

# Chieftains into Ancestors

## Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China

Edited by David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing



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# Preface

*David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing*

Chinese history has always been written from the point of view of the centre, located in some cultural heartland dominated by the political seat of the administrative state. Such centre-driven history tells the story of a Chinese culture that spread from the heartland to the periphery, replacing local practices and converting the local people from savagery (*man*) to observance of the rituals (*li*) that made up the Chinese state.

A history arguing that the spread of a state culture was closely related to the creation of a unified state is not necessarily unreasonable. No other institution in the last millennium of Chinese history commanded the resources of the Chinese state. Its military and economic prowess, its dominance of the written word through state control of the examination system and, therefore, of officialdom, and its determination to proselytize all added to the supremacy of imperial order as expressed in religion and certainly gave the state – and the institutions it supported – a competitive edge over peripheral regimes. Be that as it may, a history of China written as though there was nothing more to be told would err on three scores.

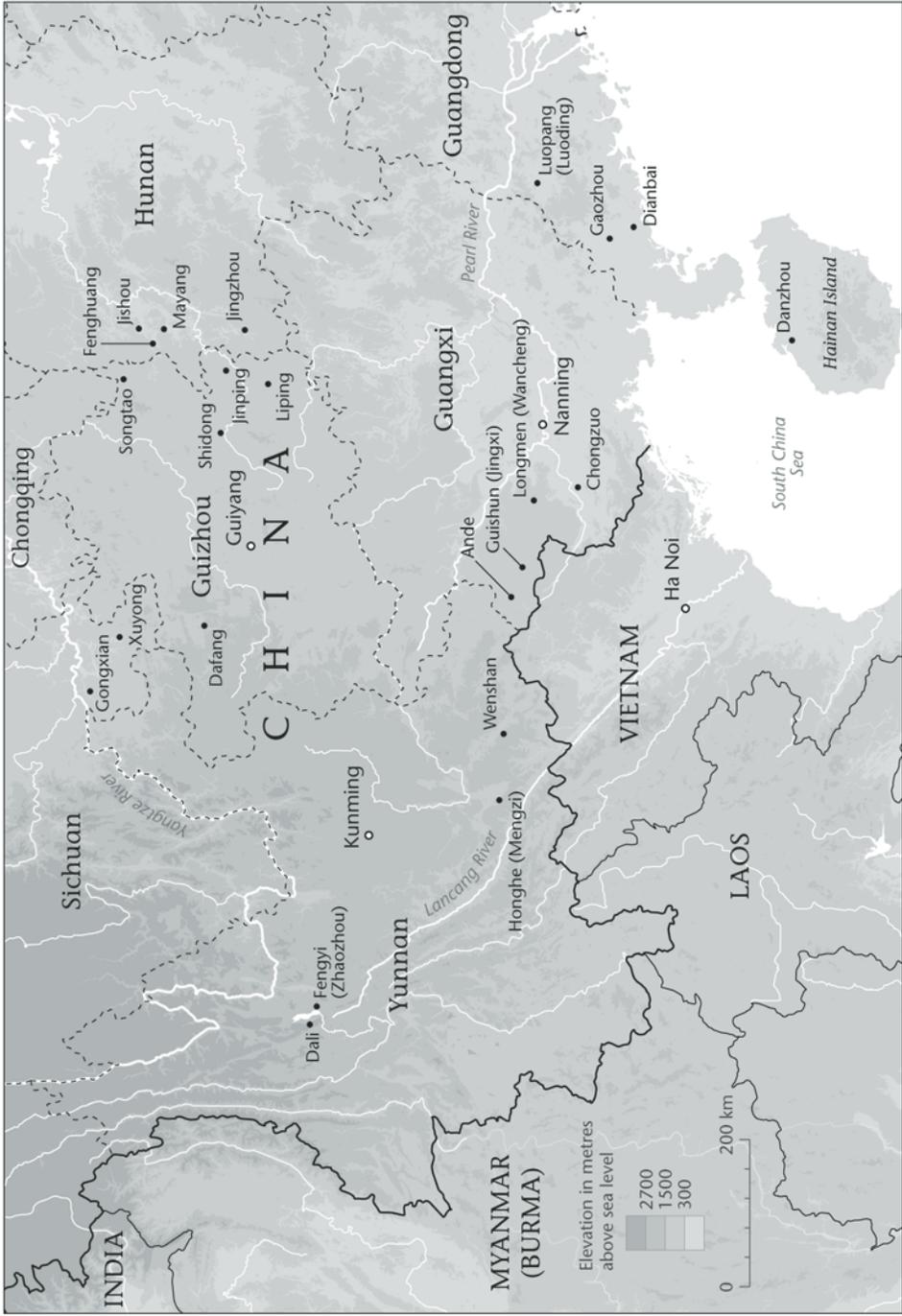
First, the Chinese imperial state was built on a loose structure that presumed much greater political unity than its institutions could deliver. The belief in the unity of the state, which was pervasive in the last millennium, was simply not translated into any unity of command through governmental administration. It would be an error of interpretation to confuse the two even though the imperial state commanded more resources than other institutions.

Second, over the last millennium, what came to be known as Chinese culture was only gradually taking shape. General statements about “Confucianism,” often drawn from the sayings of persons who wrote under one sort of circumstance but were read by people surviving in another, do not take sufficient note of the often tentative nature of these sayings as products of drawn-out intellectual processes involving not only written tracts but also events experienced by many who did not write and by more who could not even read.

Third, although it is true that at times – and maybe quite often – the imperial government acted as though it wanted to impose its will on local

society, it is an error in the reading of centralized records to accept the fiction that local society accepted the imposition without negotiation. In the earlier tradition of writing Chinese history, under the notion that “control” characterized the relationship between the centre and local society, the process of negotiation was interpreted as leading to absolute winning and losing, such that any deviation from central imposition was looked on as a “failure” and relegated to the periphery of the historian’s concern. The institutional approach – which succeeded the “control” argument by allying itself with a model that put law, rather than ritual, at the heart of the institutional building process – fared little better. One consequence of this approach was the fruitless effort to isolate the “gentry” from “merchants” and both from local society. It brought much of the Chinese social history of the last millennium into the search for “local elites,” who – when found – were construed as agents of the centre or, at best, as middlemen between the centre and the local. The prominence given the centre-local relationship in the writing of Chinese history has downplayed the vast complexities that make up Chinese society. Processes of negotiation between centre and local bring into play deeply embedded values and practices that have been reinterpreted at critical junctures and carried on as “tradition.” Beneath the China observable at any time are the layers of history experienced locally and reinterpreted to fit into the bigger whole. To write this history, the student of China has to break out of the centre-local typology.

