

Guest Lecture



Remote
Ethnography
X U A R

Making Minorities in Late Republican and Early Maoist China: A View from the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands

Wednesday, September 3rd 2025
10.00 CET



FF UP, tř. Svobody 26, Olomouc
Room 2.64



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Speaker: Benno Weiner

In early 1941, the Kuomintang dispatched a well-known scholar-official, Gao Yihan, to investigate a violent, decades-old “grassland dispute” between two Tibetan chiefdoms on the Qinghai-Gansu border. As Gao quickly discovered, the Gyelwo-Gengya feud was part of a much larger contest put into motion by the collapse of Manchu Qing power and competition between a host of regional actors—including Muslim militarists, Mongol princes, and Tibetan headmen and lamas—to shape the post-imperial order. It also pitted statist desires to create and enforce bounded political-legal jurisdiction against the mobile nature of pastoral society and the norms of monastic/religious authority that often stretched across state boundaries and into sometimes-distant, non-contiguous communities. A decade later, state media prematurely touted the Chinese Communist Party’s success in finally resolving the Gyelwo-Gengya dispute to be one of its foremost achievements in “nationality work” during the early period of the PRC, only to see the feud reignite several times over the following decades. This talk examines efforts by the late-Republican and early-PRC states to mediate grassland disputes as key components in state-making processes designed to territorially and epistemically discipline the Sino-Tibetan frontier and minoritize its inhabitants according to the demands of progressively more powerful and interventionist state formations. It also suggests that the state’s inability to eliminate these types of disputes is an avenue through which to measure the incomplete nature of these transformations.