

poverty; they have kindness and sympathy for all people in the world, no matter how much wealthier they may be. (Ma, p. 693)

Where are they? They are not in Lhasa, not in the villages and towns that have been exposed to modernity. They are certainly not in the Chinese interior. They are in the places where light is still provided by a butter lamp and a cooking pot is still made with tools used in the Neolithic Age. They are in Zanyu or Zantang, in the Xuerong valley or other similar places in rural Tibet. To the increasingly commercialized and secular Chinese who live in modern cities, the Jahriyas and the Tibetans provide a mirror through which they can look into their own souls, even if it is for a fleeting moment.

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Un-Othering Minorities in Chinese History

Brian R. Dott, Whitman College

For this paper I explore the ways in which I integrate minorities into my courses on Chinese History. For me this is a work in progress, and I am always searching for additional opportunities in which to move toward "un-othering" minorities.

I accomplish the integration of minorities into my courses with varying degrees of success. The two introductory-level courses I teach, Early and Modern East Asian History (divided at 1600) include the study of China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Given the inherent survey nature of these courses, I have much less opportunity to integrate the study of minorities into the curriculum than in my upper level courses, Early China and Modern China. At the other extreme, I have also taught a senior-level seminar on ethnicity and race in Qing China. In addition, I incorporate discussions of gender issues in all of my classes and I am pleased that these efforts occasionally dovetail nicely with the discussions about minority groups. In this paper I will concentrate on how minorities are treated in my survey courses. While I include much social and cultural history in all of my courses, for the purpose of this talk, I will be concentrating on political history. Since much of the "othering" of minorities throughout Chinese history resulted from the military and political subjugation of those groups, it follows that one way to pursue an "un-othering" of minorities is to demonstrate that at various times, they too had military and political clout.

For all of my courses, I begin with discussions of what is/was "China"? As we

all know, the boundaries of what is referred to as "China" were constantly in flux. Here we can see an example of how current reality impacts upon how we think about history. Traditionally, most courses on China have focused on the core area within the current borders of the People's Republic of China (the area dominated by the ethnic group labeled "Han"). Thus, the histories of Tibet, Mongolia, Xinjiang or Manchuria are usually only touched upon when those areas were under the political control of a government centered within "Inner China" or "China Proper." In this context I show the students a series of maps demarcating the boundaries of several of the dynasties of China, demonstrating the difficulty of defining a particular physical space as "China" throughout history. In addition, I also ask the students to regularly question how much control the center really had at the edges of its empire. I like to use the term "empire" since it implies the conquering of one group by another. So, along those lines, I also ask them to keep observing the differences among people living within the borders.

Some of the difficulties that we encounter when trying to integrate minorities into courses on Chinese history derive from the historical realities of the marginalization of minorities in the People's Republic of China as well as the lasting influences of Han nationalism. Han

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nationalism, which emerged in China in the late 19th century has, until quite recently, dominated interpretations of Chinese history that prioritize the importance of Han dominated dynasties and endorse the "sinicization" hypothesis for non-Han dynasties. The "sinicization" hypothesis builds upon the assumption that non-Han peoples wanted to rule China because they were attracted to China by a superior Han culture. In addition, according to this theory, the success or longevity of a particular non-Han dynasty was directly related to how sinicized it became.

I introduce this model as a practical lesson in historiography, getting the students to think about how modern views can have an impact upon the interpretation of the past. I begin the late Neolithic period

by debunking the theory that Chinese civilization emerged solely in the Yellow River valley. I first explain the older theory in which Han civilization was equated with Chinese civilization. In this traditional model, Chinese civilization was seen to have begun in what was perceived to be the heartland of the Han. Here recent archeological discoveries such as jade carving technology well North of the Yellow River and the bronze technology of the Sanxingdui culture centered in Sichuan are compelling examples that demonstrate to the students that there were multiple centers with enough advanced technology, organization and hierarchy to develop jade and bronze industries.

Another stereotype that I try to lay to rest early on in the courses is the assumption that the “Han Chinese” were homogeneous. Here, distinctions in class, gender, and region are stressed. When discussing regional differences,

I begin by mentioning major contrasts in climate and geography. For example, I explain major differences in social structure between growing wheat in the dry north, versus growing rice in wet paddies in the south. In addition, I have the students read about G. William Skinner’s model of macro-regions. While Skinner developed his model examining the modern period, many of the elements he discusses were also relevant to earlier periods.¹ Another example I like to use for demonstrating regional difference within the “Han Chinese” population is the practice of secondary burial, common in parts of Southern China. Most Northern Chinese are horrified by this practice. By deconstructing the monolithic nature of Han culture, the “otherness” associated with minorities begins to resemble difference within Han culture, and can be put into an appropriate perspective.

