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REVIEW ESSAY

DE-CENTERING CHINESE HISTORY

Early Modern China and Northeast Asia: Cross Border Perspectives. By EVELYN S. RAWSKI. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 350 pp. $88.00, £50.99 (cloth), $30.99, £20.99 (paper), $24.00 (ebook).

Across Forest, Steppe, and Mountain: Environment, Identity, and Empire in Qing China's Borderlands. By DAVID A. BELLO. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 350 pp. $99.99, £64.99 (cloth), $80.00 (ebook).

Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia: The Zheng Family and the Shaping of the Modern World, c. 1620–1720. By XING HANG. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 346 pp. $99.99, £64.99 (cloth), $28,99, £21.99 (paper), $80.00 (ebook).

Ming China and Vietnam: Negotiating Borders in Early Modern Asia. By KATHLENE BALDANZA. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 237 pp. $99.99, £64.99 (cloth), $28.97, £21.99 (paper), $80.00 (ebook).

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What would Chinese history look like if we were to examine it from the perspective of the peoples living along China's periphery? How might a non-Chinese perspective challenge the dominant themes in Chinese historiography, themes which represent Chinese history as a linear narrative arising from the Central Plain and its original inhabitants, the Han Chinese?[1] If, for example, we rely solely on Chinese sources to tell us about Chinese-Jurchen/Manchu relations during the first half of the seventeenth century, we will have privileged Chinese sources, affirmed the authority of the Chinese perspective, and suppressed voices that might offer an alternative perspective. Only an aggressive deconstruction of such "authoritative" Chinese texts can expose biases and logical inconsistencies, unpack cultural tensions that demand more rigorous scrutiny, and tease out into the open silenced voices from spaces buried deep in the text. Those historians who engage in such a methodological approach, however, run the risk of being accused of applying fanciful postmodernist conjecture or presentist interpretations to the past. This is why the recent (since the 1980s) addition of Manchu language sources to our examination of Qing history (1636–1912) has had such a seismic impact on the field.

[1]In English the best examples of this Chinese narrative are, Ho Ping-ti's "In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski's 'Reenvisioning the Qing,'" *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57 (1998): 123–55, and Xu Jieshun's "Understanding the Snowball Theory of the Han Nationality," in *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China's Majority*, edited by Thomas S. Mullaney, James Leibold, Stephane Gros, and Eric Vanden Bussche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 113–27. In Chinese see, Xu Jieshun 徐杰舜, *Xueqiu: Hanzu de renleixue fenxi* 雪球: 漢民族的人類學分析 (Snowball: An anthropological analysis of the Han nationality) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1999), and Fei Xiaotong 費孝通, *Zhonghua minzu duoyuan yiti geju* 中華民族多元一題格局 (The plurality and organic unity of the Chinese nationality) (Beijing: Zhongyang renmin xueyuan chubanshe, 1989).

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Manchu sources have afforded scholars the opportunity to negotiate more vigorously with Chinese texts, challenge many of the basic assumptions regarding the power and magnetism of traditional Chinese cultural institutions, and question the very foundations of China's long-standing nationalist metanarrative. The steadfast belief that the adoption of Chinese institutions and cultural practices irreversibly "turned" the borrower into a devotee of Chinese civilization has come under increased scrutiny, not just because Manchu sources have shown that the Jurchens/Manchus remained cognizant and proud of their own heritage long after they occupied China in 1644, but, as Beatrice Bartlett, Mark Elliott, and Evelyn Rawski have shown, because these same sources illustrate the lengths to which the Manchus erected physical, social, and institutional barriers to create separation from and assert control over Han Chinese.[2] Likewise, Jim Millward, Pamela Crossley, Nicola Di Cosmo, and Peter Perdue have revealed the extent to which the Manchus relied on a multicultural façade to rule a sprawling culturally diverse empire.[3] Simply put, not all Manchus were in awe of Chinese cultural practices, as most Chinese sources might have us believe, nor did the Manchus rely on Chinese institutions to extend Qing hegemony into the Inner Asian Steppe.

