

- ¹⁻ The passage from tribal society to early civilization, being one of the problems of most important concern to anthropology, witnessed a decline in interest after the Second World War. Nevertheless, Marshall Sahlins, Pierre Clastres and Claude Lévi-Strauss still made great efforts in the investigation of the genesis of politics and civilization. See for example Sahlins, 2008; Clastres, 1987; Lévi-Strauss, 1987. The series of discussions around the *New Qing History* in the past few years is related to this question, especially concerning the assessment of the nature of the Qing state as well as the formation of the modern borders of China.

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The Double Rupture. Central Themes of Historical Anthropology in Contemporary China

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Anthropology, originally the study of societies “without history,” has nonetheless shown from the start a great curiosity towards history, and had the ambition to retrace the origin of history. One of the reasons why anthropologists often devote themselves to the study of tribal societies is that these societies are considered as the concrete expressions of the natural state of humanity and the beginning of civilization. Scholars are haunted by questions such as “What happened exactly when a non-historic tribal society became a historic society?” or “How were the common shape of civilization and the different characters of individual civilizations determined by those founding events?”¹ Another theme in which anthropologists are interested is the beginning of modernity. What happened during the transformation of a “traditional” society into a “modern” one?

Although Chinese scholars have started working (again) on what they call “historical anthropology,” their problematic is rather linked with the theme of modernity. In fact, the past 30 years have witnessed an upsurge of interest in historical anthropology in China, which has led researchers to address a great diversity of topics. The majority of scholarly work, however, is still concentrated on two ruptures: that between a state based on a civilizational tradition and a state that founds its legitimacy on modern Western political discourse, as well as the rupture between a state that embraces modernity and a society that has not yet entered modernity. As I will point out later, even the research on ancient history (*shanggushi* 上古史) was mainly meant to elucidate the ruptures of modern history. While the history of the West is often considered as a pattern of internally consistent development, Chinese historical anthropologists feel entrapped by the lack of internal consistency in the modern history of China. Historical anthropologists in China, in a need to assuage the anxiety created by this double rupture, continuously seek for an intellectual project that might close this break. This article attempts to analyze both the socio-cultural and intellectual contexts of historical anthropology in contemporary China, by reviewing the process by which its fundamental problematics took shape. I will summarize key studies on modern and ancient history, and then introduce reflections on the development of this sub-discipline of anthropology.

State, Society and Market: The Anthropology of Modern History

The anthropological perspective on the modern history of China has been forged by scholars of the Yenching school 燕京学派. A quintessential example is the research on the China “from the Soil” (*xiangtu Zhongguo* 乡土中国) of Fei Xiaotong 费孝通 (1910-2005), which originated from a comparison with the economic history of the West. The 30 years that followed the restoration of anthropology in China are marked by problematics that remain directly or indirectly related to the thesis of Fei. However, Republican-period anthropology, marked by figures such as Wu Wenzao 吴文藻 (1901-1985), Fei Xiaotong, Li Anzhai (or Li An-che) 李安宅 (1900-1985) and Tian Rukang 田汝康 (1916-2006), concentrated on a critical stance over the continuation of the traditional society and hoped that an intellectual enlightenment and an adjustment of policies might impregnate it with more modernity. Chinese anthropologists in the post-Mao China, on the other hand, conceded more poetry and rationalism to the traditional society, and began to worry about a social anomie caused by its transformation and collapse under the impact of modernity.² It is difficult to say whether this is the Chinese instance of a global pattern of sentimentalism and cultural revival or the expression of anxiety and disillusionment towards a strong, new state. Nevertheless, the rediscovery of “society” and a reappraisal of local social structures have oriented historical anthropology towards cultural conservatism, making it quite different from that of Fei Xiaotong’s old Soils studies, a difference that primarily lies in the evaluation of the relationship between local society and intellectuals.

Maurice Freedman, a British anthropologist, was the first scholar to raise these questions. Starting from Wittfogelian explorations on clan familism of South China, he noticed that clans in Southeast China described by Lin Yaohua 林耀华 (1910-2000) differ greatly from the Jiangcun village 江村 studied by Fei Xiaotong in the social disintegration of their rural life by global trade (Freedman, 1965). Unlike in the Jiangnan 江南 (lower Yangtze) region, Southeastern clans during modern history, despite their social decay, still possessed a visible internal integrity. This is attributed by Freedman to the productive rice cultivation and the mature gentry in Guangdong 广东 and Fujian 福建. Anthropologists and historians working today in Fujian and Guangdong derived a great inspiration from the clear commonalities between Freedman’s point of view and Fu Yiling 傅衣凌’s (1911-1988) treatment of the economic history of Southeastern China.

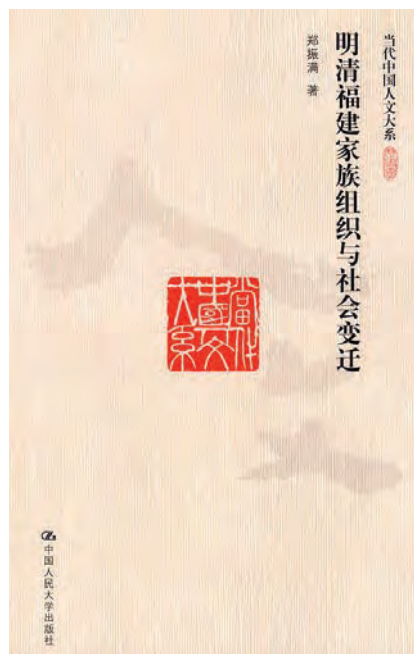


Fig. 1 - Zheng Zhenman, 2009, *Lineage Organization and Social Changes in Ming and Qing Fujian*

² In his later years, Fei Xiaotong turned to the concept of *culture* of American cultural anthropology, and asked the question of how cultural consciousness can be achieved in a globalized era. This should not be considered as a turn to cultural conservatism, though, as Fei’s vision of the future is one of mutual understanding and communication of cultures, rather than the revived Warring States of the 20th century (Fei Xiaotong, 2003).