One of the characteristics of Chinese culture that is often held up as proof of the superiority of that culture over neighboring groups was the invention and use of written language. While many have argued that a common written language helped to hold China together, it is important to point out to students that the spoken language or dialect varied considerably from region to region, even to the extent that many of the

variants were and still are mutually unintelligible. I use this as another example to demonstrate regional difference. Korean, Vietnamese and Japanese peoples also used Chinese characters for centuries, but we do not treat them as belonging to a single ethnic group. Therefore, while we would not expect to find the same degree of difference between the Han living in southern China and the Han living in northern China as we would between the

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Han and Japanese peoples, there are nonetheless differences worth exploring. In terms of written languages, I explain that the arrival of Buddhism in China awoke many to the realization that other highly advanced, and literate cultures existed. I also note that many groups that are now part of China developed their own writing systems, including the Tibetans, Uighurs, Mongols, Manchus, and Naxi, for example.

Below, I will give some more specific examples where I use information about minorities to enhance the study of Chinese history during various time periods.

Neolithic: As I already mentioned, in this section I emphasize multiple centers of development (especially the Sanxingdui culture).

Pre-unification: The small size of the areas controlled by early dynasties, particularly the Shang and Zhou, demonstrates that much of what we now consider to be China was controlled by non-Han groups from the very beginning.

Early Empire: Both the Qin and Han states were threatened militarily by the Xiongnu. The Xiongnu were a loose affiliation of nomadic tribes who moved through the territories just north of the Qin and Han states. The Xiongnu had quick striking cavalry which they used very effectively to raid the settled, agrarian

Chinese communities. Qin and Han relations with the Xiongnu created precedents for how other Chinese states would deal with threats from later nomadic groups such as the Mongols. The Xiongnu used the threat of continued attack to gain lucrative tribute agreements as well as promises to send Han princesses to marry Xiongnu leaders. Such intermarriage is a good example of the difficulty in relying upon simplistic ethnic categorization, a theme I stress throughout my courses.

I believe it is important to emphasize the fact that the famous Silk Road, in addition to acting as a conduit for dispersing silk as far as the Roman Empire, also brought many things into China, including glass, many of the popular so-called “Chinese” musical instruments, and acrobatics. Particularly in the early survey course, where I emphasize contacts between the different cultures in East Asia, I introduce the Kingdom of Nam Viet (~250 BCE – 111 BCE) which consisted of the northern part of modern-day Vietnam, and most of the modern provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi. The culture of this kingdom was an amalgamation of southern Han and Vietnamese.

Period of Disunity: There are two main themes relating to minorities that I stress for this period. The first is the spread of Buddhism. While Buddhism first arrived in China in the first century CE, it did not become widely popular until after the collapse of the Han dynasty. As I mentioned earlier, the arrival of a religion with complex texts written in a rich language other than Chinese brought some Chinese to the realization that their culture was not the only one to have a writing system and a rich history and culture. In addition, the introduction of Buddhism into China could not have occurred without the intermediary of many non-Han peoples living along the Silk Road between China and India, many of whom acted as the first translators of Buddhist texts into Chinese. Thus, Buddhism, which in subsequent periods is seen as a quintessential characteristic of the Chinese, was a foreign religion introduced into China by peoples who were the predecessors of minority groups later living in China.

The second theme that I address is the fact that many of the short-lived regimes during this period, especially those in the north, were ruled by non-Han groups. Within this context it is important to emphasize that, while many of these groups

adopted some aspects of Chinese culture, the Han were equally influenced by these cultures. Interestingly, tying these two points together, many of the non-Chinese rulers in the north were avid sponsors of Buddhism, precisely because it was not Chinese and, as Valerie Hansen notes, it “offered the non-Chinese rulers an alternative to Confucianism, which empowered literate Chinese officials.”²

Sui-Tang: Ruling families of both of these dynastic houses were ethnically a mix of Han and various Turkic groups to the north. Thus, the Tang, as seen by many as one of the heights of Han culture, was founded by a general who was only partially Han. Another important characteristic of the Tang dynasty was the cosmopolitan nature of the capital. Estimates put the number of non-Han living in the capital at one-third of the population. In addition to Daoist and Buddhist temples, the capital also contained Zoroastrian, Manichaeic and Nestorian Christian temples or churches.

