

IDEAS BEHIND SYMBOLS – LANGUAGES BEHIND SCRIPTS

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Nations and Rivers:
Their Status and Name in the *Qingshi Gao*
Reflections on the *Draft History of Qing* as a Source

Oliver Corff
Berlin

Unlike its predecessors within the *Twenty-Four Histories* 二十四史, the series of China's official historical books beginning with the *Records of the Grand Historian* 史記 and ending with the *History of Ming* 明史, the *Draft History of Qing* (清史稿, *Qingshi gao*, hereinafter: QSG) is comparatively rarely quoted, and the number of treatises dealing with the QSG as a subject is also relatively small. Anecdotal evidence¹ and qualified opinion² are in agreement on this observation.

Several factors may contribute to this situation. The compilation of the QSG began after the demise of the Qing Dynasty and the collapse of China as an Empire, yet despite initial discussions on how to write a standard history of the Qing, the editors under Zhao Erxun (趙爾巽 1844–1927) finally followed, with minor but notable exceptions, the tradition and the spirit of the *Twenty-Four Histories*. The original compilation process was never formally brought to an end; the draft, labelled as such partially in acknowledgement of the unfinished state of the work, partially in order to pre-empt any criticism, was hastily printed in 1928, and was banned by the Nationalist government in 1930. Later, various attempts were made to amend or delete portions from the text in line with political preferences. This process resulted in a number of different versions, the so-called *guanwei ben* (those 700 of the 1,100 copies initially kept in Beijing) and *guanwai ben*, the latter being revised again, yielding the *guanwai yici ben* and the *guanwai erci ben* versions. The latter serves as the basis for the annotated critical edition (清史稿校註, hereinafter: QSGjzh³) published in Taiwan between 1986 and 1991.⁴

1 While the four volumes on the history of the Qing Dynasty in the *Cambridge History of China* (*The Ch'ing Empire to 1800*, I and II as well as *Late Ch'ing 1800–1911*, I and II) mention the QSG in their comprehensive bibliographies, only one single contributor systematically refers to the QSG as a source (R. Kent Guy: "Governing Provinces", in *The Ch'ing Empire to 1800* part II: 16–76.).

2 "Das Qingshigao wird ja recht selten zitiert." Pilz, Erich: p. 222, "Das *Qingshigao Jiaozhu*: Eine kritische Ausgabe der letzten Dynastiegeschichte im editions-geschichtlichen Kontext." *Monumenta Serica* 41 (1993).

3 The fascicles of the QSG are enumerated differently between its various versions. The enumeration and pagination used in this article is based on the critical edition *Qingshi gao jiaozhu* published in Taiwan between 1986 and 1991.

Efforts to either correct or complete the manuscript with the objective of compiling the truly official history of the Qing have been undertaken both by the People's Republic of China and National China, but the QSG seems to be the epitome of a work which cannot be completed as it has fallen so much out of every historiographical reference frame that any attempt to mend this situation is doomed.

With all these issues in mind, it is understandable that the QSG has been avoided by historians. Another factor cannot be neglected: for over half a century, accessing the QSG was difficult. This situation began to change with the publication of the QSG by the Zhonghua shuju in 1976, yet only the publication of the annotated critical edition (QSGjzh) of the QSG by the Guoshiguan in 1986–1991 opened a new avenue to the research of the QSG.

From Dynasty to Nation: The QSG – A Testimony of Statehood in Transition

In light of and against all objections one might raise against the QSG as a historical source, this opus is a treasure trove of China's political thought in a period of historical transition. The work was compiled only after the end of the Qing reign, during which China's position in its perceived universe was thoroughly uprooted. Once assumed to be the centre of civilization, the Huaxia world order was successfully challenged by emerging powers of continental reach, like Czarist Russia, or even global ambition, like the United Kingdom. With Russia, China entered into its first international treaty based on an understanding of political powers on equal footing along the ideas of Westphalian sovereignty.⁵ The contact with the United Kingdom was equally humiliating, and the second half of the Qing dynasty was marked by a series of costly wars with a number of foreign nations as well as the loss of vassal states formerly believed to be firmly controlled by the Empire. The advent of Western, modern science, technology, administration undermined China's self-confidence even further, prompting officials and scholars

4 A detailed history of the meandering compilation and publication process, together with reflections on the historical and political background of the making of the QSG, can be found in Pilz, Erich, "Das *Qingshigao jiaozhu*: ..." and Chen, Hsi-yuan. "Last Chapter Unfinished: The Making of the Official Qing History and the Crisis of Traditional Historiography." *Historiography East and West* 2, no. 2 (2004): 173–204.

