

Excellence Forum
CHINA global - ideas, values, practices
Working Paper Series

No. 2 /2019

Wang Mingming

**Antiquity and China: Notes on Chronological
Occidentalism in Post-Traditional China**

Abstract: In the late 19th century, the dynasty-bound historiography began to be perceived by a minority of Chinese thinkers (e.g. Kang Youwei) as "backward". An attempt was made to substitute it with what mimetic of the missionary way of historical time-reckoning - in particular the temporal succession following the birth of Confucius or Buddha. By the beginning of the 20th century, the project had been conceived as unsatisfactory. A whole new generation of Chinese historians were led by Liang Qichao to rewrite China's "national history". They saw imperial historiography as "individualistic" - tied to the emperor's "lineage" and life course - and the "national history" as "collective" - made by the "nation" as a "unity of diversity". To change the old into the new, they painfully adapted the dynastic cycles to the newly adopted years, decades, centuries, and ages and, very soon, they accomplished their mission of "historiographic estrangement". The "historiographic estrangement" has resulted in the consequential re-division of "Chinese history" into antiquity, Middle Age, and modernity whose accumulative and teleological contents have deeply affected Chinese political life since the early 20th century. Wang Mingming reflects on the transition by situating it in the Western priestly sinological translation of "ancient China" and the post-traditional Chinese "chronological Occidentalism", and by contrasting the "new history" with classical and early imperial Chinese ideas of the ancient. While he will emphasize the importance of understanding the radicality of the chronological transformation, he will also draw attention to the "secret lives" of the old history.

Author: Wang Mingming is Professor of Anthropology at Peking University and specially appointed Distinguished Professor of Ethnology at Yunnan Minzu University. His main ethnographic and historiographic research has been done in Southeast and Southwest China. His recent interests include different perspectives of others, comparative cosmology, and anthropology of civilisations.

Excellence Forum CHINA global – ideas, values, practices

Chair Anthropology of Globalization
Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology

University of Cologne
Albertus Magnus Platz
50923 Cologne

The Excellence Forum CHINA global was established at the University of Cologne in 2017 as part of the German Excellence Initiative, involving the Universities of Cologne, Fudan, Nottingham-Ningbo and Xiamen. The *interdisciplinary research team* of the Excellence Forum believes that a Chinese-centered globalization will bring a different normative perspective to the world, one that has historical and philosophical roots in a Chinese world view of center and margins, in Chinese notions of justice, fair exchange and moral values, and in particular Chinese experiences of modernity and models of development from the 19th century onwards.

In short, we believe that Chinese globalization will globalize or universalize values, ideas and practices particular to a Chinese perspective to the world. In order to better understand the prospects of a China-centered globalization, *we need to explore these ideas, values, and practices from a historical, philosophical, sociological and anthropological perspective.*

Speakers

Prof. Dr. Susanne Brandtstädter (Anthropology)
Phone: +49 (0)221 - 470 1120
Email: sbrandts(at)uni-koeln.de

Prof. Dr. Wilfried Hinsch (Philosophy)
Phone: +49 (0)221 - 470 2373
Email: whinsch(at)uni-koeln.de

Project Coordinator

Amtul Shaheen, M.A.
Phone: +49 (0)221 - 470 6365
Email: amtul.shaheen(at)uni-koeln.de

Website: china-global.uni-koeln.de

Wang Mingming

**Antiquity and China:
Notes on Chronological Occidentalism in Post-Traditional China¹**

In the following, I will present an early example of Western priestly sinological translation of “classical China”. I will also reflect on the post-traditional Chinese “historiographical nationalization” in which the idea of Antiquity and the periodizations coming with it, were adopted to replace the “old history” with the new. In addition, I will outline later “internal” controversies over the issue as to whether Antiquity is a good or bad time (thing). Then, I will provide a few facts of classical and early imperial Chinese ideas and studies of the ancient, which could be said to parallel Western distinctions between Antiquity and its opposite. I cannot be certain if such bits and pieces of things are relevant to our speculations of “Antiquity and the dynamics of civilization”; but I do believe that, in themselves, the stories are suggestive.

Priestly sinology

Let me begin with a Jesuit translation.