This book is part of a wider effort to rethink the history of China so that local society does not have to appear to be driven by the centre. To this end, we fully recognize that local society has to be given its voice. We also realize that the local voice cannot depend on records that have been gathered and preserved by the centre. We believe that much local documentation is not preserved in texts found in the libraries but is scattered on steles and in private manuscripts and is recalled in legends and acted out in rituals. That said, however, we also realize how inappropriate it can be to let historians and anthropologists loose in indigenous society so that they can, like governments, impose on it their own readings of local practices. For this reason, we believe that discussions of local history and culture should be clearly documented so that the reader can distinguish, without too much bewilderment, between the researcher’s personal on-the-spot observations, reports as heard or seen, and his or her own interpretation of events. We have to recognize the great expanse of China and the diversities it encompasses, and the best way to do so is to ensure that any history of China reflects the history of the parts as much as the history of the whole.



China's southwestern frontier

# Introduction

*David Faure*

Southwest China was brought into the Chinese state only from the time of the Mongol conquest – that is, the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368).<sup>1</sup> Earlier than that, the southern cities of Nanning and Guangzhou served as the Song dynasty's imperial outposts, and, in between, Guilin guarded the main route leading up to central China. From Guilin, traffic could go north up the Lingqu Canal into Hunan province, east downriver to Zhaoqing city and then Guangzhou, northwest through winding hill paths into Sichuan, or southwest downriver into Vietnam. There was also coastal traffic, with junks sailing out of the ports on the Bay of Tonkin (Beibu wan), through the Hainan Strait, and up the coast to Guangzhou. The persistence of long-distance traffic linked all of the southwest not only to the Chinese state but also far beyond to Southeast and Central Asia.

Beyond the Song dynasty frontier stood some fairly long-lasting regimes. The most prominent in the tenth century was the Dali kingdom, located in what is now the province of Yunnan. Dali, having supplanted Nanzhao, had by then existed as a Buddhist kingdom for close to three centuries. To its south lay the kingdoms of mainland Southeast Asia, of which Dai Viet in present-day Vietnam, still struggling to build up a regime in the Red River Basin, was looked on by the Chinese state as the most threatening to its security or, perhaps, the most inviting for an extension of its borders. Dai Viet was pushing into the Zuoyou jiang area in the Nanning frontier, thereby setting off the spark of what in Chinese records came to be known as the uprising of Nong Zhigao from 1041 to 1053. Nong ransacked Nanning and laid siege to Guangzhou, before turning north to Shaoguan on a route that could have taken him into the Song heartland of Jiangxi province and beyond. For the established states all around this region, Guangxi and Guizhou would have been frontier territory. Looking out from China, the Song government would have seen this frontier as its wild west (Wiens 1952; Anderson 2007).

Groups such as the Nong clan abounded in the frontier region. We have so little information about them that we hardly know whether they should

be referred to as tribes, clans, or states. Chinese travellers described them as peoples marked out by speech, dress, and a supposed history of contact with China. They had chieftains, like Nong Zhigao. Some groups were not confined by very clear territorial boundaries but made alliances with one another. Others, like Mu'ege, on the road from Dali through Guizhou to Hunan, exhibited a sense of territorial control under an established seat of government and might have been more akin to what we, nowadays, think of as a state. Most owed some allegiance – according to Chinese sources anyway – to the Chinese state. Many also owed allegiance to Dali. But in any case, allegiances were to change, for by the thirteenth century the Mongols had conquered Dali, and by the fourteenth century the Ming dynasty had taken over the frontier as it drove the Mongols out of China. Under the Ming, all of this area was brought under imperial administration, whether directly ruled by appointed magistrates (known as “circulating officials,” or *liuguan*) or indirectly ruled by hereditary “native officials” (*tusi*). From the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, under the firm rule of the Qing dynasty, many native regimes were brought under the administration of appointed magistrates in a process known to Chinese historians as *gaitu guiliu* (replacing the native official with the circulating official). Much of the subsequent history of China's southwest has been written from the imperial standpoint, which sees *gaitu guiliu* as the end product of natives' accepting allegiance to the Chinese empire (Wu 1988; Herman 2003; Faure 2006).

By the twentieth century, down the same roads traversed by imperial administrators from central China had come contemporary historians and ethnographers, and instead of the chieftains and the native kingdoms, they encountered in the southwest the Miao, the Zhuang, the Bai, the Yao, the Tujia and – why not? – the Han, many of them Baihua/Cantonese-speaking. So many historians and ethnographers had come that the scene became crowded, and in the 1950s the ethnic terms they introduced took on a legal implication as the People's Republic of China, in recognition of ethnic autonomy, designated many of the peoples of the southwest ethnic minorities. Historians of China, now sensitive to ethnic terms, know them for what they are. They know that such terms were often taken out of context from Chinese historical texts, reinterpreted in the light of contemporary Western ethnographic discourse, and applied as part of a political process that in its own way was working in China on bodies of living people on its periphery (Harrell 1995b, 1995c; Litzinger 2000). A literature has now accumulated that points its finger at twentieth-century nation building: both the Republican effort from before and after 1911 and the socialist effort very much concentrated in the 1950s (Mackerras 1994; Kaup 2000; Leibold 2007; Guo 2008). As Schein

(2000, 66) has aptly put it, the nation-building effort “fixed” the markers that came to be indicative of any group’s ethnic description. The Zhuang, for example, were not a ready-made ethnic group waiting to be recognized but, as Kaup (2000, 73-111) notes, had to be “discovered,” “defined,” “promoted,” and “administered” by the Chinese government from the 1940s to the 1960s. Wang (1997, 2003) provides the crowning example: the Qiang were nowhere near Sichuan when the term was originally coined in ancient China, and the Qiang he came in touch with there told him they did not know that they were called “Qiang” until they learned that in school. The history of ethnicity has to be full of such examples: histories of words and histories of people criss-cross, serving many purposes, their historians frequently not knowing what they were.

