

Doing Research on the History of Madness in China

The tight connection between Western Imperialism and philanthropic undertakings is widely recognized. I shall argue that the Asylum for the Insane in Canton was a striking symptom of the imperialistic attitude, an attitude which could be termed one of 'double-intrusion' because of the obvious attempt to teach the Chinese what is 'normal' and what is 'abnormal'.

By ANGELIKA C. MESSNER



Canton 1898: The medical missionary John Glasgow Kerr (1824-1901) establishes the first 'Asylum for the Insane' that has ever existed in Chinese history. One of the main purposes of this asylum was, in the words of Kerr, 'the change [of the insane] from the treatment and influences of heathen relatives.' ('The Refuge for the Insane', Canton, *The China Medical Missionary Journal* 12, 4 (1898), p. 178).

Western psychiatry, an invention of nineteenth century Europe, is well known as an extraordinarily controversial field of study. The view of psychiatry as representing essentially the history of humanism (Zilboorg, 1967) stands in direct opposition to the view of psychiatry as representing one constitutive part in the process of developing industrialization and technology in Europe and North America since the eighteenth century (Foucault, 1961). The latter approach is fundamentally based on the critique of Modernity (Enlightenment), which focuses on the dichotomy between ratio and madness. This view led to the fact that different 'explanatory mechanisms' (appearing first around the eighteenth century) aimed at the elimination of madness.

Notions entertained by medical missionaries on the relatively infrequent prevalence of insanity in China - when compared to Europe and North America - which they attributed to the 'phlegmatic temperament of the Chinese' and the generally quiet lifestyle in China, should be read merely in the sense of their own representations. Such notions betray their mostly affirmative support for the project of 'modernity', including the generally attempted 'cultural hegemony' on the part of Western countries (Said 1979) against the backdrop of evolutionary, biological, and racist patterns.

Idiots

Examinations of Chinese medical discourse in late imperial China indicate many heterogeneous notions, explanations and methods of treatments on *dian*, *kuang*, *xian*, and *feng*. Whereas the first three terms can be traced back to the *Wushier bingfang* of the *Mawangdui-corpus* (300-200 BC) and the *Huangdi neijing* (200 BC - AD 800), *feng* does not appear until the Qing medical discourse [where it indicates an unfathomable form of madness, but

also leprosy or rabid dog]. This term also appears in the judicial discourse of the Qing era, where it indicates a particularly threatening state of insanity, which demands special attention from family and village community. Whereas the medical discourse informs us of the possession by demons or of the prevalence of wind in different organ systems, both of which have to be cast out, the judicial discourse provides no explanation. Judicial discourse on madness in Chinese history shows that since early times (Zhouli) it has been a kind of weakness afflicting the very young or old, the 'idiots and imbeciles'. Such persons were granted special consideration in law until the turn of the twentieth century and were judged as having 'lessened criminal liability' (Bünger 1950:6).

Medical discourse in late imperial China shows two dominant patterns of explanation: possession of demons and an explanation within the 'medicine of systematic correspondence'. Many texts indicate that families accepted any form of explanation, as long as the doctor or shaman called could succeed in healing. The central concept of madness within the medicine of systematic correspondence was of disharmony (madness due to *yinyang* imbalance, disturbances in body fluids connected to *qi*-disturbances inside the body, e.g. *qi* reversal, states of repletion (*shi*) and depletion (*xu*), and disharmony of emotional states).

The most crucial point in this discourse on madness is that although madness was also described in terms of 'mental' symptoms and 'mental' illness throughout, these terms were by no means perceived as forming a single and separate category standing in opposition to a single physical category. This is also evidenced by various theories appearing in late imperial China, such as the prominent role of the study of heat (heat as the origin of all diseases, and hence also for madness) as well as different attempts to locate the cause of madness (*kuang* for instance) as 'fire on the yangming meridian', or on the spleen-organ system, or on the liver and gall bladder, or on the heart, where the accumulation of sputum or wind were seen as causes, as well as on sudden frights, and the like. Even such approaches which attempted (since the seventeenth century) to subsume different forms of madness under the category 'shenbing' - indicating a conceptual extraction of madness from other illnesses -

remained fundamentally within the general systemic approach both in diagnosis and treatment.