The first who made the idea of Antiquity useful for the translation of Chinese civilization into Western languages was the seventeenth century Italian man Martino Martini (1614-1661), who obtained a Chinese name 卫匡国 Wei Kuangguo. Martini was one of the several

¹ **Note:** The author used most of the contents of the paper in his lecture entitled “Historiographic Estrangement: Notes on Chronological Occidentalism in Post-traditional China” delivered at Excellence Forum China Global, University of Cologne on July 9, 2018. But the paper is not a new one; it was written a few years ago and was once circulated among the discussants and participants of a workshop on “Antiquity and Civilisations” held on 27th March, 2015 at University College London.

distinguished Jesuit missionaries who went to live in the East for years. Following the footsteps of the heroic missionaries such as Matteo Ricci (Spence, 1998:19-40), he stayed in the South (Hangzhou) of China in the transitional period between the Ming and Qing dynasties. Among historians, Martini has been famous for his part in the China Rites Affairs. He represented the defenders of the approach of “inculturated missionary” which allowed Chinese customary practices such as ancestral worship to be practiced by new Christians (Mungello, 1989). Trying to make Chinese culture comprehensible and acceptable to the Europeans, in 1655, he completed a famous geographic atlas of China, *Novus Atlas Sinensis*. He also planned to write a complete history of China, which was to begin with the primary or the most “ancient”, pass through the lengthy period of the imperial, and end with the arrival of God; but he eventually, in 1658, only completed and published volume one, *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima*, virtually the pioneering work in the study of Chinese Antiquity.

For missionaries such as Martini, the birth of Christ necessarily marked the global end of Antiquity. Thus, in his book, Martini framed the history of early China with the primary periods beginning in the earliest stage, reaching until the birth of Jesus, or the third Yuanshou year of Aidi Emperor of Han 汉哀帝. The periodization itself has suggested that the idea of Antiquity as applied by Martini had been part and parcel of the early Christian civilizational mission. However, another fact has complicated our observation. Martini was deeply anxious to bring a scientific historiography of Chinese Antiquity into the Biblical chronology, and he argued that the beginning of Antiquity in the Far East was six hundred years earlier than that dated in the Old Testament. The fact points to an ambiguous aspect of Martini’s sinology. One may still impose Edward Said’s famous critique of Western Orientalist discourse (Said, 1978) upon Martini’s historiography; but *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima*, like other European histories of Asia (Lach and Kley, 1994), has the charm of conceptualizing the Western self from the outside. This is not far from modern anthropology. As the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss puts it, anthropology derives its wisdom from “concrete apprehension of subjects by another” (Levi-Strauss, 2013:26).

Liang Qichao and the modern “native” politics of translation

Although some of the Jesuits had written by the late Ming and early Qing dynasties in classical Chinese to inform Chinese scholars of how they re-patterned their own history and others', Chinese historians did not give up their chronological concepts until the end of the 19th century. They continued to describe history as a sequence of dynasties with their “emperor-specific” reigns. Thus, in the phase in which Western priestly sinologists devoted their energy to discovering a counterpart of Antiquity in the East, scholars in China were hardly interested in the Western historiographic characterizations.

However, in the year 1901, Liang Qichao (梁启超 1873-1929), the famous reformer and founding father of modern Chinese historiography and political theory, sought to make a change. He invented Zhongguoshi 中国史, the history for the whole of the Central Kingdom, an alternative to both Chinese dynastic names and to such foreign terms as “China”. It is in the kind of “New History” that the Western trichotomies of Antiquity, Medieval, and Modern emerged in China.

To substitute the dynasty-particular older sequence and emperor-specific older reigns with his “new history” (Xin Shixue 新史学), Liang wrote a critique of old dynastic historiography and wrote a new introduction to the history of the Chinese nation. According to Liang, the ills of conventional Chinese historiography were fourfold: (1) confined to the cycles of dynasties, it was totally negligent of national history as a whole, (2) confined to the narratives of individual kings' doings, it spoke nothing of the significance of collective actions, (3) confined to the collection of the old traces of the past, it never made the present relevant for the past, and (4) confined to repetition of facts, it never cultivate historical ideals of the future (Liang, 2014:85-91).