Even in the peripheral areas of China proper, the largest, wealthiest, and most populous part of the Qing Empire, the Manchus seldom relied on conspicuously Chinese institutions and cultural practices to expand its empire, despite the fact that many Chinese historians persist in repackaging this linear metanarrative to describe the southward expansion of Chinese civilization. The most recent variation of this metanarrative, by Xu Jieshun, titled *Snowball: An Anthropological Analysis of the Han Nationality*, was published in 1999.[4] For the better part of two millennia, Xu tells us, Han superior culture has hypnotized and lured non-Hans into wanting to become Han, and they were welcomed into this civilized Han world precisely because Han culture possesses a "rare ability to absorb" others, or what Ho Ping-ti referred to in his passionate defense of sinicization as Han civilization's "open-mindedness" and "large-heartedness."[5] Building on a conceptual framework first elaborated by the eminent anthropologist Fei Xiaotong, Xu sees Han civilization as a non-violent snowball (*xueqiu* 雪球) rolling across a sullied (non-Han) landscape constantly expanding in size and density, but never sacrificing its purity by becoming dirty from the soil it comes in contact with, even if the non-Han peoples, let's call them Mongols for argument's

[2]Beatrice S. Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch'ing China, 1723–1820* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991); Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); and Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of the Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998). As Elliott points out in *The Manchu Way*, this linear narrative was already examined and found wanting back in 1949 by Karl Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng in *History of Chinese Society: Liao, 907–1125* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1949).

[3]James A. Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759–1864* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999); Nicola Di Cosmo, "Qing Colonial Administration in Inner Asia," *The International History Review* 20 (1998): 287–309; and Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005). See also R. Kent Guy, "Who Were the Manchus? A Review Essay," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61 (2002): 151–64.

[4]Xu, *Xueqiu*. The renowned anthropologist Fei Xiaotong was one of the first Chinese scholars to describe the Han as a snowball when he outlined his theory of "plurality and organic unity" (*duoyuan yiti* 多元一題) of the Chinese nation/race (*Zhonghua minzu* 中華民族). According to Fei, the Han *minzu* (nationality, ethnic group or race) was the "coagulate core" (*ningju hexin* 凝聚核心) to which various peoples fused together (*ronghe* 融合) as they spread across the Central Plain and beyond. Fei, *Zhonghua minzu,* 1–13.

[5]Ho, "In Defense of Sinicization," 134–37.

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sake, had conquered China, subjugated its population, and aggressively discriminated against the Han.

Within this nationalistic metanarrative the *tusi* 土司 (native chieftain) title/office is most closely associated with Qing state expansion into southwest China, and with initiating the process of "turning" the non-Han peoples toward Han civilization. In return for an oath of allegiance to the Qing throne, Beijing agreed to recognize the non-Han leader and his descendants as hereditary rulers of the land and people identified at the time of investiture; it pledged to support him against local rivals who might challenge his authority; it offered him preferred access to Chinese markets and commodities that no one else in his immediate area enjoyed; and finally, it bestowed upon him a title, generically termed *tusi*, which gave him not only significant prestige in his dealings with Han and non-Han, but also quasi-official status within the Qing bureaucracy. Not surprisingly, Chinese historians have consistently viewed non-Han acceptance of the *tusi* title as proof of the formidable allure of Han civilization, and as such they present this submission to the Qing throne as a cultural act, not a political undertaking of mutual benefit.[6]

However, if we view the Qing state–*tusi* relationship from a non-China-centered perspective, say from Manchu, Yi, Zhongjia, and Tibetan viewpoints, or even from a comparative global perspective, it appears Han culture played an ancillary role in how the Qing state sought to extend its influence into the southwest. "An empire in the classic sense," Charles Maier tells us, "is usually believed, first, to expand its control by conquest or coercion, and, second, to control the political loyalty of the territories it subjugates. It may rule these subject lands directly, or it may install compliant native leaders who will govern on its behalf, but it is not just an alliance system among equal partners."[7] Moreover, because most universal empires comprise a multitude of cultural constituencies, the political loyalties involved tend to consist of hierarchies of lordship based on multiple types of authority, and Qing China was no different.[8] According to Elliott, "in the Qing, some of these hierarchies were Chinese, while others were Inner Asian (Manchu, Mongolian, Tibetan, Turkic). We thus find the early Manchu emperors striking a number of poses, each equally 'authentic' yet grounded in distinct sources of authority, addressing different imperial constituencies."[9] This multicultural affectation was designed, first and foremost, to enhance the legitimacy of the Qing throne, but the "authentic poses" Elliott mentions were crafted in such a way that political

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[6]Representative research on the role of the *tusi* office in Chinese civilization's southern expansion are She Yize 佘貽澤, *Zhongguo tusi zhidu* 中國土司制度 (China's *tusi* institution) (Shanghai: Shangwu shuju reprint, 1947); Wu Yongzhang 吳永章. *Zhongguo tusi zhidu yuanyuan yu fazhan shi* 中國土司制度淵源與發展史 (The origins and historical development of China's *tusi* institution) (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chuban she, 1988); Li Shiyu 李世愉, "Luelun tusi zhidu yu gaitu guiliu" 略論土司制度與改土歸流 A brief discussion of the native official [*tusi*] institution and bureaucratic consolidation), in *Zhongguo gudai bianjiang zhengce yanjiu* 中國古代邊疆政策研究 (Research on ancient China's frontier policies), edited by Ma Dazhang 馬大正 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1990), 465–94; Gong Yin 龔蔭, *Zhongguo tusi zhidu* 中國土司制度 (China's *tusi* insitution) (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1992). In English see Herold J. Wiens, *China's March Toward the Tropics* (Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1954), and Huang Pei, *Autocracy at Work: A Study of the Yung-cheng Period, 1723–1735* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974).

