Qing Connections to the Early Modern World: Ethnography and Cartography in Eighteenth-Century China

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'Consulting literary sources is not as satisfactory as observation ... If one wants to control the barbarian frontier area, one must judge the profitability of the land, and investigate the nature of its people.'
—*Qian Shu*

'If one does not differentiate between their varieties, or know their customs, then one has not what it takes to appreciate their circumstances, and to govern them.'
—'Miaoliao tushuo'

During the century spanning 1660-1760, the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) doubled the area governed by the previous, Ming, dynasty (1368-1643). The results of this imperial expansion have shaped the scope and nature of the modern Chinese nation-state in concrete ways. The enlarged borders, with the exception of Outer Mongolia, largely form the shape of the territorial claims of the People's Republic of China today. In addition, many non-Han, or culturally non-Chinese, peoples who were incorporated into the empire during the Qing dynasty now help to make up the fifty-five officially recognized 'minority nationalities' of the People's Republic.

As part of its process of expansion the Qing state produced both ethnographic and cartographic records that at once facilitated and justified its colonial policies. In these documents we can see the roots of modern Chinese nationalism; later self-definitions of the modern nation-state are in large part based on widespread international acceptance of the claims laid down during the Qing regarding the extent of its territory and composition of its subjects. China's multiethnic character and great size remain two of the hallmarks of the modern Chinese nation-state.

Hostetler, Laura. "Qing Connections to the Early. Modern World: Ethnography and Cartography in Eighteenth-Century China." *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no.3 (July 2000): 623-662. https://www.jstor.org/stable/313143.

This article explores the Qing use of ethnographic and cartographic representation in the building of empire within the context of the early modern world. Scholars have identified the emergence of to-scale cartography and the widespread practice of ethnography, as well as related empirical practices in the collection and categorization of knowledge as distinctive to the early modern period in Europe. Yet by these criteria certain Qing practices, at least until the middle of the eighteenth century, can also be legitimately described as early modern. Europe had no monopoly on modernity. While admittedly dynastic China had a long history of both cartography and of ethnographic writing, as I demonstrate, their specific development and use in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reveals parallels to developments in early modern Europe. These simultaneous developments suggest that Qing China was not isolated from global trends in science and the codification of 'objective' knowledge, nor was it simply a recipient of European knowledge, but actively connected to an emergent early modern world.

The question of whether early modern is a meaningful, and appropriate, term when used to refer to non-Western regions is beginning to be debated. This article supports the view of Sanjay Subrahmanyam, who would decouple the often assumed link be tween 'European' and 'early modern.' He argues that the early modern period (which he defines provisionally as from 'the middle of the fourteenth to the middle of the eighteenth century') 'represents a more-or-less global shift, with many different sources and roots.' One important defining factor he identifies is 'a new sense of the limits of [the] inhabited world' stemming from 'an age of travel and discovery, [and] of geographical redefinition'—on a world-wide scale. In his view the voyages of the early modern period 'were accompanied by often momentous changes in conceptions of space and thus cartography' and that 'significant new empirical ethnographies also emerged from them.' These included not only European but also Chinese maritime exploration, and overland expeditions by other powers as well. This article contributes to the debate on the early modern non-West, arguing that the term early modern can appropriately be used to describe global, rather than uniquely Western, processes.

We need to see the Qing during this period as part of, rather than isolated from, the early modern world. In its use of various modes of visual representation the Qing constructed images of its peoples and territory in ways that can best be described as early modern. Using both Chinese and European primary documents I examine specific instances of the development and use of ethnography and cartography to demonstrate that the techniques of expansion that the Qing employed, and the epistemology behind these techniques, were similar to those that shaped early modern European expansion. This should not be surprising, for the circumstances that required their implementation for successful state building stemmed from the same geo-political imperatives. These included, but were not limited to, a recognition of the world's finite area as the globe became charted according to both latitude and longitude, and massive population growth that encouraged state expansion and accounted for increased contact across cultures.

The Context of Qing Expansion

Few would dispute that the Qing was an expansionist imperial power. Its rulers took over Inner Mongolia during the 1630s prior to their 1644 conquest of former Ming territory inside the Great Wall. In the 1680s after the Ming loyalist Zheng Chenggong's followers lost their stronghold on Taiwan, the island was made a prefecture of Fujian province. The Revolts of the Three Feudatories in southwest China ended in 1681 with Qing suppression bringing those areas under (sometimes only nominal) imperial control. In 1720, during a succession dispute for the next Dalai Lama, the Qing imposed a military presence in Tibet for the first time. Under the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723-35) *gaitu guiliu* brought much frontier land in the southwestern provinces of Guizhou and Yunnan under the regular administration of the central government. Finally, the conquest of Xinjiang in present-day northwest China by 1760 completed the Qing's territorial conquests.

