

Reconciling history with the nation?
Historicity, national particularity, and the question of universals

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Abstract:

This article interprets the historiography of two modern Chinese historians, Fu Sinian and Chen Yinke, who both have been labeled the Chinese Ranke. Both historians have in recent years attracted a lot of attention in China, due to their prominent and very different concepts of national history.

In this article Axel Schneider brings out the characteristics of their approaches to history by, *first*, situating modern historiography within the context of the philosophical crisis of modernity. By “modernity” he refers to the process of historicization and, hence, relativization of norms and values once conceived as timeless and universal. In Europe, this process has been characterized by a decline of metaphysical and theological assumptions on the structure of the world and a concomitant decline of traditional assertions of ontological and epistemological coherence. In China, this process challenged the inherited, very prominent status of traditional historiography as a core field for political and philosophical debates.

Second, he interprets Chen Yinke's and Fu Sinian's writings against the background of an understanding of Ranke's historiography that acknowledges the dual nature of Ranke's approach as consisting of both, the widely known text-critical, objectivist methodology and a less known, hermeneutic methodology of empathetic understanding that is based on Ranke's belief in divine providence underlying the particular manifestations of history.

Axel Schneider comes to the conclusion that neither Fu nor Chen can be labeled the Chinese Ranke. Fu was mainly oriented towards the positivist sciences. He advocated a view of history as determined by factors comparable to laws in the sciences. He envisions history as characterized by universal progress towards a rational, scientific mode of thought. He argues against any kind of interpretation, and formulates the task of the historian as consisting of the verification and organization of the material, allowing the bare facts contained in the material to speak for themselves. He thus subordinates China's history to universal laws and tries to establish a Chinese identity by fitting China into world history as determined by characteristics that are universal, but in fact are of Western origin.

Given this methodology, it is not unlikely that in spite of the fact that Fu only referred once to Ranke, he equated his approach with that of Ranke. However, his Ranke clearly was the empiricist Ranke.

Chen Yinke, in contrast to Fu, stressed cultural particularity assuming that all cultures are of equal status, thus implying a universalist perspective. His research was based on the assumption that Chinese history is characterized by the gradual development of its particular "national spirit". What guarded him against relativism was the notion of "the universality of abstract ideals". He recovers the lost universal by assuming the formal universality of human attachment to "abstract ideals" that do vary from culture to culture, but have to be protected in order to safeguard the identity of the respective cultures. The ideals and their corresponding cultures can not be integrated into world history by general schemes of evolution or by means of universal norms. It is *Chinese* history that speaks to Chen who thereby wants to establish an identity that can only be integrated into the larger world through respect for each culture's commitment to its specific ideals. Accordingly, the historian has to adopt a

historicist, hermeneutic methodology. His research should aim at the “empathetic understanding” of the historical manifestations of the national spirit.

Although Chen never referred to Ranke, later historians claimed to know of such an influence. Chen's position surely was closer to the hermeneutic Ranke who struggled with the problem of the relationship between the individual and the universal and who opposed any notion of teleological progress. However, while Ranke had lived in a Christian world still comparatively at peace with its theological assumption of a divine providence, Chen could not fall back on a Christian God for solace. He was – far more than Ranke – confronted with far-reaching changes, bringing about the rapid decline of his Confucian world.

關鍵詞

現代性的危機，中國史學，歷史性，特殊性，普遍性，蘭克，陳寅恪，傅斯年

摘要

本文要詮釋都被稱作中國的蘭克的兩位現代中國歷史學家傅斯年和陳寅恪的史學。近年來，他們由於他們卓越而又極為不同的民族史學觀念，在中國吸引了許多的注意。

在本文中，我首先將現代史學置於現代性的哲學危機脈絡中，以便提出他們治史的特點。關於“現代性”，我要談的是歷史化的過程，及曾一度被認為是永恆和普遍的標準與價值之相對化。在歐洲，這個過程的特色表現在有關世界架構的形而上學和神學之假說的衰微，以及伴隨發生的、有關本體論和認識論貫通一致之傳統看法的衰微。而在中國，這個過程所挑戰的是作為政治和哲學論戰核心舞台之傳統史學非常突出的傳承地位。