[7]Charles Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 24–25.

[8]Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context: Volume 1, Integration on the Mainland, c. 800–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context: Volume 2, Mainland Mirrors: Europe, Japan, China, South Asia, and the Islands, c. 800–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1999); and Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).

[9]Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, 4.

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loyalties were not based solely on the cultural institutions of the imperial center. Loyalty required compromise.

Having said this, it would seem reasonable to assume that the Qing throne would strike the pose of an authentic Chinese emperor as it moved to assert its influence in the southwest because that was the hierarchy of lordship best understood in China proper. Yet, prior to the seventeenth century, China's elites did not consider the southwest to be an integral part of China proper: the vast majority of the people living in the southwest were not Han; the Chinese state was represented almost exclusively by a haphazard collection of frail military units located along the region's main arterials; and the institution of lordship that halfheartedly tied this frontier region to China proper consisted almost entirely of *tusi* offices that were created not by Han Chinese but by Mongols during the Yuan empire (1270–1368). It is true that the Han-dominated Ming state (1368–1644) did expand the number of *tusi* offices throughout the southwest, and even attempted to inject specific Han cultural influences into this hierarchy of lordship, such as requiring *tusi* to receive a Confucian education and insisting the *tusi* family accept patrilineal succession modeled on Han practices, but by most accounts Han cultural practices among the non-Han were almost nonexistent in the southwest prior to the seventeenth century.[10] In other words, the process of integration sited in *tusi* offices embodied a political relationship based on concepts of loyalty and reciprocity shorn of excess cultural accoutrements.[11] Such political relationships were at the heart of the world's several multicultural empires, and as James Scott argues in *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, many people in the southwest found these relationships asphyxiating to the point they consciously migrated to remote areas and adopted lifeways that were the antithesis of the settled agrarian regime the Han Chinese represented.[12]

Prasenjit Duara speaks to the very issue of a contrived Han metanarrative when he describes the "defensive strategy" of China's cultural universalism in *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*. "The universalistic claims of Chinese imperial culture," Duara tells us, "constantly bumped up against, and adapted to, alternative views of the world order which it tended to cover with the rhetoric of universalism." This covering rhetoric "secures for the contested and contingent nation the false unity of a self-same" (Han Chinese) and defends the national narrative as a type of unadulterated national history.[13] In this sense, then, the de-centering of Chinese history is not "an esoteric or merely academic enterprise,"

[10]The exception to this argument are the published works by Chen Ding, a young man who spent considerable time among the *tusi* in Guizhou and Yunnan during the last decades of the seventeenth century. Several of the *tusi* officials Chen was acquainted with did speak Chinese, were familiar with Han cultural practices, and enjoyed one of the more unusual products to reach China at this time, tobacco. But even Chen admits that beyond the *tusi* official and his immediate family, Han cultural practices were virtually non-existent. See, Chen Ding 陳鼎, *Dian Qian youji* 滇黔遊記 (A record of my journey through Guizhou and Yunnan) (1690), and *Dian Qian tusi hunli ji Dian Qian tusi hunli ji* 滇黔土司婚禮記 (An account of marriage ceremonies among the *tusi* in Yunnan and Guizhou) (1700).

[11]To appreciate how the Qing monarchy interacted with powerful regional actors in southwest China, I have benefitted from the insights of Victor Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycles: Anarchy and Conquest, c. 1580–1760* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 33–38; Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 81–97; and Peter C. Perdue, "Strange Parallels Across Eurasia," *Social Science History* 32 (2008): 263–79. For school building in eighteenth-century southwest, see William T. Rowe, "Education and Empire in Southwest China: Ch'en Hung-mou in Yunnan, 1733–38," in *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600–1900*, edited by Benjamin Elman and Alexander Woodside (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[12]James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

[13]Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4. See also, Joseph W. Esherick, Hasan Kayah, and Eric Van Young, eds.,

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precisely because it lays bare the fabrication of China's national metanarrative by looking at China from the outside in, and by utilizing non-Chinese sources in order to capture, as best as possible, how the non-Han peoples situated along China's peripheries viewed China, its institutions, and its peoples.[14] It is no wonder, then, that Western scholars identified as adherents of New Qing History have been attacked for promoting an "imperialist" or "splittist" agenda, for they have exposed flaws in a poorly conceived metanarrative and pricked at the yet unhealed wounds from a not-so-distant colonial past.[15]