Zheng Zhenman 郑振满 is a representative figure of the historical anthropology of Southeast China centered in the University of Xiamen 厦门大学. Under Fu Yiling's direction, Zheng Zhenman worked on clans and popular religion in Northern Fujian, Southern Fujian and Taiwan, starting from the 1980s. The Tang-Song transformation in medieval China, according to Zheng Zhenman (2009a), brought about a metamorphosis to the local social organization of Southeastern China. With the disintegration of the *menfa* 门阀 system of the quasi-noble lineages (*shijia dazhu* 世家大族), the literati-gentry (*shidafu* 士大夫) realized that the rapidly increasing social mobility brought about an accelerated decrease of the power of the state to organize society. They wished to recreate social order by, contrary to the Confucian injunction, “bringing the rites to the common people” (*lixia shuren* 礼下庶人), with the creation of systems like *jiali* 家礼 (clan-internal rites) and *xiangyue* 乡约 (community conventions). This project of the literati-gentry, however, was still based on preexisting hierarchical structures, ill-adapted to the high mobility of the civil society. The civil society, while borrowing the ideas originating from the literati-gentry, adopted their own adjustments, which challenged orthodox rites. Most importantly, the difference between *dazong* 大宗 (main branch) and *xiaozong* 小宗 (subsidiary branch) was gradually abolished, while the ritual privilege of the *dizhangzi* 嫡长子 (eldest son of the main wife) was abandoned, in a process that Zheng Zhenman terms “the popularization (*shuminhua* 庶民化) of the clan system” (*ibid.* : 172). Starting from the early Ming period (14th-15th centuries), local budget was tightened by the central government, a tendency that resulted in the complete inability of the Qing-period (17th-19th centuries) local government to manage the complexity of local public affairs. This tendency, compounded by the *yitiaobianfa* 一条鞭法 (mid-16th century) reforms that uniformized local taxation, gave a major power to clans in the management of local affairs. Clans and temples of the popular religion became a public space where a “ritualized” local administration took place, and triggered a development of the capabilities and latitude of local self-government unprecedented in China (Zheng Zhenman, 2009b: 245). Zheng Zhenman follows Fu Yiling in considering clan organizations in Chinese civil society neither as a continuation of primitive villages, nor as a result of a local imitation of the literati-gentry and the state, but as the result of a power devolution of the Song-Ming state, that is to say, a chimera of local historical development, literati-gentry ritual ideology and state political authority. Hence, the autonomy of local society depends on the internal presence of the state in the society.

Zheng Zhenman pointed out that local clans in traditional China developed through three stages: heritage clans, dependence clans and contract clans. Zheng Zhenman considers heritage clans as the natural state of clans, while the latter two are considered as deformed versions of heritage clans owing their existence to an internal diversification, linked with both the civil service examination system and the development of trade. On a larger scale than the clans, there also existed local systems of popular temples, which developed from the *lishu* 里社 system of the Early Ming period. Under a societal morphology characterized by ritual organization and alliances, popular religion became a dominant force in local politics, morality and economy (*op.cit.*). Zheng Zhenman follows Fu Yiling and

departs in three important ways from the perspective of Freedman. The first difference concerns the dating of the origins of clans. Unlike Freedman, who considers clans as originating from the massive migration of Han Chinese in these areas, Zheng Zhenman considers them as a result of collusion between the state, the literati-gentry and the regional society resulting from the increasing openness and mobility of a maritime society. Secondly, clans owed their continuous survival, not to the economic advantages of rice cultivation, but to marketization and to increased social mobility. Thirdly, the development of clans and popular cults represents an internalization of the state in the society, not a confrontation with the state. The three revisions had a great influence on the historical anthropology of this area. In Zheng Zhenman's point of view, clan organizations in Southeastern China constitute the most successful Chinese pattern of adaptation and response to the challenges of the modern global trade system.



Fig. 2 - Center for Historical Anthropology, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou

Not far from Xiamen University, the Center of historical anthropology of Sun Yat-sen University 中山大学, founded in March 2001, is also at the forefront of the research in historical anthropology in China. Major scholars belonging to this institution had already taken notice of the paradigm of historical anthropology in the early 1990s. In 1992, Chen Chunsheng 陈春声 published 市场机制与社会变迁: 18世纪广东米价分析 (*Market Mechanisms and Social Transformation: Rice Prices in 18th Century Guangdong*), a book that showed the way for anthropological research in South China. With a methodology grounded in econometrics, Chen Chunsheng analyzed the sociological reasons for the fluctuation of rice prices in Guangdong in the 18th century, and concluded that it did not result from a natural market fluctuation, but from a back-and-forth interaction between preexisting political and societal structures that sustained the tributary economy in the sense of Eric Wolf (1982: chapter 3) and a gradually developing market economy. Based on the concept of “involution,” Chen Chunsheng emphasized that the development of the market economy stayed well inside the limits of societal absorption and could not lead to a real emergence of capitalism in terms of mental structure and social mechanisms (Chen Chunsheng, 2010: 266-268). This position, one that recognizes the great influence of state tax policies from the Mid-Ming period on and also emphasizes the cultural prestige of the literati-gentry in the local society, is upheld by Chen Chunsheng and Liu Zhiwei 刘志伟. According to their analysis, while market and the development of the worldwide trade system cannot be ignored, they do not represent a challenge to preexisting political and societal structures. In an earlier work, Liu Zhiwei discussed the process by which state taxation system in the Mid-to-Late Ming period was implemented in Guangdong. This work emphasizes both governance rationalization through state-directed adjustment in land and population control and the regional society's responses to these state policy changes. The conflicts that took place are considered as resulting from a mismatch between the idealized and unbalanced nature of the state policies and the particularities of the Guangdong society (Liu Zhiwei, 1997: 9). The rationalizing tendencies of Ming and Qing tax policies had a considerable influence on the organization of Guangdong society, but were not commensurable with the other rationalization, that caused by the international market. Stability was finally achieved in the Mid-Qing period, when state and society had achieved a reciprocal adaptation. In a 2010 article entitled 贡赋、市场与物质生活: 试论十八世纪美洲白银输入与中国社会变迁之关系 (“Tributes, Market and Material Life: The Relationship between the Import of American Silver in the 18th Century and the Transformation of Chinese Society”), Chen Chunsheng and Liu Zhiwei reiterated this point of view: the large-scale inflow of American and European silver was quickly absorbed into an extensive tributary system, and did not, as was the case for Latin Europe, encourage an economic and social transformation.