其次，我依據對蘭克史學的了解，來解析陳寅恪和傅斯年的著作。所謂對蘭克史學的瞭解，乃指認知到認蘭克治史方法的雙重性，即廣為人知的考證式的客觀主義的方法論，和鮮為人所知的、以同情的了解為基礎的解釋學的方法論。關於後者，藍克相信歷史中所展現出的特殊明示，有神聖天意為其基礎。

我的結論是，不論是傅斯年或是陳寅恪，他們都不能被貼上中國的蘭克的標籤。傅斯年主要以實證科學為方向。主張因素決定史觀，就好像科學裡的律則。他認為歷史具有一種趨向理性科學思考模式的普遍進化特徵，反對任何形式的歷史解釋，而歷史學家的工作是證明和組織材料，及聽認包含在材料中的赤裸裸的事實自己說話。

因此，他將中國的歷史置於普遍的規律之下，並且試圖藉由將中國適當地放入世界史中的方式，來建立一種中國認同。而這個世界史由源起西方的普遍性特徵來決定。

儘管事實上傳斯年僅提過蘭克一次，但傅斯年因這一特定的方法論而將他的研究方式等同於蘭克的方法論，並不是不可能。可是，他的蘭克顯然是經驗主義的蘭克。

與傅斯年對照，陳寅恪認為所有文化都是平等的，因而強調文化的特殊性。這暗示著一個普遍性的立場。他的研究根據一個假設，即中國歷史的特色在於其特有的“民族精神”的逐漸發展。而保護他去對抗相對主義的是“抽象理想的普遍性”概念。他藉假設人類對“抽象理想”的執著之形式普遍性，來恢復失去的普遍道理。而抽象理想由文化到文化非常多樣，只有保護抽象理想，才能保護各別文化的認同。藉由進化的普遍規律或使用普遍標準，是無法將理想和符合這些理想的文化整合入世界歷史中。向陳寅恪示意的正是中國的歷史，他因而想藉此來建立一個認同。中國歷史只有藉由尊重每個文化對其特有理想的看法一途，才能被整合入一個更大的世界。因此，歷史學家必須採用一種歷史主義的、解釋學的方法論，他的研究應該致力於去同情的瞭解明示於歷史中的民族精神。

雖然陳寅恪從未提及蘭克，但晚近的史學家宣稱知道藍克對陳寅恪有非常的影響。陳寅恪的態度的確接近解釋學的蘭克。而解釋學的蘭克正為存在於個體和普遍之間的關係一問題奮鬥，並反對任何目的論的進化概念。不過，蘭克生存在一個基督教世界，這個基督教世界與其天意神學假說仍尚能相當和平地生存。陳寅恪無法為求慰藉而投靠基督上帝。遠甚於藍克，他所面對的是一個影響深遠的轉變，這個轉變所帶來的是其儒家世界的急速衰微。

Recent years have witnessed a considerable resurgence of interest in nationalism and the structures and processes of collective identity and memory. This renewed focus is not only linked to the revival of nationalist movements after the end of the Cold War, but also hinges on the phenomenon of globalization and our understanding of modernity.¹

Based on an interpretation of the historiography of two outstanding Chinese historians – Chen Yinke (1890-1969) and Fu Sinian (1896- 1950), who both have been labeled the Chinese Ranke² – I argue, first, that major problems with regard to modernity that early modern Chinese thinkers were facing can better be understood on the foil of German historicism, and that, second, some of the so-called conservative thinkers do show a much stronger awareness of the problematic of modernity as previously had been recognized. However, this awareness is not spelled out explicitly, but is hidden within the debates on language, culture, and history.

