gift of silk and other consumer goods to the Liao, which was far less of a fiscal burden on Song than a major military campaign. Liao rule over 16 prefectures of Chinese population along the border, ceded to it by a weak northern dynasty before the Song founding, was much harder to accept, giving Liao control of some key routes onto the North China plain. The loss of areas with Han Chinese populations and heritages was particularly resented; here we see the rise in Chinese constructions of foreign relations of what we might call a “territorial Confucianism,” with deep roots in the ancient altars of earth and grain, the more recent temples of City Gods, and little room for enclaves within the empire like the Han dependent states. The Liao, based in the rich plains of what is now northeast China, were a more steady partner for such a relation than the Xia, multiethnic, feud-ridden, with dangerous Tibetan and Uighur neighbors on its farther frontiers. In 1040–45 Xia attacked Song, and won a settlement roughly comparable to the Song–Liao settlement of 1005, and Liao got a revised treaty with higher payments from Song, including compensation for the non-return to Liao of two especially strategic border areas, and return to Song of one of the 16 prefectures.

After 1100 the Song took notice of the rise on the northern frontier of Liao of the Jurchen, and made a transformative error by allying with their new and dangerous Jin dynasty in 1120, with some hope of destroying the tottering Liao and retaking the 16 prefectures. The Jin honored the agreement only in part, and swept down to a secure occupation of the Yellow River valley. A desperate scramble of Song loyalist forces ended in 1142 in a treaty of more definitive subordination to Jin than the earlier to Liao, and a rump “Southern Song” regime at Hangzhou, struggling to control its militias, many of whom called for the retaking of the North China plain. The legendary warrior Yue Fei with his call to “give us back our rivers and mountains” led a militia in an invasion of the north, and was summoned to the capital and executed (Wills 1994; 2012, ch. 11).

The statesmen who pulled together the Southern Song remembered the 16 prefectures, perhaps less so in their tentative dealings with the rising Mongols, but the vehement domestic quarrels, involving even students, of the late Southern Song capital left little time to focus on the rising Mongols, and it is not clear that any policy could have done much to blunt this world-historical phenomenon. Khitan, Jurchen, and Central Asian ministers of the Yuan shaped a formidable new combination of steppe cavalry and Northern Zone mixed exploitation. Yuan expeditions to Japan and Java were manned by Chinese sailors, and may have contributed to the brief early Ming age of naval expansion. Mongols interested in the rising influence among their own people of Tibetan Buddhism built some enduring connections with great lama lineages. These were at most fragments of shaping of Chinese foreign relations under the Ming.

Many texts consulted by late Ming and early Qing officials showed a unified set of bureaucratic practices for the management of all foreign relations, a tribute system in the full sense of the term, continuing throughout the Ming and early Qing. This unity was largely a reality from about 1425 to 1550; it took some time to pull together, and frayed badly or did not cope at all with the new realities of the late Ming. The great effort that the early Ming rulers put into establishing their tribute system is one of many examples in which the long ascent of Neo-Confucian principles, reinforced by reaction to the alienness of the Yuan and the urgent need for new coherence after the civil wars, led to immense and often successful efforts to create idealized realms of institutionalized Confucian value; the most important was the three-level examination system. Foreign rulers were summoned to pay homage to the new dynasty; the King of Annam/Vietnam came in person in 1369. In the great Yongle reign (1402–25) the emperor led expeditions into Mongolia that accomplished little of enduring use and sent envoys and armies to the northeast and northwest to reconnoiter and summon local rulers to homage. Although Chinese seafarers had been trading to Southeast Asia and even India for centuries, the maritime world had had little impact on *tianxia* concepts and goals, but in this reign seven great expeditions were sent as far as India and east Africa, many exotica, including a giraffe, were received at court, but the expeditions always were controversial, there was only one after the death of the Yongle emperor, and the world of the great oceans remained out of focus for the Chinese rulers until after 1800. In fact, we may see the Yongle reign as a high-water mark but also an end of open-ended expansionism, shaped not so much by Ming policy as by changes in neighboring countries. In a Korean peninsula that had been harshly dealt with by the Jurchen and the Mongols, the great general Yi Sŏnggye overthrew the Koryŏ Dynasty in 1392, established the Chosŏn that ruled until 1905, and set the conditions for a long political and cultural transformation that made Chosŏn the most Confucian polity outside China and a most diligent sender of tribute embassies. North of the Yalu, the Ming incorporated various Jurchen groups as tributaries with military titles for their rulers. The Jianzhou Jurchen entered on a long process of learning pieces of Chinese tradition and statecraft and cynically exploiting their privileges in the tribute system, so that they were ready to take full advantage of the decline and fall of the Ming. Brantly Womack (2010) has pointed out another very important case: the Ming invasion and occupation of Annam met effective resistance by big armies and guerrillas, and after the Ming withdrew Lê Loi, leader of the resistance, made emphatic gestures of respect to the Ming and reestablished tribute relations.