No one disputes that there are many different peoples, minority or not, in southwest China. The locals would say as much today, and what records historians can find of different times in the past provide enough ethnic terms for them if need be. Taking heed of Crossley’s (1990) warning about the use of the word “sinicization,” one might point out that what the locals say today departs somewhat from the written records in at least one respect: today the locals take as a reference point for their being a people notions of their being non-Han, whereas in the Ming dynasty the records speak of strange practices of the periphery and peoples who were not properly registered in the imperial realm (even though household registration in most of China was only a legal fiction) (Crossley 1990). Let there be no misunderstanding of this argument: people in the Qing dynasty known as Han were in the Ming records known as *min* (the people, meaning people registered under household registration), and even if “Han” might be taken as an ethnic term, “min” was a legal status. Records available to historians, most of which were written in Chinese by Ming and Qing administrators and their affiliates, contain plenty of references to notions of “we” and “they,” but by no means can it be said that the “we” sinicized the “they” given that the process often looked on as an indication of sinicization – the use of Chinese script, the imposition of household registration, participation of local people in the official examinations, and acceptance into the Chinese universe through ancestral sacrifice as defined in the imperial statutes – was itself evolving among both “we” and “they” from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries. If “sinicized” they must be, all of China as the land mass we know it today was “sinicized” from the fifteenth century, for “sinicization” was no more and no less than Ming dynasty state building.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, the “state-building” argument holds for the southwest only if students of this very large region understand that it was not a one-off twentieth-century phenomenon. The Ming dynasty built a nation-state, which

the Qing dynasty turned into an empire, which the Republican government had to redefine as a nation-state consisting of different peoples (Rawski 1996). Many of these peoples had to be “discovered” during the Republican period and were classed as minorities during the nation-building efforts of the People’s Republic. The reason this story has never been told clearly lies in an accident of history. Anthropologists who trawl the ground for the scent of the “other” pick up the smell of history on the imperial frontier but are not equipped with the expertise to work at the written records, and the historians who can read these written records but are ill-equipped to deal with indigenous versions of history retreat into descriptions of the Chinese empire, whether at war, in popular culture, or in maps (Hostetler 2001; Shin 2006). Very few writers on the southern frontier are the likes of Harrell (2001) and Mathieu (2003), who have reconstructed an indigenous history from its own records, both oral and written. Most writers, confronted with people who adopted personas that fitted into the Chinese state, sense the surrender of an earlier identity but are at a loss as to how they might probe beyond the facade of the ethnic minority to come to terms with the ascendancy of the Chinese empire over a host of “peripheral” (in Chinese terms) polities in the southwest. It is time to stop bemoaning the imposed ethnicity of the southwest and move on to write the history of this imposition. To do so, however, historians and anthropologists have to find the indigenous historical voice.

The contributors to this book, historians and anthropologists, seeking the voice of the indigenous in the southwest, approach the indigenous with a strategy that has been well tried in other parts of China. For the past few decades, scholars of local religion, with background training in Chinese historical texts and fieldwork, have successfully examined the transformation of religious rituals over time to reconstruct indigenous views of history (Watson 1985; Faure 1986; Sangren 1987; Hansen 1990; Feuchtwang 1992; Dean 1998; Hymes 2002; Lagerwey 2010). Four reasons may be given for their success. First, the locations at which religious rituals are held often provide continuity, unbroken even by conquest, where history is acted out. Second, ritual practices are layered rather than replaced – that is, later practices tend to be superimposed on earlier practices, and signs of earlier practices are retained even when the purposes for such are altered. Third, legends are retained for very lengthy periods, often well after the ritual practices themselves have fallen into disuse. Fourth, the Chinese imperial state, at least since the Song dynasty, actively pursued the policy of absorbing local societies into the state by advocating ritual changes. The state did not always have its way, but much negotiation between state and local society took place in religious-ritual terms, and because what eventually became the written version of this

history was written in administrative terms, the ritual negotiation was subsumed undigested within an administrative history.

Indeed, indigenous views are often tinted with elements of imperial history, for they speak of the devotion of local gods to an imperially sanctioned pantheon, imperial honours granted in return, and miraculous deeds often in support of imperial ends. Yet, many religious rituals remain unmistakably local in that they deal with local places of power and involve local people gathering there periodically to sacrifice, and even if they sacrifice in ways that borrow from the imperial traditions, the rituals are interpreted by the locals as their own. Above all, the deities to whom sacrifice is offered are bonded to the locals because sacrifice by the locals is reciprocated by the deities through protection. Clashes in ritual traditions, contrasting local interpretations, and competitions for pre-eminence among identifiable groups have buried in them different voices of the local, if only observers care to listen.

Whereas the traditional historical approach describes the administrative absorption of the southwest, and hence its history leading up to *gaitu guiliu*, and the ethnographic describes the historical movements of people and similarities in language and cultural practices, this book examines legends and rituals linking the points of contact between indigenous peoples and the Chinese imperial state. Many such legends and rituals have to do with wars, betrayals, and defeat, with heroes and heroines cast as protective deities, and with ancestors who negotiated for an indigenous people their continued existence as a people under imperial rule. But there was generally more to the legends than conquest. Because the legends deal with locations, marked out by caves, rivers, and hills and by shrines and temples, they also deal with a geography of indigenous existence that blends into the history of conquest. Because the legends deal with events, they also deal with conceptions of the chronology of shifting allegiances. Ethnicity poses the question of who people are. Translated for the indigenous, this means where they operate and to whom they owe allegiance, which is precisely what this book is about.

### **Indigenous Representations of Locality**

We begin in Chapter 1 with a study by Huang Shu-li of the funeral ceremony known as the *qhuab kev* among the Hmong people, found scattered in villages in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan. The ceremony consists of the ritualist (*mof*) showing the deceased the way on a journey to the ancestral homeland. The chapter is a fitting reminder that we have to begin without assuming that we, as researchers intruding into a local community, know even what “local” might consist of. Yet, even without going into indigenous cosmology, we suspect that ideas about who belongs to which group and about which

community must accept standards laid down by which polity have something to do at least with knowing one's way in a real or imagined geography. Knowing the way is almost exactly what we intruders might expect of local people when we ask for directions: when they cannot point the way, we assume either that they have little to do with our destination or that they, like ourselves, are intruders. Having a destination and knowing how to get there tell us something about who and where we are. Such knowledge must count among essential local knowledge, although even then it must not be assumed that this knowledge is evenly shared.