5 The Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689) was not only the very first international treaty which China signed; it is remarkable that the authoritative version of this treaty was in Latin, a neutral language to both treaty parties, with translations into Manju and Russian. Yet, in the QSG, no word is lost on the language and circumstances under which this treaty was drafted and written; notably the critical contribution by Thomas Pereira (徐日升 1645–1708) remains unmentioned. Pereira is only mentioned once as a musician at the Imperial court for his contribution to music theory and harmony (*Treatise on Music*, 1 樂志一, QSGjzh 4:2886).

alike to mistrust their own traditions and thoughts. This is the broad context in which Liang Qichao (梁啟超 1873–1929), the influential scholar, writer and politician wrote a comment on how an official history of the Qing Empire should be conceived. He upheld the idea that former official histories of China were records of genealogies rather than of nations, and strongly emphasized a focus on the nation as a subject of historiography. Despite Liang’s pointed criticism of the old form, the structure of the QSG very much mimicked its predecessors in the *Twenty-Four Histories* but it is certainly due to Liang’s suggestion⁶ that for the very first time in the history of Chinese official historiography, there is a section on International Relations: 邦交 (邦交志, 卷 160 – 167, 志 135 – 142).⁷ Foreign nations made their way into the QSG in approximate order of importance to and first significant contact with the Chinese Empire. In sections 1 to 6 of the *Treatise on Foreign Relations*, we find Russia (俄羅斯), Great Britain (英吉利), France (法蘭西), the U.S.A. (美利堅), Germany⁸ (德意志) and Japan (日本); section 7 contains short accounts of several states: Sweden/Norway (瑞典那威), Denmark (丹墨), the Netherlands (和蘭), Spain (日斯巴尼亞), Belgium (比利時) and Italy (義大利); section 8 contain short accounts on Austria-Hungary (奧斯馬加), Peru (秘魯), Brazil (巴西), Portugal (葡萄牙), Mexico (墨西哥) and Congo (剛果).

While the authors of the QSG had a clear notion of national power and influence with regard to the Western powers, they still continued to think in terms of the system of vassal states, yet clearly perceived the clash with the new world order that approached China from across the ocean:

“At the heyday of the Qing, all countries sent their tributes and were treated according to protocol. Once the ocean corridors were open, the situation changed.”⁹

Thus the tone is set in the opening of the treatise on foreign relations.

The acknowledgement of the new and foreign international order did not imply that the long-held idea of vassal states was abandoned. Rather, the authors of the QSG complain that the Empire lost some of its traditional vassals to emerging foreign powers:

“Beginning with Kangxi and Qianlong, [...] in the west the loss of the Khanate of Kokand and Badakhshan to Russia, in the south the loss of Vietnam and Burma to England and France, in the east the loss of Ryukyu

6 Liang Qichao 梁啟超. “Qingshi shang li 清史商例.” [Suggestions for a Qing History]. In Xu Shishen 許師慎, *Youguan Qingshi gao bianyin jingguo ji gefang yijian huibian 有關清史稿編印經過及各方意見彙編*, 34–52.

7 QSGjzh 6:4267–4410.

8 The treatise on Germany has been translated to German by Jessica Wang: “Das Kapitel über die Deutschen (‘Deyizhi’) im Qingshi gao.” *Orientierungen: Zeitschrift für Kultur Asiens* 29 (2017): 181–226.

9 有清盛時，諸國朝聘，皆與以禮。自海道大通而後，局勢乃一變。QSGzhj 6:4267.

and Korea to Japan, at the northern border the loss of vast stretches of territory [...] caused grievance among the people and made the leaders sick.”¹⁰

