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Ethnic Minorities and the State in Eurasia

In 2012 and 2013, this Focus Group continued its project "Ethnic Minorities and the State in Eurasia", which explores the forms, practices, and structures of interdependencies, dominance, and resistance in various parts of Southeast Asia, China, and Russia. This multi-sited approach provides ample opportunities for comparing different forms of colonialism (continental, internal, and overseas) in time and space, including cross-epochal legacies as well as synchronous interferences and influence. For a better understanding of contemporary state-minority dynamics it is important to know how the shifting formats of colonialism resulted in differing modes of integration and to what extent these variables depend on factors of *longue durée* in society, nature, and history. Notwithstanding the huge diversity of forms and transformation processes involved, there is consistency and common ground in the group in that all projects are positioned within the framework of or related to imperial formations (either large ones as in the case of China and Russia or in miniature as in the case of Laos), of multi-national states or multi-cultural societies.

Research Results and Achievements

Imperial formations in Eurasia have developed lasting strategies to integrate cultural diversity resulting from the immense variety of ethnic minorities they have absorbed in the course of their expansion. While in pre-modern empires (Byzantine, Mongol, Muscovy, Ottoman, Mughal) 'difference' was still the prevalent mode of integration, this pattern changed radically with the 'well-ordered' state and the final stages of continental colonialism when 'belonging' and 'sameness' became the dominant mode leading to ideologies of nostrification, homogenisation, and unification. Since then, some empires (Ottoman, Habsburg) have transformed into nation-states, while some large (Russia, China) and smaller formations (Laos) are still struggling to find 'unity in diversity'.

Though integration strategies vary in time according to their historical background, their ends remain almost the same as the obvious timeless challenge: to maintain cross-epochal cohesiveness in a multi-national state *and* to guarantee certain rights of national self-determination. In the case of Russia, the urge to have 18th-century enlightened scholars from Western Europe take stock of the empire's riches, peoples,

and languages led to an assiduous counting and classification paving the way for a *mission civilisatrice* and the modern nationalities question.

In Ming-Qing China, on the other hand, a surprisingly lesser interest in defining ethnic groups (other than Han) can be observed. Here we can see a robust tradition of clustering them under ethnocentric stereotypes instead (Fan, Meng, Hui, etc.) and the belief that Confucianism is instrumental to promote the 'barbarians' from a lower 'raw' to a higher 'cooked' status. Both empires, however, invented and developed, independently of one another, central institutions needed even today to structure ethnic-cultural diversity, to govern the civilisational frontier, and to implement various strategies of integration for the sake of imperial cohesion.

Quintessentially for continental colonialism and in contrast to corresponding agencies of overseas colonial powers, these institutions were never officially called or recognised as 'colonial offices'. This also holds true for Southeast Asia where traces of French overseas and pre-modern internal colonialism still play an influential role today. What these formations (Russia, China, Laos) do have in common is a shift from 'indirect' to 'direct' rule, in the latter case stimulated by French colonialism. Territorial contiguity of both the Russian and Chinese empires with their Central and Inner Asian peripheries can thus hardly be used as a counter-argument against classifying their rule as colonial and contrasting their continental formations with overseas variations.

Why Some Institutions Do Not Die

Colonial continuities as petrified in institutional structures, cross-epochal habitus, and transformed ideologies are key issues in a comparative research project on governmental agencies in Qing China and Russia by Chia Ning, Heuschert-Laage, and Schorkowitz. Focussing on the role of the *Lifanyuan* (Court for the Regulations of the Frontier) colonial administration, Heuschert-Laage, in her source-based research project, explores Mongolia-related Qing integration strategies and analyses the impact of these processes on Mongolian societies. Having once been a powerful player in Eurasia, the Mongols underwent many changes and were, by the end of the Qing Dynasty (1912), in a state reminiscent of that of colonised peoples in other parts of the world. To explain the changing modes of their integration into an administrative system with the emperor at the top, Heuschert-Laage investigates the political techniques of patronage with their formalised language and expressions of courtesy. She shows that the Qing, by re-interpreting the obligations of gift exchange, transformed the network of personal relationships with Mongolian leaders into a system with clearly defined rules to the effect that, during the late Qing, the façade of a patronage-clientele relationship was maintained in order to legitimise increasingly unequal power relations. Whereas techniques of patronage were developed long before the Qing came to power, it was the *Lifanyuan* which now monitored and modified its performance: the emphasis in gift exchange shifted

from recording what was *received* to recording what was *given*, thus stressing the kindness and generosity of the emperor and relegating the Mongols to a subordinate role at the Inner Asian frontier.