The Korean kingdom of Koguryō provides an example similar to that of Nam Viet, mentioned earlier. The state of Koguryō consisted of the northern part of the Korean peninsula and much of what is now considered to be Manchuria. This state militarily repulsed both Sui and Tang troops before falling to an alliance of the Tang and another Korean state, the Silla. Koguryō is another interesting example of how contemporary politics and borders impact historiography. China has recently requested UNESCO World Heritage Site status for several Koguryō sites in Manchuria, claiming that they represent Chinese culture, which of course has outraged the Koreans who see Koguryō as Korean.

In 763, during a period of unrest and political schism under the Tang Dynasty, Tibetan troops entered the capital and looted it for two weeks before withdrawing. Tibetan troops continued to attack the Tang capital every autumn for the next 20 years. Thus, by the 8th century Tibet had become China’s most powerful neighbor. Its troops continued to plague China until the 9th century when it fell into disunity.³

Song Period: Throughout the period of the Northern and Southern Song significant territories in the north and west were ruled by non-Han dynasties: the Liao, Xi Xia and Jin. While I cover all of these regimes and cultures in the upper-level

course, for the survey I concentrate on the Jurchen who ruled the Jin, because they were the ones who conquered roughly half of the Song territory in 1126.

Mongols: For both of the pre-1600 courses I spend a significant amount of time studying the Mongols. I begin with legends surrounding the birth and early life of Chinggis Khan, examine the formation of the trans-continental empire and continue with the Mongols’ on-going threats during the Ming and the influences of Mongol rule on Zhu Yuanzhang and his successors. I also link the Mongols back to the Xiongnu. The unit on the Mongols is also a good example of the merging of the teaching of gender and minorities. The most poignant example here is footbinding. Mongol women did not practice footbinding. Indeed, the Mongols viewed this Han practice as barbaric, while the Han saw the practice as a concrete example of their cultural superiority.

Manchus: The Qing period is probably the one where I am most successful at integrating minorities. The Manchus made up only about 2% of the population of the empire they ruled over. By the 18th century they came to see themselves as the rulers of the so-called Five Peoples: Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans, Han Chinese and Uighurs. In both of the modern courses I explore all four of these minorities as well as the influences and relationships between the Manchus and the Han. In addition, we also study further minority groups including the Hui (Moslems), Miao and Hakka. I examine the marginalized Hakka in the context of the Taiping civil war, which allows for a fascinating and complex analysis of ethnic interactions. For the later 19th century I spend a fair amount of time examining the creation of Han nationalism and the implications that this had for minority groups. For the upper-level course, I have the students read a series of articles arguing pro and con positions for the sinicization hypothesis.⁴

Twentieth-Century: The governments of both the Republic and the People’s Republic saw themselves as the heirs of the territory ruled by the Qing, and by default rulers over the same Five Peoples, with the major difference that the rulers were now majority Han. Both regimes marginalized and sometimes antagonized minorities. For the PRC we discuss the establishment of the so-called

“autonomous zones,” comparing this policy to the loose rule which the Manchus utilized in Outer China. For the upper-level class, I assign an essay by Louisa Schein on internal Orientalism, and in both classes, I refer to her example of the use of minority images on PRC currency.⁵ One further policy I explore is the impact of not applying the one-child family planning policy to minority families.

This rather brief outline gives a general idea as to how I integrate the study of minorities into my teaching, and I welcome input about ways to improve upon these attempts. Two recent textbooks I use make the incorporation of minorities into histories of China much easier for the upper-level courses:

Hansen, Valery. *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

Schoppa, R. Keith. *Revolution and Its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002).

Endnotes

¹For a good overview of the characteristics of Skinner’s macro-regions see R. Keith Schoppa, *Revolution and Its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 14-23.

²Valery Hansen, *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 159.

³Hansen, 227.

⁴I use a series of three articles, read in chronological order: Ho Ping-ti, “The Significance of the Ch’ing Period in Chinese History,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 26.2 (Feb. 1967): 189-195. Evelyn S. Rawski, “Presidential Address: Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing in Chinese History” *Journal of Asian Studies* 55.4 (Nov. 1996): 829-850. Ho Ping-Ti, “In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski’s ‘Reenvisioning the Qing,’” *Journal of Asian Studies* 57.1 (Feb. 1998): 123-155.

⁵Louisa Schein, “Gender and Internal Orientalism in China,” *Modern China* 23.1 (Jan. 1997): 69-98. Also reprinted in Susan Brownell and Jeffery Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities / Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 385-411.