Significantly, this extensive imperial expansion was achieved under Manchu rather than Han Chinese rule. In many of the new territories the foreign origins of the ruling house presented advantages. The Manchus could both adopt Ming institutions and bureaucratic procedures for ruling the Han population, and employ a variety of techniques growing out of their own traditions to incorporate vast amounts of territory and numerous non-Han peoples into the empire. Particularly in Inner Asia the Manchu heritage, including Tibetan Buddhism and a martial and nomadic tradition, opened various avenues for legitimizing the extension of Manchu rule. David Farquhar has demonstrated, for example, that the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-95) had himself represented in art work as a bodhisattva, thus fostering the adulation and compliance of adherents of Tibetan Buddhism. Chia Ning has argued that what she calls the ritual pilgrimage (*chaogong*) of Inner Asians to the Qing court also constituted a new means of incorporating these territories into the Empire. Strategic marriages with rival powers in the north and northwest secured alliances on those frontiers. Thus in Inner Asia common points of reference served as a basis on which the Manchus successfully established legitimacy for their expanding territorial claims.

The southwest, however, populated largely by non-Han peoples, presented special problems. Here the Manchu heritage provided no particular advantages or status to the imperial government. Furthermore, the inherited dynastic model of dominance via the sinicization (*hanhua*) of non-Han groups through education may have been in conflict with the Manchu vision of empire. Qing rulers, particularly the Qianlong emperor, consciously struggled to preserve (and in some ways create) Manchu racial and cultural identity. How then could they justifiably promote the sinicization of other non-Han groups?

This dilemma may have induced the court to experiment with employing techniques (and technicians) that were neither identifiably Chinese nor Manchu. Jesuit priests and lay missionaries, who adopted Confucian dress and learned both Manchu and Chinese in order to adapt themselves culturally to their host country, worked in extremely sensitive areas where they held positions of authority. They headed the imperial board of astronomy, conducted cartographic surveys of the empire, planned weapons manufacture (primarily cannons), worked as tutors and advisers to several emperors, and depicted the court and the empire in imperially commissioned paintings as well. During the early years of the dynasty their status as outsiders may have made them less threatening to the Manchus than the Han officials.

The Manchus' interest in Jesuit knowledge and skills was as much the consequence, as the cause, of a growing Asian awareness of a shifting eighteenth-century world order. Although surely not the impetus for initial Manchu imperial ambitions, by the eighteenth century Qing expansionism should not be seen as operating in a regional vacuum. As demonstrated below, the Kangxi emperor (r. 1662-1722), aware of expanding European (and Russian) mercantile, and increasingly colonial, interests in Central, South, Southeast, and East Asia, viewed territorial expansion in a new light. The Qing needed to stake out its own territory internationally against claims of other empires. It did so by expanding on the ground militarily and on paper cartographically, using the emergent international discourse of early modern mapping, which relied on to-scale representations based on information collected by means of astronomical surveying techniques.

On the domestic front the court simultaneously searched for and explored additional means of ruling non-Han populations in southwest China that had previously been only nominally part of the empire. In this cultural context the Manchu heritage offered no special advantages to empire building. Rather, the production of knowledge about frontier areas and the peoples who inhabited them gained increasing importance. Accurate, detailed maps and ethnographic accounts became key to achieving and maintaining control of the area. Ethnographic documents depicting non-Chinese peoples populating the empire's southwestern provinces at once demonstrated achievements in knowing these new territories and their peoples and served as reference works for officials on local customs and the geographic distribution and 'nature' (*xing*) of various nonHan peoples.

Qing Ethnography of the Southwest

The previous section has outlined Qing expansion to familiarize the reader with the growth of the empire generally. Here I turn specifically to the relationship between ethnographic depiction and colonization in the southwest. Analysis of ethnographic texts found in local gazetteers and histories of Guizhou province shows a clear correlation between the conquest of the region and increased attention to the collection and compilation of ethnographic information based on direct observation. We see both a growing familiarity over time with the groups depicted and an increasingly complex taxonomic system of categorization. I also discuss the advent of the related but distinct Miao album genre. The prefaces to the albums explicitly spell out their intended administrative usefulness.

Textual ethnographic descriptions of non-Han peoples in Guizhou are found in local histories and gazetteers of the province dating from 1560, 1608, 1673, 1690, 1692, 1741, and 1834. (The 1673 and 1692 gazetteers include woodblock illustrations of the non-Han peoples described.) Analysis of these written works chosen for the extensive ethnographic information they contain on Guizhou's minorities reveals noteworthy changes in ethnographic writing between 1560 and 1830, and more significantly to this argument, between 1608 and 1741. We can trace four significant ways in which these texts became more comprehensive and the system of classification around which they are organized more intricate up until the mid-eighteenth century. These trends, discussed below, demonstrate the correlation between imperial expansion and the development of the ethnographic record. Furthermore, the changing nature of that record points to the emergence of an epistemology that valued measurement, precision, and 'objective' description as the most effective means of describing or knowing other peoples, their customs, and location.

