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Workshop
**Recalling Historical Legacies:
Ethnography and Ethnology in China, 1950-1980**
September 1-3, 2010
at the Ethnographic Museum, University of Zurich

Western perceptions of Chinese ethnology in the era of the “Cold War” today still seem biased between anticommunist disregard and pro early PRC Chinese dreams. This workshop aims at bringing together new perspectives on this period and at reconsidering its place in modern Chinese ethnology.

Two issues seem particularly relevant when dealing with the historical legacies of ethnography and ethnology in China during the period of 1950-1980: the academic activities of scholars and the everyday practices of “the masses”, i.e. the common people. This international workshop, organised by the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich, will thus address the history of the academic field of ethnology as well as the ethnography of contemporary peoples’ lives.

Since 1950, ethnological studies have been experiencing serious adaptations within the whole-scale academic landscape of the People’s Republic of China. Ethnology (*minzu xue*) was renamed as “studies of ethnic nationalities” (*minzu yanjiu*). The disciplines sociology as well as social anthropology were abolished but their personnel and methodological concerns were partly assimilated into the new, practice-oriented discipline “studies of ethnic nationalities”. Folklore and folk literature studies were equally renamed if not reduced to “people’s oral works”. This situation has lasted until the reform era at the end of 1970s.

Several large-scale research projects like linguistic and social historical surveys of ethnic minorities, collections of oral narratives have been officially initiated during the early years of the PRC. The perspective of the Chinese scholars though was mainly oriented towards past or vanishing practices, serving to construct a past that would serve the future. The daily practices of “the masses” though, including technical innovations in their everyday life, received yet little attention of the ethnologists of the time.

This workshop raises the question of how we should today deal with the academic legacies of this historical period. How are the continuity and interruptions of the research projects to be analysed, and especially, to which extent were they influenced by the Soviet-Union? How should we integrate the research materials collected throughout these projects into our own current research? How may, first of all through the oral history of the informants, the “total facts” of daily practice between 1940 and 1980 be constructed and reconstructed?

Re-evaluating the historical ethnologic legacies of the period of 1950-1980 will foster our understanding of contemporary Chinese society and contribute to a more cosmopolitan ethnological study of multi-ethnic China.

Date: September 1-3, 2010
Venue: Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zuerich, Pelikanstrasse 40, CH-8001 Zürich, Switzerland, <http://www.musethno.uzh.ch>, Tel.: +41 44 - 634 90 10, Fax: +41 44 - 634 90 50
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