In this world order, the old notion of vassal states still persisted, and the QSG reflects this by locating the treatise on the vassal states in a totally different place. This treatise is found not even near the series of traditional treatises (志), but is an appendix to the series of biographies and epitaphs (傳), right after the biographies of “Local Chieftains” (土司, 卷 519 – 524¹¹, in six sections covering Huguang 湖廣, Sichuan 四川, Yunnan 雲南, Guizhou 貴州, Guangxi 廣西 and Gansu 甘肅) and articles on the “Western Tribes” (藩部, 卷 525 – 532¹²), in eight sections beginning with the Khorchin Mongols 科爾沁, the Jalaid Banner 紮賚特, the Dörbet 杜爾伯特, et al., and finally ending in one dedicated article on Tibet (西藏, 卷 532). After the “Local Chieftains” and the “Western Tribes” we finally find those entities which were considered vassal states (屬國, 卷 533 – 536¹³) by the Chinese Empire, some of which had either been “lost” to foreign nations, dared to receive foreign ambassadors or gained sovereignty and independence. Laid out over four sections, we find Korea (rather: Choson) 朝鮮 and Ryukyu 琉球 in the first section, Vietnam 越南 (formerly known as Annam 安南, renamed in Vietnam during the Jiaqing reign) in the second section, Burma 緬甸, Siam 暹羅, Lan Xang 南掌 and the Sulu 蘇祿 Archipelago in the third section, and finally Gurkha 廓爾喀, the Khanate of Kokand 浩罕, Burut 布魯特 (i.e. Kirgiz), Kazakh 哈薩克, Andijan 安集延, Margilan 瑪爾噶朗, Namangan 那木幹, Tashkent 塔什幹, Badakhshan 巴達克山, Bolor 博羅爾, Afghanistan 阿富汗 and Hunza 坎巨提 in the fourth section.

The Tumen River

From the point of view of the Empire, the division into geographic entities along the traditional parts of the Empire (covered in the *Geography* treatise 地理志 of

10 乃康、乾以來所力征而經營者，任人蠶食，置之不顧，西則浩罕、巴達克山諸部失之於俄，南則越南、緬甸失之英、法，東則琉球、朝鮮失之日本，而朔邊分界，喪地幾近萬里，守夷守境之謂何，此則尤令人痛心而疾首者也。QSGjzh 6:4267.

11 QSGjzh 15:11761–11865.

12 QSGjzh 15:11866–12056.

13 QSGjzh 15:12057–12167.

the QSG¹⁴), foreign nations (covered in *Treatise on Foreign Relations* 邦交志) and *Vassal States* (屬國), seemed plausible, but was not without its own contradictions. As soon as matters involved more than one nation, things became complicated and it was not always clear which section was an appropriate choice for a given subject. The Tumen river,¹⁵ for example, played a role not only in the border demarcation with Russia in the context of the Convention of Peking (1860), but is also the decisive landmark mentioned in the Gando Convention between China and Japan, signed in 1909. The official Chinese name of the convention is 圖們江中韓界務條款 *Border Service Agreement on the Tumen River between China and Korea*.¹⁶ The QSG summarizes the text of the convention in such a format and to such a degree that the unaware reader may be tempted to see quotes from the original text of the convention; yet here, as in many other places, the compilers of the QSG wrote their own summaries of these documents, with deliberate oscillation between stretches of verbatim quotes and substantially condensed summaries.

The summary of the discussion of the exact demarcation of the border agreed between China and Russia in the Convention of Peking follows a similar pattern: The phrase indicating the positions of the border tablets on an official map, marking these positions with Cyrillic characters, is nearly a verbatim quote of the treaty text, yet no credit is given in the QSG:

大激等以咸豐十年北京條約中俄東界順黑龍江至烏蘇裏河及圖們江口所立界牌，有俄國「阿」「巴」「瓦」「噶」「達」「耶」「熱」「皆」「伊」「亦」「喀」「拉」「瑪」「那」「倭」「怕」「啦」「薩」「土」「烏」十二字頭，十一年成琦勘界圖內尚有「伊」「亦」「喀」「

14 [Homeland] Geography comprises the traditional Chinese provinces. The *Treatise on Geography* (地理志, 3:2204–2562, 4:2563–2705) covers, in 28 sections: Zhili 直隸, Fengtian 奉天, Jilin 吉林, Heilongjiang 黑龍江, Jiangsu 江蘇, Anhui 安徽, Shanxi 山西, Shandong 山東, Henan 河南, Shaanxi 陝西, Gansu 甘肅, Zhejiang 浙江, Jiangxi 江西, Hubei 湖北, Hunan 湖南, Sichuan 四川, Fujian 福建, Taiwan 台灣, Guangdong 廣東, Guangxi 廣西, Yunnan 雲南, Guizhou 貴州, Xinjiang 新疆, Inner Mongolia 內蒙古, Outer Mongolia 外蒙古, Qinghai 青海, Tibet 西藏 and Chahar 察哈爾. This view of geography offers basically an administrative perspective on China's traditional territory, together with the areas which became administratively part of China proper at the end of the 19th century, like Xinjiang, hence my *impromptu* addition [homeland].