Perhaps most important for the argument that ethnographic depiction and colonization were closely related is the simple fact that in more recent editions of the Guizhou provincial gazetteer the territorial scope covered in the ethnographic descriptions of Guizhou's peoples expanded, revealing increased bureaucratic penetration into frontier regions. Not surprisingly, when new groups are mentioned for the first time in a revised gazetteer, the administrative district in which they are said to dwell is also mentioned for the first time. In other words, as the Qing extended its administrative reach into more remote areas, the scope of geographical inquiry reflected in the provincial gazetteers increased as did the number of recorded groups of non-Han peoples.

We also have evidence that, as territorial reconnaissance and control improved, compilers increasingly included information based on direct observation rather than relying only on previous textual sources. Gradually, more detail was added to existing entries as more information became available. Take, for example, the additional information on the jiugu Miao included in the 1673 Kangxi Guizhou Gazetteer as compared to *Qj,anji* (1608). We learn from the 1608 text that this group was not pacified until 1600 and that, up until their submission, when groups in bordering areas revolted they would supposedly entice the Jiugu Miao to assist them. The author also records the amount of tax they paid per year. Absent from the earlier entry is the kind of ethnographic information that appears in the 1673 Kangxi gazetteer (i.e., they are similar to Bianqiao's Hei Miao, are fond of the color blue, and live in deep caves). All that the early text says regarding their customs is that they are 'like those of the Miao of Zhenyuan' (who are not actually discussed!). In other words, earlier officials could not get close enough to gather information based on observation. They only knew into which administrative category the Jiugu Miao fell.

Related to the first two trends is an increasing refinement and systematization in the categorizing and naming of non-Han groups residing in Guizhou seen in later editions of the provincial gazetteer. The number of different minority groups that was recorded by name and thus categorized increased steadily. The number grew from thirteen in 1608 to thirty in 1673 to forty-one in 1741 to eighty-two by 1834. The difference was not only due to expansion in the territory surveyed; in later works more subgroups are given their own entries. For example, by 1673 there are different entries for each of the various kinds of Miao, rather than one entry for Miao with numerous subheadings. But even accounting for this reorganization the later accounts deal with more groups overall than the earlier accounts.

Finally, administrative concerns, although present throughout, are gradually represented as goals achieved. For example, comments on the degree of sinicization of various groups appear for the first time in the 1673 Kangxi gazetteer. A note following the entry on the Guyang Miao shows evidence of categorizing groups according to their degree of docility and/or acculturation. The entry ends with the statement: 'Of all the Miao, only the first four kinds are pure and simple. They shrink from seeing officials. When there is an injustice they comply with what their village elder decides. They pay rent and provide services like loyal subjects. Their poverty is especially keen.' This modification in the 1673 text shows a direct concern with matters concerning administration and governance. Another instance of commenting on acculturation is found in regard to the Songjia. A final line states: 'Now they have moreover changed completely and become Chinese, and do not revert [to their old ways].'

By the turn of the eighteenth century the utility of gathering both ethnographic and geographic information had been fully recognized. Tian Wen, who assumed governorship of Guizhou in 1688, authored the preface to the 16go history of Guizhou, entitled *Qian shu*. He posed and then replied to the question of why the dynasty should concern itself with Guizhou when the province's apparent benefits to the empire were so small. He observed that the Miao, Zhuang, and Gelao inhabitants, 'plunder and rob, hold grudges, and kill,' and the land is largely barren and unproductive, reaching only about two-tenths the productivity of other places. But Guizhou, he reminds his readers, is strategically located, allowing access to Guangxi, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Hubei: 'Without Guizhou [as part of the empire], Guangxi and Sichuan's arms would be held, and Yunnan and Hubei's throat would be grasped.' Although Guizhou was resource poor, it was still vital to the empire.

The next question the author addressed was how to achieve control over this strategic area. One answer he supplies is that 'If one wants to control the barbarian frontier area, one must judge the profitability of the land, and investigate the nature of its people.' Just such an 'investigation' was the goal of the ethnographic chapter of the book.

The preface to *Qian shu* suggested a two-pronged approach that included both taking active steps within the means at one's disposal to achieve control, and using mollifying, less resource-intensive methods when more feasible. The more active approach included gaining familiarity with routes of communication and with meeting places, learning about the weapons the native populations had at their disposal, subjecting them to certain laws, and generally strengthening defenses. The companion approach was to simultaneously 'make them mutually peaceful in their customs, mutually happy in their idleness and feasting.' Tian believed that if the native peoples were content they would be obedient and not fearful of rule by the central government.