For the Yongle emperor the domination of the Mongols was the prime goal of foreign relations. He led his armies to some victories and seemed to have a chance for stable dominance over the western Mongols, but somehow this was squandered in arguments over Mongol demands for more titles, subsidies, and trade, Ming rejections of them, and resulting Mongol indignation. It is not at all clear if the Ming could have avoided these breakdowns by more systematic concessions, as the early Han had granted to the Xiongnu, for which the routines of the emerging tribute system would have seemed to offer useful frameworks. Inner Asian peoples and values were more influential in Beijing and in inner court culture in particular than in the broader politics and values of the elite (Robinson 2008b), but this did not lead to coherent management; policy was deeply hostile to the Mongols and there was a reluctance to grant them trading rights as was done so readily for the Jurchen. Efforts to manage relations with Hami and Turfan in the tribute system matrix were confused and ineffective. The worst fiasco was in 1449, when an emperor led an expedition into the steppe and was captured and held by the Mongols

for several years. In the 1550s a formidable Mongol force raided the suburbs of Beijing, several tentative agreements for trading privileges were undercut by high-principled Confucian opposition, but finally in 1570 a durable agreement was reached.

The great changes in the maritime world in the 1500s only rarely attracted even dysfunctional attention from the Ming state and elite. The demand for silver in the commercializing Ming economy drew streams of American silver via Europe and India and across the Indian Ocean and across the Pacific to Manila, where Chinese merchants obtained it in payment for silk and other consumer goods. Local officials arranged a controllable enclave for the Portuguese at Macau with little or no notice from the court. Portuguese trade in that area and maritime trade in Chinese shipping from Haicheng, Fujian, were controlled and taxed without any relation to the precedents of the tribute system. There was no Spanish or Dutch involvement in the Ming tribute system, no Portuguese between a first embassy in 1517–24 and four to the Qing. Rare and turbulent Japanese embassies stopped altogether after 1550, but Chinese traded to Japan. After 1600 the Ming state, beset by multiple crises of internal rebellion and foreign invasion, does not seem to have noticed the control of the tribute trade of Ryukyu (Okinawa) by the Japanese domain of Satsuma or the Dutch outpost on Taiwan.

When the Ming dynasty collapsed and the rebel Li Zicheng occupied Beijing in 1644, there was a bilingual, multicultural counter-regime waiting to the northeast beyond the Great Wall, the last and greatest product of the Northern Zone. The Jurchen people already had ruled North China for over a century before the Mongol conquest, and continued to grow and learn in an environment where some agriculture was possible, along with trade in ginseng and furs and interaction with the Chinese (including cynical manipulation of large tribute embassies to Beijing), the Koreans, and the Mongols. They sent some forces to help defend Korea against Hideyoshi's invasion in 1592–98. The story of their self-transformation into the Manchu people, the creation of a script for their language, and their elaboration of a very tight and effective nation at arms of "eight banners" is closely tied to the life of a leader of genius, Nurhaci, born in 1559, but of course could not have happened without a lot of help from people with similar cultural formations and political savvy. Nurhaci spent some of his youth in the household of a Chinese border general, learned Chinese, and read a lot about the stratagems of the great Chinese generals. He and his son steadily built structures of central control of troops and resources, employing many Chinese. Some Mongols took his side, but the Ming held the allegiance of many. Through cultural interaction and elite intermarriage the Manchus were fully aware of the attractions of Tibetan Buddhism to the Mongols; the khan who made so much trouble for the Ming from the 1550s to 1570s had been the key to the recognition of the Dalai Lama lineage in 1578. Once the Manchus were firmly in control of Beijing, and long before they were secure in South China, the Dalai Lama was summoned in 1653, treated with great splendor but definitely as a tributary. As the Qing rulers faced the major challenge of the Zungar Mongols, they mounted a major expedition to drive them out of Lhasa in 1720, established their own garrison of 1,500 there, and made sure that the affairs of the great Dalai Lama lineage were thoroughly under their control thereafter. Many Mongols became monks settled in monasteries of some Tibetan lineage, quite a change from their world-conquering warrior ancestors. The Qing rulers built on their increasing dominance of Mongol society to divide the Mongols into well-defined banner groups with bounded territories and supervision of movement and legal decision by Qing bureaucrats. For both the Ming and the Jurchen, relations with Mongols and Tibetans had been definitely foreign relations in

the tribute system matrix in 1500; the Manchus, with their superior understanding of and management skills toward these cultures, made them very much part of the internal history of the Qing realm by 1800 (Perdue 2005; Elverskog 2006). Many Han Chinese were impressed by the coherent and stable rule of Great Qing and its effective domination of the Mongols and eventually the peoples of what became Xinjiang.