Similar shifts towards inequalities in power relations and direct rule are documented in the changing concepts of territory, especially when land rights and the use of nomadic pastures became challenged by in-migrating Chinese farmers, and with regard to the legal sphere, in which controversies over jurisdictional competence played an important role in re-defining Manchu-Mongolian relationships (see her *MPI Working Paper No. 138*). What becomes evident from this analysis is, first, the change from a multi-jurisdictional legal order towards greater coherence and consistency. Like the changing formats in gift exchange and patronage, this drift towards incorporating the Mongols into the Qing Chinese legal system corresponds to the general trend towards formalisation and assimilation in other parts of Mongolian and Inner Asian cultures. Secondly, the formation of the *Lifanyuan* was contested along jurisdictional and administrative lines and its functions were permanently re-interpreted through the interplay between coloniser and colonised, centre and periphery – a feature attested for many colonial institutions.

The positioning of the *Lifanyuan* within this empire-wide perspective is instrumental for a better assessment of its general role in Qing colonial governance and particularly its engagement with non-Chinese groups in Inner Asia. Guided by her source-based research Chia Ning gives a precise description of the *Lifanyuan's* differentiated procedures of indirect rule, employing various 'social systems' to govern different 'social entities', thus preserving ethnic identities, traditions, and local political orientations for a long time (see her *MPI Working Paper No. 139*). Since its establishment in 1636, the *Lifanyuan* functioned as an institutional pillar in Qing empire-building even when indirect rule in the operative social systems was later converted into forms of direct governance and decision-making processes were increasingly centralised.

Complementary to the analysis on *Lifanyuan's* involvement in Mongolian affairs, Chia Ning's research not only corroborates the idea of changing colonial formats but also enlarges our analytical framework by including the *Libu* (Board of Rites) into a comparison of institutions in charge of Qing colonial affairs. Taking the ethnic-culturally diverse population of the Qing Empire and its Ming predecessor as a starting point, she examines three different types: 1. the *Lifanyuan*, introduced by the Qing, for Inner Asia; 2. the *Libu* in its Ming-Qing forms; and 3. the Six Boards for China proper. *Lifanyuan* and *Libu* responsibilities overlapped in some regions (Amdo, Qinghai) and with regard to particular patronage-clientele activities (pilgrimage, court rituals, tribute), the processing of imperial examinations, and the supervision of Buddhist and Muslim affairs, leading to forms of close cooperation in colonial management.

Both agencies, however, represent but two formations in a series of institutions dealing with the legacy of ethnic diversity in imperial China. Relieved of its respon-

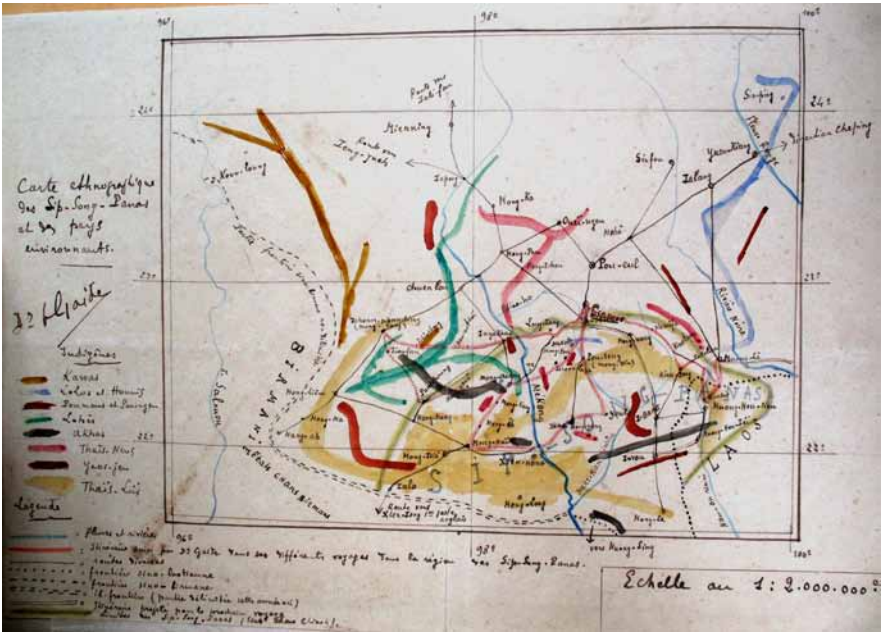
sibilities in foreign affairs, the *Lifanyuan* continued to exist as *Lifan bu* (a revised name of the *Lifanyuan* since 1906) until 1912 and was soon re-established initially as the Board (1914) and later Commission (1928) of "Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs", which is still active in Taiwan today and has a parallel 'twin' agency in the People's Republic of China ("State Nationality Affairs Commission"), founded in 1949. It is because of this continuity and the thick structure of China's internal colonialism that trends of integration, from 'difference' to 'sameness' (see Schlee, *MPI Working Paper No. 143*), and rule, from 'indirect' to 'direct', can be brought into continental perspectives when compared with and contrasted to similar developments in Russia, which is the focus of Schorkowitz's research. Here the *longue durée* picture looks similar, though the evolution of political institutions is quite different. While there was a "Department of Asian Affairs" (1797) and the "Asian Department" (1819, being the de facto colonial office) as a prominent part of Russia's foreign office supplemented by a number of indigenous self-governments and steppe dumas (indigenous self-administration), institutional centralisation took shape rather late with Stalin's "People's Commissariat of Nationalities". The urge for ethnic-cultural integration surfaced in Russia especially during caesura-like ruptures (1917, 1989-91) mirroring the oscillation in imperial cohesiveness often described as 'dynastic' or 'administrative cycles'. It remains atop the agenda even today as the "Presidential Council for Intra-National Relationships" shows, founded in May 2012 by a presidential *ukase* (decree) with the aim of forming a 'single political nation'. Results from these three projects have been presented at international conferences in Beijing, Bonn, Halle, and Paris, at the German Anthropological Association's convention in Mainz, and have also been published in prominent Chinese and Japanese series.