Before Liang Qichao wrote, on the basis of his reinterpretation of Confucian cyclic perspective of history, Liang's mentor Kang Youwei (康有为1858-1927) had developed his famous "thesis of the three generations". Kang argued that evolutionism was not only modern Western in origin but also ancient Chinese; it had a root in Confucius' thought. Socio-political historically, the evolution of China's history could be seen as the progress from the generation of chaos 据乱世 to that of rising higher peace 升平世, from that of higher peace to that of the great universal peace 太平世 (Hsiao, 1975: 309-386).

Although Kang claimed his chronological ideology to stem from China's own tradition, it seriously contradicted the orthodox historiographic legacy followed in imperial times. In imperial times, the periodizations of historical time did not follow the trichotomy of Antiquity, Medieval and Modern; instead, they were based upon a cosmological principle of binary opposition. When the first Chinese historian Sima Qian (司马迁145-90 BCE) presented his mode of historiography as 究天人之际, 通古今之变, by 变 or change, he did not refer to a sequence of temporal transformations defined in terms of a continuum of periods; rather, he referred to what he called 成败兴坏之理, namely the reasons behind the accomplishments and failures of Powers. Most of the later historians followed Sima Qian's example and "periodized" history with a hidden "logic" of alternational linearity. This was a kind of historicity coded by the structural dynamic of Yin and Yang (Granet, 1930; 1973). It got expressed in the kind of "historical periods" defined as dynastic and reignal sequences and described in terms of the oscillations between order and chaos, separation and unity, and prosperity and decline, which were correlated with the rotation of fortune' in opposite directions. The alternations did not imply the substitution of one shape of things for another. On the contrary, each period necessarily had both aspects of chaos and order, and its distinctiveness consisted in the "hegemonizing" of one of the two aspects, determined by the fate of history.

In the late nineteenth century, while Kang was inventing his thesis of the three generations, the trichotomy of Antiquity, Medieval or Middle Ages, and Modernity was being translated by Japanese scholars into Chinese characters 上世史, 中世史, and 近世史. Being more overly modern than Kang, Liang adopted the Japanese translations of these Western periodic terms and applied them to what he called “Zhongguoshi” (History of the Central Kingdom).

Liang was fully aware of the ills of ethnocentrism, but he saw ethnocentric Zhongguoshi as a necessary alternative. He had two considerations. First, the national history of Zhongguoshi could help Chinese historians transcend dynastic-bound historicity; secondly, it could add force to Chinese national identity, desired as the proper Eastern reaction to Western imperial intrusion.

In Zhongguoshi Xulun (中国史叙论 Introduction to the History of the Central Kingdom) written in 1901 (Liang, 2014: 63-82), Liang introduced the trichotomy to Antiquity, Medieval, and Modern, and deployed it to re-shape Chinese history. He argued that, for Zhongguoshi, Antiquity could refer to the period between the time of the Yellow Emperor and the establishment of the empire of Qin, “Medieval” could refer to the period between the Qin and the end of Qianlong Reign (1711-1799), and “Modern” could refer to the period following the death of the great emperor Qianlong (Liang, 2014:80-81).

Liang’s theory of historiography was an evolutionary one, based on the model of the triadic phases which, for Liang, very well suited the national civilizing mission of making China a part of the world. Liang argued that Chinese Antiquity was “Chinese China”, “Medieval” was “Asian China”, and the “Modern” was “the world’s China”. The connotations of “Chinese”, “Asian”, and “global” were complex. On the one hand, they formed a historical spectacle of the Central Kingdom’s becoming more and more open to the outside world; on the other hand, the “progress of history” could also be perceived as the “turn of Heaven,” which his contemporary British-trained Yan Fu (严复 1854-1921) had, in 1896, deployed to translate

Thomas Huxley’s “evolution” (Yu, 2003), the shifting of the center of the world from the East to the West, and the Chinese loss of the “golden time” - the classical and imperial past.

The translation² has not lost all the original connotations found in the West, but it has obtained a new meaning. The original Western concept of Antiquity has both temporal and spatial connotations: as “remote past”, antiquity refers to a time marked by distance. But in it, only a two-dimensional imaginary of history is implicated: the binaries of the far and the near, and the past and the present are drawn on the horizontal axis only. By comparison, the Chinese versions have an extra dimension. Shang Shi or Shang Gu have both horizontal and vertical connotations in them; it not only means Yuan Gu (远古 distant ancient), but also implies that the further ancient is also further “up” in the hierarchy of being “higher”. This has contradicted the widely accepted progressive historicity, which, as Liang postulated, the more modern the more open and stronger.