By “modernity”³ I refer to the ongoing process of historicization and, hence, relativization of norms and values once conceived as timeless and universal. In Europe, this process has been characterized by a decline of metaphysical and theological assumptions on the structure of the world and a concomitant decline of traditional assertions of ontological and epistemological coherence. The world was less and less conceived as one finite world, but rather turned into a meta-world, that was dissolved into a diversity of possible world *views*⁴ – a term in itself symptomatic of the change that had taken place.

Kant's philosophy only was but a first step towards what Max Weber would later call “disenchantment”. In his epistemological turn, Kant transferred the

¹ For an analysis of this topic with regard to present discussions in the PR China, see Schneider 2001.

² For a detailed analysis of Chen Yinke's and Fu Sinian's historiography see Schneider 1997 and Wang Fansen 2000.

³ On the development of views of history and the problem of historicity in 19th and 20th century Europe, see Barash 1988. For a reappraisal of the history and impact of historicism, see Jaeger and Rüsen 1992, and Rüsen 1993.

⁴ The term “worldviews” aptly refers to the reflexivity of modern consciousness and hints at the cultural plurality and historical relativity, which is so characteristic for modernity. On the modernity of “worldviews”, see Heidegger 1980: 73-110. For a definition of the typical modern view of culture, see Mannheim 1980: 44-50.

structures of the world into a priori structures of consciousness, thus preparing the ground for the ongoing process of decentering the world. However, history understood as the historicity and relativity of human existence not yet played any role – Kant's world was still *one* world, even if turned epistemological.

But not later than Hegel, history became the central issue and Western thought ever since has been characterized by various attempts at reconciling historical relativity with universal norms. However, Hegel's view of history was not only based on the conviction that historical particulars had to be reconciled with a universal spirit, it also provided a teleological path of the articulation of the Spirit in world-history, thereby ultimately subordinating the individual to universal necessity.

In the course of the decline of German idealism, his grand vision and the underlying premises of Enlightenment and Idealism were increasingly challenged. From Herder's philosophy of individual cultures, to Ranke's historicism, and to Dilthey's view of history based on a philosophy of life, we encounter various attempts to guard against relativism by holding particularity in esteem, without abandoning the quest for history as a meaningful whole. It was not until after World War One that these approaches were superseded, culminating in the growing awareness of an irreconcilable chasm between contingent facts and normative tenets. Heidegger, for example, refuted any attempt at defining a metaphysical absolute, declaring the historicity of human existence to be the only universal left.⁵

None of these philosophers and historians reestablished a universal teleology of history. Universal reason, the backbone of Enlightenment, was explicitly denied a dominant role in history and became itself historicised. Most of the historicist and hermeneutic approaches in fact opposed and replaced the Enlightenment idea of progress by the notion of “development” (German *Entwicklung*). Based on an analogy with individual organic growth, the idea of development did not entail a hierarchy based on the progressive realization of knowable norms.

⁵ Barash 1988: 21-23, 54-73. On Herder, see Whitton 1988. On Dilthey, see Riedel 1997: 9-80.

In the light of these historical developments of reflecting on “historical development” I suggest to conceive of modernity as a phenomenon that can not be adequately characterized by a totalizing notion of the progress of reason or any other absolute.⁶ Instead, I believe that it should be understood as marked by the intrinsic tension between attempts, on the one hand, at resurrecting some sort of philosophical, theological, historical, or scientific certainty, and, on the other hand, the consequences deriving from the verdict of Nietzsche, that God is dead and mankind is liberated from and condemned to live without firm metaphysical or theological foundation.⁷

Turning to China, however, it is striking first, how much our image of modern Chinese intellectual history has long been dominated either by May Fourth historiography or by state-official ideologies, and that, second, Chinese intellectuals opposed to these interpretations have been stigmatized as conservative or even as reactionary.⁸ Yet, taking into consideration that in Europe it were the very conservatives contributing in important ways to the clarification of the notion of historicity and the problem of modernity,⁹ paying more attention to their Chinese counterparts will help us to arrive at a more balanced understanding of the interrelation between historicity, national particularity and the problem of universals.

