Fall 2012, History 274: China 1100-1850, Prof. Pomeranz Short Paper, Julian Lee

Topic 4: All the authors we have read who wrote about frontier issues emphasize that they want to get away from the myth of a numerically and organizationally superior Han people simply rolling over helpless ethnic minorities. Yet by 1759 the Qing realm was roughly double the size of the Ming at its height, and by 1850 most of the newly conquered territories had at least some substantial Han settlements; by 1880 the Qing would have crushed a series of frontier rebellions (even though these rebellions occurred when the state was reeling from the Taiping and Nian Rebellions) and Han would be moving into the lands of the defeated rebels in unprecedented numbers. In short, it seems as if, given a large enough time frame, some elements of the older "China's march to the tropics" (and the steppe) may still hold up after all. How much, then, would you say that the new wave of frontier history that began in the 1980's has really revised our story? Does it matter for purposes of, say, a one quarter introductory survey of China since 1600? Why or why not? What specific points made in the newer literature would you want to make sure introductory students heard about, and why?

Non-Aggression Could Not Stand: Ming and Qing States Sinicize the Frontier

The Chinese version of manifest destiny may at first glance lack a second ocean toward which to strive, but an extended time frame and reconceptualization from missions of civilization to modernization in China's frontier could be similarly enabling. At second glance, toward the present, Southeast Asia and the "second island chain"[1] offer ample room for Chinese expansion, many examples for new historical accounts to show the contingencies of successful sinification. Militarized campaigns of expansion were not only undertaken by dynasties whose Chineseness was tenuous at the time of conquest, and most of these have apparently worked well in tandem with state-sponsored (or coerced) Han resettlement. The state was just as present in the process through the Ming and Qing as today, though the contemporary state must work harder to hide or justify both its role and the process altogether. If we loosen the expectation that a "march to the tropics" be completed in a timely fashion, say, within a single dynasty, a distasteful door is opened to suggest that all of Asia may one day be Chinese. This essay will examine some revisionist works on Chinese frontier issues and campaigns to suggest that giving primary agency to the state and local resistant elements is a worthwhile historical contribution. The older story has indeed changed, but the ending may be the same.

The pre-1980 story of Chinese expansion into its frontier was based almost entirely on Chinese sources, either from official court documents or literati who were variously sympathetic, complicit, or active in the

[1] Wachman's book uses this phrase to tie China's current irredentism directly to geostrategic restraints on the PRC's ability to project power beyond the "first island chain" of Hainan and Taiwan.

process of "civilizing" indigenous barbarians with a strong dose of Confucianism.[2] In contrasting means if not ends, Herman's work is the primary example this essay will use to represent the "new frontier scholarship". Since 1980, with the widely applauded opening of PRC archives, new accounts heavily incorporate sources from the subaltern indigenes, for Herman in particular the Nasu Yi of Shuixi in what is now Guizhou Province, and which generally consider the Confucian overtones in "civilizing missions" to be little more than a rhetorical device. Either resonating with or rankling the same actors today, Herman posits that the erstwhile well-meaning, defensive, and non-expansive Ming really wanted to mine the natural resources of its frontier.[3] The new wave of history, first and foremost, notes the heavy-handed paternalism of the Chinese state toward its indigenous populations and does away with illusions of benevolence being the primary motivation for *hanhua*. Concomitantly, and just as important, the processes and mechanisms by which lands and peoples came under Chinese control—and the collective consciousness as part of China—are also revised by new texts.

Herold Wiens' 1950's thesis of mass migration into the Southwest fits and extends trends noted by Robert Hartwell up to 1500, and both posit a more or less peaceful colonization wherein ecological pressures and Han agricultural superiority brought frontier lands and peoples into China.[4] According to Herman, Wiens puts migrants at the forefront of an "inexorable" Sinicization project, and the state plays a "secondary, if not inconsequential role."[5] In new frontier narratives which highlight continuities, recurring themes, and developments in administrative structure and capacity[6], dynastic differences are largely compared in terms of

[2] See Dardess' consideration of the role of *shengjiao* restraining a Song intellectual's interest in conquest (pg. 115). He later claims that Chinese intellectuals were far more concerned with the barbarization of Chinese customs in the outer regions brought into China by the Yuan than with civilizing the locals.