Recent works by James Scott, Pat Giersch, Don Sutton, and Jodi Weinstein, to name just a few, have affirmed something Frederik Barth said a long time ago when he warned against the idea that dominant civilizations could incorporate and assimilate smaller groups of people simply because of "the sheer weight of its presence."[16] It was in these peripheral areas where sustained contact between peoples was extraordinarily intense and violent that Barth believed cultural differences were strengthened and ethnic boundaries formed. For Barth, something like the Han snowball absorbing all in its path simply could not exist. Sure, there were plenty of examples of non-Han *tusi* who were able to speak and read Chinese, and some even acquired a rudimentary understanding of Chinese cultural practices, but the political context in which a non-Han leader was obliged (and enticed) to accept the *tusi* title should caution us, as Barth has, against thinking that the *tusi* title holder willingly accepted Han cultural practices or even admired such practices. In fact, the historical record is littered with examples of non-Han leaders forsaking their allegiance to the Qing throne and discarding the *tusi* title in order to protect their people, land, and resources from predatory Qing officials and aggressive Han in-migrants.

In a recent study titled, *From Subjects to Han: The Rise of Han as Identity in Nineteenth-Century Southwest China*, Giersch takes Barth's argument one step further and shows how different in-migrant groups from China's interior with particularly vibrant native-place loyalties, appropriated the term "Han" in order to create a "pan-regional alliance" they could use to coordinate in their struggles with non-Han communities for control of economic resources. To many of the non-Han in southwest China during the Qing, the people we now identify as Han, and by association ascribe certain common cultural features that make up Han civilization, initially presented a surprisingly diversified cultural front to the non-Han, with the one prevailing feature being that they came

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Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006).

[14]Evelyn S. Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia: Cross Border Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 17.

[15]Guo Wu, "New Qing History: Dispute, Dialog, and Influence," *The Chinese Historical Review* 23 (2016): 47–69; Joanna Waley-Cohen, "The New Qing History," *Radical History Review* 88 (2004): 193–206; Ding Yizhuang, "Reflections on the 'New Qing History' School in the United States," *Chinese Studies in History* 43 (2009): 92–96; Li Zhiting, "New Qing History: An Example of a New Imperialist Historiography," Chinese Social Sciences Today (April 20, 2015) (http://sscp.cssn.cn/xkpd/zm_20150/201504/t20150420_1592234.html); "Why a Chinese Government Think Tank Attacked American Scholars," National Public Radio, May 21, 2015 (http://www.npr.org/2015/05/21/408291285/why-a-chinese-government-think-tank-attacked-american-scholars).

[16]Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*; C. Patterson Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China's Yunnan Frontier* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); Donald S. Sutton, "Ethnicity and the Miao Frontier in the Eighteenth Century," in *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China*, edited by Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2006), 190–228; Donald S. Sutton, "Violence and Ethnicity on a Qing Colonial Frontier: Customary and Statutory Law in the 18th Century Miao Pale," *Modern Asian Studies* 37 (2003): 41–80; Jodi L. Weinstein, *Empire and Identity in Guizhou: Local Resistance to Qing Expansion* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013); Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (1969) (Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1998).

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from China's interior.[17] Giersch clearly complicates the image of Han civilization's advance into the southwest by suggesting that prior to the nineteenth century there might have been a Han snowball, but it was not nearly as dense and defined as Chinese historians have made it out to be, nor did this snowball possess the "open-mindedness" and "large-heartedness" Chinese scholars have attributed to it. This snowball was a predatory creature for it appropriated people, land, and natural resources for its own benefit.

This brings us to the books currently under review. These four books represent a logical continuation on the part of western scholars to move beyond a singular Chinese view of its borderlands to a more nuanced cross-border perspective. Three of the books deal exclusively with Qing border regions (Manchuria, Mongolia, Yunnan, and the southeast maritime region), while the fourth book examines Chinese–Dai Viet (Vietnam) relations during the Yuan (1272–1368) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties. All four authors make impressive use of Chinese and non-Chinese sources to examine the multilayered interactions in China's border regions, and as a consequence they challenge many long-held claims regarding the power and influence of Chinese civilization. Each author is quite clear in stating that non-Han adoption of Chinese institutions and the acceptance of certain Chinese rituals and cultural practices did not indicate a desire to become Han. In addition, these authors invigorate the history of border regions by showing how state (Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, etc.) policy was influenced by environmental issues, and that tailored or adapted frontier policies were the norm, which adds further evidence in support of those historians who have focused on issues of Qing hegemony in the Inner Asian Steppe. Finally, these authors place Ming and Qing China within a much larger global context. In each border region examined here the Chinese state was but one part, albeit a large part, of an integrated transregional/transnational network that demanded considerable dexterity, accommodation, and compromise by all parties involved.