Laos and Vietnam: multi-ethnic empires in miniature

Both Laos and Vietnam, prime examples of ethnic-cultural diversity, can be portrayed as excellent laboratories for the exploration of colonial transformations of political and sociocultural configurations, and the making of a frontier between upland and lowland societies. Tappe in his recent research shows that before French colonial intervention in Southeast Asia, Lao and Vietnamese rulers were content with mere indirect control over upland people, mainly to guarantee the flow of goods from the mountain forests. While in pre-colonial times, Lao rulers maintained tributary and marriage relations with certain groups, the Vietnamese offered titles and ranks to co-opted upland elites. Some groups, such as the Tai Deng, however, constantly moved and mixed and thus created the kaleidoscopic appearance of this specific upland context which challenged the French colonial gaze at the turn of the twentieth century.

While developing integration strategies of its own, the French colonial administration adopted lowland 'imperial' strategies such as the co-optation of local elites, thereby reinforcing interethnic hierarchies and socio-political tensions. Under French

colonialism, ethnic minorities emerged as a distinct social category, namely as upland societies outside the dominant Lao and Vietnamese cultural mainstream. As an internal frontier in French Indochina, the upland regions dividing Laos and Vietnam entered a new stage of political and economic integration. By taking this perspective 'from above' and yet critically engaging with James Scott's upland-lowland opposition, Tappe emphasises the internal dynamics and frictions of the frontier and uncovers new aspects of historical upland life-worlds. He argues that this ethnically heterogeneous region must be considered not as a periphery, but as a zone of contact and exchange, of mutual interpenetration of different cultures, and of mimetic appropriations similar to the Inner Asian frontier.



Ethnographic map, Lao-Chinese-Burmese frontier. (EFEO Paris, 1899)

Postcolonial nation-building in Laos was characterised by tensions between Buddhist cultural hegemony and the project of creating a single national identity, thus facing an analogous challenge of maintaining cohesiveness as large imperial formations do. This cross-epochal legacy of Buddhism as a mediator of interethnic relations has been in the focus of Ladwig's research on Buddhification strategies and practices in the two Lao provinces of Attapeu and Salavan. Though exchange and intermarriage with surrounding animist Mon-Khmer groups signify the porousness of religious boundaries, hegemonic relations between ethnic Lao and upland

minorities have been a constant feature. Buddhist principalities in pre-modern Laos were eager to integrate these groups not only for economic (slavery) and military (forced recruitment) reasons, but also because Theravada Buddhism was considered to be a superior civilisational force.

In order to engage with forms of internal colonialism prior to the French intervention of 1893, Ladwig has analysed Buddhist historiography, local chronicles, and oral histories where Mon-Khmer groups are classified as forest people living in a state of savagery without any form of writing or state-building, performing buffalo sacrifices, and not knowing the teachings of the Buddha. The sources also emphasise, however, the integrative potential of Buddhist polities using conversion which, as in the case of Cheng villages, started as early as the seventeenth century, granting the group a status as 'temple serfs', and has continued into the present through the state's policy of linking Buddhist temples to the new idea of a 'civilised modernity'. Buddhification as a strategy of integrating ethnic-cultural diversity thus shows a great continuity not only from the pre-colonial to the colonial period, but also through the era of the postsocialist nation-state.

Both Ladwig and Tappe have applied diverse approaches and methods of historically informed anthropology making extensive use of archival research (Paris, Aix-en-Provence, Vientiane) combined with multi-sited fieldwork in village societies of their regions. This emphasis on archival sources entails methodological challenges, since official documents generally represent discourses of domination that often only allow for indirect assessments of the colonised (see their *MPI Working Paper No. 141*). Research results of both projects have been presented at international conferences in Lisbon, Chicago, Madison, Halle, Göttingen, Berlin, Paris, Kyoto, at the EASA biennial conference in Nanterre, and the German Anthropological Association's convention in Mainz.

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