Since the two fundamentally interwoven spheres were not divided and cannot simply be reduced by an exclusion of a single element from the whole, madness tended to figure rather as a 'quantitative' alteration of normal health; in this, madness did not differ from other illnesses and was not considered a different state, which would imply a fundamental 'qualitative' difference between insanity and health. The latter general conception of disease appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Europe; and although Wang Qingren (1831) first mentioned the idea of the brain as location for the 'outbreak of epilepsy (*xian*)' (whether influenced by Western thought or not), this viewpoint did not achieve any significance within general medical discourse on madness until the 1930s.

Paradox

The focus on the brain as locus for the outbreak of madness was the main challenge to the Chinese explanation of madness posed by Western medicine - and not only to the Chinese medical discourse on madness, but also for philosophy, because now the brain and not the heart had to be perceived as the location for thinking. Another challenge was posed at the socio-political level: the institutionalized care of the insane. The question as to why Western-style psychiatry did not take root in China (Lin 1985) can be answered at different levels: although the involvement of China in war after war can be seen as an important hindrance, the historically rooted cultural perception of 'normality and abnormality' seems to have been much more important. Starting from the results on the Western history of madness, Chinese history shows at least two paradoxes. On the one hand, since early times within the medical discourse on madness, madness has been considered to be just one illness among others. However, this is not to be confused with the developing 'medicalization' (Foucault 1963) - a complex process which gradually subdues a population to the power of the physician and the state (Foucault determined the beginning of this process in Europe to be at the turn of the nineteenth century).

On the other hand, judicial discourse on madness in China shows that since early times it has been considered a kind of weakness. In the West, a similar special concern for the insane is not paid before the nineteenth century. This is not to be confused with the special attention given to it within the Chinese context mentioned above: while in the West - based on the 'qualitative' conception of madness - medical authority became juridical authority. At the same time, this was never true of China, where the family remained the main carer of any of its afflicted members.

Perhaps more than in other fields of historical research, explorations into the history of madness in China demands a highly reflective and clearly formulated methodological basis. Mindful of the fundamental challenge posed by any attempt to privilege the norms of agency and responsibility (based on Foucaultian theory), we should nevertheless be aware that Foucaultian results reflect a European *Weltanschauung* and are based on the given 'dichotomy between ratio and irratio', which cannot be applied *sui generis* as a heuristic concept to the Chinese history of madness. ■

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Wei Jingsheng in Leiden



Wei Jingsheng (born 1950) is China's best-known dissident. He spent more than half of his adult life in prison for the peaceful expression of his political beliefs. In 1978 Wei wrote an essay entitled 'The Fifth Modernization' in which he stated that, without democracy, China could not truly modernize. His essay caused a sensation: not only because of its open assault on the government, but also because the author dared to sign his name and address on the essay.

In 1979 Wei was convicted of 'counterrevolution' and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. After his release in 1993 Wei continued his work for human rights and democracy. He was imprisoned again until 1997 when he was put on a plane bound for the United States.

Since he has left China Wei has incessantly brought the issue of human rights and democracy in China to the attention of the world. Amongst others he has been received by President Clinton of the United States, President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic, and by President Lee Tenghui of Taiwan. On March 10, 1999, Wei Jingsheng again expressed his political opinions in a debate with students in the Academy Building of the Leiden University. The debate was organized by the Dutch United Nations Student Association (SIB) and the Students' Association of Sinology (SVS), both in Leiden

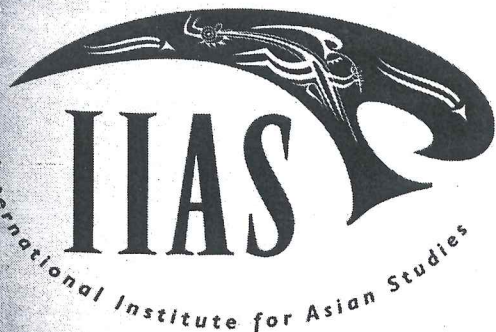
and co-sponsored by the International Institute for Asian Studies.

During the debate Wei remarked: 'Since 1989 every Chinese will agree that China is in need of democracy. The question is therefore not 'Should we implement democracy?' but 'How?' There is no general agreement on this matter. In my view China needs true political reform: more parties and a distribution of political power through general elections. The people should be able to choose their leaders.' ... 'I am not against international trade if all parties involved benefit from it. In China unfortunately, it is the government which controls and profits from international trade. The West pays too little attention to the human rights issue in China. At the human rights convention in Geneva not one single country has condemned China! Western politicians do have their responsibilities.' ■



Wei Jingsheng (r.) at the debate.