Apart from economic history, Liu Zhiwei also paid attention to the history of the regional society in Guangdong. Chen Chunsheng and Liu Zhiwei emphasized the cultural diversity of the local society, which resisted a thorough transformation

into a standardized socio-cultural morphology through state political power and the cultural and prestige authority of the literati-gentry. Its regionalism and cultural diversity were in opposition to late Imperial politics and culture (Faure and Liu Zhiwei, 2008).

Wang Mingming 王铭铭 began to work on the historical anthropology of Southeast China in the late 1990s, and paid great attention to the position, methodology and discipline of historical anthropology. 逝去的繁荣：一座老城的历史人类学考察 (*Past Glories: The Historical Anthropology of an Old City*, 1999) still figures among the most important works of city history in Chinese anthropology. In this work, based on Anthony Giddens' theory of the state, he divided the history of Quanzhou 泉州 into four periods: the migration and the formation of the economic zone of Quanzhou, a period that ended in the 10th century; the traditional empire, which ended in the foundation of the Ming dynasty; the absolutist state, a period that covers the Ming-Qing period; finally, the nation-state, from the late 19th century to the present day. The central concern of this book is as follows. In the period of the traditional empire, thanks to a relatively relaxed political system and ideological control, Quanzhou witnessed exceptional development in maritime trade and enjoyed a diverse culture. After the beginning of the Ming dynasty, due to state suspicion on the maritime trade and the establishment of Neo-Confucianism as the dominant state ideology, the maritime trade in Quanzhou lost its momentum. Simultaneously, the originally rich cultural tapestry gradually broke down into an opposition of orthodox Neo-Confucianism and folk religious practices. In a process that began with the building of the modern nation-state in the 19th century, Quanzhou started being the field of toing and froing between a hierarchical and an egalitarian nationalism. Wang Mingming hopes on the one hand to build on theories of Prasenjit Duara and liberate the multiple contexts of regional history from the grand narrative about nation-state (Wang Mingming, 1999: 402), and, on the other hand, to engage with Wallerstein's theory of modern world-system. Even though Quanzhou became part of the global trade network, the changes of its social morphology and the rise and fall of its trade were mostly influenced by local changes in ideology rather than resulting from the impact of a worldwide trade system centered on Western Europe. According to Wallerstein and Wolf, before the rise of the modern world trade system, there were a number of large-scale maritime trade networks, which, however, all existed as empires and exchanged mainly luxury goods. The mechanism of these trade networks is different in essence from the modern world-systems based on market and commodities. The inclusion of China into the Wallersteinian world-system was no earlier than the Opium War (1840). In the book 溪村家族 (*Family of a Creek Village*), Wang Mingming discovered that, after the end of the pre-modern period, the state's pursuit of integration and order could no longer absorb the internal complexity and diversity of the rural society. The power network of the modern state penetrated every corner of the village culture, but was not able to achieve a thorough reform. Clans in the Creek Village not only preserved their own ritual institutions during their interactions with the state, but also retained their functions of social, political and economic organization, and hence obtained a position of historical subjectivity. The study of community history is only possible with the

prerequisite of understanding this subjective, emic view of history (Wang Mingming, 2004: 14).

Based on the studies of rural Fujian of Zheng Zhenman, especially the process of *tiliu* 提留, which communized clan land, Liu Yonghua 刘永华 wrote an article entitled 明末至民国华南地区的族田与乡村社会: 以闽西四保为中心 (“Clan Land and Rural Society from the Mid-Ming to the Republican Period: A study of Sibao in Western Fujian”, 2005), in which he described the process through which, as clans developed, communities differentiated into land owners and tenant farmers. In his studies of folk religious practices, he found that *lisheng* 礼生 (expert of rite), a sharply Confucian social role, had endorsed a religious role ever since Antiquity, and concluded that in this respect, Confucianism (*rujia* 儒家), generally understood as an intellectual tradition, had aspects of Confucianism-as-a-religion (*rujiao* 儒教) in its ritual practice. In two articles entitled 明清时期的神乐观与王朝礼仪: 道教与王朝礼仪互动的一个侧面 (“The View on Sacred Music in the Ming-Qing period and Dynastic Rituality: The Interaction between Taoism and Dynastic Rituals,” 2008) and 道教传统、士大夫文化与地方社会: 宋明以来闽西四保邹公崇拜研究 (“Taoist Tradition, Gentry Culture and Local Society: A Study of the Cult of Zougong in Sibao in Western Fujian from the Song-Ming period,” 2007), Liu Yonghua emphasized the historical continuity of the *lisheng* tradition from the *chunguan* 春官 in the Rites of Zhou 周礼 and explained the victory of the *lisheng* class and the Confucian rituals over hitherto dominant Taoist rituals with detailed court and social material. Especially in the local society, there was a complex process of text superposition between Confucianism and Taoism. In an article entitled 小农家庭、土地开发与国际茶市 (1883-1901)——晚清徽州婺源成家的个案分析 (“Xiaonong Small Peasant Families, Land Development and the International Tea Market (1838-1901): an Analysis of the Cheng Family in Wuyuan in Late Qing Huizhou,” 2015), Liu Yonghua reassessed the relationship between the world trade system and the functioning of the local economy. He concluded that the international market, rather than causing a collapse of the smallholder (*xiaonong* 小农) economy, actually enabled peasants to increase their income. In the same time, some degree of involution maintained a certain distance between the modern peasant and the international market.