15 For a detailed analysis of the historical, regional and political importance of the Tumen river see Song, Nianshen. *Making Borders in Modern East Asia: The Tumen River Demarcation, 1881 – 1919*. Cambridge University Press, 2018. In the bibliography of his book, Song mentions the QSG as a primary source but he does not seem to use it.

16 Here, Korea is assumed to be a sovereign nation and rendered by the name Han 韓; the vassal state – in Chinese terminology – is called 朝鮮, and the same area is also referred to as Gaoli/Goryeo 高麗. In an exchange with Li Hongzhang 李鴻章, the Japanese ambassador Mori Arinori (森有禮 1847–1889) tries to make his point that Korea is not a vassal state as, among other reasons, it receives a Japanese ambassador, to which Li Hongzhang replies: “Goryeo is a vassal state of China 高麗系中國屬國”(autumn 1875; QSGjzh 6:4394).

拉」「瑪」「那」「倭」「怕」「啦」「薩」「土」「烏」十二字頭，何以官界記文內僅止「耶」「亦」「喀」「拉」「那」「倭」「怕」「土」八字頭？圖約不符。¹⁷

The next uncertainty arises from the fact that there was, despite its importance for political geography, different naming conventions in Chinese and Korean of the Tumen river caused the misconception that there might be two different rivers. Both the treatise on Japan (as part of the *International Relations*) and the treatise on Korea¹⁸ (as part of the *Vassal States*) refer to the Tumen river by its name in Korean: 豆滿. The treatise on Japan points out that “the Koreans call the Hailan (海蘭) River *Domun* (土門) whereas the Tumen River 圖們江 is the Dumangang 豆滿江”¹⁹.

China in International Comparison

A final example which demonstrates the inherent shortcomings of the classical layout of the QSG in light of a “modern” (read: Western) understanding of foreign relations can be seen from the discussion of how international powers can be compared, and which conclusions can be drawn from that comparison for the survival of China. At the end of the 19th century, in the course of numerous disastrous wars and disadvantageous international treaties, it had become abundantly clear to China’s government officials that the foreign powers with their advanced military, economy and technology posed a formidable challenge to the very existence of the Chinese Empire. While a naive reader would assume a reflection on these matters to be found in the treatise on International Relations, the introduction to this treatise exhausts itself in the lamentation mentioned above. Nonetheless, a rudimentary discussion of the matter can be found in the biography of Dai Hongci (戴鴻慈 1853–1910²⁰), a minister who, together with four eminent colleagues, was commissioned to conduct a comprehensive survey of Western nations. The QSG does not fail to mention his book “A Ranking of the Politics and Key Facts of Nations”²¹ which was compiled as the result of a study tour to Italy, France, Germany, the United States of America, and others, in 1905, following the role model of the Japanese Iwakura Mission quarter a century earlier.

17 QSGjzh 6:4289. The bracketed character equivalents stand for A. B. B. Г. Д. E. Ж. 3. И. I. K. Л. M. H. O. П. P. C. T. Y as stated in Article 1 of the Convention.

18 QSGjzh 15:12058–12084.

19 QSGjzh 6:4408.

20 QSGjzh 13:10442–10446.

21 See QSGjzh 13:10443. Dai Hongci et al.: *Lie guo zhengyao* 列国政要. Reprint Guilin 桂林: Guangxi Shifan daxue chubanshe 广西师范大学出版社, 2014.11.

Conclusion

The QSG stands, in many dimensions, for the era of a sunken Empire. Not only does its contents reflect a struggle between old and new, a clash between homeland and alien, which had hitherto been unheard of in the Celestial Kingdom, it also stands for the structural failure of traditional official historiography to adequately give testimony to the events which mark the encounters of China with the foreigners. Traditional official historiography as seen in the *Twenty-Four Histories* had been compiled with the understanding of an empire with the dynastic succession at its centre; the *Draft History of Qing* is conceived after the collapse of the imperial world order; their contributors try in vain to perpetuate the old concepts of how history is perceived and recorded; the few half-hearted innovations, notably the introduction of a treatise on International Relations, which make the *Draft History of Qing* stand out from its predecessors, are not thoroughly defined with regard to their scope. The concept of nations is acknowledged, but the time-honoured understanding of vassal states persists; hence the apparent contradiction of finding Korea both as a vassal and a treaty party, albeit under different names. In summary, the *Draft History of Qing* offers a fascinating insight into a world occupied with its past, and struggling to come to terms with the challenges of the present.

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