During ceremonies, not uncommonly, participants go on journeys. We observers do not assume that all of them know the way, and neither do the participants. In the qhuab kev ceremony, the deceased finds the way with the help of the mof, the ritual specialist. Instructed by the mof, the deceased goes on diverging roads, encounters interlocutors who pose questions, and all the while is drawn into making decisions about the ways and means of the journey. As the mof accompanies the deceased on this final journey, he casts bamboo sticks to divine the deceased's responses to instructions. The object of the directions given the deceased, ultimately, is that the deceased should go on the road of the forefathers, presumably the road shared by the deceased and the audience alike. As Huang puts it, as the deceased departs from a world where the Hmong share a geography with other peoples, such as the Han and the Yi, the qhuab kev performance helps him or her to choose the "correct" Hmong way. If there is a failure to do so, the deceased becomes lost. Other studies of the return to a Hmong origin in the death ritual have assumed that the text might have recorded a historical diaspora. Huang disagrees: "The journey of the deceased is not conceived by the Hmong as an objectification of either geographical reality or religious reality ... the qhuab kev objectifies a reality in the journey of the deceased in the reality of its words and their consequences." Surely, one must know the way, even when reality is only imagined.

From Huang's report, it appears the ceremony was conducted without resort to written texts. We do not have to assume that the oral and the written traditions, where the two coexist, are necessarily distinct or that the oral tradition might have been altered or sustained by influences from outside of the area in which it has been observed. We do not even have to assume that the qhuab kev ceremony, independently documented for different Hmong communities, is necessarily without parallels in other ethnic communities. The starting point for this book is simply the understanding that an indigenous geography that stands apart from any appeal to a Chinese imperial order may be documented. In chapters to follow, it will be seen that the imperial

influence – or “metaphor,” to use Feuchtwang’s (1992) term – is far-reaching without necessarily being very similar in different parts of southwest China. Few parts of China did not feel the influence of the imperial government, but chapters to follow will show that different parts of southwest China reacted to the imperial influence in different ritual terms.

In Chapter 2, Kao Ya-ning presents her observations of another ceremony in an area where the indigenous traditions are more markedly entwined with imperial influence in the representation of locality. The ceremony takes place at the town of Ande, where in 1048 Nong Zhigao established his second kingdom, and the ceremonial rituals take account of the geography of the town that has been mapped onto a history of this event. The Nong Zhigao Temple now stands where it is said he set up his command (referred to by the Chinese term for magisterial offices, *yamen*), and a nearby cavern houses a goddess referred to as *lunx*, explained variously as being Nong’s mother or wife. Some aspects of the ceremony itself are no longer what they used to be. Nowadays, even though the local people might continue to think of the ceremony as an effort to invite Nong Zhigao into the town for its protection, official approval has found for it the secular purpose of commemorating national hero Nong’s defence of China’s border from Vietnam. It is not even clear whether all of the villages within the township used to take part in the ceremony. Nowadays, all of them are represented in the name of the village alliance known as the Six Flags. Participation means being involved in the organization of the ceremony, taking part in the procession, and being engaged in ritual acts, but ritual leadership falls to a woman known as the *moed*, who communicates with the *lunx* goddess through her singing. She leads the procession to the cavern to seek the goddess’ indication that she will participate in the ceremony. She crosses into a spiritual realm, passing twelve doors to wake up the ritual master, who is able to access the goddess. The audience members in the procession learn of all this through her songs. They also witness the goddess descending to the *moed* and sing through her voice. She returns from her journey and takes the procession to the Nong Zhigao Temple, where, in the goddess’ presence, Nong Zhigao descends and also speaks through her. Then the procession parades through the town, where the Six Flags villages demonstrate their unity through their common festivities.

Some of the features in this ceremony are well known to scholars who have studied primarily those parts of China long steeped in the imperial tradition. The use of the temple as a focal point of worship, and hence organization, by the village alliance of the Six Flags is a well-known feature of the nineteenth century. The story of Nong Zhigao the rebel, who serves in Ande as a protective deity, likewise reiterates a common theme. Very different from these

features is the interplay of gender in the Zhuang territory. Kao Ya-ning notes that the female symbols represented in the cavern form a pair with the male symbols represented in the temple and that much of the ceremony can be explained as an effort to invite the joint presence of both sexes. Other chapters in this book add to this theme, and in Chapter 9, Ho Ts'ui-p'ing draws together these observed threads to consider the representation of gender in the history of the region. For the present, it is necessary to understand the role of the temple within the terrain in the portrayal of local loyalties.

### **Temples as Markers**

A simple case of this portrayal may be summarized from the example of the worship of the Venerable Flying Mountain in Jingzhou, Hunan province, discussed by Zhang Yingqiang in Chapter 3. To recapitulate the ethnography, Zhang found in this border area of the provinces of Hunan and Guizhou temples dedicated to the Venerable Flying Mountain, as might be indicated by name plaques on the doorways and by stories about the principal deity venerated in them. Some of these stories are still being passed on by word of mouth, and others have been recorded at different times in local histories, genealogies, and stele inscriptions. To this day, this principal deity is widely worshipped in the area, as evidenced by worshippers appearing at the temples, by donations made for temple building and repairs, and by annual festivals in which his temple statue is paraded through the villages.

The stories commonly, but not exclusively, tell of a man known by the name of Yang Zaisi, who had been a chieftain in the area. Zhang traces the history of Yang Zaisi to official Chinese history in 911, when he surrendered to the commander dispatched by the imperial dynasty of the time. Zhang also notes that through the tenth and eleventh centuries, numerous chieftains by the surname of Yang surrendered to the imperial dynasty. By 1083 the Song dynasty emperor had awarded a title to Yang Zaisi, now more than a century after his death. In 1176 Yang, as a deity, appeared to troops sent to quell a local rebellion. Such appearances to imperial troops or their commanders became a regular pattern, which gained him further official recognition in 1537 and 1825. The 1825 event, however, was marked by a twist in the relationship between the worshipper and the deity. Yang Fang, a Hunan military commander, who offered sacrifice to Yang Zaisi on this occasion, did so not only as military commander but also as his descendant, and the ceremony was conducted not at any of his temples but at a grave in Liping county, Guangxi province, some distance from his temple on Flying Mountain. Nevertheless, the event was known also at the temple, for Yang Fang's status as descendant was noted on a plaque donated by Yang himself. The

commemorative essay for the occasion, written in 1879, recounts the lineage connection, the exploits of the Venerable Flying Mountain, and a defence of his loyalty to the reigning dynasty of his time.