Some aspects of the foreign relations of Great Qing changed little from Ming, especially the sending of regular tribute embassies by Korea, Annam/Vietnam, Ryukyu, and Siam. Occasional tribute embassies were not very good sources of information about the tributaries, but occasionally provided ceremonial matrices for the acceptance of new realities (Wills 2012). The Tibetans and Mongols might send tribute-style gifts to the emperor, but had much less autonomy than Korea and the others, and were within the borders of the Qing state. In early Qing both the Dutch and the Portuguese sent tribute embassies to Beijing, but then South China ports were opened to controlled and taxed trade by foreigners without regard to the presence of their sovereigns among the tributaries (Wills 1984/2011; 2011b). The constantly growing export of tea from Canton/Guangzhou was a source of revenue to the court but little was done to learn more about the Europeans and their growing power in Asian waters (Van Dyke 2005). Taiwan was incorporated in the Qing empire but was not a center of maritime connections with foreigners. Jesuit missionaries had served effectively at court, and under the umbrella of their influence Jesuits and others had established missions in many areas, but papal interference in the ceremonies permitted to converts led to imperial prohibitions of missionary activity, which survived largely in remote rural areas. The Qing rulers were very effective assemblers and users of geographic information, especially in long and successful efforts to establish effective frontiers for their Mongolian and Tibetan territories, but they did not put their information on these frontiers together into a unified picture of the great changes taking place in Asian lands and waters; for example, the names used in the trade at Canton for India and those used on the Tibet–Nepal border simply did not match up (Mosca 2013). Getting little information from Chinese traders to Southeast Asian ports, they did not see the great power headed their way until the Opium War. The confrontation with the Macartney embassy over the “kowtow” ceremony made them more wary of contacts at the capital.

European language historiography saw the “unequal treaties” of 1842 as a great break, as China was forced to join a world of treaty-making sovereign nation-states. The memory of the “century of humiliation” from 1839 to 1949 is central to all Chinese thinking about their place in the world and to the founding narrative of the People’s Republic (Bickers 2011). This periodization was challenged by Fairbank and his colleagues with special clarity in Fairbank’s own contributions to *The Chinese World Order*. Opening four more ports as “treaty ports,” enclaves to which foreign traders were confined, was a sensible way to buy time, especially when some of the foreigners helped fight the Taiping rebels. The Qing polity, an intricate “synarchy” of Chinese tradition, Manchu rule, and canny management and cooptation of the Mongols, now broadened a bit to include the treaty ports and a very effective Imperial Maritime Customs under Euro-American management. The really big breaks came not in 1842 but with the wars and treaty settlements ending in 1860. The huge Taiping upheaval was beginning to turn in favor of the Qing (Platt 2012). A British and French expedition occupied Beijing, burned the Summer Palace, and imposed a new order in which foreign envoys, received as representatives of sovereign equals, and their protective forces would be a permanent presence in Beijing, a radical break from the brief visits of inferior rulers or ministers

under the tribute system. More new ports were opened, including Nanjing and Hankou on the Yangzi; even Chongqing would be opened when it became accessible to steam navigation. France secured in its treaty the right of missionaries to settle where they wished in the interior.

The vortex of change after 1850 was not Beijing but Shanghai, gateway to the commercial riches of the Yangzi valley, partly occupied by local rebels in 1853, menaced by Taiping forces in 1860. Foreigners, now inclined to support the Qing since it was committed to the new treaties, were collecting customs tolls for the ruling dynasty. The steady elaboration of a foreign-officered Imperial Maritime Customs under the direction of Robert Hart after 1863 certainly was advantageous to foreign traders and limited Chinese sovereignty, but provided reliable revenues and later navigation aids and the beginnings of a modern post office (Van de Ven 2014). The complicated working out of “mixed courts,” especially at Shanghai, preserved the forms of Chinese law while placing foreign judges in charge of the sentencing of foreign defendants (Cassel 2012). Qing officials were full participants in these relations, drawing on their own earlier practices of separate jurisdictions for ethnic groups, including the Manchu garrisons.