Jing Jun 景军, also inspired by the research on Southeastern clans by Freedman and his followers, centered his research on the Northwestern province of Gansu. In the book *The Temple of Memories*, he described how ancestor worship declined and was rebuilt in the Kong 孔 clan in Dachuan 大川, Gansu 甘肃. He studied the form and political importance of local clan memory, which is not only outside official memory, but often contrasts with it. Ancestor worship in the Kong clan is an interesting phenomenon, linked to both the state canon and local clan ritualism. The Kong clan of Dachuan, being a branch far away from the original Qufu 曲阜, the hometown of Confucius, had a turbulent history. The cult of Confucius and the compilation of the *jiapu* 家谱 (clan genealogy) have a long history, which, along with the traditional prestige of Confucius, brought honor to the Kong clan of Dachuan. In the 20th century, especially after the establishment of the Communist state, political campaigns and economic construction brought much suffering to

the Kong clan, which, according to Jing Jun, fell into three categories. First, there was personal, physical affliction during the Land Reform, Cultural Revolution and the migration due to the building of the Yanguoxia 盐锅峡 reservoir. Second, there was the destruction of preexisting community structure. Third, the mental world of people belonging to the Kong clan was devastated. In 1984, the worship of Confucius started to be restored. The turning-point was the replacement of the old party secretary by a new party cadre in 1985, followed by the humiliating death of the former. After this, the traditional clan genealogy, once hidden in a cellar, was brought back into daylight. A renewal of efforts followed in the compilation of family genealogy. Jing Jun himself brought a part of clan genealogy from America to Dachuan, which also contributed to the project. Restoring clan genealogy led to a renewal of clan identity and a sense of belonging to the clan. This was followed by the large-scale reconstruction of Confucian temples in Dachuan and Xiaochuan 小川. This reconstruction is analyzed by Jing Jun as a condensed demonstration of social memory: in the modern history filled with misery, the Kong family and the Confucian temples shared the same fate of suffering. Jing Jun described a *miaohui* 庙会 (temple event) of Xiaochuan temple in detail. The newly rebuilt temple had to avoid political risks associated with the memory of decades of suffering, and borrow the worship model of the Confucius' Temple in Qufu, because the latter enjoyed a better official recognition. Due to Qufu influences, the newly built Hall of Great Accomplishment (*dachengdian* 大成殿) became not only a clan-internal ritual space, but also a space of public worship, where members of other clans can also participate in the services in honor of Confucius. The organizers of the *miaohui* needed to carefully shelter their rituals from the chaotic witchcraft of local year-cycle rituals, in order to maintain their solemnity. Cultural invention and social memory enabled the revival of a local religious and ritual system. Jing Jun concluded that the social memory of local clans in China, despite being repressed by state ideologies, can still express their own power and claims in a continuous social reproduction.

Historical anthropology on the modern history of China is mostly reducible to the research on the relationship between state and society. The works surveyed in this section demonstrate the inadequacy of such a reduction. Researchers already noticed the importance of *shidafu* 士大夫 (literati-gentry), *shishen* 士绅 (local gentry) and the worldwide trade system to understand the process of modern history. Zhang Xiaojun 张小军 considers that *lixia shuren* 礼下庶人, "bringing the rites to the common people," a dynamic that started from the Southern Song dynasty, directly led to *dishi gongzhi* 帝士共治, the joint rule of Emperor and the literati-gentry, which liberated the literati-gentry from what Fei Xiaotong calls a double dependence to state and society, and made it the third historical subject distinct from the other two (Zhang Xiaojun, 2012). Of course, the three historical subjects have different effects and status in the modern history. Zhang Xiaojun (2004) made a sharp criticism of the excessive expansion of the state's symbolic property. In my analysis of the history of the Jinci 晋祠 temple (Zhang Yahui, 2014), I concluded that Confucian intellectuals and the peasant society are intrinsically feudal, which contrasts with the requirement of unity of the Imperial power. On the other hand, both the Imperial power and the peasant society regard

agricultural fertility as a symbol of morality, which contrasts with the rationalizing tendencies of the literati-gentry. What is at stake here is not the “joint rule of Emperor and the literati-gentry” analyzed by Zhang Xiaojun (*op.cit.*), but a structural superposition between the feudal and imperial periods of Chinese history.

