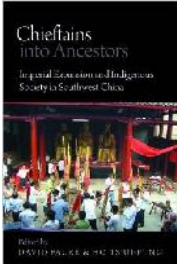


## REVIEW: *CHIEFTAINS INTO ANCESTORS*

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David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing (eds). 2013. *Chieftains into Ancestors: Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China*. Vancouver: UBC Press. xii + 254. 19 figures, 1 table, contributors, index. ISBN: 9780774823692 (paperback 34.95CAD), 9780774823685 (hardcover 95CAD).

This essay collection is a must-have for everyone interested in the history of empire and in what we may call the social consequences of empire. It presents a highly sophisticated set of essays on Chinese imperial expansion as seen from the perspective of local peoples in what today is Southwest China. It explores how they were historically drawn into the Chinese imperial project and negotiated this challenge through their own systems of social reproduction through gender and kinship; their economy; their concepts of history and identity deployed in genealogy and mythology and so on.

The imperial project was partially, of course, an effort to incorporate this region to extract its resources and, to that end, enforce both change and uniformity in many different ways, frequently attended by demands for the locals to submit to the state ideology formulated to justify this expansion. The grandiose imperial project of conquest and assimilation is recorded in numerous Chinese historical annals and largely written up in Classical Chinese, but in many places engulfed by the empire, no comparable counter-stories can be found. Or can they?

This book seeks to excavate such hidden stories of empire by reading between the lines in the received Chinese documents, and also by seeking further alternative sources in oral traditions and mythologies, in persisting social arrangements, in religious ceremonies, and more. The essays are edited and presented jointly by the distinguished historian, David Faure, and the prominent

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anthropologist (Ho Ts'ui-p'ing), who have also both included writings of their own. All the other authors are likewise recruited from among historians deeply engaged in cultural and ideological issues, and from among anthropologists who see history as an indispensable dimension to their research.

As the editors make clear, including in the astute introduction by Faure, the intent is not simply to rewrite or write the history of the conquered, but to "break out of the center-local typology" (xii) when investigating the inter-digitation of local societies and the empire, and pay special attention to finding and analyzing the "indigenous historical voice" that is either suppressed altogether or is but indirectly represented in most Chinese historical records, and treated imperfectly in many previous discussions of these topics.

The book is well illustrated with mostly contemporary snapshots taken by the authors from field visits to the sites of the ongoing broad revival of traditionalist institutions. These photos include temples and memorials now being reconstructed across the region. The volume also, appropriately for a serious book on China, includes the proper glossary with Chinese characters for key terms and names for each chapter. We like that!

Inevitably, there are some minor typos and misspellings, such as "Steven" for Stevan (Harrell); "Hsingchu" for Hsinchu; "La Nan" for Lanna (or Lan Na), and a few more. But these small errors in no way detract from the impressive contribution that this volume makes. I highly recommend it.

Each of the independent chapters in its own way delves deeply into ways of reaching behind the *façade* of straightforward submission to imperial demands and state-sanctioned forms of worship, and so on. Each author strives to relocate the purposeful adaptations and accommodations that have been attempted by locals in the face of such pressures. Several chapters treat what Faure identifies as a pattern in which "local society's adoption and, sometimes, manipulation of state-accepted ritual provided a means whereby the commitment between state and local society was sealed" (9). Thus, things are definitely not always what they seem in the "standard" histories, and the book's method of creatively and subtly reading multiple dimensions of history and ethnography together,

makes possible the uncovering of manipulations and negotiations that are often in fact "still" ongoing, before our very eyes.

In the first chapter, "Showing the Way," linguistic anthropologist Huang Shu-li presents a thoughtful and probing discussion of a key Hmong (Miao) funerary rite that is currently adapted in many Hmong global diaspora situations globally. It involves a destination and a routing that, she argues, served and continues to serve to fashion a distinct Hmong identity. The key element is participation, which has little to do with whether the rite could or could not also serve as an alternate genre of history meant to compete with dominant Chinese historiography. Like the other authors, Huang engages with other authorities in the same field. Future discussion of these ideas might take up Nicholas Tapp's (2010) work on Hmong identity and its global ramifications. This might include the Hmong debates of if and how they themselves really need to "compete" with authoritative orthodox historiographic genres that demand precise locations and a precise chronology for any true historical account, where such criteria were once irrelevant, or salient to the Hmong in ways radically different from the history-writing of others.

In Chapter Two, Kao Ya-ning writes about the remembrance and canonization of the famed eleventh-century Guangxi-area rebellion and its leader Nong Zhigao, claimed by today's Zhuang nationality as an ancestral hero, in accordance with New China's new historiography. Kao reports the commemorative rituals in detail and shows that they suggest a very different understanding of the past, not least because of the locating of sacred sites outside Chinese-sponsored towns. This, plus the complementary-gender representations in the deification and in the retelling of its memory with a celebrated cavern-dwelling goddess, said to be Nong Zhigao's mother, or wife, digresses from orthodox Chinese conceptions and practices.