As governor, Tian Wen had good reason for his interest in the province. Concern with conditions in Guizhou also extended further up the bureaucratic ladder. The Kangxi emperor himself held an ongoing interest in the region. He commissioned the 1673 and 1692 gazetteers, and even after the publication of the later edition continued to collect information about Guizhou's geography and its nonHan populations. In 1707 the new governor of Guizhou province, Chen Shen, sent an official report to the emperor, detailing the circumstances of Guizhou native chiefs (*tusi*) and the Miao areas. Based on his research he had maps made to which he attached explanatory text. Upon their completion he submitted them for imperial inspection. These illustrated reports were made to convey information directly relevant to the court's strategic and military interests. Although it is unclear precisely what form they took, these documents appear to have been intended to supplement the information already documented in the local gazetteers.

But do Qing efforts to systematically comprehend and catalog non-Han peoples on its southwest frontier in the context of colonial expansion actually provide evidence of active participation in the early modern world? Does the methodology behind these efforts necessarily bear witness to the presence of an epistemology that valued direct observation and empirical measurement comparable in some ways to identifiable trends in other parts of the early modern world? The development during this period of a branch of Chinese scholarship known as *kaozheng*, or evidential learning, which was based on these principles is recognized, but its connection to global trends in the early modern period has not been thoroughly explored. A comparative look at the qualities of early modern European ethnography suggests that the kinds of intellectual inquiry associated both with *kaozheng* and with early modern intellectual inquiry in Europe may not have been mere temporal coincidence. Rather they may have been similar responses to a changing world in which population growth and finite frontiers figured prominently.

Margaret Hodgen argues that Western ethnography during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries distinguishes itself from earlier descriptions of foreign peoples through its reliance on direct observation; rejection of non-verifiable information; concern with method; the urge it reflects both to collect and systematically categorize information; and finally the interest it takes in social institutions, making humankind the center of its inquiry. This 'new' way of knowing the world is seen in an increasing interest in natural history that included but was not limited to observing, collecting, and categorizing the habits and customs of different peoples. These are the same qualities that emerged in the above consideration of ethnographic depiction of the peoples of Guizhou province in the Qing empire, and that distinguish it from earlier Chinese writing in the genre.

Certainly, in many respects the ethnographic writing in Guizhou province during the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century reflects developments similar to those described above for early modern European ethnography. Texts about Guizhou's populations displayed evidence of increasing reliance on direct observation to gather information, the elaboration of a system of classifying and naming different groups, and a concern with social institutions, as well as evidence of the collection of this kind of material for its utility to the state in the expansion of its frontiers. Precisely the qualities that Hodgen describes—all relating to an epistemological outlook rooted in early enlightenment rationality—can be identified in Qing ethnographic texts on non-Han minority groups on the southwest frontier.

Parallels can also be drawn with later ethnographic works. The Miao albums, which continued to be produced well into the nineteenth century, bear similarities to exotic paintings of others carried out by Western powers in the process of exploration and colonization in many places around the globe and over the course of several centuries. The Victorian period in Britain, for example, saw a boom in the production of images of non-Europeans by British artists. A Catalog of one collection of such literature lists over 500 illustrated books in English dealing with various parts of the world. Exploration of the nineteenth-century American West also produced many drawings and paintings of American Indians of various tribes.

The political implications of representation generally, and ethnographic representation in particular, have been thoroughly critiqued. In essence those who do the depicting define the peoples described. Dominant groups or powers thus restrict minorities by speaking both about and for them, circumscribing their rights or potential to define themselves. In the colonial context the goal of the colonizer, or imperial authority, is precisely and unabashedly to learn about, or rather construct, the identity of those to be ruled. Such knowledge simplifies the task of governance.

Too often unrecognized is the fact that the politics of representation encapsulated in the idea of 'orientalism' is not simply a feature of Western modernity, but of the colonial encounter itself, wherever colonial relations are played out. This capacity or inclination to 'orientalize' is not unique to the Western World. Techniques of representation grounded in measurement and direct observation, while fundamentally related to our definition of the early modern period, were not unique to early modern Europe. Although the topic is only beginning to be explored, interesting work is being done in this area in late Ming and Qing China. At the 1997 meeting of the Association of Asian Studies numerous papers were devoted to arguing for evidence of an epistemology rooted in observation and measurement during this period.

This preliminary research suggests the pervasive presence of a nascent empiricism across different disciplines engaged in various forms of representation, and serves to illustrate the broader context into which the early modern Qing engagement with ethnography may reside. Although I cannot do justice to all forms of literary and visual representation in this article, a brief foray into Qing use of cartography will serve to strengthen the argument that the increasingly refined techniques of measurement and quantification employed under the Qing were related to global patterns of expansion during the early modern period.