Besides, the crucial point of the series of research is the relationship between an open market brought by the worldwide trade system and a land-based agricultural economy. A satisfactory answer to this question does not only involve a comprehension of the economic historical process of the modern period, but also an evaluation of the nature of rural society. On this point, the debate is still open. I and Liu Yonghua consider clans in Northern Fujian as a new type of social morphology formed in the context of post-Ming high monetary and population mobility and using a religious and ritual system provided by the state and the literati-gentry. Chen Chunsheng and Liu Zhiwei, on the other hand, tend to regard Guangdong clans as regional communities formed under high-volume migration from the Song dynasty on and norm-making of the state and the literati-gentry. Jing Jun and Wang Mingming put a greater emphasis on how regional society, as a *Gemeinschaft*, was able to keep its own integrity despite constant interference from state and market. Finally, we have more radical visions, such as that of Zhang Peiguo 张佩国, who considers rural Jiangnan region as communities bonded by economic interest and maintained by sociological borders such as village borders and village identities (Zhang Peiguo, 2002).

Witchcraft, Kingship and Border: at the Origins of Civilization

In comparison with those scholars who tend to find links between modern junctures and medieval period or antiquity, some others go even further: they attempt to clarify the origins of Chinese civilization. In fact, anthropologists and historians since the 1980s have converged on the position that, although the current Chinese society is indubitably a result of the course of modern history, a thorough comprehension of the ancient civilization is indispensable to understand and evaluate field data.

In the 1980s, Zhang Guangzhi 张光直 (or Chang Kwang-chih, 1931-2001), basing on a comparison between Shang's 商 (c. 1600 B.C.-c. 1046 B.C.) archeological material and Mircea Eliade's work on Shamanism, gave for the first time an anthropological response to the concept of oriental despotism, repeatedly discussed by Karl Marx, Max Weber and Karl Wittfogel. He analyzed the *Guoyu* 国语 story of *juedi tiantong* 绝地天通, breaking the communication between Earth and Heaven, as a case in which political power is based on controlling the means of communication between gods and men, and in which the king himself is the chief of sorcerers. He then turned his attention to various animal motifs on Shang dynasty artifacts. Once the possibilities of totemic symbolism or a purely decorative function are excluded, he explained the animals as shamans' animal companions in their journey to heaven. He took the example of *Nišan Šaman*, an important text in shamanic studies, to demonstrate that the trance voyage of shamans is often accompanied by animals. Further, he noticed that the taotie motif is always paired, which recalls the *zhaomu* 昭穆 system of Shang kingship itself and the duality of Shang worldview discovered by Claude Lévi-Strauss:

“When sorcerers go back and forth between two worlds on behalf of the royal house, they must devote attention to both the zhao and the mu groups. Hence, animal assistants in rituals are naturally paired.” (Zhang Guangzhi, 1983: 65)

To Zhang Guangzhi, phenomena ranging from clan symbols on clay artefacts to early Chinese writing such as Oracle Bone Script and Zhou-period Bronze Script are all symbols that give the power to communicate with ancestors. The possession of knowledge itself is a crucial tool in the communication between heaven and earth, between gods and men, and between past and future. The first possessors of knowledge were sorcerers in the service of the king. Through these kinds of evidence, Zhang Guangzhi considers ancient civilization in China as deriving from a concentration of knowledge and art, and not, as Wittfogel would imply, from water management technology. What led to the concentration of political power and consequently wealth is the royal monopoly of religious techniques of communication with heaven. Influenced by post-1960s American cultural anthropology, Zhang Guangzhi considers shamanistic witchcraft that leads to heaven as the cultural origin of Chinese civilization. Independent of the question of the correctness of this point of view, Zhang Guangzhi’s genealogy, tinged with cultural anthropology, eased the narrow space that China caught itself in between the Marxian and Wittfogelian conceptions of oriental despotism.

Wang Mingming is similarly inspired by American cultural anthropology. An important promoter of the translation of Marshall Sahlins’ work in cultural anthropology, he devoted much effort to seeking a Chinese world schema that corresponds to the Hawaiian myth of Lono, and found it in the notion of *Tianxia* 天下 (All-under-the-heaven), which took shape in the Shang period and crystallized in the Han period (202 B.C.-220 A.D.) – in order to respond to the desacralized, objectivized examination of the non-Western world inherent in Wallerstein’s analysis of the modern world-system. Wang Mingming divides the intellectual history of *Tianxia* between the Ancient period of Shang-Zhou and the Imperial period. In the first period, following Marcel Granet, Su Bingqi 苏秉琦 (1909-1997) and Qian Mu 钱穆 (1895-1990), he considers China as a system of a multitude of lords (*duozhuzhi* 多主制). The central criteria between the Chinese and the Barbarian were rituals of local sacred mountains and rivers, later made into a court-centered system. The *wufu* 五服 system, which radiated from the royal domain, became a fixed, two-dimensional world-schema. The social group of *shi* 士, ancestral to later literati-gentry and evolved from Zhou 周 (c. 1046 B.C.-256 B.C.) nobility, was not only the model of a civilized lifestyle and the carrier of civilization, but also controlled politics, religion and law (Wang Mingming, 2005: 241). The relationship between the king and the *shi* group constitutes a radiance of civilization from center to periphery, and also the central content of a religious and moral narrative. After a lively period of Machiavellian pragmatism, China entered the second period of *Tianxia*, when the system of multitude of lords was replaced by centralized political and religious institutions. *Fengshan* 封禅, a ritual system exclusive to imperial power, had thoroughly dominated and replaced more local forms of geographical worship characteristic of alliance politics. Shi, a highly autonomous social group that bore morality and knowledge, had turned into a group of literati bureaucracy. This process, powered by the magician class of *fangshi* 方士, led to a

centralization of power. However, the gradient of prestige between center and periphery, an important heritage from Zhou institutions, guaranteed the mutually beneficial relationship between the Emperor and peripheral barbarian polities. The world-schema of *Tianxia*, taken by Wang Mingming as a conceptual schema or a native cosmology pioneered by Sahlins in his Polynesian studies on mythology and kinship systems, is different from the Polynesian case in that it is a dynamic concept whose meaning kept evolving during historical and political practice, being originally a political alliance rather than an internally homogeneous community. The idea of rituals acting as the basis of alliance is a staple of historians' narrative. However, without an explanation of the cultural conditions of an alliance, *Tianxia* merely expresses a purely sociological process, and cannot function as a root metaphor for a culture due to insufficient stability and inner diversity.