Given the fact that historically the writing of history in China had always enjoyed a higher status than in the West,¹⁰ it is no wonder that historiography found itself at the center of modern debates, not only leading to a considerable

⁶ In the field of China research a recent example of an understanding and hence critique of modernity as the progress of reason by referring to Hegel's philosophy of history can be found in Duara 1995.

⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* 343 (in Nietzsche 1990: Vol. 1, 489-490) and *Götzen-Dämmerung, Die vier grossen Irrtümer* 8 (in Nietzsche 1990: Vol. 2, 351-352).

⁸ This is reflected in the scarcity of Western historiography on these intellectuals. For the only monographs on these intellectuals, see Alitto 1979, 1986. See also Furth ed. 1976. Conservative intellectuals like Du Yaquan, post May Fourth Zhang Shizhao, Chen Huanzhang, the Xueheng group including Wu Mi, Mei Guangdi, Liu Yizheng, Miao Fenglin and others are still not very well known in the West and more often than not lumped together under the general term of conservatism.

⁹ See Mannheim 1984.

¹⁰ Chevrier 1987.

reorientation of Chinese identity, but also to a growing awareness of the challenge posed by modernity. Already from the late Qing onwards, Western ideas began to influence the conceptions and eventually the very language by which Chinese intellectuals tried to cope with that challenge.¹¹ Though historiography initially had been heavily influenced by the evolutionary worldview,¹² already in the 1910s the situation had changed dramatically as various imported concepts of historiography together with indigenous traditions shaped a discourse that was very lively and pluralistic.

Although both Chinese historians I discuss here have followed dissimilar methodologies and agendas of research, both have been described as having been influenced by Ranke.¹³ Therefore a comparison of their historiography will not only shed light on the processes of the adoption and appropriation of Western thought and its intermingling with indigenous approaches, but can additionally serve as an example of how Chinese historians tried to cope with the modern problem of historicity, the crisis of identity and the task to redefine China's position in the world.

Before turning to Chen Yinke's and Fu Sinian's historiography, it is necessary to clarify Ranke's concept of historiography. He usually comes to mind as the founder of empiricist research emphasizing the critical evaluation of archival material, and aiming at objective knowledge about the past. His often-quoted slogan that the aim of research is to find out "wie es eigentlich gewesen" represents this image.¹⁴

However, his methodology was nothing but a means to a higher end. The historicist Ranke argued against the enlightenment approach to history, ca-

¹¹ Liu, Lydia H. 1995, Lippert 1979.

¹² As was the case with Liang Qichao's and Zhang Taiyan's early historiography. See Liang Qichao 1902. For Zhang Taiyan, see Wang Fansen 1985: 189-199, and Furth 1976: 113-150. A detailed comparison of their respective views of history can be found in Schneider 1997: 68-82.

¹³ On Fu Sinian as a Chinese Ranke, see Zhang Zhiyuan 1952: 10-15, Sun Tongxun 1989: 10b, and Xu Guansan ²1989: vol. 1, 206-207. On Chen Yinke as a Chinese Ranke, see Wang Rongzu 1988: 53-57.

¹⁴ On this very influential empiricist image of Ranke and the extent to which it partially misrepresents Ranke's historiography, see Iggers 1962. On the similarly one-sided reception of Ranke in Japan, see Tanaka 1993 and Mehl 1998.

stigmatising it as superimposing abstract theories on history, thereby violating its very individuality. Not philosophy, but theology was the basis of his view of history. He assumed that every epoch is characterized by its “particular tendency” and its “own ideal”. The aim of writing history thus was to elucidate the differences between the individual epochs, and to show how every epoch, although individual and incomparable, was the manifestation of God’s will. The methodological conclusion was to envision historical research as a hermeneutic project. The prerequisite attitude towards the object of research was to be one of “Mitgefühl”, that is “compassion” or “empathetic understanding”. The historian was to become aware of the individuality and the ideals of an epoch through intuition and spiritual contemplation.¹⁵

But how can we make sense of these apparently self-contradictory demands to carry on disinterested, objective research and, at the same time, to contemplate the very individuality of history as the expression of divine providence? For Ranke, to be sure, this was not a contradiction. Understanding history as the always individual manifestation of God’s will, almost inevitably led him to the demand not to subdue a past to present, subjective needs of *making* sense of the past. On the contrary, meaning was to be found *in* the past and the only way to relate this meaning to one’s own present was through God. This understanding of the relation between historical particularity and the religious universal was his way of defending the particular, that is Germany, against what he perceived as the arrogance of universal enlightenment, that is the French revolution, without being forced into relativism.