The Ming and Qing empires, unlike such equally successful contemporary empires as the Mughal and Ottoman, had had little place for legitimate nodes of foreignness within their boundaries. You could live beside the main route from Guangzhou to the Yangzi valley and see at most a tribute embassy or two every year, nothing like the parade of costumes and customs on the road from Surat to Delhi or Aleppo to Istanbul. But after 1860 foreigners were, by treaty right, all over the empire—steamboats on the big rivers, consuls and merchants in the cities, and, worst of all, missionaries. News of their presence and calls to resist it, violently if need be, were spread in new journals, old-fashioned posters and pamphlets, and the meetings of study societies. In 1893 there were 33 treaty ports, by 1917, 92. Their geographical distribution, with many in the northeast and near the frontier with Vietnam, reveals some basic discontinuities: war with France over Vietnam, the new Russian presence along the Trans-Siberian Railroad, and, above all, Japan’s end of isolation and plunge into power politics on the continent. Tribute relations ceased as Korea, Ryukyu, Vietnam, and Burma fell under direct Japanese or European colonial rule, and Siam indirect. These pressures, and the visceral hostility of many Chinese to the missionaries, produced pressures far beyond the capacities of the half measures and complexities of the post-1860 adjustments; the Boxer upheaval led to another foreign occupation of the capital, a massive indemnity, and even the ever-helpful Customs Service assisting in the identification of revenues to pay the indemnity.

Japan’s drive for dominance in China was the prime reality of Chinese foreign relations from 1895 to 1945. Japan’s victory in the war of 1894–95 and the dictated Treaty of Shimonoseki were seen by many Chinese as proof that basic political and cultural changes like those of Meiji Japan were vital if China was to survive. Many young Chinese went to study in Japan, and Japanese advisers were involved in many reform projects in Chinese provincial capitals. But there were many distractions, including railroads built with foreign capital and whole zones of a province or more in which one foreign power had priority for any new concession. China, it seemed to many, was about to be carved up like a melon. The dramas of the “Hundred Days” of reform in 1898 and of the Boxer upheaval and resulting foreign invasion were further distractions. After 1905 and even after 1911, the debates in schools and journals and the work of some very competent people in the Foreign Ministry focused on interaction with the many powers. That changed abruptly in 1914, when the guns of August destroyed

the European powers' interest in China. Japan was ready; a shifting but far-reaching set of "Twenty-One Demands" for special priorities and privileges was first presented to China in January 1915.

From 1919 to 1931, China's foreign relations and Chinese understandings of them were transformed by conflicting foreign models, conservative integral nationalism versus revolutionary class mobilization. Modern urban dramas—demonstrations, strikes, brutal repression—turned polarization into civil war, with foreign advice and support on each side. In the May Fourth Movement of 1919, students at the very ambitious and cosmopolitan Beijing University responded to a globalized hope for a new just order in the aftermath of World War I, protesting in vain the transfer of the old German holdings in Shandong to Japan. Labor organizing, especially in Shanghai and Guangzhou, had the advice of agents of the Communist International who came from many countries and took orders from Moscow. Exploitative working conditions in foreign-owned factories had special salience in the great narrative of national humiliation and the often futile calls for recovery of national rights. Sun Yat-sen presented an appealing vision of modern Chinese nationhood but was not an effective politician. Chiang Kai-shek emerged dominant among his successors and turned on the Communists, who survived only in remote rural areas. The new Nanjing government had little success in "rights recovery" from foreigners, and took a few lessons in anti-Communist nation-building from German advisers.

From 1931 to 1945 the Nationalist-Communist civil war was tangled with phases of the struggle with Japan. For most leaders and followers Japan was the mortal enemy of the Chinese nation until its defeat. The Soviet Union opposed Japan's power in East Asia over a wide range of questions of political principle and territorial power. Apart from the Chinese Communists, whose project of nationhood was likely to have Moscow's support but on Moscow's terms, Chinese leaders were very wary of seeking Moscow's support against Tokyo, and quite a few hoped that powerful individuals or groups in Japan would support the rise of a Chinese nation joining with Japan and others to resist the Communist menace. Local military power, economic advantage, and bureaucratic careerism were among their goals, but some of them were well-placed Guomindang insiders, who occasionally had the ear of Chiang Kai-shek. For some years Japan made a real effort to give Manchukuo some of the trappings of autonomous nationhood. The most important pursuer of a pro-Japan option was Wang Jingwei. Step by step from 1934 to 1940, Wang found that he had less room for maneuver and Japan's demands were greater and less negotiable than he had thought. We might see this, and the similar mistakes of lesser figures, as misapplications of tactics effective in the multicentered, multilevel swirl of Republican politics to relations with a formidable nation that had its own contradictions but almost always faced other nations with a united front, especially in these years of increasing military dominance. Memories of the massacre of Chinese civilians by Japanese troops at Nanjing in 1937 and of other brutalities of the occupation remain vivid today.