This brief history in Chapter 3 encompasses the essential turning points in the history of the Venerable Flying Mountain: local people surrendering to the imperial state from the tenth century; a temple set up in honour of one of these people, real or imaginary, from the eleventh; the deity so established being viewed as a protective god by the locals and as a defender of the imperial state by incoming troops from the twelfth; and claims to descent being made in a sacrificial ceremony by the nineteenth. The pattern is significant in the context of what is already known about some other parts of south China: it reflects the Song dynasty's concern with incorporating local society into the state by recognizing its deities and the Ming dynasty's concern, continued into the Qing dynasty, with lineage building (Hansen 1990; Faure 2007). It is not possible by looking at the texts to determine the extent of the geography occupied by the territorial groups that paid homage to the Venerable Flying Mountain. Yet, it would have been worth the while of the state to honour the deity as an indication of its acceptance of local society if the local people had similarly regarded sacrifice to the god as pivotal to their allegiance. Local society's adoption and, sometimes, manipulation of state-accepted ritual provided a means whereby the commitment between state and local society was sealed. This pattern is borne out by other cases included in this collection, especially those discussed in Chapters 4 to 7.

Anthropologist Zhang Yingqiang, therefore, could be confronted with a temple dedicated to the Venerable Flying Mountain outside the city of Jinping in Guizhou and could trace its origins to another temple dedicated to the same god in Jingzhou, Hunan province, eighty kilometres away. In this sense, the Venerable Flying Mountain Temple at Jingzhou was a significant ritual marker – that is, it was significant to the local people as a marker of their linkage to a place. Reference to subsequent chapters will show that the geographic coverage of the deities and their temples varies: some deities are very local, such as Nong Zhigao in the town of Ande in Chapter 3; others are regional, such as the Heavenly Kings in western Hunan in Chapter 4 and Madam Xian in Gaozhou and on Hainan Island in Chapter 6; and still others such as the Empress of Heaven (Tianhou), are sacrificed to all over China (Watson 1985). Why any deity might be more popularly supported over a larger geographic area than other deities is the result of many circumstances: some gained ascendance from state recognition and spread along major trade routes, whereas others were subsumed under invading deities and might even have ceased to be remembered. Yet, although the deity might be local, the

temple was frequently built in a style commonly found all over China. Exhibiting this style, the temple claims universality for its deity. In an extended process that evolved over centuries, many deities were absorbed into a pantheon in which all but a handful came to be represented as officials in a heavenly hierarchy (Hymes 2002). Zhang's documentation shows that a magistrate in 1182 put "tiled roofs over 100 official buildings," including that of the Flying Mountain Temple in Jingzhou, indicating an architectural change under official direction. Prior to the existence of the temple, as Kao Ya-ning notes of Ande, Nong Zhigao might have been a spirit of the Nyazslays Forest. With the temple came a new personage related to the imperial state.

### **Genealogies and Affinity with the Chinese Imperial State**

With the onset of the imperial state, documentation in Chinese became more abundant. In Chapter 4, Lian Ruizhi's study of Dali draws on such documentation – recorded now in steles at the temples, local histories, and genealogies – to arrive at a comprehensive account of the manner in which the Dali aristocracy might have portrayed itself subsequent to the Yuan conquest. Dali was a Buddhist state before the Yuan conquest, and it was destroyed and recreated as a Ming dynasty administrative region. Lian writes that Dali's predecessor, Nanzhao, had established a bureaucracy that included a unified hereditary-status system, which survived its replacement by Dali in 937. Nanzhao and Dali were Buddhist states that had increasingly come under the Song dynasty's influence (Lian 2007). By the time Dali was overrun by the Yuan, it would not have regarded as alien those institutions that depended on Chinese texts for their support, as it would have already been pregnant with cultural markers quite distinct from those of many parts of Yuan and Ming China, many borrowed from Buddhism.

In Chapter 4, Lian traces the efforts of the Dali aristocrats to reinvent themselves in a new political mould after the kingdom had fallen. The Zhao surname, an aristocratic lineage, was carried by people who had laid claim to the Zhao Basin at the southern end of Lake Erhai, a claim sustained by the story that their primordial ancestor, Zhao Gang, had been awarded the land by King Cheng Gepi (712-28) of Nanzhao. Zhao Gang used to be sacrificed to in a shrine, the name of which indicates that the king had acknowledged him as a maternal grandfather. The shrine was destroyed in 1384 by incoming Ming troops, and two years later it was replaced by an ancestral hall. Before the hall was built, one Zhao Liang, a member of the lineage, had accepted high office from the Ming. Lian is no doubt right in thinking that in this process, "the primordial ancestor's position was being supplemented with a true-blooded Ming dynasty ancestor," for from this time on, we are

able to ground what is known of the Zhao surname in contemporary records. Interestingly, gravestones, which comprise some of these records, did not dwell on Zhao Gang as a primordial ancestor but on Zhao Duoxie, a Nanzhao military governor who discovered a sacred site marked by the Bodhisattva Guanyin's footprint, and his descendant, Zhao Yongya, an acarye, that is, religious specialist of esoteric Buddhism. Working through the genealogy, Lian finds that the Zhao family had produced well-known ritual specialists, and into the fifteenth century, the family continued to be recognized for its skills in the traditional rituals.

From the fifteenth century on, texts written in Chinese script became obviously important in the maintenance of the genealogical record. Claims made to a Nanjing ancestry or to descent from the Nine Dragons' clan were said to be grounded in a Chinese textual source, namely *Hou Hanshu* (*The History of the Later Han Dynasty*). Significantly, some of these claims were made in records written in Bai, the native language, and in Chinese characters. The cited stele recording imperial awards for Zhao Gang and Zhao Liang, written in Chinese characters, bears every characteristic of an invention under the influence of Chinese ritual texts. Given the predominance of statues as representations of ancestors in Dali, one has to ask whether Zhao Liang's ancestral hall exhibits a conversion from statues to script as the representation of ancestral spirits, this conversion being very much a feature of neo-Confucian orthodoxy and enforced as such in the Ming era.

Lian Ruizhi's reconstruction shows that the conversion of Dali to the rituals popularized by the Ming dynasty was quick, sharp, and comprehensive. Characteristically, the new rituals did not totally replace the old rituals. As new rituals were adopted, they overlaid earlier ones. Signs are plentiful, therefore, that beneath the lineage ideology of the Ming was an earlier society huddled around territorial shrines. We should suspect a strong element of Buddhism as well, but this element is not a focus of Lian's chapter. The same transformation of lineage rituals imposed on territorial shrines occurred throughout much of the heartland of Ming China as well and should, therefore, not be regarded as a unique frontier phenomenon (Dean 1998; Faure 2007; Du 2007).