Yet, at the end of the nineteenth century, many German historians, already far removed from Ranke’s worldview, had lost faith in divine providence. They either did – in a positivist manner – put more stress on the methodological aspects related to the treatment of primary sources or were looking for other ways of relating the historical to the universal as was the case with Dilthey’s philosophy of life.¹⁶

¹⁵ Rüsen 1993: 18-134.

¹⁶ Barash 1988: 54-74.

Turning to the reasons why Chen Yinke and Fu Sinian have been labeled the “Chinese Ranke” it is most interesting to note that both argue for a very different philosophical and methodological approach to history.

Fu,¹⁷ a leader of the May Fourth Movement, was mainly oriented towards the positivist sciences. He advocated a view of history as determined by geographic-climatic factors comparable to laws in the sciences, a view he applies to explain how the Chinese nation came into being.¹⁸ Besides, Fu envisions history as characterized by the universal progress of mankind towards a rational, scientific mode of thought. He depicts *Xunzi* and *Kaozheng* (考證) empiricism as precursors of scientific, rational thought, which thus loses its Western coloring and is being raised to universal status.¹⁹ Referring to Ranke²⁰ and *Kaozheng* methodology he strongly argues against any kind of interpretation, and formulates the task of the historian as exclusively consisting of the verification and organization of the material, allowing the bare facts contained in the material to speak for themselves. Accordingly, he opposes the use of any kind of theory or view of history and fiercely condemns any involvement of the historian in politics.²¹

This short summary reveals that in his case *China's* history as a *particular* history was muted by subordinating it to universal laws. Thus, he tries to establish a Chinese identity by fitting China into world history as determined by characteristics that are universal, but in fact are of Western origin. While he ventures to find precedents of the correct, scientific world view in Chinese history, he forsakes the very possibility to devise an answer to the question of what is typically Chinese.

Although Fu referred to Ranke only once it is not unlikely that he equated his approach with that of Ranke, namely the empiricist Ranke. The problem of how to define and protect one's particularity without being trapped in relativism and historicity could hardly be resolved within the limits of this approach.

¹⁷ On Fu Sinian, see Wang Fansen 2000 and Schneider 1997.

¹⁸ Fu Sinian 1933.

¹⁹ Fu Sinian 1940.

²⁰ Fu Sinian 1945.

²¹ Fu's most important article on methodology is Fu Sinian 1928a. Other texts are Fu Sinian 1923, 1927, 1927-1928, 1928b, 1928c, 1930 1995.

In fact, Fu's approach subjugating China to universal laws that to a certain extent allow the prediction of its future can be interpreted as implying the de-historicization of China's past. At the same time, however, Fu satisfied his nationalist agenda enacting China as an equal member in the world of nation-states, and was, contradicting his own methodological stipulations, again and again driven into political nationalistic action,²² a fact that was not only reflected in his many journalistic publications²³ and some methodological texts,²⁴ but also in some of his historiographical writings of the 1930s.²⁵

Chen Yinke, in contrast to Fu, stressed cultural particularity assuming that all cultures are of equal status, thus implying a universalistic perspective. His research was based on the assumption that Chinese history is characterized by the gradual *development* of its particular "national spirit" (*minzu jingshen* 民族精神). He identified the Confucian social ethics as its core (*Sangang wuchang* 三綱五常),²⁶ without hypostatizing it as an unchanging essence.²⁷ He focused on the ongoing exchange between China and foreign peoples, in order to show, that its national spirit has always been in the making by assimilating external influences.²⁸ Chen claimed that only the receptivity to external stimulants had guaranteed the persistence of Chinese cultural identity by preserving its core, though in different historical manifestations. Any notion of an unchanging national essence contradicts this concept of continuity by change in the same way as the unqualified adoption of foreign ideas alien to the Chinese national spirit.²⁹

²² See Schneider 1997: 33-56.