After Pearl Harbor, American efforts to aid the beleaguered Guomindang government in Chongqing produced a great deal of interaction and journalism, but became tangled in Chiang's struggle for control of his own forces. When foreign reporters got to the main Communist base at Yan'an they described effective mobilization of rural manpower under Party control, a radical shift from the city-centered struggles of previous decades. Their reports set the stage for postwar arguments about how if at all to support the Guomindang in the final civil war. The Chinese, fighting that war, had little attention to spare for the views of foreigners. Soviet forces occupying Manchukuo in 1945 eased the way for establishment of Communist base areas.

In the patriotic art of the new People's Republic of China, revolutionaries often could be seen marching alongside Africans, Indians, and many more in a global liberation from capitalism and imperialism. In fact there were only two foreign relations that mattered much to China, those with the Soviet Union and with the United States. American intervention in the Korean War and inclusion of Taiwan in its Pacific defense perimeter strengthened China's alliance with the USSR, already deeply founded on Moscow as the center of advancing global revolution and expertise on how to make a socialist society real and workable. The shift to deepening Sino-Soviet antagonism after 1958 had some sources in issues of borders and of power issues within the bloc, but far more within the Chinese society and polity, in quests for ways to mobilize individual and collective wills and avoid Stalinist rigidities. As popular mobilization strategies were turned on the Party hierarchy in the Cultural Revolution, the world outside China receded to the periphery of politics and policy from some years.

China's engagement with the world has been transformed since Deng Xiaoping's crucial steps toward a market-oriented economy in 1978. The Chinese leadership has encouraged its people to travel, trade, invest, study, engage in cultural exchange, participate in regional and international organizations, and much more, all around the world. The urban middle class, determined that its children will grow up to be citizens of the world, sends its children on group trips abroad; we host a few in Pasadena, California, every year on the Chinese New Year break. China's rise is said to be peaceful, simply a matter of China taking its proper place in the world. But what if it is thwarted? Can our historical studies help us understand the course of these dramatic changes, and avoid conflict as far as possible? Brantly Womack (2010) thinks we can, if we pay attention to some neglected pieces of history. He builds on his special studies of China's relations with Vietnam, in which for long periods Annam/Vietnam managed to defer to its huge neighbor and retain its autonomy, while rulers of China recognized and confirmed the autonomy of the smaller neighbor. Concepts of antagonistic equilibrium, with asymmetries of power being overcome by coalition-building, have been central to international relations theory, but here asymmetries can be adjusted and rub along if both sides understand the benefit and possibility of such a relation. In fact, Womack reminds us, the vast majority of bilateral relations between two states are asymmetrical. I am less optimistic than Womack about the particular asymmetric relation he draws on, China and Vietnam, in view of recent confrontations at sea and a bit of personal experience of just how deeply resistance to China is embedded in the Vietnamese nationalist consciousness, but certainly he has shown that history intelligently read can change the way we talk about contemporary realities and crises. George Soros (2015), a major player and observer, thinks a win-win accommodation of China's rising power and assertiveness may be possible but certainly will not be easy. Daniel Lynch (2015), drawing on careful reading of Chinese policy analyses and interviews with some of the authors, notes that whereas discussions of domestic economic policy often show a wide range of views, support of Chinese assertiveness in diplomacy seems almost unanimous. There are some exceptions in informal discussion within Party think tanks, but once a Party position has been defined there is no perceptible dissent. The primacy of the unity of the party-state, the imperative of unity of the one huge polity, will remind some seekers for historical perspective of the successful internal unification, transient uneasy acceptance of equality with the Liao, and botch of the Song-Liao-Jin triangle, a thousand years before.

*Suggestions for further reading*

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# Glossary of Selected Terms

Names of individuals, places, and texts are generally not included.