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GENERAL NEWS



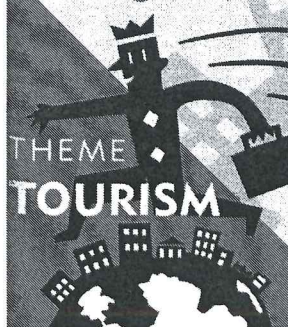
At the IIAS annual lecture Professor James Scott argued that the oldest state project in the world is fixing its population in space. He illustrated this with the Malay distinction between hill people and valley people. Though more a continuum than a dichotomy, the cultural divide between hill and valley is stunningly constant as an experienced and lived essentialism. - (pp. 3 & 45)

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THEME: TOURISM IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

This Newsletter features the first thematic issue, **Tourism in the Asia-Pacific**. Heidi Dables and Toon van Meijl spark off the discussion with their full-page article 'Local Perspectives on Global Tourism in the Asia-Pacific Region'. They have asked twelve colleagues to explore what steps local people in the region have taken to redirect external tourist development in order to keep control of their own lives, or to initiate tourism developments for their own benefit.

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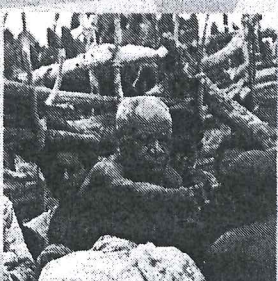


CENTRAL ASIA

The Orientalist Johan van Manen (1877-1943) can be regarded the founder of Tibetology in the Netherlands. His legacy comprises 2105 Tibetan manuscripts and block-prints, 500 South Indian palmleaf manuscripts in Sanskrit, as well as 350 objects including Tibetan Buddhist scroll-paintings. Yang Enhong describes a life almost sunk into oblivion. - (p. 13)

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INSULAR S.W. ASIA



The ancestors play a significant role in the lives of the Malagasy people. In the book 'Ancestors, Power, and History in Madagascar' eleven specialists explore what local models of identity and personhood ancestors embody, how ritual around ancestors engages with history, what kinds of social and political contradictions ancestors reveal, and more. - (p. 15)

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SOUTH ASIA

According to Pancha N. Maharjan democracy in Nepal can only be consolidated if politicians are prepared to pull up their socks and confront their own immorality. People have started to express their disillusionment with democracy, stating that all it means is 'for the parties, by the parties, and of the parties'. - (p. 16)



The Kern Institute in Leiden possesses an impressive collection of nineteenth and twentieth century photographic prints on art and archaeology of South and Southeast Asia. A project has now been launched to preserve the prints and to make them accessible to the public. Gerda Theuns-de Boer reports. - (p. 19)

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SOUTHEAST ASIA

W.S. Rendra, Indonesia's most celebrated poet, playwright, and theatre director, wants his art to be contextual. 'I do not make films, which can be put into storage. Theatre is in the here-and-now.' Earlier this year Rendra was a guest of the IIAS. Matthew Cohen seized the opportunity to interview him about his life and the circumstances that influenced his work. - (pp. 22 & 23)



Though 'continuity and change' might be a cliché, the contemporary Philippines demonstrates that clichés sometimes have validity. However, the city's growing slums and impoverishment, the increasing problem of pollution, and renewed challenges to government authority suggest that change may soon catch up with continuity. Paul A. Rodell reports on his recent visit to the country. - (p. 27)

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EAST ASIA

David Ip and colleagues have indicated that there are considerable advantages to diaspora Chinese business in the use of trust-based, long-term relationships and networks. In view of the current financial crisis that has struck many regions in Asia, these scholars are now prepared to ask how far have networks been crucial to survival, success, and new beginnings since the crisis? - (p. 29)

Food may be one of the most sensitive indicators of the problems of cross-cultural communication and interaction. Five scholars study Chinese Immigrant Cuisine (in Canada, Britain, Belgium, and Singapore) in relationship to cultural identity and come up with some highly entertaining material. - (pp. 30/31)

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ASIAN ART



The Taiwanese exhibition Face-to-Face will be coming to Australia in September. In the post-industrial society where modernization, urbanization, and commercialization co-exist, young Taiwanese artists are exploring issues concerning Taiwan's identity and its history, as well as political, environmental, and gender issues, in an effort to find deeper, personal meaning. - (p. 36)

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