In the trichotomy of “Upper”, “Middle”, and “Near”, an imaginary of history as a river is established: like a river, history inevitably flows from high to low, and the inevitability of history is necessary and “progressive”. However, the inevitable and “progress” can also be derivatives of the “condemned to modernize”. Classical Chinese dichotomies of past and present are defined in terms of Qian 前 and Hou 后. Spatially, Qian means “before” or “in front of”, Hou means “after” or “behind”. Used in the conceptualization of historicity, Qian means “previous”, and Hou means of “later”, and Qian also conveys “history”, and Hou also conveys “future”. To a Chinese, history is thus “in front of us” or what we are facing, future is thus “behind us”, or what lies behind our back. This is very unlike the situation in the West, where history is behind us and future is in front of us (Qian, 2005:92-140).

² Since Liang Qichao wrote, the Chinese translation of Antiquity has been Shang Shi or Shang Gu 上古 or Shang Gu Shi 上古史, literally meaning Upper Generation, Upper Ancient, or Upper Ancient History, and it has referred to the periods preceding the Middle Ages as Zhong Shi, Zhong Gu (中古 the Middle Ancient Times), or Zhong Gu Shi (Middle Generation, Middle Ancient, or Middle Generation or Ancient History), and the Modern Age as Jin Shi or Jin Dai (Near Generation or Age 近代).

Antiquity, a good or bad time (thing)?

Translated into Chinese in or near the end of Qing, the study of Antiquity came to occupy a major scene in modern Chinese intellectual landscape. Mainstream discourses between late Qing and the late 1930s have varied with changing times but have in common shared the psycho-mental complex of progress and “backwardism”. In late Qing, Chinese intellectuals remained confident of the institutional and cosmological legacies of China’s ancient times, and oriented their discourse of the West toward its advanced technology, especially that of ship and railroad building and war industry; between the end of Qing and the establishment of a centralized national government in 1927, they felt greatly more than before anxious to learn from the West theories of social institution and political economy; from roughly 1927 on, they had given priority to learning modern Western worldview and ontology, which, to many of them, were necessary “recipes” for the curing of the afflictions affecting the Central Kingdom (Wu, 1990:216). For me, these phases were characterizable in terms of three occidentalisms, technological, institutional, and ontological.

The interest in Antiquity persisted throughout these phases.

Some of the first generation Western-style Chinese classicists were diffusionists or mythologists who refused to see Chinese culture as lacking the institutional and cosmological requisites for modernity. Following the French sinologist Terrien de Lacouperie who in 1894 published a book to argue for the Western origin of the early Chinese civilization, some late imperial Chinese scholars such as the anarchist 刘师培 (1884-1919), who craved for Western inspirations for revolution, sought to discover, in Mesopotamia and Egypt, the elements of civilization that China shared with the West, and strove to recover ancient Chinese myths comparable to Greek counterparts so that East and West could be seen as founded upon the same ancient foundation (Sun, 2010: 116-137; Wang, 2014: 49-86).

But these late imperial intellectuals immediately irritated their nationalistic colleagues. Liang Qichao himself wrote to argue that all the sources of early Chinese civilization had been available within China's national borders. Liang's disciples Wang Guowei (王国维 1877-1927) and Chen Yinke (陈寅恪 1890-1969) developed their own historiographies. Wang, focused upon Chinese Antiquity, contributed a great deal to the reconstruction of early Chinese institutions, with his own synthesis of Chinese own ideas and Western social science concepts; Chen Yinke, concentrating upon "Medieval China", developed his characteristic historiography to shed light on the making of fusion of a variety of religions and ethnicities (Qu, 2015). Both paid attention to the Central Kingdom as a combination, but did not give up Liang's theory that the combination was Chinese. Eventually, most of the revolutionary historians abandoned diffusionism, and turned to evolutionism, through which they found both the location of traditional China in the global civilizing process and the inspiration of "survival of the fittest" necessary for Chinese civilization's self-renewal.