- ba* (hegemon) 霸  
*baguwen* (eight-legged essay) 八股文  
*bailian jiao* (White Lotus teachings) 白蓮教  
*baobian* (praise and blame) 褒貶  
*baojia* (collective responsibility system) *hokō* (J) 保甲  
*bencao* (pharmacopeia) 本草  
*benshengren* (people of this province; Han Taiwanese whose ancestors arrived on Taiwan prior to Japanese colonial period) 本省人 (see *waishengren*)  
*biannian ti* (annals) 編年體  
*bianwen* (transformation text) 變文  
*bifa* (style of writing) 筆法  
*biji* (brush jottings; notebooks) 筆記  
*buzhi* (supplements and corrections to the book catalogues in the standard histories) 志 (see *shizhi*)  
*caizi* (romantic scholar) 才子  
*changliu* (long-term storage [of archives]) 常留  
*chanyu* (title of Xiongnu chief) 單于 (variant pronunciation *shanyu*)  
*Chenghuang* (City God) 城隍  
*chidi qianli* (left the ground scarlet for a thousand miles—said of a battle) 赤地千里  
*chuanqi* (Ming Southern drama) 傳奇  
*chuanqi* (transmitting the marvelous) 傳奇  
*chūko* (J) (middle antiquity) 中古 (see *zhonggu*)  
*chūsei* (J) (Middle Ages) 中世  
*ci* (lyrics) 詞  
*congshu* (collection) 叢書

- daitian xingdao* (to carry out the Way on behalf of Heaven) 代天行道  
*Dangwai* (Taiwan's main political opposition in the 1970s and 1980s.  
 Precursor to the Democratic Progressive Party) 黨外  
*danwei* (work unit) 單位  
*daoxue* (Teaching of the Way/neo-Confucianism) 道學  
*diaocha* (investigation) 調查  
*difangzhi* (local gazetteer, local annals) 地方誌  
*Dongyue* ([cult of the] Emperor of the Eastern Marchmount) 東嶽  
*Dunhuangxue* (Dunhuang scholarship) 敦煌學  
*er er ba shijian* (Feb. 28 1947 incident) 二二八事件  
*fa* (law/method) 法  
*fang/shou* (cycles of relaxation and repression) 放守  
*fangsheng* (to set free animal life) 放生  
*fei changliu* (short-term storage [of archives]) 非常留  
*fengjian* (feudalism; term for decentralized political system of antiquity) 封建  
*fenjia* (household division) 分家  
*fu* (rhapsody; offering) 賦  
*fubing* (garrison militia system) 府兵  
*fugupai* (Archaists) 復古派  
*fuke* (women's medicine/gynecology and obstetrics) 婦科  
*fumuguan* (mother and father official/county magistrate) 父母官  
*fluxing* (revival; restoration) 復興  
*geming* (revolution) 革命  
*getihu* (self-employed household) 個體戶  
*gongguo ge* (ledgers of merit and demerit) 功過格  
*gongsuo* (urban guild) 公所  
*gongtishi* (palace style poetry) 宮體詩  
*gui* (return [home]; said of a woman's marriage) 歸  
*guicai* (ghostly genius) 鬼才  
*guji* (old [i.e., pre-1912] works) 古籍  
*Guomindang* (Chinese Nationalist party, KMT) 國民黨  
*guoshi* (reign history; standard history) 國史  
*guqian* (bone chit record) 骨籤[籤]  
*guren* (ancient man) 古人  
*gushi* (old poems) 古詩  
*guwen* (old prose) 古文  
*guwen* (old script) 古文  
*Han* (Han dynasty, ethnicity, identity) 漢  
*hang* (guild) 行  
*hanshi* (Cold Food festival) 寒食  
*Hanzu* (Han nation, ethnicity) 漢族  
*haofang* (heroic) 豪放  
*heji cuoza zhi zu* (integrated ethnic heterogeneity) 合集錯雜之族  
*hongmen* (Chinese Freemasons association) 洪門  
*hu* (barbarian; generic term for northern foreign peoples) 胡  
*hua* (transformation) 化  
*huaben* (vernacular stories) 話本  
*huaixiang wenxue* (nostalgia literature) 懷想文學

