

Chieftains into Ancestors: Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China.
David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, editors. Vancouver and Toronto: University of British
Columbia Press, 2013. ISBN: 9780774823692

The scholars whose essays appear in this volume all attempt, in one way or another, to provide a history of southern and southwestern China from the perspective of the people who lived and still live there. One of the driving forces behind the impressive span of research across several cultural and geographical areas is to produce or recover the history(ies) of indigenous conquered people as they saw and experienced it, rather than from the perspective of the Chinese imperial state. It is a bold and fresh look at a part of China that has had a long-contested relationship with the imperial center. The essays in this volume are all based on extensive fieldwork in places ranging from western Yunnan to western Hunan to Hainan Island. Adding to the level of interest in these pieces is the fact that these scholars also engage with imperial-era written texts, as they interrogate the different narratives found in oral (described as “ephemeral”) rituals and texts written in Chinese. In fact, it is precisely the nexus or difference between these two modes of communicating the past and the relationship between the local and the central state that energizes all of the scholarship presented in this collection of essays. They bring a very different understanding of how the Chinese state expanded its reach over this wide swath of territory, sometimes with the cooperation of indigenous groups, sometimes in stark opposition, and how indigenous local traditions were, and continue to be, reified and constructed in ways that make sense of the process of state building from local perspectives.

These essays cover a lot of territory, not only in terms of the geography of China, but also in terms of cultures. Starting our review in the east, He Xi contributes an interesting study of the story of one Madam Xian in southwestern Guangdong and Hainan. Starting with the first

appearance of this story in the official imperial History of the Sui Dynasty text and then moving through time to situate this work at temples and ritual practices that are still carried out, He Xi makes a compelling argument that the usual trope of the subjugation of troublesome southern indigenous peoples by northern migrants is a product of late-imperial China, and does not reflect the fact that Madam Xian and the members of her extended lineage saw themselves, and were portrayed in earlier imperial texts, as part of the Han cultural and political tradition, a counter-intuitive narrative that is displayed in rituals practiced today in temples honoring Madam Xian.

We next move up to northwestern Hunan where Xie Xiaohui's work focuses on the shift in focus from the maternal to the paternal figure among the Miao people over the course of late-imperial history, seen in the cult of the White Emperor Heavenly Kings and rituals still practiced in their temples today. As in other chapters, the comparison between the written texts and rituals is a fruitful exercise that underscores the enduring nature of the frontier character of western Hunan as seen in the shifting nature of the rituals honoring the Three Kings.

Zhang Yingqiang stays in this same area of the borderland spanning western Hunan and eastern Guizhou to tell us about a deity known as the Venerable Flying Mountain. This study weaves together a fascinating narrative of the Yang family and their relationship to the local deity via a series of local indigenous chieftains, their claim to imperial privileges based on a lineage claim, and how that claim continues to resonate in the area, most recently with the state's protection of the main temple and all of the economic benefits that are accruing to the local community as a result. The study exemplifies how the processes captured in the book's title actually worked and continue to work among indigenous people in southern China.

Moving just a bit further west, Huang Shu-li studies a Hmong funeral ceremony, disagreeing with scholarship that has viewed that death ritual as representing a historical

diaspora story. In fact, Huang argues that the ceremony, which was performed without using written texts by ritual specialists, actually creates a new reality that can only be experienced by the deceased. It is a “metalinguistic” reality (38), not something that represents either history or cosmology. Huang’s emphasis on orality is instructive and helpful for anyone who studies ritual performance in any setting.

Three of the chapters are located in Guangxi Province. Kao Ya-ning’s research on the worship of the historical figure Nong Zhigao, chieftain of a clan that settled in the eleventh-century Sino-Vietnamese borderland by the Tai-speaking Zhuang people, illustrates the dueling roles that historical figures like Nong became as either indigenous chieftain, a deity, or a national hero, all depending on how the encroaching Chinese state met and interacted with indigenous peoples. It is also here where we see gender becoming a central issue in the figure of Nong’s wife or mother as goddess.

David Faure’s work on the native official (*tusi*) system in western Guangxi highlights another interesting aspect of the intersection of indigenous peoples and the Chinese state: the hazy distinction between ruler and ruled in the person of the native official and his family. We learn, through his research on *tusi* families, that creating genealogies in the Han tradition became an important locus of the *tusi*’s political and social power.

James Wilkerson continues the exploration of the *tusi* system in southwestern Guangxi and their use of genealogies to reify their authority. Wilkerson provides a surprising thesis, namely that the introduction of a Han-style lineage system as an organizing principle among indigenous peoples had two opposite results. In the countryside, resistance to the native officials resulted in an alliance of rural literati and collapse of the *tusi* system, while the exact opposite occurred in the urban administrative centers.

We end the individual case studies in western Yunnan with Lian Ruizhi's study of Bai lineages in Dali, finding that local legends and written genealogies fed each other to help create new local identities. As is seen in the case of one Dali clan, the Zhao, Lian shows how different versions of lineage genealogies for different groups of Zhao ancestors and family members reflected and helped mediate how Dali local society interacted with the state. As time went by, early indigenous aristocratic ancestors at the Dali court became officials with the Zhao surname who came originally from central China.

Ho Ts'ui-p'ing wraps up the book by focusing on the specific roles of orality and ritual performance, and especially the central role of women, as critical to understanding the critical but often overlooked role of indigenous agency in the meeting of the Chinese state and indigenous southern cultures. This is a helpful counterpoint to David Faure's introduction because he focused on written sources and institutions like temples and lineages in explaining the impact of the Chinese state in this meeting of cultures. They remind us of what all of the authors are arguing, that indigenous southern and southwestern peoples and cultures did not simply give way passively to the Chinese state. Instead, those indigenous peoples actively negotiated their identities and existence, often by borrowing specific tools from Chinese culture and using them for their own purposes. Thus, we see written histories and lineages produced that reflected and revived earlier oral traditions, the power of local deities and religious specialists affirmed through temple and imperial state rituals and markers, and male and female chieftains and local leaders who became ancestors.

Anyone interested in the long history of how the southern and southwestern borderlands became part of China will want to read and own this volume of essays. The authors showcase a remarkable assortment of research approaches that range from working with ancient texts found

in archives, to site visits to communities and temples. The essays are especially rich in their description of temple rituals and how oral performance and gender can be interrogated by the researcher. Students will also find much that is useful and inspirational in these essays, especially in their descriptions of how the research was actually conducted. In fact, this book could be easily assigned as required reading for history and anthropology graduate methods seminars. Also of interest to scholars and general readers will be the lively discussions of ethnic categories in China and how they function in society today. Again, the nice pairing of historical and contemporary fieldwork data make this an unusually informative and useful work.

Michael C. Brose, University of Wyoming