²³ The texts are too numerous to be quoted here. Suffice is to refer to his participation in the debate on traditional Chinese medicine. See Fu Sinian 1934a, 1934b.

²⁴ Fu Sinian 1935.

²⁵ Fu Sinian 1932. For a detailed analysis of Fu Sinian in comparison with other historiographical trends of the 1920s and 1930s see Schneider 1997: 146-176.

²⁶ The *Sangang wuchang* (Three Bonds and Five Relationships) refer to the relationship between ruler and official, father and son, and husband and wife, and are the concrete expression of Confucian social ethics.

²⁷ Chen Yinke 1927.

²⁸ His most important historiographical works are his monographs on "medieval" Chinese history; see Chen Yinke 1943, 1944.

²⁹ The most prominent formulation of this methodology and his view of history can be found in Chen Yinke 1930, 1933a, 1939, 1935, 1942, 1933b.

What guarded him against cultural relativism was the notion of “the universality of abstract ideals” (*chouxiang lixiang zhi tongxing* 抽象理想之通性). Referring to Plato he recovers the lost universal ground not by proclaiming a humanistic Chinese civilization superior to the West (as e.g. Zhang Junmai) or by referring to universal science (as e.g. Fu Sinian), but by assuming the *formal* universality of human attachment to “abstract ideals”, which do vary from culture to culture and change in the course of history, but have to be protected in order to safeguard the identity of the respective culture.³⁰

Accordingly, the historian's task is seen to consist in contributing to the recollection of the national spirit, an aim he has to achieve by adopting a historicist, hermeneutic methodology. His research should be based on the meticulous examination of historical sources, aiming at the “empathetic understanding” (*tongqing zhi liaojie* 同情之了解) of the historical manifestations of the national spirit. Then, and only then, may the historian venture to evaluate history from a present perspective.³¹ The correlate of this was the demand, that the historian should stay aloof from politics. Because history is no longer the manifestation of absolute principles, the historian loses his former, eminently political position to actualize the universal *Tao* through historiography. Chen thus dissolves the previous unity of knowledge and action and assigns the historian the *new* role of a mere guardian of historical memory and cultural identity.³²

Chen's view of history is thus a form of idealism, albeit qualified by his emphasis on the particular manifestations of abstract ideals. The specific contents of these ideals vary from culture to culture, manifesting themselves in different ways in history. Hence, the ideals and their corresponding culture cannot be integrated into world history by general schemes of evolution or by means of universal norms as implied by Fu's approach.³³ It is *Chinese* history, which speaks to Chen who thereby wants to establish an identity that can only

³⁰ Chen Yinke 1927.

³¹ Chen Yinke 1930, 1933a.

³² For a detailed analysis of Chen Yinke in comparison with other historiographical trends of the 1920s and 1930s see Schneider 1997: 126-146.

³³ This is not only manifest in Chen's writings on history, but is also made clear in his writings on language, especially on the relationship between Chinese and foreign grammar, see Chen Yinke 1931.

be integrated into the larger world through respect for each culture's commitment to its specific ideals.

In Chen's case it is much more difficult to assess Ranke's influence. Though he never referred to Ranke later historians claimed to know of such an influence.³⁴ However, if we take into consideration that Chen had studied in Germany for many years it may well be justified to assume that he knew of Ranke and the tradition of German historicism.³⁵ Chen's position surely was closer to the hermeneutic Ranke who struggled with the problem of the relationship between the individual and the universal and who opposed any notion of teleological progress. However, this should not mislead us to ignore some fundamental differences between Chen and Ranke.