The mechanics of genealogy tracing, however, followed its own rules, some of which are crucial to an understanding of the Tianwang traditions in western Hunan, detailed by Xie Xiaohui in Chapter 5. Western Hunan, it must be understood, had as complex a frontier history as did the area of China bordering Vietnam, for in western Hunan, from the Song dynasty to the Qing, the imperial government expanded into a region settled by the Miao, and the agents of the imperial government, from the Ming on, were people who have

been referred to as Tujia since the 1950s. As is sometimes said, the Tujia might be extremely similar to the Han in lifestyle (Brown 2001). Nevertheless, the indigenous character of the western Hunan Tujia is not totally devoid of a historical foundation. Not only were they governed by their own chieftains until the eighteenth century, but by serving as aboriginal mercenaries (known as *langbing*) in the Ming, the chieftains also played up their ethnic difference. A consequence of this identity is succinctly illustrated in an account of the defeat of the Tujia in 1728 by Qing imperial forces. The Yaxi Temple of the Heavenly Kings, the Qing commander noted, was the symbol of the local power with which he had to deal. He knew that there were three of these kings, who had red, white, and black faces. The Miao venerated the gods but dared not look them in the face. The Qing commander sent his men into the temple at night to see the statues so that by morning he could claim to have seen them in a dream. Only then did the Miao chiefs enter the temple to see that the gods were as he had described them, causing them to surrender. We do not often have descriptions of temple worship in which the segregation of worshippers is as clearly noted as in this story. Since the Miao stayed outside the temple when they sacrificed to the gods, it may be asked who sacrificed to them inside. Surely, this person would have been the chieftain, who was one of the Tujia, who had just been deposed.

Realizing that the Miao and the Tujia both sacrificed to the three gods but in different capacities, we need to turn to the relationship between them prior to the conquest of Yaxi by the Qing. Accordingly to Xie, a clue to this relationship may be found in the lineage built around the Yang surname, which was the surname of the three gods' mother, and in the layout of their statues – both the kings' and their parents' – which may now be found at the temple. Ritual practices to this day emphasize the popularity of the kings' mother as the object of veneration. Many of the ritual specialists, in fact, are also women.

The surname Yang, as Xie has found, was common in the area not only among the Miao but also among the native officials (*tusi*). Careful documentary work has been able to trace people of the Yang surname who acted as chieftains in the surroundings of Yaxi from at least the early Ming dynasty (fourteenth century) all the way into the eighteenth century. Parallel to this observation is the tracing of descent in the form of a lineage characterized by stories of common origins and the use of written genealogies. Xie has again located this lineage in the early Ming – not at Yaxi but at Bozhou, along the road into Guizhou, southwest of Yaxi. The powerful chieftain of Bozhou, who rebelled against the Ming government in the sixteenth century, was removed from power when the rebellion collapsed. From the early Ming, the line had shared a common descent with the “Yang family generals” of Shanxi

province, as indicated by a statement found in the genealogy compiled at Lutijian village, the site of the Yang family generals' principal ancestral hall in Shanxi. Near Yaxi, the Yang family generals' connection is further corroborated by a manuscript genealogy that Xie obtained in the field, which she reckons dates from no earlier than the early nineteenth century. The reasons for this dating are circumstantial: contemporary reports of the eighteenth century suggest that at Yaxi, death rituals did not follow lineage practice as defined by the textual tradition. It was said that the local people did not even keep spirit tablets, used no coffins, and practised no grave sacrifice after the initial three years. Having established the sequence of events in the adoption of the written tradition at Yaxi, Xie is able to argue that the arrangement of the deities now present at the temple reflects conditions after conquest, not before. The present arrangement includes two altars, one devoted to the Three Kings and one to their father and mother. The father, surnamed Long (Dragon), might appear in the legend but played little part in the ritual. He was installed on the altar only after the written texts had shifted the focus of the legend from the mother to the patriline.

We are now in a position to consider the legend and its fascinating subplots. Different versions, all of which would have appeared orally before they were written down, probably in the eighteenth century, tell of a mother of the Yang surname giving birth to the Three Kings, who served the Chinese emperor in war and who, on victory, were poisoned by him. An essential subplot has either the mother searching for the sons after their deaths or the ghosts of the sons searching for their mother after her suicide on news of their deaths. Another subplot has to do with the river that flowed by Yaxi. The river led to the Chinese empire. It was there that the kings were conceived and there that they died, and when a father had to be found for them, this was the dragon king, that is to say, the god of the river. The local people had no qualms relating to the kings genealogically even though this connection would have been built through the matriline.

Sacrifice by the river at a location where land and water met to produce life would have been a very early theme. We do know that what the Qing forces took over in 1728 was a temple housing three statues, and temples were uncommon in Miao territory – as stated in the report “Fenghuang ting chengzao zixun gexiang shiyi qingce” (Clear Record of Enquiry on Miscellaneous Matters in Fenghua Subprefecture) (1886). We also know that although the chieftain's descendants would have been related to the gods, the gods were revered rather than trusted by the Miao. We do not know when the story of the kings' poisoning began to appear but suspect that it reflected the local perception of Han-native relationships over a long period of time.

Thus we can say that from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, a belief in local deities – in which the mother, as procreator, played a central role – gradually gave way to a lineage structure in which the patriline was deemed to have precedence, even though in ritual practices the mother still played an important role. Ironically, therefore, at Yaxi, the removal of the chieftain meant the opening-up of his family temple to his subject people just when the written genealogy appeared, which overturned his fundamental lineage relationships. This change should not be surprising, as the Chinese state had long insisted on privileging the patriline in tracking unilineal descent, and it was extending its influence among people for whom the will to track the patriline exclusively, and even the tracking tools, did not necessarily exist.