- huangdi* (august god; emperor) 皇帝  
*huanjingshi* (environmental history) 環境史  
*huaqiao* (overseas Chinese) 華僑  
*huaren* (Chinese person; typically used for Chinese overseas) 華人  
*hui* (concealment) 諱  
*huiguan* (native place association; guild) 會館  
*Huixue* (Huizhou scholarship) 徽學  
*huofa* (vitalism) 活法  
*ji* (literature branch) 集  
*jia* (marry—referring to female) 嫁  
*jiaguwen* (oracle bone script) 甲骨文  
*jian* (slips) 簡  
*Jian'an qizi* (Seven Masters of Jian'an) 建安七子  
*jiancha* (investigation) 檢查  
*jianduxue* (bamboo-strip and wood-board studies) 簡牘學  
*Jiang Jieshi re* (Chiang Kai-shek fever or craze) 蔣介石熱  
*jiobhua* (transformation of morality through education) 教化  
*jiazu* (lineage) 家族  
*jiben shiliao* (basic historical materials; primary source) 基本史料  
*Jin ren* (Jin people) 金人  
*jindai shehui shi* (modern social history) 近代社會史  
*jindili* (exhaust the earth) 盡地力  
*jing* (Classics branch) 經  
*jingbiao* (court testimonial system; court conferral of honors on virtuous and worthy) 旌表  
*jinsan ke* (Gold Mountain guest; Overseas Chinese in America) 金山客  
*jinshe lu* (list of office holders) 縉紳錄  
*jinsi* (Presented Scholar) 進士  
*jinwen* (metal script) 金文  
*jinwen* (new script) 今文  
*jishibenmo ti* (topical arrangement historical style) 紀事本末體  
*jizhuan ti* (historical style combining annals and biography) 紀傳體  
*jue* (character used in religious affiliation names) 覺  
*jueju* (quatrains) 絕句  
*juntian* (equitable field system) 均田  
*junzi* (lord's son; gentleman; moral actor) 君子  
*Kangri zhanzheng* (anti-Japanese war; World War II) 抗日戰爭  
*kaogu* (archaeology) 考古  
*kaozhengxue* (evidential studies) 考證學  
*Kōminka* (J) (Japanese policy aimed at transforming Taiwanese into imperial subjects) 皇民化  
*kuaiji* (national accounts) 會計  
*kuajiang minzu* (trans-border nationality) 跨疆民族  
*kyōdōtai* (J) (cooperative system) 共同體  
*li* (principle; natural law) 理  
*li* (rites) 禮  
*li* (substatutes) 例  
*liangge yibai nian* (two centuries) 兩個一百年

- lishi renlei xue* (historical anthropology) 歷史人類學  
*lishi xuwuzhuyi* (historical nihilism) 歷史虛無主義  
*lixue* (learning of principle; neo-Confucianism) 理學  
*lü* (statutes) 律  
*luan* (chaos, turmoil) 亂  
*lun* (discourses) 論  
*lüshi* (regulated poems) 律詩  
*mengfu* (state treaty archive) 盟府  
*miao* (character used in religious affiliation names) 妙  
*Ming-Qing dang'anxue* (Study of Ming-Qing archives) 明清檔案學  
*Minggong shupan qingming ji* (Collection of decisions by famous judges to clarify and enlighten) 名公書判清明集  
*MinGuo re* (Republican fever or craze) 民國熱  
*mingyun gongtongti* (community of shared fate) 命運共同體  
*minjian wenxian* (private documents; documents in private hands) 民間文獻  
*minzu* (ethnonationality; ethnonational group) 民族  
*mixin* (superstition) 迷信  
*nanxi* (Southern drama) 南戲  
*Nanyang* (South seas/southeast Asia) 南洋  
*nongmin qiyi* (peasant uprising) 農民起義  
*nügong* (women's work) 女紅  
*nüshu* (women's script) 女書  
*pai* (scholarly schools) 派  
*pan* (decisions; judgements) 判  
*pian* (sections) 篇  
*piantimen* (parallel prose) 駢體文  
*piaobao* (native bank) 票號  
*pu* (character used in religious affiliation names) 普  
*qi* (matter; material force) 氣  
*Qi'ai shi* (Seven Sorrows Poems) 七哀詩  
*qiangguo meng* (strong nation dream) 強國夢  
*qianhou sanshi nian* (former and latter periods of 30 years; 1949–1978 and 1978–2008) 前後三十年  
*qing* (emotions, passion, or feeling; circumstances of a legal case) 情  
*Qingjiangxue* (Qingjiang studies) 清江學  
*qingkuang baogao* (situation report) 情況報告  
*qingtan* (pure talk) 清談  
*qiqiao* (refined skills; of a woman) 乞巧  
*qu* (take a wife; said of a man's marriage) 娶  
*qu Zhongguo hua* (desinification) 去中國化  
*quxi leixing lilun* (regional systems and variants theory) 區系類型理論  
*quzici* (song lyrics) 曲子詞  
*ru* (classicist; Confucian) 儒  
*san xitong shuo* (theory of three systems) 三系統說  
*sanqu* (independent songs) 散曲  
*shanghen wenxue* (scar literature) 傷痕文學  
*shanshu* (morality book) 善書  
*shanyu* (title of Xiongnu chief) 單于 (variant pronunciation *chanyu*)