Under the influence of Wang Mingming, Zhao Bingxiang 赵丙祥 studied the historical process of the imitation of *fengshan* rituals of the Mu 木 local chieftain family of Lijiang starting from the Ming period. Unlike Wang Mingming, however, Zhao Bingxiang did not aim to achieve an integral comprehension of peripheral polities, but rather sought to understand the precise sociological mechanism by which Chinese *fengshan* and *yuedu* 岳渎 systems entered Yunnan 云南 and led to an expansion of civilization to the periphery. In this process, the imitation of emperorship of the house of Mu is the key factor behind the rise and fall of the *yuedu* system in Yunnan (Zhao Bingxiang, 2008: 256-257).

Unlike Zhang Guangzhi, who centered his research on the ancient state, Fei Xiaotong (2004) proposed in 1989 the notion of *duoyuan-yiti* 多元一体 (single entity of diverse elements) for understanding the Chinese nation. Fei's paradigm of interaction and transformation of ethnicity is deeply influenced by Sergei M. Shirokogorov's theory of the ethnos, and tries to understand, in terms of *zutuan* 族团 (ethnic unions), the process of the interaction between the Huaxia 华夏 (ancient Han Chinese) people, with an ethnogenesis in the lower Yellow River basin, and other ethnic groups surrounding it, which led to the formation of the greater ethnic union of the Chinese nation. Fei Xiaotong did not pay excessive attention to spiritual and political systems, but concentrated on exchange and mobility between ethnic groups, in which the Han Chinese ethnic group was formed through the establishment of a sacred royal genealogy. Here, Fei Xiaotong followed Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896-1950)'s theory of *yixia dongxi* 夷夏东西, according to which the Shang people in the East and the Zhou people in the West jointly constituted the basic dichotomy of Ancient politics. A heightened cultural exchange during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (771 B.C.-476 B.C.) led the ethnic entity of Han Chinese to gradually coalesce into existence (Fei Xiaotong, 2004: 127).⁵ In the Qin-Han 秦汉 period (221 B.C.-220 A.D.), Xiongnu 匈奴, a dominant group in the North, also achieved a unitary political legitimacy in the Steppes, resulting into a bipartite structure between farmers and herders, which had a long-lasting influence on the later *duoyuan yiti* configuration.

⁵ Even though Fei Xiaotong, just as Qian Mu, considered that the Huaxia people gradually formed in a process that lasted until the Qin dynasty. The difference lies in that Qian Mu paid great attention to the process of homogenization of intellectual and ritual systems, while Fei Xiaotong emphasized the formation of the ethnic union. This difference is crucial to the understanding of Fei Xiaotong's ideas.

While the formation of an ethnic union is not yet clear in the Farmer-Nomad trade and wars, the population interexchange starting from the inward migration of South Xiongnu tribes and the large amount of states formed by Northern peoples during the Wei-Jin 魏 晋 periods (220-420) substantiate the idea that the relationship between North and South was not merely one of confrontation. The Sui and Tang dynasties (581-907), which reunited North and South, symbolize the reconsolidation of the ethnic union. The population and cultural exchange between North and South lasted all the way down to the Qing dynasty and constitutes the central axis of the formation of the *duoyuan yiti* configuration. During the formation of the South-North relationship, military and trade actions of both sides led to the intervention of smaller polities on the periphery and swept more ethnic groups into this larger ethnic coalition. Fei Xiaotong studied the southward and westward migrations of Dongyi 东夷 and Baiyue 百越 ethnicities, as well as the southward expansion and subsequent diversification of the Qiang groups.

Fei Xiaotong's theory of the *duoyuan yiti* configuration of the Chinese nation is purported as an argument for the process in which the higher-level ethnic union, namely the Chinese nation, obtained its objective historical existence, while the cultural and historical particularities of the 56 nationalities remained conserved and respected.

“The Han nationality and the 55 national minorities all belong to the same level. They integrated with each other and formed the Chinese Nation. The Chinese nation is a single entity (*yiti* 一体) formed through the diverse elements (*duoyuan* 多元) of the 56 nationalities.” (*ibid.*: 163)

This kind of statement left two questions to be clarified. First, given that political unity is the principal expression of the fact that the historical ethnic groups and unions that lived in China had formed a larger ethnic union, how can it be justified that this unity is not only a result of military and economic hegemony, but something “with a higher level of national consciousness, sentiments and moral principles by which fortune, prosperity, honor and fate are shared,” so that nationalisms cannot progress beyond limits set by history? Secondly, although the sacred royalty and political genealogy of modern China comes from that of the Han Chinese, given that Mongolians and Tibetans on the periphery also have their own sacred kingship and political genealogy, which are also highly complex ethnic coalitions formed by absorbing various tribes and ethnic groups and centered on the Golden Family or the Btsan-po, how can the relationship between peripheral and central kingships and ethnic coalitions be analyzed? Fei Xiaotong, without giving a definite response, asked intellectuals faced with the problems at the end of the 20th century for a “cultural consciousness.” Both China, as a subaltern member of the world trade system, and national minorities, as peripheral components of the *duoyuan yiti* entity, need to reflect on their future fate in a larger configuration.