Evelyn Rawski's *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia: Cross Border Perspectives* is a fascinating study of how Jurchen, Mongol, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese interests intersected in the highly politicized environment of northeast Asia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As the title indicates, the purpose of this study is to examine China's historical relationship with northeast Asia from multiple non-Han Chinese vantage points, and the author's masterful use of Chinese, Manchu, Korean, and Japanese sources brings a rich new perspective of early modern northeast Asia, one where a multitude of competing states and state-like entities vied for political supremacy in a surprisingly fluid transnational setting. Rawski organizes her study into two parts. The first part challenges the general consensus among Chinese historians today that northeast Asia has long been an irrefutable part of China. She traces northeast Asia's role in Chinese history to show how the peoples of this frontier region developed states that not only resisted incorporation by various Chinese regimes, but by the tenth century were strong enough to expand southward and assert control over Chinese territory. The second part utilizes multiple non-Han perspectives to examine issues of culture and identity in order to show how non-Han (mostly Korean and Japanese) adoption of Chinese institutions and Confucian cultural practices were based primarily on a political calculus designed to augment the power and prestige of the individual(s) adopting such practices, not to become Han, as China's nationalist metanarrative claims. Instead, the adoption of such Han institutions and practices, Rawski tells us, often provoked a cultural reaction that affirmed

[17]C. Patterson Giersch, "From Subjects to Han: The Rise of Han as Identity in Nineteenth-Century Southwest China," in *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China's Majority*, edited by Thomas S. Mullaney, James Leibold, Stephane Gros, and Eric Vanden Bussche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 191–209. A similar type of situation was described by Stevan Harrell in "From Xiedou to Yijun, the Decline of Ethnicity in Northern Taiwan, 1885–1895," *Late Imperial China* 11 (1990): 99–127.

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preexisting ethnic boundaries between Han and non-Han, and even invigorated non-Han cultural practices.

In the emotionally charged first decades of the twentieth century, when China was transitioning from empire to nation-state and history was seen as a critical component of this nation-building process, the sleight of hand reasoning that tends to be the bedrock of nationalistic histories refashioned the Manchus from hated barbarians to Han Chinese–lite. Similarly, the traditional Manchu homelands in northeast Asia became an integral part of a greater China. According to this perspective, northeast Asia had given rise to three separate regimes that together occupied parts of China for over half a millennium, the Khitan Liao (907–1125), Jurchen Jin (1126–1234), and Manchu Qing (1636–1912), and this prolonged contact with Chinese civilization successively mitigated the barbarous nature of the non-Han as they increasingly adopted Chinese ways while residing in or near Chinese territory. This was especially the case during the Qing as the Manchus relocated to China proper and allegedly fused (*ronghe* 融合) with the Han Chinese. Moreover, prior to the Qing conquest of China the Han-dominated Ming state (1368–1644) projected its authority into northeast Asia by establishing piecemeal networks of military garrisons and bestowing *tusi*-like titles and honors upon tribal leaders in southern Manchuria, thus affirming China's political and cultural influence in this frontier region. Yet, in the early decades of the twentieth century not everyone saw northeast Asia the same way the Chinese did, certainly not the Russians, Japanese, and Koreans, even some Manchus rejected the notion that their ancient homelands were a part of a greater China, but history unfolded in such a way that by the 1950s the general consensus among historians affirmed the Chinese perspective, that northeast Asia had long been historically linked to China. It is in the first part of her study that Rawski uses Chinese and non-Chinese sources to expose the extensive conceptual flaws in China's nationalist metanarrative.

In the second part of her study, Rawski focuses on questions of culture and identity to show how Japan, Korea, and various entities in northeast Asia adopted and then altered Chinese practices (state rituals, bureaucratic institutions, kinship practices, and succession principles) to fit their specific cultural circumstances. This part of Rawski's study is a logical continuation of her earlier works on the Qing in which she examined how the Manchus safeguarded their cultural identity as they embraced Chinese institutions to rule the Han, and described how Qing policies toward its major subjects (Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Hans) aimed to preserve cultural boundaries, not eliminate them.[18] Ambitious individuals in northeast Asia considered China an influential source of political legitimacy, and relations with the Chinese state were often used to support their political aspirations without their having to sacrifice political independence and cultural identity. The Jurchen chieftain Nurhaci (1559–1626) is an excellent example of just such an ambitious individual who used his familiarity with Chinese rituals and bureaucratic practices to build an independent powerbase in northeast Asia.[19] It is for precisely this reason that Rawski spends considerable energy disassociating Confucianism from the types of Chinese state rituals promoted among the non-Han peoples of northeast Asia. Ultimately, her analysis of the region

[18]Evelyn S. Rawski, "Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55(1996): 829–50; Evelyn S. Rawski, "The Qing Formation and the Early Modern Period," in *The Qing Formation in World Historical Time* edited by Lynn A. Struve (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 207–41; Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Pamela Kyle Crossley and Evelyn S. Rawski, "A Profile of the Manchu Language in Ch'ing History," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53 (1993): 63–102.