Next, in Chapter Three, Zhang Yingqiang discusses another such deified barbarian leader, the "Flying Mountain" god of the Hunan-Guizhou border areas, dating to the tenth century. Here, too, is a complex history of attempts from both local quarters and agents of the empire to claim the memory of the deified figure, once portrayed as vanquishing a demon wielding a heavenly book as one of

his weapons. This complex inter-digitation is carefully discussed, including the key element of the purposeful recognition and co-option of such a figure by the Chinese state. This discussion also includes how today "the process of history making continues," (80) with local people and authorities grappling with the historical meaning of this cult, once again re-emergent today. This can be compared to the struggle over multivalent Northern figures such as the great Genghis Khan, and other officially "adopted" hero-enemies of China.

Chapter Four by Lian Ruizhi discusses the rapid adoption in the Dali area of Chinese-imposed forms. Thus, "Surviving Conquest in Dali" details a mode of survival that continues to this day. The Bai are, of course, already a *cause célèbre* of sorts in the study of Chinese identities, not least because of the now-famous misreading of the Bai by Francis LK Hsu (1948), which continues to be much debated. This chapter does not directly engage that debate, which after all is mostly about outsiders' misreadings, but rather offers its own sophisticated reading of the history of Bai identity formulation through the parallel and mutually-related forms of legend-telling and the written genealogies, made to look more and more Chinese.

Xie Xiaohui, in her excellent chapter (Five) titled 'From Woman's Fertility to Masculine Authority: The Story of the White Emperor Heavenly Kings in Western Hunan', tells of the demotion of the mother figure that was important in certain autonomous Hunan societies. Instead, the Han orthodoxy of unilineal male lines of worship and authority were favored. The story once again turns on the co-option of local deities-heroes, who were recast as the empires' helpers. Nevertheless, it is evident that this project remains incomplete and unfinished. With its discussion of the recalcitrant hero mother figure that will not go away, and a father that is added only on orders from above, this chapter recalls the earlier discussion of Nong Zhigao. It also delves deep into the transformations of gender and gender symbolism as part of the imperial-local tug of war.

A terminological footnote: I note that Dr. Xie here chooses "untamed" and "tame" as translations of the Classical Chinese terms *sheng* and *shu*, used for barbarians of the past who shared cultural features (such as language), but who were split on those still outside state control (the *sheng* barbarians), and those halfway incorporated

into the state (the *shu* barbarians). She uses untamed/ tame instead of raw/ cooked, because "there is no evidence that the food analogy applies to natives any more than to domesticated and wild animals" (133, n2). However, as I have argued (Fiskesjö 1999), "raw" and "cooked" still may better represent the original (Chinese) sense, not in a literal but in a metaphorical sense: the raw/ cooked analogy suggests the emperor's civilizing mission is the preparation (cooking) for the ultimate purpose of the ingestion and full incorporation of those natives into the body of the empire, for its digestion and use. Translating *shu* as "tame" does not quite capture the sense of the imperial project's ultimate goal of erasure of everything "native," which is achieved when the barbarians' identity vanishes into the mass of regularized imperial subjects. Actually, this Chinese conception of civilization does not even distinguish between animals and barbarians, who are themselves seen as half-animals. And ideally not only the barbarians, but even the wild animals would eventually be civilized. In practice, the imperial ideological project is characterized by a perennial incompleteness, as amply demonstrated throughout this book.

Chapter Six by He Xi also tells the story of a mother-goddess figure, Madam Xian of the Lingnan and Hainan region, who is a historical figure turned protective goddess. She too has been kept alive to this day, yet also has been marginalized by the state insistence on patriliney as the link to state authority. In this dense and rich chapter, the manipulation of the ownership of stories of subjugation of natives yet farther afield (which may actually not have happened historically until in the more directly interventionist Ming and Qing dynasties), emerges as a fascinating subtext.

In Chapter Seven, David Faure offers a tantalizing story from nineteenth century Guangxi, in his contribution entitled 'The *Tusi* that Never Was: Find an Ancestor, Connect to the State'. The term *tusi*, of course, refers to the Chinese imperial system of appointing local chiefs as "native chiefs." Faure's chapter discusses an outright invention of an ancient ancestor, by locals who are trying to overcome a Sinicized, patriliney-defined ruler in their own time by cleverly using the state-favored tools of patriliney, genealogy, and tomb-construction and elaboration to invent their own, even more ancient, fake ancestor, to displace the power of the one imposed from the outside. This

chapter is an excellent guide to how the outward language and form of Chinese rule might well conceal a different story. In this case, it is clear it would have remained hidden but for the kind of social-archaeological history practiced here (complete with an on-site visit to the very real, and yet at the same time invented, ancestral cemetery).