While Ranke had lived in a Christian world still comparatively at peace with its theological assumption of a divine providence and untroubled by the devastating experiences of the 20th century, Chen could not fall back on a Christian God for solace. At the same time he was – far more than Ranke – confronted with far-reaching political, social, and cultural changes,³⁶ bringing about the rapid decline of his Confucian world, a decline at least accelerated by a civilization more different from the Chinese world than France had ever been different from Germany.

This may explain why Chen, comparable to European late historicism, tried to conceptualize a view of history capable of accommodating change without, however, necessarily leading to a breach of continuity and identity. He achieved this by means of a methodology that took historicity and culturality serious. It is true that he – as Ranke – conceived of meaning as to be

³⁴ Wang Rongzu 1988: 53-57.

³⁵ Chen Yinke studied in Germany from 1909 to 1911, and from 1921 to 1926, a time when the dilemma of late historicism became apparent and was widely discussed e.g. by Ernst Troeltsch and, with quite different conclusions, by Friedrich Meinecke. See Meinecke 1936, Troeltsch 1922, 1924.

³⁶ Chen Yinke's opinion that Wang Guowei's objectives of protecting and continuing traditional Chinese culture were illusionary due to the overall social, economic and political change, and that this fact was the reason for his suicide, is evidence that Chen was quite aware of this dilemma of historicism. It is clear from Chen's repeated affirmation of the values Wang was fighting for that this applies to Chen's own situation as well. See Chen Yinke 1927.

immanent in history, but at the same time, he acknowledges that this meaning is mediated by the observer. Comparable to Dilthey's historical methodology, Chen seems to conceptualize historical meaning as the product of a dialogical process between manifestations of past human endeavors and present interested perspectives, integrated under the umbrella of overarching and coherent ethical and cultural orientations.³⁷ Deprived of any metaphysical foundation and opposed to a progressive universal *Telos* Chen embraced a view of history that left much more space for intercultural diversity and intracultural plurality.

The case of Chen Yinke's historiography clearly evinces that some Chinese historians from the Republican period tried to come to grips with the same problematic of historicity and relativism typical for modernity as their European counterparts. I hence propose an interpretation of Chinese concepts regarding the relation between historicity, nation particularity and the question of universal standards that not only takes so-called conservative approaches into account, but also suggests that these approaches have not been as marginal as sometimes assumed. It is true, that Chen Yinke was an exceptional case, but an analysis of the historiography of historians affiliated with the Xueheng group reveals that their view of history, culture, and the nation was less hegemonic and much more pluralistic than hitherto assumed.³⁸ However, it is true too, that these approaches have long been neglected. The reasons for this are manifold, but three important factors come to my mind, which might explain this peculiar phenomenon:

First, due to their view of history some of these intellectuals consciously avoided politics, thereby considerably reducing their influence on public discussions. This, however, does not mean that they exerted no influence. Quite a few of them wrote multi-volume histories of China and Chinese culture that were widely read and often referred to.³⁹

³⁷ Barash 1988, Rüsen 1993.

³⁸ See e.g. the historiography of Tang Yongtong, Zhang Yinlin, Miao Fenglin, Liu Yizheng, Zheng Hesheng and others. I am currently working on a monograph on so-called "conservative" historians and intellectuals of the post May Fourth period including these historians as well as Du Yaquan, Liang Qichao, Zhang Taiyan, Zhang Shizhao and others.

³⁹ See e.g. Liu Yizheng 1932.

Second, due to their opposition against the view of history as propagated by so-called liberals and leftists they were, at best, stigmatized as conservative, if not banned at all from *state-official* historiography – long time an influential source of information on China.

Third, and perhaps most important, their concepts of history do not easily fit into notions of progressive history and directly challenge the ideological supremacy of the West. It might have been their “obstinacy to surrender” that concealed them from our investigations, an “obstinacy” much more fundamental than the nationalist anti-imperialism of historians like Fu Sinian, Guo Muoruo, or even Gu Jiegang.

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