We see a similar shift to tracking using the patriline in the case of Madam Xian in Gaozhou and Hainan, both part of Guangdong province in the Ming and the Qing, and studied here by He Xi in Chapter 6. Madam Xian is probably as well documented as can be expected of a bona fide historical person. Unlike north China, where the imperial court was located for three millennia, south China did not see the emperor in person very often. However, when he did appear there, his presence created stories, which were then recorded in the official histories, and the same stories persist locally and are reinforced by the written accounts. In the case of Madam Xian, the imperial presence was provided by the emergence of the Chen dynasty in the sixth century in the period of what are known as the North and South Dynasties. By going through the dynastic histories from the Chen to the Tang dynasties, He Xi pieced together the history in what later became Guangdong and Guangxi of local chieftains supporting the first Chen emperor, Chen Baxian, in his campaign to gain control of the Dayuling road, an essential passage between northern Guangdong and Jiangxi. They succeeded, but the Chen dynasty lasted only thirty years and then was conquered by the Sui, which reigned for only twenty years before giving way to the Tang in the early seventh century. Madam Xian, therefore, served four dynasties in her lifetime. During this time, not only were some of the official dealings between herself and the imperial court recorded in the histories, but at times some of her sons or grandsons were also sent as hostages to the imperial court, where they participated in poetry writing in Tang upper-class society, and a Gaozhou native even became a favourite eunuch at court. The writer of the Tang history, no less, was himself engaged in policy advice on dealing with Gaozhou. There are good reasons to believe, therefore, that the engagement of the Gaozhou chieftains and the Tang court is not simply legendary.

After the eighth century, no reference was made in the records to Madam Xian. When she surfaced again, it was in the twelfth century, when she was

housed in a temple on Hainan Island. For having appeared to aid the local people in flood control, she was awarded an imperial title in 1155. It is possible to push this date back by a century, when it was recorded that she had been rewarded by the Nan Han (917-71) kings for similar deeds to help the local people. Whether or not we resort to the uncorroborated earlier date, there still remains a gap of some three centuries when nothing, apparently, was known of her existence.

Unlike in western Hunan, where the local surname was connected to the gods genealogically via their mother, in Gaozhou, the Madam Xian legend from its historic days tied her firmly to her consort, Feng Bao, and local people made their genealogical connections through both the Xian and the Feng surnames. By the Ming dynasty, in the Gaozhou village of Changpo, where the principal Madam Xian Temple was located, people of the Feng surname had claimed descent from the union of Feng Bao and Madam Xian. Much is said about Changpo by its location. From the Song dynasty until the fifteenth century, this was the seat of the Gaozhou prefectural administration, but by the second half of the fifteenth century, because of the Yao turmoil, it had been necessary to move the prefectural seat to present-day Gaozhou city. A Madam Xian temple was built at the city in the sixteenth century and given full government recognition. Contemporary reports, meanwhile, spoke of Changpo as having by then been worn down by war.

Also relevant to the importance of location was the emergence of the garrison town of Dianbai as a coastal port in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In the fifteenth century, and maybe extending into the first half of the sixteenth, because of the dislocation caused by the Yao uprising, the traffic linking Guangzhou and the Bay of Tonkin would have skirted the coast, and Dianbai would have been excellently located to serve this traffic. This became the main route from the Guangzhou area into Gaozhou, as the land route was interrupted by the Yao uprisings. In the second half of the sixteenth century, however, government troops put down the Yao at Luopang and thereby cleared the land route leading from Gaozhou up to the West River. Changpo, located on this land route, would have benefited from the re-establishment of government control.

Changpo, like many other villages in Guangdong, is now structured as a lineage village. By examining the genealogies of the Feng surname in Guangdong and Guangxi, and especially one locally found genealogy, He Xi has been able to date the adherence to various practices that would have come with the adoption of written genealogies and sacrifice to ancestors in an ancestral hall. Although, nowadays, many Feng surname groups in Guangdong and Guangxi claim a genealogical connection with Feng Bao, this claim has

been widespread only since the eighteenth century, when people of the Feng surname in the Guangzhou surroundings built a clan ancestral hall there. At Changpo, the genealogy was written from probably no earlier than the mid-sixteenth century, and ancestral spirit tablets were set up, possibly in an ancestral hall, from the eighteenth century. If we merge these dates into the earlier chronology, it seems that the Madam Xian Temple was maintained at Changpo before the Feng surname had either a written genealogy or an ancestral hall. The architectural evidence now corroborates this impression, for He Xi demonstrates that prior to the extant ancestral hall, which is located right next to the Madam Xian Temple, Feng Bao would have been sacrificed to, along with Madam Xian, in a small shrine behind the temple. For some centuries, probably, people of the Feng surname had laid claim to the Madam Xian Temple at Changpo, even though only from the eighteenth century did the claim spread beyond the village.

After the Tang dynasty, Gaozhou was not governed by chieftains. Through the Song dynasty, it was governed by appointed officials, so the social division between the chieftain's lineage and the lineages of the governed did not appear there as in, for instance, western Hunan and much of Guangxi. The Madam Xian Temple in Gaozhou would not have been beyond bounds for all, whereas people of the Feng surname, when they saw fit, had to build their own exclusive lineage hall. The alignment of their hall with the temple and the hall's location adjacent to it, both at Changpo and in Gaozhou city, stand as testimony that they held not only ritual claim but, probably by the eighteenth century, also ownership of the land on which the two buildings now stand. Meanwhile, the character of Madam Xian as a protective goddess emerges most clearly in her relationship to the three "commanders" who were honoured with the sacrifice of an ox or a cow. Ox or cow sacrifice is not part of the lineage repertoire that can be associated with written genealogies or ancestral halls. In fact, under the imperial regime, it would have been a taboo. The sacrifice is conducted in Madam Xian's Temple but is not dedicated to her, indicating a very clear distinction in practice between the "commanders" she pacified and the authority she represented.

The similarities between Madam Xian and the mother of the Three Kings at western Hunan, therefore, now become more apparent. In both areas – as, indeed, probably in many parts of south China – sacrifice to protective goddesses was common prior to the acceptance of a social order in which the patriline was raised to exclusive prominence, which can be associated with the spread of the written genealogy and sacrifice to ancestors in ancestral halls. This was the case notwithstanding the fact that local groups themselves

practised patrilineal descent. As a corroboration of her observations at Gaozhou, He Xi discovered that on Hainan, in some instances, local goddesses were absorbed into the Madam Xian legend as the legend came to be more broadly accepted. Seeing that the extension of the imperial state had marginalized sacrifices to goddesses and had raised to the fore the impression of subdued natives (compare the story of the Three Kings' poisoning), she raises the question of when the subjugation image was introduced and suggests that the answer lies not in the Song or earlier but in the Ming and Qing. The Song state was probably not strong enough in south China to project the suppression image. Nor were the native people of the southwest necessarily so ignorant of the imperial way as to be totally unable to negotiate – witness the native who explained mainline primogeniture succession to the imperial envoy in Leizhou in the mid-twelfth century. Military conquest was very much more the line of approach of the Ming and Qing.