[19]Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1985), 49–88; and Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror*.

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and its actors leads her to conclude that northeast Asia, Korea, and Japan should be viewed as an "integral political and cultural unit." In short, in this study Rawski moves beyond her earlier China-centered (from the inside out) approach to Qing history to present a multi-layered cross-border perspective that thoroughly discredits the Chinese nationalist metanarrative.

In *Across Forest, Steppe, and Mountain: Environment, Identity, and Empire in Qing China's Borderlands*, David Bello offers three representative case studies of Qing borderland formation to show the political and historical significance of environmental relations as it relates to people and animals: Manchus and game in northern Manchuria, Mongols and livestock in southern Inner Mongolia, and indigenous non-Han peoples and mosquito-borne blood parasites in southwestern Yunnan. Each of these relationships is expressed not simply by the human effect on the immediate ecology, which is the traditional perspective, but by the ecology's impact on the formation of distinct borderland identities. Manchu military skill depended on game, Mongol steppe survival required livestock, and indigenous non-Han activity in southwestern Yunnan was shielded by malaria. As Bello makes clear, these three distinct identities were not entirely determined by dynastic decree, nor were they created out of processes of indigenous resistance to an expanding imperial presence, because these borderland peoples lived amid their respective climates, flora, and fauna. Seen from another perspective, the Chinese state constructed a Han identity in China proper on the basis of imperial arablism (the expansion of arable land), while militarized hunting, or venery, formed a similar basis for Manchu and Mongol identities. Thus, Bello argues that ethnic identity formation in Inner Asia, or in any of China's borderlands for that matter, should not be viewed solely from the prism of culture-based arguments, but instead must incorporate a sound understanding of the ecology in which the people reside.

The author builds upon the recent works by James Millward, Pamela Crossley, and Peter Perdue, to name a few, to show that "a fully monocultural or anthropocentric Qing imperial system of control over its vast empire was impractical" (2), precisely because the range of ecological and cultural diversity that informed the historical space of Qing borderlands was so remarkable. Interestingly, Bello's analysis of the role of the environment in ethnic identity formation pivots between the heterogeneity he finds in Manchuria, Mongolia, and southwest Yunnan, and the far more monocultural Chinese empire located in China proper (*neidi*). According to Bello, prior to the Qing various Chinese states had constructed a relatively uniform ecological and ethnic setting, and this uniformity was largely a long-term "reductive ordering" of the complex diversity of this "Hanspace" mainly by promotion of fixed-field grain agriculture wherever possible. Fixed-field grain agriculture, as James Scott described in *The Art of Not Being Governed*, was not only promoted by the premodern Chinese state, it was the foundation of its power. It led to land and population registries, property rights, and a reasonably efficient taxation system, important measures in the state's goal to standardize and integrate administrative, economic, and cultural practices. Moreover, fixed-field grain agriculture is inherently expansionary, and is compelled to move and seek out new living space when not checked by disease, famine, insufficient manpower, or a defiant ecology.

Bello examines how Han Chinese during the Ming lived in relative isolation from the ecologically and culturally diverse areas of northeast Asia, central Eurasia, and large portions of south and southwest China where mosquito-borne blood parasites acted as a biological barrier to aggressive Han migration. Yet, it was the Qing Empire that affixed this arablist Hanspace to the "multi-environmental" Inner Asian venery despite the oft-stated trepidation with which Han Chinese viewed the peoples of the northern steppe. Such ecological and cultural diversity necessarily precluded the uniform imposition of Han China's intensive fixed-field grain cultivation in these borderlands. Likewise, no particular cultural configuration was preeminent, although at the center of this sprawling empire the Qing state modified certain Hanspace practices, such as state rituals, a Confucian education, a legal system, and defined bureaucratic procedures to help unify the empire and create Qing subjects. The Qing state manipulated the political levers at the center in order to

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forge an imperial identity for the purpose of unity, while at the same time it adapted to the local ecological-cultural conditions specific to each borderland area.