Inspired by Fei Xiaotong's discourse on the *duoyuan yiti* configuration, Wang Mingke 王明珂 believed that the criteria by which China can define itself should be sought on the periphery rather than in the center. Following the process theory of Fredrik Barth, he explored the principal frontier zones around Ancient China

(Wang Mingke, 2005), and investigated, with an ethnography of the Qiang 羌 people in Western Sichuan, how the frontier process is still active in the making of the modern state (Wang Mingke, 2003). There were, on the Northern and Western periphery of Huaxia, societies combining agriculture and herding. However, during a period of arid climate that started around 2000 B.C., an internal diversification happened in these mixed societies of farmers and herders. In the Ordos region, the whole population migrated to the North and divided into nomadic, egalitarian groups, which were highly armed in order to plunder its neighbor agricultural societies. In the Hehuang 河湟 region, on the other hand, the population was nomadized locally, similarly to people of the Liao basin, also affected by aridity. The Qiang peoples, on the other hand, were pushed west into the Eastern periphery of the Himalayas by the expansion of the Huaxia coalition from their homeland in Shanxi and Henan. Under another perspective, the story of Taibo, according to which the Prince Taibo 太伯 from the Central Plain is a civilization founder of the Wu 吴 State in the East China, demonstrated the dependency relationships created by the admiration of peripheral peoples towards the Huaxia, an example of a sinicization through conscious choice of the peripheral elite. Wang Mingke considered the complementary specialization in the Northern and Western frontier as resource competition caused by a large-scale aridity, and the sinicization of Southeast China as a result of Huaxia cultural prestige and Southeastern internal diversification. The difference between the two ways of characterizing the reasons is not clearly stated. The latter matches the dynamics of specialization of process theory anthropology and contradicts the pragmatism of the former.

Liang Yongjia 梁永佳 and Lian Ruizhi 连瑞枝, both working in Dali 大理, analyzed the origins of civilization in the Dali region. According to Lian Ruizhi, tribal alliances in the Erhai 洱海 region, in order to achieve a sacralization of kingship and the integration of the society, combined the Buddhist concept of the cakravartin into the sacred marriage between Shayi 沙壹 and the Yellow Dragon in the indigenous mythology, traced their own ancestors to Aśoka, and sanctified the kings with the myth that Avalokiteśvara, in a manifestation as a monk, bestowed a sign on kings (Lian Ruizhi, 2007: 76). Liang Yongjia, on the other hand, studied the mythological context of the *rao sanling* 绕三灵 (Bai: *guainx sanl-na*) myth, by which Xinuluo 细奴逻 inherited the Nanzhao kingship by winning Jingu 金狐, the daughter of Zhangleqinjiu 张乐进求. Liang Yongjia (2009) considers the power of abundance represented by Xinuluo is introduced inside the Nanzhao 南诏 society through the sexual relationship with Jingu 金姑, analyzed as a case of the Sahlinsian mechanism of stranger-king. The ritual of *rao* 绕 is an annual manifestation of this myth. Lian Ruizhi and Liang Yongjia, in their study on the Dali society, were both inspired by work on Southeast Asian Buddhist anthropology, which is a useful complement on the traditional paradigm of explaining Chinese history by reference to Shang and Zhou social and intellectual history.

To every ancient civilization, the history and myth in its incipient period is a fundamental question. The reflections of Chinese anthropologists on this question were based on work in archaeology, mythology and the history of ideas, and made a detailed comparison with other civilizations, prehistorical societies and modern fieldwork. On the one hand, scholars look for the necessity of the genesis of

Chinese civilization in the human prehistory, by which they hope to elucidate how the Chinese civilization could contribute to the understanding of the general condition of human civilizations. On the other hand, they hope to distinguish the Chinese civilization from other civilizations, especially ancient civilizations in Europe and the Near East, in an attempt to find anthropological evidence for particularities of the Chinese civilization, which could contribute to a better-founded evaluation of the Chinese road to modernity and to reflection on China's strategies of modernization.

Reflections on the construction of historical anthropology

Historical anthropology, a discipline that has witnessed an exceptional flourishing since the 1980s, does not only consist of concrete empirical research, but is also a process in which both anthropologists and historians continuously seek to elaborate a domain of questioning that appeals to both disciplines. In the inaugural issue of *历史人类学学刊* (*Journal of History and Anthropology*⁴), Zhang Xiaojun (2003) published an article entitled "Anthropologizing History and Historicizing Anthropology: Historical Anthropology as History's Trademark Squatting." In this article, he made a systematic presentation of the development of historical anthropology, according to which historical anthropology was first used by the French *Annales* scholar Jacques Le Goff, who aimed to give a name to the approach that synthesizes anthropology, history and sociology. By coining this term, Le Goff showed his intention of studying subaltern social history with anthropological theory and methodology. From then on, the dichotomies between history from above and history from below, between continuous history and event history, between native view and outside view of history became the emblematic characteristics that distinguish historical anthropology from traditional history. Historians turn to fieldwork and search, in the daily life, for symbols and practices that mark the moment of historical transition. As for the side of anthropology, there was the process – called the historicization of anthropology by Zhang Xiaojun to distinguish it from Le Goffian historical anthropology – in which reflections on the colonial history made anthropologists recognize that History had penetrated tribal societies long ago, and that the isolated and static primitive society assumed by functionalists is nothing but a pure illusion. The historicity of its research object forces anthropological research to face history itself. Western anthropology still mainly deals with the history of the rise of the modern society driven by the global trade system. The culture and society observed by anthropologists in the field are no longer the complete representation of a system of meaning or a structure, but an ephemeral fragment of a current of changes. Zhang Xiaojun is undoubtedly dissatisfied by history as it is done by anthropologists, not only for the reason that, so far, anthropology has never proposed a complete and feasible strategy of studying history, giving only overly fragmented problematics, but also because the theoretical heritage of anthropology is fundamentally unable to face the historical question – incoherencies are glossed over by vague statements, which, in return, makes the problems too fundamentally hidden to be expressible.