- she* (clubs/associations) 社  
*shehui shenghuo shi* (history of social life) 社會生活史  
*shehuishi* (social history) 社會史  
*shengshi* (prosperous age) 盛世  
*shengtaishi* (ecological history) 生态史  
*shenshi* (gentlemen who wear the sash/gentry/office holders) 紳士  
*shi* (history; Histories branch) 史  
*shi* (poems; classical poetry) 詩  
*shi yuan qing* (poetry follows from the emotions) 詩緣情  
*shidafu* (literati/gentry) 士大夫  
*shigu* (explaining antiquity) 釋古  
*shilu* (veritable records; court annals) 實錄  
*shizhi* (book catalogues in the standard histories) 史志 (see *buzhi*)  
*shuanggui* (double designated; internal CCP disciplinary process) 雙規  
*shuguo* (dependent state) 屬國  
*shuli* (water conservancy; hydraulics) 水利  
*shuntian xingdao* (carry out the Way on behalf of Heaven) 順天行道  
*shuzu* (commoner) 庶族  
*Siku quanshu* (*Complete Library of the Four Branches*) 四庫全書  
*suibi* (random jottings) 隨筆  
*suzhi* (quality) 素質  
*Tangren* (person of Tang; Chinese person) 唐人  
*Tangrenjie* (Chinatown) 唐人街  
*tianci* (filled in) 填詞  
*tianren xiangying* (affairs of Heaven and men are correlated) 天人相應  
*tianxia* (all under Heaven; the empire) 天下  
*tianzi* (son of Heaven; the emperor) 天子  
*tongxin* (childlike mind) 童心  
*waichen* (external subjects) 外臣  
*waishengren* (non-natives of this province; Han Taiwanese who arrived on the island after 1945 and their descendants) 外省人 (see *benshengren*)  
*wang* (king) 王  
*wanyue* (graceful) 婉約  
*weiwen* (stability maintenance) 維穩  
*wen* (style; literature) 文  
*wending* (stability; social peace) 穩定  
*wenren* (literati) 文人  
*Wenshi Ziliao* (*Materials on culture and history*) 文史資料  
*wuzu gonghe* (Republic of Five Peoples) 五族共和  
*xi* (caesura character) 兮  
*xiang* (township) 鄉  
*xianzhi* (county gazetteer) 縣志  
*xiao jiating* (nuclear family) 小家庭  
*xiaokang* (moderately prosperous) 小康  
*xiaoshuo* (novel) 小說  
*xiejiao* (heretic teachings; false cult) 邪教  
*Xin yuefu* (New Yuefu) 新樂府  
*xing* (punishments) 刑

- xingu* (believing in antiquity) 信古  
*xinshixue* (New History) 新史學  
*yangsheng* (nourishing life) 養生  
*yeshi* (informal history) 野史  
*yigu* (doubting antiquity) 疑古  
*Yiguandao* (Unity way) 一貫道  
*yin* (citation) 引  
*youji* (travel account) 遊記  
*yue* (bond) 約  
*Yuefu* (Music Bureau) 樂府  
*yuefu shi* (*yuefu* poetry) 樂府詩  
*zaju* (variety play) 雜劇  
*zashi* (miscellaneous historical genre) 雜史  
*Zhaohun* (Calling Back the Soul) 招魂  
*zhengshi* (standard history) 正史  
*zhengshu* (institutional historical genre) 政書  
*zhengtong* (legitimate succession) 正統  
*zhibi* (honesty and forthrightness in historical writing; historical rectitude) 直筆  
*Zhigongtang* (Chinese Freemasons association) 致公堂  
*zhiguai* (accounts of the strange) 志怪  
*zhiqing* (educated youth; youth sent down to the countryside in the Cultural Revolution) 知青  
*zhishu* (honesty and forthrightness in historical writing; historical rectitude) 直書  
*zhonggu* (middle antiquity) 中古  
*Zhongguo* (Central country; China) 中國  
*Zhongguo meng* (China dream) 中國夢  
*Zhongguode gushi* (China story) 中國的故事  
*Zhonghua minzu* (Chinese people, Chinese nationality) 中華民族  
*Zhonghua minzu weidade fuxing* (Great revival of the Chinese nation) 中華民族偉大的復興  
*zhuan* (biographical narrative) 傳  
*zhuzi baijia* (Hundred Schools) 諸子百家  
*zi* (philosophy branch) 子  
*zong* (descent-line) 宗  
*zongzu* (patrilineal lineage) 宗族

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