Kathlene Baldanza's *Ming China and Vietnam: Negotiating Borders in Early Modern Asia* examines Chinese–Dai Viet (Vietnam) relations from the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries in order to show how Vietnamese elites, although adopting features of China's political and cultural institutions to enhance their own domestic power, actually de-centered the Chinese world by "positing a cultural hub beyond the borders of the Chinese state" (6). Contemporary China's nationalist metanarrative would lead us to believe that Dai Viet's adoption of classical China's political-cultural institutions demonstrates the radiant authority of China, and that Ming China's elites viewed this adoption of their institutions with glowing aplomb. However, Baldanza's examination of Chinese–Dai Viet relations and her careful analysis of Ming sources shows that Chinese leaders "were made profoundly uncomfortable by the imitation of a center of classical culture outside of China" (6). The existence of a vibrant Dai Viet center of classical Chinese culture so challenged the stature and coherence of Ming political-cultural institutions that Ming statesmen reacted with hostility, casting the Vietnamese as barbarians unfit to be included as part of a greater Ming Empire. In other words, despite the Dai Viet adoption of Chinese institutions, many Ming officials reacted disapprovingly to how the Vietnamese adapted and modified these institutions for domestic purposes, and as a result influential voices within Ming officialdom emerged demanding that the Ming state reject the Dai Viet embrace of their institutions and erect barriers, both physical and rhetorical, to distance themselves culturally from the Vietnamese.

Baldanza organizes her study around three overarching themes: first, she examines in detail the close historical relationship between these two countries in order to show that the relationship was built on a foundation of mutual negotiation and compromise; second, she analyzes how both countries held very different perspectives on how culture was transmitted from one to the other, which resulted in conflicting assumptions about ownership of these cultural institutions; and finally, she exploits Chinese and Vietnamese sources to elucidate the internal policy debates underlying decisions about foreign relations in both countries. The stage to discuss these three themes was set in the early decades of the fifteenth century following the Ming occupation of Dai Viet (1407–27). By 1427, Dai Viet had grown in size and military strength, but more importantly "it had transformed into a state that was both adamantly independent from China and more confident in its deployment of the classical culture and imperial rhetoric that the Ming claimed as its exclusive right" (78). These changes in Dai Viet, Baldanza states, were the unintended consequences of the Ming occupation of Dai Viet, and this newly assertive Dai Viet forced Ming China into an introspective examination of its own conflicted approach to its southern neighbor.

The Chinese–Dai Viet relationship became particularly thorny after 1527 when Mạc Đăng Dung (1483–1541) overthrew the Le dynasty, thus launching Dai Viet into a decades-long civil war. The Dai Viet conflict created a crisis for the Ming throne as well as it proved incapable of drafting a clear response to the situation. One faction at court, still feeling the pains of a humiliating withdraw of Ming forces from northern Vietnam in 1427, advocated a military response to the crisis in order to assert Chinese control over a territory it claimed to be a part of greater China—Jiaozhi. Another faction at court proved far more cautious in its approach to the Le-Mac civil war, probably because it knew that supporters of the deposed Le loyalist forces, Nguyễn Kim (1476–1545) and Trinh Kiểm (1503–70), harbored ulterior motives in their support for the Le dynasty. The more the Ming court learned about Mạc Đăng Dung, the more concerned it became with how he had appropriated Chinese state rituals and rhetorical devices to promote his legitimacy, such as his disturbing claim to the Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming*). In response to this obvious affront to the Chinese throne, Ming officials "mocked the Vietnamese for their misbegotten attempts to be civilized" (105) and began to make clear the cultural and political boundaries that separated China and Dai Viet. In doing so, these Ming officials undermined the pro-intervention

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position that sought to uphold China's tributary obligations by supporting the Le against the Mạc, but their position also tacitly recognized Vietnamese independence. Chinese control of northern Vietnam was no longer a realistic option, and this change in perception required a corresponding change in both policy and rhetoric. As Baldanza writes, "in order to accept Vietnamese independence, and overlook Vietnamese neo-Confucian reforms, it was better to de-civilize the Vietnamese, to cast them as barbarians in order to demonstrate they were not fit for Ming rule" (105–6). In short, Vietnamese adoption and modification of Chinese state rituals went beyond what the Ming court deemed acceptable for it challenged Chinese primacy, and in response, the de-civilizing of the Vietnamese was a rhetorical move that argued against extending China's borders to accommodate these southern barbarians.

Finally, in *Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia: The Zheng Family and the Shaping of the Modern World, c. 1620–1720*, Xing Hang utilizes Chinese, Manchu, Japanese, Korean, and European sources to offer a vigorous examination of a vast seventeenth-century multinational and transnational enterprise operated by the Zheng family of Fujian province. In a succinct narrative style, Hang describes the rise of the Zheng family amid a "unique confluence of regional and global history" (2) in which the initial wave of European expansion into East Asia played out against the traumatic events of the Ming-Qing transition (ca. 1644–1681) in China and the consolidation of Tokugawa (1603–1868) authority in Japan. Within the relatively short span of three generations, the Zheng family evolved from being leaders of a transnational mercantile-pirate empire under the patriarch Zheng Zhilong (d. 1661), to leaders of an anti-Qing resistance movement in China and rivals of the powerful Dutch East India Company at sea under Zhilong's son, Zheng Chenggong (1624–62), to organizers of a bureaucratic state in Taiwan under Chenggong's son, Zheng Jing (1642–81). Even though the fascinating life of Zheng Chenggong has been recounted many times over, Hang's study analyzes the Zheng maritime empire within a much larger global context, and as a result the empire appears unexpectedly disengaged from events in mainland China.