[3] On pg. 140-143, Herman goes into detail about the riches in silver, copper, and cinnabar to be found in Yunnan, but transportation costs and greedy local officials were siphoning off much of the product and profit before it could reach lands under more direct Chinese control. It was thus in the interest of every dynasty for the state to play an active role in settling these areas with Han farmers, military bases, and institutions which combined them.

[4] Hartwell, pg. 388, notes that northern migrants followed land reclamation all the way into the Southeast (present-day Fujian and Guangdong), later (pg. 389) that the process of colonization was "peaceful". I'm not clear whether his piece was intended to represent the old narrative, but it certainly takes the long view of this migratory trend. As the Southwest is absent from his account, one doubts that Herman's book could supplement it. Both note that northern Chinese (or Manchu) were stationed in these "macro-regions" by the government as part of the effort to bring them under dynastic control, but they differ fundamentally in the local elites' response (*tusi* appointments or resistance, displacement and later localism).

[5] Herman, pg. 5.

[6] It is hard to imagine that provinces could be an innovation, but Guy is convincing that the Qing were both most dependent on them and necessarily adept at using provincial governance (and direct appointments by the emperor of governors) to rule the vast, diverse, and

capacities and willingness to impose Chinese rule. Dardess notes that the Yuan were simply very well disposed to and capable of subjugating nearly all of the small states which existed in the Southwest prior to 1200. The Mongols, unlike the fully Chinese Ming, were more interested in getting the crucial support of local elites to solidify their rule over vast territories, while the Ming, like the Song before them, are said to be attracted to conquest only where the land "already had a Chinese population or appeared capable of sustaining one."[7] As Herman puts it, the Yuan "formalized" the Chinese empire by placing local officials, as *tusi*, under dejury dynastic control, but the Ming and Qing had to wage "uninterrupted, state sponsored violence" before these regions (and ambitious appointees) would fully and permanently submit.[8]

Interestingly, references to Chinese migration into Southeast Asian territories in this period largely agree that the Ming state was not much involved, yet there is presumably much less assertion that areas receiving Chinese immigrants in Thailand, the Philippines, or Indonesia were actually part of China.[9] Perhaps, then, a Mongolian conquest under the Yuan was a necessary but not sufficient condition for incorporating SE Asians into China.[10] Herman's book is again illustrative of the limits of Qing ambition, as the Southern Ming could find no quarter in the Southwest, with its beleaguered Yongli emperor chased by Qing forces all the way to, but not into, Burma.[11] Expanding one's lens to the region as a whole, Chinese dominance and inclusion of the Southwest shows both limitations and contingency, as illustrated by Yingcong Dai's article on the Qing's "disastrous"

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expanding lands and peoples of China. Clearer perception that provinces were pieces of a larger whole, a major achievement of the Qing, likely laid a foundation for a national Chinese identity.

[7] Dardess, pg. 21. Herman, pg. 11, concurs: "the Mongols sought to control people, not territory…Yuan officials were concerned first and foremost with winning the loyalty of the elites under their control."

[8] Herman, pg. 13.

[9] For example, the first in a series of Spanish massacres of Chinese immigrants in the Philippines occurred in 1604 and is said by Parmer, pg. 28, to indicate the Ming's unwillingness/inability to protect Chinese settlements in SE Asia. Anthony Reid, pg. 44, similarly inaugurates a "Chinese century" of SE Asian history beginning in 1740, in light of their "overwhelming dominance" of Vietnamese and Siamese trade. Furthermore, while the half-Chinese Taksin ascended to the Siamese throne in 1767, it is hard to imagine that he and the 30,000 Chinese in Siam (Lieberman, pg. 290) were working (actively or unintentionally) to turn it from a tributary into another Qing province. Even with the Chinese population at 230,000 by 1825, an unstable Siam may have been "desperate to strengthen Chinese ties" (Lieberman, pg. 304) but neither desiring to be part of China nor seen by Chinese as such.

[10] An exception again would be "Great Ming Revivalists" who see the Ming's forays into Vietnam, where the Yuan and Qing did not venture, as evidence that Vietnam should be part of China. Mixing and matching territories to dynasties and the Chinese state must be fodder for contemporary armchair khans and historians alike.

[11] Overstating the Ming Loyalist threat in the Southwest is portrayed by Herman as the reason the Qing allotted so many resources to Wu Sangui. The account of Wu's surprisingly accepted resignation and formation of his own short-lived dynasty suggests that ample opportunities existed to challenge the state in the Southwest frontier.