In Chapter Eight, 'The Wancheng Native Officialdom: Social Production and Social Reproduction', James Wilkerson also writes of Guangxi and likewise about *tusi* officialdom, but focuses on how the native elites' mimicry of Chinese-style lineage came to clash with the meritocratic ideal of Confucian-style schooling and an examination path to officialdom, an ideal that was supposed to accompany the *tusi* system. The examination avenue to social and official advancement was opened up over time, in the context of other economic changes, and in ways that disrupted the exclusive elite previously in charge. Consequently, education helped in breaking down what remained of such semi-autonomous authority. Here, as in other chapters, when faced with this kind of highly subtle reading of an intense and complex social-historical drama, the reader becomes very curious about the extent to which the different actors were aware of their options, or of the consequences of their choices - to the extent that they had them? How many of the changes were intentional, and how much circumstantial and unintended as part of an unavoidable historical process beyond the comprehension of those involved?

In the final chapter (Chapter Nine), Ho Ts'ui-p'ing draws together several threads around the theme of gender, a key dimension of the book. Given that so little is written - with exceptions, of course, such as the equally sophisticated and historically aware works by Uradyn Bulag (2002; 2010) about gender dynamics in the history of the "barbarians" and China's barbarian frontiers, this aspect is one of the book's most valuable contributions. Ho Ts'ui-p'ing argues that the empire transformed everyone; that the developments of penetration and conquest by the imperial state discussed in the book cannot just be taken to reveal a lingering after-effect of female deities pre-existing those penetrations, or surviving them in a role of protector of women oppressed under the new externally imposed system of patriliney. It is important to understand that those goddesses, which may have already existed in some pre-

conquest form, were themselves recast as a locus of new identity formation provoked in the course of the conquest. They "empower not the deprived second gender, but the conquered communities and the lost kingdom, in the historical process of making China" (239); they also represent a new belief that "women's agency can revive those communities" (238) because the men have been broken. (One might ask if their women today, are being drained away as workers in the Chinese factory world, or as wives in China's rural interior, never to return, or in such massive numbers that this revival itself becomes a lost dream.)

Overall, the book makes a tremendous contribution in discussing the historical confrontation between the demands of the Central State and its agentive peripheries where people have not been foreign to formulating strategies and agendas of their own. The book delves into the resulting consequences of contested historical memory, the duplicity and doubling up of rituals, and of other manipulated forms of purposeful commemoration and identity-making that locals engage in. These developments are often examined from both sides, with ample citations from Chinese documents, but with special concern for the local and native perspective.

With these great achievements, what is missing? Among the many possible threads that are not spun here is that of Wolfram Eberhard, the idiosyncratic Sinologist-folklorist whose chains of tales and patterns linking and making local cultures in the South of China (f.ex. Eberhard 1968) is only briefly hinted at (20). Overall, perhaps more attention could have been paid to the inter-digitation of indigenous and the local Chinese (Han Chinese) traditions that vary tremendously in themselves and which similarly have been at the receiving end of the imperial project of "nivellation" that falsely homogenizes them, so as to hide and to neutralize their original diversity, as has been explored by many other scholars of South China, such as Göran Aijmer (2010), and others.

That aside, in terms of analysis of the imperial-indigenous axis, perhaps the discussion could also have engaged with Marshall Sahlins' recent work (2008a, 2008b, 2014; see also Liang 2011) on the Southwestern Chinese presence of the pervasive global figure of the Stranger-King, the chief or king cast as an alien invader appropriating the native soil's mother as a counterpart, in a

configuration of power originating in the manipulation of kinship relations. This obviously can be relevant in the constellations of local mother-goddesses and conquering fathers aiding the alien empire's incursions - not least for building a global-comparative perspective, which is not really present in the book, which is very heavily China-focused. In some ways this is a pity, since the book's readership should ideally include students of other empires and empires generally, and the strong Sinological bent of this book makes it less accessible for the non-Sinologist. Perhaps further discussion of the obvious parallels with other imperial frontiers (beyond the explicit lines of comparisons on gender issues, drawn in the final chapter) would have enhanced this value even more. Will Whitmore and Anderson's forthcoming volume be different in this regard?

On a similar note, the powerful but oft-ignored theory of Southwest Chinese identity dynamics that was constructed by Jonathan Friedman (new edition 1998) as a part of his critique of Edmund Leach's (1954) and Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1969) incomplete attempts to discuss ethnicity and power relations in this region (and by implication well beyond it, in general terms), is also missing here.

But there is much to be said for the searching and penetrating studies of Chinese particulars, on which this book so carefully focuses. The essays are enormously rewarding to read, if challenging at times. It strikes me that they often amount to something like an archaeology, and I believe that real archaeological studies of *material* remains should be added to the list of potential tools for writing the sort of alternative history that the authors are after. It is well known that the material remains of the past can be mobilized to expose lies and cover-ups in the official record, where such a record exists. Yet it is also true that historical archaeology, and especially the historical archaeology of the "barbarian" frontiers, and especially those of recent centuries, is rarely pursued in China. Among some archaeologists there is even a harmful misunderstanding that recent history is only for the historians, not for archaeology. But in fact it is very much possible that careful excavations of the remains of the past at these frontiers could reveal a great many things that cannot be ascertained even by reading between the lines in received texts.



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