Hang prefaces his study with a critical description of the surprisingly diverse and convoluted historiography of the Zheng family in order to prepare the reader for what he believes are three critical aspects to understanding the success of the Zheng maritime empire. First, the Zheng organization was able to successfully adapt classical Chinese state rituals, Confucian orthodoxy, and time-honored bureaucratic institutions to govern a constituency of mostly merchants and soldiers operating in a hybrid, transnational maritime organization. This maritime organization, as well as the bureaucratic state established in Taiwan in the 1660s, was staffed primarily by men with mercantile and military backgrounds, and according to Hang these men performed their tasks with reasonable skill despite what Confucian-trained scholars might say about the abilities of such men. Second, following Zheng Chenggong's defeat of the Dutch in Taiwan in 1662, the Zheng family transformed itself from an improvised military organization based on a dispersed network of outposts located along the southeast coast of China into a state-building enterprise centered in the resource-rich island of Taiwan. The maritime empire did not cease with the acquisition of Taiwan; on the contrary, it expanded and thrived as the focus shifted from its anti-Qing activities in China to building an independent polity, despite the Zheng family's fierce loyalty to the Ming. Hang's meticulous description of Zheng Jing's rule of Taiwan seems strikingly similar to what the Manchus did in northeast Asia under Hong Taiji (1592–1643) a couple of decades earlier. Finally, Hang describes how the Zheng maritime empire "alternated, according to the geopolitical situation, between the political models of an autonomous feudatory of a restored Ming, a Korean-style Qing vassal, and an independent maritime kingdom" (16). On at least twenty different occasions, Hang informs us, the Zheng organization held talks with their Qing counterparts in hopes of ending hostilities and normalizing a two-state relationship.

Hang's study is part of an exciting body of work from a new cohort of maritime historians interested in pushing the boundaries of the maritime-continental China dichotomy most actively

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articulated by the path-breaking research of John E. Wills, Jr.[20] True to our de-centering theme, these maritime historians take as their geographic unit of study the littoral zone of ports, islands, and coastal territories stretching from the Liaodong peninsula in the north to Hainan Island in the south. From a cultural standpoint, the peoples of this littoral zone are believed to have understood that their livelihood was tied to profit-driven mercantilism and realpolitik outcomes associated with the operations of transnational trade networks, and not to the inward-looking, highly rigid Confucian value system that prevailed in China. Similar to Rawski's discussion of northeast Asia, these historians tend to focus on the early modern period, from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, and in doing so they (Hang's contribution is significant here) have reshaped our image of China as a country far more interconnected with the world than we once thought.[21] Finally, despite the staunch Ming loyalism of Zheng Chenggong and Zheng Jing, which Hang sees as the empire's Achilles' Heel, a strong case can be made to examine this maritime empire separately from the Ming-Qing transition gripping the mainland.

[20]John E. Wills, Jr., "Contingent Connections: Fujian, the Empire, and the Early Modern World," in *The Qing Formation in World-Historical Time*, ed. Lynn A. Struve (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004); "Maritime Chia from Wang Chih to Shih Lang: Themes in Peripheral History," in *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-century China*, edited by Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); and *Embassies and Illusions: Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K'ang-hsi, 1666–1687* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council of East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984). See also Deng Gang, *Maritime Sector, Institutions, and Sea Power of Premodern China* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999); Cheng Wei-chung (Zheng Weizhong) 鄭維中, "Shi Lang 'Taiwan guihuan Helan' miyi," 施琅台灣歸還荷蘭秘議 (Shi Lang's secret proposal to return Taiwan to the Dutch) *Taiwan wenxian* 台灣文獻 61 (2010): 35–74; 荷蘭時代的台灣社會:自然法的難題與文明化的歷程 (Taiwanese society under Dutch rule: The conundrum of natural law and the civilizing process) (Taibei: Qianwei, 2004); Patrizia Carioti, "The Zheng Regime and the Tokugawa *Bakufu*: Asking for Intervention," in *Sea Rovers, Silver, and Samurai: Maritime East Asia in Global History, 1550–1700*, edited by Tonio Andrade and Xing Hang (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016).

[21]For a brief introduction to this topic, see the many excellent articles in Lynn A. Struve, ed., *The Qing Formation in World-Historical Time* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004).

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