In Chapter 7, I continue the history of veneration for chieftains along the southwest borders of Guangxi province, specifically in the subprefecture of Guishun. The scene shifts to the last half-century of imperial China. In the aftermath of the Taiping Rebellion, during which the local magistrate had organized the local militia to fight against the rebels, the native official's prowess was little more than a shadow of that of his forebear. More than a century earlier, in the 1730s, the imperial government had broken the back of native rule in Guangxi, having replaced the most powerful native officials with appointed officials. The Guishun native official, a distant relative of the powerful officials of the Cen surname, now faced secession by groups of people who had, until then, come under his rule. They supplanted his authority with a legend about an earlier official who had governed them prior to the Cen family. The legend had been derived through spirit writing, in which the spirit, descending on a scribe, wrote messages on sand. Graves were set up for the fictional earlier official by the militia groups of the mid-nineteenth century. The process of lineage tracing had now quite transcended the social ladder. The tracing of patrilineal descent, which the native official had acquired from the Chinese, had now been acquired by his subject people as a weapon to turn against him.

A similar process for the Wancheng native officialdom in Guangxi is traced in Chapter 8, where James Wilkerson argues that native officialdoms resulted in hierarchical statuses that were reflected in marriage patterns but that were at odds with the expansion of schools and the emphasis on agnation that was introduced along with the Confucian ideology emphasized in the official examinations. Importantly, the case of Wancheng shows that in the social

formation of the late-imperial era, Chinese-style lineages supplanted the indigenous-style bureaucratic strata of the mid-imperial era by replacing endogamous occupational statuses with degree statuses. Direct rule by imperial officials, rather than hereditary chieftains, had important implications for the value of women. In her concluding chapter, Ho Ts'ui-p'ing expands on this theme. Drawing together the ethnography presented in this book, she argues that in the southwest – coexisting with the process of incorporation into the state by veneration, scriptures, and texts – there were also processes of gendering ritual communities for self-identification through the “naturalized” construction of conceptive procreative goddesses. Through the agencies of gender and of ephemeral ritual performance, new gender ideals were created in the dialogical process of encountering the state. The transformation imposed by the Chinese state changed the value of women and created new gender ideals for women in rituals and myths, but it also marginalized women in terms of their political role and status.

### **Conclusion**

Knowledge of the history of state building in the area, arising from multiple centres, provides a tool for stripping back, layer by layer, the strata of politics, administrative practices, and beliefs introduced at different historical times. Reworking the local histories should make it possible to arrive at a chronology of turning points at which institutions crossed over between the state and local societies. These chronologies, constructed from local histories and rituals, speak not only of the extension of the Chinese state but also of the proactivity of local societies in their dialogues with the Chinese state. As a methodology, these local chronologies might be compared and contrasted for hypotheses concerning the geographic spread of institutions and the historical processes of institutional change. In the case of China, where so much history is constructed from centralized government records, and where documentation for local histories is so plentiful, comparative local chronologies provide the means whereby history can be written to demonstrate not only that the centre formulated policies but also that the massive territory to which they were applied responded in different, and often creative, ways.

A comparison of the chronologies for changes in ritual practices in different parts of Guangdong, Guangxi, and Yunnan indicates that, politically at least, the Ming frontier was demarcated by a change in administration. The Ming behaved like a nation-state, even though the term flies in the face of Eurocentric biases. The emperor's subjects (*min*) were governed by magistrates and subject to taxation and, therefore, to a different legal language that was reflected in rituals as much as administration. Beyond government by the

magistrates, who were appointed by the emperor, was the realm of the chieftains, whose office was acquired through inheritance but whose authority was recognized by the Chinese imperial government. Beyond the chieftains, the Chinese imperial government had no authority. The entire region of southwest China once lay beyond the Song dynasty state and was incorporated into the Chinese empire during the Ming dynasty. If one could look at state extension in Chinese history along two axes, it might be seen that the east-west axis stretching from Fujian to Yunnan differs significantly from the north-south axis from Hebei to Guangdong. Along the north-south axis, gods from the north were brought into the south in the Song dynasty even as southern gods were included in the Chinese pantheon, and in the Ming, the extension of imperial administration gave rise to the dominance of ancestral sacrifice as defined in relation to state rituals. Along the east-west axis, although lineages are important, substantial territories remained under chieftain control throughout the Ming, the lineage principle barely extended beyond the chieftain's relatives, and much more was preserved from earlier religious practices. Therefore, although in terms of physical distance, both the coastal southeast and the inland southwest were far from the imperial capital or the major commercial cities (such as those in the lower Yangzi), the southeast had always given the impression that it was administratively central, whereas since the Ming, the southwest had always been considered "peripheral" to the Chinese state.

The word "peripheral" is used with caution here to indicate perception rather than economic or political reality: there are good reasons to think that some of these communities were much more central to imperial policies than the standard histories have implied. They were "peripheral" primarily because, from the Song to the Ming, they fell within areas that were governed not by state-appointed officials drawn from the imperial bureaucracy but by recognized hereditary chieftains. Administration under the chieftain imposed differentiation between the chieftain's lineage and the lineages of the subject people whom he governed. In some "peripheral" areas, these differentiations could have been considerably altered as the chieftains gave way to appointed officials in the early seventeenth century.

One day, the history of China will have to be rewritten so that the varying experiences of local groups within the state are reflected not in administrative terms familiar to the centre but in the self-identifying language that one might find operating from the ground up. In such a history, "centre" and "peripheral" will be only temporal constructs. It will be a history of changing institutions that came out of multiple centres, reflecting the multicultural society that a population of millions must have been.

### Notes

- 1 This is not to say that the southwest had not been exposed to influences from outside areas, including those parts that the Chinese imperial state had claimed, from well before the Yuan. Northern influence on the south is well documented (Wiens 1952; Schafer 1967; Eberhard 1968).
- 2 Harrell (1995c) describes the efforts to transform the peoples on China's frontier regions, by the dominant political powers of different times, as "civilizing projects." The concept is useful as long as it is not assumed that the civilizing projects were directed only at frontiers.

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