⁴ A biannual journal published by the Center of historical anthropology of the Sun Yat-sen University jointly with the South China Research Center of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology starting from April 2003.

In an article entitled “How I Understand Historical Anthropology,” Wang Mingming (2011) gave the reasons for his fascination with historical anthropology, and the reasons why he studies historical anthropology in China. According to Wang Mingming, British anthropology’s suspicion and exclusion of history from the period of functionalism is a result of academic specialization, and cannot be regarded as a proof of an ahistoricity of British social sciences. The supposed historicity in social sciences in China, on the other hand, is a mirage of distorted ideologies, the Chinese emphasis on history is often nothing but a reflection of a fetishization of novelty. In this sense, although Wang Mingming is one of the most acute critics of the provincial ahistoricity of functionalist community studies, he aligns himself more with mythology, as the study of mythology links prehistorical societies with literate ones, and suggests a more authentic meaning of history. To Wang Mingming, historical anthropology should concentrate on a comparative study of how different groups conceive their history, and not on the reconstruction of the history of the Other with analytic categories.

Zheng Zhenman (Zheng Zhenman and Huang Xiangchun, 2007), based on decades of work on Southeast and South China, emphasized “understanding history through folklore.” To him, customs and folk practices as components of a coherent meaning system are the real subjects of history. A mere collection of popular texts results only in fragments, the meaning of and the link between which can only be determined by an attempt to establish an interpretative framework of folkloristic systems.

Wang Mingke, on the other hand, defines historical materials as subjective representations of historical memory, and considers one of the core motivations of historical anthropology as the search of the correspondence between texts and scenarios (*qingjing* 情境) (Wang Mingke, 2016). Huang Guoxin 黄国信, Wen Chunlai 温春来 and Wu Tao 吴涛 (2006) claim that if regions are considered compounds of folklore, society, market and politics, the social history of regions has an intimate relationship to historical anthropology.

From a methodological point of view, the large differences between the historians’ and anthropologists’ representations of historical anthropology did not hinder their empirical collaboration. Tension still exists, though. For historians, historical anthropology is a paradigm-changing branch discipline – under the push of the *Annales* school and subsequent cultural history, history of the life of ordinary people has become a domain and direction that is integral and ordered, which stands apart from more traditional kinds of history. For anthropologists, on the other hand, this direction of investigation has not even acquired the status of an integral branch discipline. On the anthropological side, the development of historical anthropology has not received as strong an institutional push as that of the *Annales*. For anthropologists, historical anthropology is not a matter of utmost importance. Anthropologists certainly like to write about historical backgrounds and cultural transformation, but their emphasis is still on cultural modalities. Whether one is functionalist or structuralist, anthropologists all fundamentally seek to present the link between different cultures and thought-factors. It would be great for them if the mechanism of historical transformation were explained as a side-effect, but one can do well without. It is true that from the 1960s, culture

started being considered as something dynamic and ever-changing. However, cultural transformation is not history itself; culture does not change at the same pace as history. To take an extreme example, even if history did end, as Fukuyama claims, in liberal democracy, culture will still keep changing. Anthropology is willing to entangle itself with history, but lacks the capacity or the willingness to become history.

Also, for anthropologists, the ultimate question is comparative study. Historians might very well investigate the transformation of Southeastern China clans from the Song dynasty to the present; they might very well understand it better than anthropologists. The anthropologists, on their side, are more willing to compare this process to the transformations to modernity in Polynesia, in the Americas or in Africa, in order to find some general law that governs all transformations into modern societies.

For all these methodological divergences, historical anthropology in China will continue to prosper under joint efforts by historians and anthropologists. This is inevitable given the particular shape between historical vicissitudes and cultural transformations of China's modernization, which calls for a joint effort of historians and anthropologists in order to go deep inside the empirical data. All the methodological reflections and arguments are merely suggestions to improve this collaboration.

Conclusion

As was stated above, historical anthropology in China is principally interested in the double rupture of modern life. For some Chinese scholars, the Chinese are principally faced with the problem of how a life with dignity can be lived in a modern world dominated by the West. For this reason, the objectification (*keguanhua* 客观化) of a modern state, in other words, the establishment of state institutions free from individual motivations and shared by all citizens, is still the most important matter to many Chinese intellectuals. The reflection on state-building is deeply embedded into research on culture. Historical anthropology is a primary example of the intellectual anxieties concerning this question. However, Chinese scholars realize that if a new Chinese state is desirable, it should be, at the same time, rooted in Chinese civilization. Thus, both local and traditional cultural logics are examined in historical anthropology, so that the rupture between traditional state and modern state, and that between modern state and traditional society, can be paradoxically presented as a resource for building a modern state with Chinese characteristics.

It should nevertheless not be forgotten that as fierce a proponent of Westernization as Fei Xiaotong, in his later years, asked Chinese intellectuals to have a "cultural self-awareness." This does not merely require an intimate feeling of our own cultural transmission, but should promote the comprehension and dialogue between different cultures. His new vision of the world would be one in which every culture, while being the Other to each other, is also part of each other, in a word, a world as a Culture of cultures. This should be the vocation of historical anthropology in China.

(Translated from the Chinese by **Gong Xun**)

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