"Myanmar Campaign" from 1765 to 1770. The force of Chinese state expansion was clearly resistible, whereas migration itself is the inexorable process in the long term.

Herman's treatment of the highest Qing official in the Southwest, Wu Sangui, also shows that the Sinification of Guizhou and Yunnan was highly contingent. Wu is described as being more interested in seeing his cronies appointed to local positions than in "establishing civil institutions to rule the southwest". He narrowly survives a military blunder which would have negated his military advantage, must resort to intrigue and desperate measures to avoid being wiped out in an anti-Qing siege by superior forces, and finally lets his successes go to his head with the formation of his own dynasty.[12] The topic question offers the challenge that, given a long enough time, the Qing would still have marched through Guizhou and brought it into the fold regardless of Wu's mixed tenure of achievements, setbacks, and diversions. Perhaps there was no one in China who had Wu's talents but not his ambition at this time, and so the appointment of another person to his post would have resulted in very different decisions, a different Southwest China altogether. Guy notes that micromanaging emperors like Yongzheng did manage to assign provincial governors to the frontier who were both "talented" and loyal, notably Manchus skilled in military affairs and posted to the Northwest to pacify or eliminate the Zunghars, but success was hardly guaranteed.[13] At very least, new scholarship has shown that the Chinese state was leading the "march", that mistakes were made, and there are reasons, malaria not least among them, that the tropics remained tributaries rather than taxed directly.

Another important point for introductory students to retain is that Chinese state capacity always preceded identity and identification. This is to say that the state's ability to conquer and subjugate frontier lands and peoples, to extract their resources, often accompanied the establishment of a new dynasty, especially in the case of the Yuan and Qing. For the new dynasty to be congruent with the "cultural entity" of China, a standard of learning and observance of Chinese customs over generations had to be established. Dardess notes that the Yuan

[12] See Herman's sixth chapter, largely focused on Wu's checkered past and mixed record of serving the Qing and himself, both with and against local populations. He largely convinces the Qing to provide him with resources to take control of Shuixi to eliminate Ming loyalists while opening up the land's vast potential for state exploitation, while on pg. 202 and throughout the chapter it is convincingly shown that he intended to use the central provisions and the local wealth "for his own purposes."

[13] Guy, pg. 358.

struggled mightily to do this, and fully Chinese members of the intelligentsia always harbored doubts on a racial basis. In a similar vein, as long as frontier areas were governed by non-Han locals under the institution of the *tusi*, created under the questionably Chinese Yuan, these areas and peoples were barred by more than exclusive examinations from status as Chinese.[14] They remained, instead, what Herman calls the "periphery within", lands under Chinese control by Yuan inheritance, whose peoples fell into an assimilative imperative, internal "others" who not only *could* become civilized (Chinese), would have to in the name of territorial integrity.[15] The old narrative neglects the fact that such assimilation is still a work in progress and that resolve wavers with the belief in its possibility, considering primordial or perennialist identities, and its desirability, considering modern notions of national self-determination and indigenous rights. State capacity had to come first.

Dynastic identity as Chinese was more an imposition on others than a matter of cultivating one's own power and capacity. It is no wonder, then, that the *tusi* were aggressively phased out by the Qing. As another conquering dynasty, but one made up of many ethnicities unified by the banner system, the Manchus could hardly allow pockets of non-Chinese areas to exist within its very formal empire, lest its own Chineseness continue to be challenged. Campaigns throughout the Ming laid the foundation for full Chinese control of these areas, but their frontier status had hardly begun to fade before the Ming-Qing transition brought additional conflict to the region. While the Ming had great trouble pacifying this region, they presumably faced fewer doubts that they (and their armies) represented China. Herman's closing chapters note that this transition was far more violent and contingent in the Southwest than elsewhere, but little in the way of anti-Chinese resistance is heard from by the time of the book's closure in 1700.

Whether by their closer adherence to Confucianism or much longer reign, Crossley claims that the marginally Manchu Qing became, for better or worse, equivalent to Chinese political culture for 20th century

[14] Herman notes in passing that local indigenes were ineligible from taking exams to become central officials, but this is a central concern of Hartwell, who wants to revise the notion of social mobility through exams. Instead of fostering upward mobility, Hartwell concludes that only those with means and familial connections really had a chance to pass, that "[t]he examination system was, in fact, the chief method used by the local gentry to perpetuate their political position." (pg. 419) Frontier peoples newly integrated into China but not recognized as Chinese (thereby excluded from whatever benefits were accorded to such a status) would likely be subject to metic status, inheriting generational non-Chineseness in the eyes of government.

