

## Editorial

### Welcome to the sixth volume of the Irish Journal of Asian Studies (IJAS).

The sixth issue of IJAS, “Chinese Borders: Transcultural and Historical Perspectives”, presents papers on the broadly understood topic of borders in a Chinese context. Here, borders are understood not as more or less static state borders, but as cultural, ethnic, lingual or other borders along which people constitute loose differentiations between themselves and other people. At the same time, such borders form “contact zones”. Mary Louise Pratt famously defined contact zones as “social places” where “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power”<sup>1</sup>. In the papers presented in this issue such social places as well as their effects on diverse societies living in contact zones are analysed in a Chinese context. The authors approach the topic of Chinese borders from different disciplinary angles, including historical and conceptual historical perspectives as well as ethnomusicologist and literary studies viewpoints.

The first article by LAW Ho Sing focuses on diplomatic contacts and communications between the Chinese Ming empire (1368-1644) and the Chosŏn kingdom (1392-1910) in Korea. Law bases his analyses of Ming-Chosŏn relations on the *Chaoxian fu* (朝鮮賦, Poetic essay on Chosŏn, 1488), a record by Dong Yue (董越, 1430-1502), a Ming envoy to Chosŏn, of what he saw and experienced during his diplomatic journey to Seoul. In *Chaoxian fu*, the official Chinese perspective of Ming-Chosŏn relations comes to the fore, summarized in the famous Mencian policy of “serving the great”, which meant that smaller and weaker countries like Chosŏn are expected to establish and maintain harmonious relations with greater and stronger states like the Ming empire in order to remain safe and stable. Law puts the official Chinese view in perspective by analysing Chosŏn images of the Ming, particularly the records of the Chosŏn official Ch’oe Pu (崔溥, 1454-1504).

In her article on Miao Albums (百苗圖, *C. Baimiao tu*, or 苗蠻圖, *C. Miaoman tu*) from eighteenth-century China, YIP Suk Man scrutinised the intended purposes of these works. Miao Albums, compiled by Chinese scholar-officials, include illustrations and texts on non-Chinese people in the southwestern regions of China proper, often generically called Miao (苗) or Miaoman (苗蠻). Yip particularly aims at finding out why the Qing, being a Manchu dynasty, relied on Chinese scholar-officials to study southwestern non-Chinese people and even aimed at assimilating the latter into the Chinese rather than their own culture. The Qing strategy is exemplified by the policy of “changing chieftains into officials” (改土歸流, *C. gaitu guiliu*). Finally, Yip demonstrates how the images of southwestern non-Chinese people as produced and perpetuated in Miao Albums clearly portray a Chinese perspective.

SHE Miaojun’s article connects directly to Yip’s, as she provides a comparative analysis of how Chinese scholars of Qing times, but from diverse eras and backgrounds constructed the Miao people. She selected three scholars for her comparative analysis: Chen Ding (陳鼎, 1650-?), Wei Yuan (魏源, 1794-1857) and Zhang Taiyan (章太炎, 1869-1936). Written only some decades after the decline of the Ming in the late seventeenth century, Chen Ding’s texts reflect a nostalgic yearning for the Ming dynasty. Wei Yuan, on the other hand, approached the Miao from his pragmatic perspective as a statecraft scholar, who was aware of the increase of threats from Western imperialists. Finally, Zhang Taiyan’s image of the Miao needs to be embedded into the wider nationalist discourse in late imperial times. All three, however, used the Miao to clarify the position of their own Chinese culture rather than having a genuine

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, [1992]2008), 8.

interest in the Miao themselves. She's article brings to the fore that southwestern non-Chinese people like the Miao were on the margins or even outside of a cultural Chinese border. During Qing times, they remained in the lower ranks within the Chinese hierarchical understanding of cultures and had no opportunity to represent themselves in a Chinese-dominated scholarly discourse.

Ming GAO approaches the topic of Chinese borders by studying the opium production and circulation in Manchukuo (1932-1937), an important contact zone of diverse East and North Asian cultures. He focuses on how the Japanese occupying powers monopolised the opium industry to gain revenue from their newly established puppet state. Gao provides a nuanced picture by using a social historical approach and analysing the history of 'people on the ground'. Such people participated in the opium industry as producers and shop proprietors. Based on his thorough analysis of English, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean sources, Gao concludes that the Manchukuo opium industry was not merely a revenue stream for the Japanese authorities, but that despite Japanese state monopoly on opium it provided non-state actors with opportunities to gain profit.

In his article on the recognition of the northwest Chinese folk-song tradition of *hua'er* (花儿, "flowers", referring to beautiful females as well as love) as an UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in 2009, Meng REN presents his analysis of the relation between cultural policies and political propaganda in present-day People's Republic of China. The *hua'er* song tradition is shared by nine different ethnicities in northwest China and thus presents a musical contact zone of diverse cultures. It was forbidden during the Cultural Revolution also due to the songs' content (usually about love and sex). Since the Reform and Opening Up after 1978, however, *hua'er* songs have been increasingly politicized by the Chinese Communist Party as welcome propaganda tools. Consequently, originally diversified *hua'er* traditions have been reconstructed as homogeneous in order to create a homogenised image of shared tradition and national heritage and replace the diverse *hua'er* traditions followed by different groups.

Finally, Mario DE GRANDIS concludes this volume on Chinese borders with his study of how the arrival of Islam is remembered in China. De Grandis chooses three sites of memory to trace this history of memorization: Islamic tombs of legendary Muslim missionaries from Tang times, and two myths, a pre-modern origin myth and a post-Mao myth. De Grandis shows that all three make use of one and the same 'master narrative', but transmit that narrative in different ways, depending on the respective narrators' needs. Whereas members of the Chinese Muslim elite originally used the tombs and the pre-modern myth to legitimate Islam in China, the post-Mao myth, on the other hand, was a rebranding of the master narrative as part of "Hui folk tales" by the Chinese Communist Party. De Grandis concludes that the master narrative is used at different sites of memory for a variety of reasons.

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