

Taiwan Fellowship, Spring 2019: Final Report

The Taiwan Fellowship allowed me to make fundamental progress in my book project *Of Chains and Tattoos: A Cross-cultural Approach to the Body in Early China and Ancient Rome* (now renamed *The Origins of Human Rights in China: A Cross-cultural Approach to Law, Ritual, and Historiography in the Formation of the Early Empires*). It enabled me to extend my stay at Academia Sinica as a visiting researcher into the spring of 2019, while establishing important working relationship with my international colleagues at the Center for Chinese Studies at the National Central Library.

My Book Project and Connected Research Initiatives

My current book project connects the study of physical punishments, imprisonment, and slavery under the Qin and Han dynasties of China (3rd -2nd centuries BCE) with ongoing debates on the putative universality of human rights. From a historical perspective, it reconstructs the crucial phases of the creation of a unified penal system in early imperial China. It does so by for the first time integrating descriptive and normative sources with recently excavated manuscripts documenting litigations and case law. From a theoretical point of view, it proposes a more inclusive intellectual platform for cross-cultural discussions on the relationship between state and individual freedoms—one that puts in conversation approaches based on the study of the Greco-Roman and European past with preoccupations and experiences deriving from Chinese history and contemporary East Asian debates.

While in Taipei for the Taiwan Fellowship, I was able to work on both the philological and theoretical aspects of my research. At Academia Sinica, the possibility of accessing its specialized libraries has proven extremely fruitful for my research concerning the cultural history of law and human rights in China and Taiwan. During my year as a Visiting Researcher at Academia Sinica I also had the opportunity of immersing myself into the study of the specific language of Qin/Han legal excavated documents, while working with local specialists in the field. Our collaboration, in addition to allowing me to advance in my research project, resulted in the panel “Law and Community in Early Imperial China: Historiographical Rhetoric and Social Practice,” chaired by the world leading scholar of ancient Chinese law (Robin Yates, McGill University). It had been accepted and scheduled for the 2020 Annual Conference of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS), held in

Boston, MA, in March. Unfortunately, due to the coronavirus outbreak, it will be probably be postponed to next year. However, I continued to work on the paper I was expected to deliver at that event, “Harmonization of Li 禮 and Fa 法 under the Han: Ritual, Myth, and Historiography.” I am now turning into an article that I plan to submit for peer review to the scholarly journals *Early China* and *Asia Major* at the end of the summer.

As for the comparative side of my project, my work with the international colleagues of the Taiwan Fellowship resulted in:

1) An invitation to deliver a talk at the first symposium on Jewish studies ever held in Taiwan: “The Transformation of Confucianism into a “Universal Abrahamic Religion,” Politics of Life - Politics of Light 生命的政治/光的政治: Humanitarian Diplomacy and Jewish Studies in Asia 東亞人道外交暨猶太研究, organized by Tamkang University, in Tamsui, Taiwan on June 29, 2019). As for the historic and international relevance of the event, this symposium was also attended via Skype by relatives of WWII diplomats Chiune Sugihara and Ho Fen-shan, who are known respectively as the “Japanese and Chinese Schindler.”

2) A panel accepted for 26th World Congress of Political Science, in Lisbon (Portugal), which has now been moved to July 2021. The paper I will deliver in that circumstance is titled “Rethinking the Foundations of the ‘Paternalistic State’: Philology, Historiography, and Ideology in Modern and Contemporary China.”

3) A keynote address (provisionally titled “Identity and Religion between East and West: A Global, Intercultural, and Reflexive Perspective”) for the conference “Scientific excellence – origins, research, results,” organized by the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland, 28-30 June 2020. This event too is in the process of being rescheduled, due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Also, while in Taipei for the Taiwan fellowship, I prepared the talk “Every Structure is a Hidden God: Ancient History, Empire, and Crypto-Monotheisms” 每一个结构都是一个自隐的神：古代、帝国与神秘一神主义, which I delivered for “Ancient History from the View of World History: Eurasian Dialogues and Imperial Comparisons: A Joint Workshop of University of Copenhagen and Fudan University,” at Fudan Daxue, Shanghai, China, June 29-30, 2019.

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In conclusion, my collaboration with the scholars met under the aegis of the Taiwan Fellowship as well as the research project carried out thanks to its sponsorship, continue to this day. The conference talks, published articles, book chapters, and monographs that will result from this experience will all explicitly acknowledge my intellectual debt and gratitude for this institution.

Sincerely,
Filippo Marsili

April 15, 2020