[15] National integrity as a motivation for Sinicizing locals, was and possibly remains anachronistic.

China scholars.[16] This was apparently easier for scholars than for China, but the problems of national identification by China's population are recognized by both parties. The goal of turning China into a modern nation-state, with a population whose primary identity is Chinese, is very much ongoing in the PRC frontier, as few other than elites and anti-Manchu nationalists seem to have thought of themselves as Chinese first even by last decades of the Qing.

What would make the revisionist historiography more consequential, in addition to incorporating non-Chinese sources, must unfortunately be phrased in terms of lacking what was occurring contemporaneously with the West's "discovery" of the Americas. Perhaps the total novelty of native Americans' "savageness" to Spain necessitated explicit debates about their humanity, assimilability, or even the capacity to have legitimate dominion over their lands, but a debate of the likes between De Las Casas and Sepúlveda in the 1500's seems to be missing among Chinese intellectuals. Perhaps the longer history of Chinese civilization, the constant proximity to threats from militarily strong nomads, made the Chinese so certain of what barbarians were that no splendor of cities or number of written languages could convince them otherwise. Resistance to colonization, in other words, could only be ignoble or trivial without recognition from the Chinese state and its learned elites.[17] Chinese empathy for the barbarians as having their own culture must be found instead in concessions like allowing the commemorative stones placed on either side of a bridge in Guizhou in 1592 to differ, with the Chinese stele blandly describing the structure and features of the bridge while the Nasu Yi stele grandly extolled Yi civilization's historical and cultural achievements.[18]

[16] Crossley, pg. 1476. That the Qing were Manchu, not Chinese, only seemed to resonate with the majority of the population, excepting rebellions, at the beginning and end of the dynasty, the impetus to resist at first and then to overthrow. From this perspective, Herman's assertion that "[e]thnicity…is fundamentally defensive" (pg. 14) fits the formation of Chinese national identity to the growing and realized threat China faced from the West. The Han majority, seeing parallels with the Qing's establishment and furthermore the Manchu's failure to defend China from people who were beyond the pale of Chinese civilization must have played no small role in Chinese identity formation. Being able to expand into barbarian, but familiar, territory while putting down domestic rebellions must have been small consolation to a nascent nation birthed into "humiliation" on the global stage.

[17] Herman's inclusion of a letter from Wang Shixing (pg. 140-1), an official posted to Yunnan in 1600, comes close, but in the end it only laments the natives losing control of their natural resources, not suggesting that they have a right to govern themselves, keep their lands separate from China, or resist becoming Chinese themselves (though this last point was probably not a priority at the time, if it was even conceived as possible).

[18] Herman, pg. 155.

In Peter Bol's terms of localism, Sinicizing conquest might have been facilitated by a unified Chinese aesthetic of the kind exemplified by the early Ming, when all locales strived to be the best at something.[19] The localist turn, in which uniqueness came to be prized, might also have provided an opening for non-Han apologists to make the case that barbarian cultures had their own forms of civilization. If frontier peoples were ever to see themselves as part of a unified Chinese nation, rather than under the thumbs of capricious local officials loosely connected to a colonizing Khan from the northern steppe, "China proper" would first have to be unified itself, a condition which obtained only in the last century. These considerations suggest that at least until the Qing, the line between the frontier of China and lands which were *not* China, outside it, had to be drawn on a basis of more than just the presence of Han immigrants in the population.

When Chinese lands expanded and contracted with each new emperor (within dynasties), perceptions of internal and external "others"—those who could and could not be civilized/sinicized—necessarily shifted with them. A longitudinal study in one region, such as Herman's, adds both color and grey areas to the black and white narrative of "Chinese civilization versus the barbarians". It shows that dynasties shared subtly different continuities and made non-linear progress in their administrative goals in the frontier, but it also highlights that real assimilative "progess" required the Chinese state to be relatively unified, with local officials loyal to the central government and able to use their resources effectively. New works using new sources have largely succeeded in showing that other Chinas were possible, and the resemblance of today's Chinas to their imperial past is quite remarkable.

[19] Consensus on what Chinese education and high culture are, or how they should be interpreted, might conceivably lead to a unified nation, a unified cultural front to push into the frontier and make new Chinese people.

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