After a short period of silence, in the late 1920s, the interest in the "native" Antiquity revived. Under the sponsorship of the KMT, Academia Sinica established its Institute of Historical and Philological Research, where a group of scholars trained in the West in different disciplines, history, archaeology, ethnology, philology, and philosophy converged in a project of "scientific oriental study", with the aim of repatterning the original shape of the Central Kingdom by means of modern human science (Chen, 2011; Du and Wang, 1998). In their various works, internal divisions and relatedness of ancient China were emphasized; but these were interpreted from the perspective of the national plurality of diversity. However, amazingly, among the group, there emerged a new effort to return to the alternational linearity critiqued by Kang and Liang. For example, according to Fu Sinian, the director of IHP, the long millenia between late neolithic age and the early empire can be seen as composed of two alternations from late neolithic separation and Shang and Zhou relative unity and from Spring and Autumn and Warring States "chaos" to Qin-Han order. Within the shorter period of Shang and Zhou, we can speak of the alternations between prosperity and decline: Shang

created in its early reigns long centuries of prosperity, but when time approached its end, everything became “chaotic”, which justified Zhou’s “revolution”. The alternations can also be described in terms of the rotation between the East and the West: Shang emerged in the East as a strong Power, Zhou emerged in the West as a feudality under Shang, and eventually replaced Shang (Fu, 1996). Fu went further to argue that the alternation from Qin to Han followed the same directional logic.³

During the same period, in other institutions, there emerged a generation of historians who concentrated on the study of the culture history of China. They were seriously divided; some, adopted Western periodizations to define history in the East (e.g., Liu, 2008), and in writing history of Antiquity, used all available materials including those before Confucius; some, developed a school called “Antiquity Skepticism” (Yigupai), seeking to pull down the sacred architecture of the archives (Gu, 2009). By the 1920s, Marxist historical materialism had also been translated, and influenced, sometimes via Japan, left-wing Chinese scholars. Between the late 1920s and the 1930s, among these scholars, a debate broke out. The debate has been known as “Zhongguo Shehuishi Lunzhan 中国社会史论战”, or the Theoretical Battle of China’s Social History, which concerned three problems: 1) is slavery an inevitable stage in human history, and did ancient China have slavery? 2) when did feudalism start and end in China, and what were the characteristics of Chinese feudalism? 3) what is Marxist theory of Asiatic mode of production, and did the Asiatic mode exist in ancient China? Many of the works produced during the period were focused on Antiquity, but they defined nothing good and respectable in it, either being slavery or feudalism (Gong and Li, 2004).

Prior to the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949, post-traditional Chinese intellectuals had taken almost all available paths toward their own ideological reorientations,

³ To me, the merit of such “inculturated” decipherments of history has been that they have allowed contestations. For instance, an old Chinese saying suggests that 乱世出英雄, meaning “heroes are mostly the chaotic times”. The late neolithic “separation” period saw the emergence of the five sovereigns, and the post-Zhou periods of contestations saw the ripening of Chinese philosophy, and as Sima Qian was fully aware, the ordered, unified, and so-called “prosperous” times could also be times in which dictatorship replaced sage hood.

from technological Occidentalism to institutional Occidentalism, then to ontological Occidentalism. In terms of what was achieved during such turns of directions, the Marxist approach, now mixed up with Lenin's and Stalin's theories of evolutionary stages of history, became dominant after "Liberation" (Schwartz, 1996). During the first decade of "New China", Chinese historians worked under heavy political pressures, but they were not undivided: some of them read more Marx and got influenced by the idea of static Asiatic society, some of them remained satisfied with the simplified evolutionary schema.

The craving for Western Antiquity was heavily criticized at this time, but it continued to grow quietly in the minds of the intellectuals. Even during the "Cultural Revolution", in 1968, Gu Zhun, the liberal intellectual within the Party, secretly completed his masterpiece *The Institution of the Greek Polis* (Gu, 1982). In the book, he explored the future of China's democratization from the perspective of ancient Greek political institution.

Gu Zhun's book did not get published until 1982, eight years after he died of political torture and illness; by then, the study of Antiquity and the classics had begun to flourish again.

In the past fifteen years, in Chinese academia, there are "Occidentalists", who read Greek and Latin, apart from English, German, and French, there are "Orientalists", who are good at classical Chinese but have chosen to interpret Chinese pasts with concepts similar to those adopted by either Western sinologists, there are also "fundamentalists" who reject all the modern interpretations of the classics. There hasn't been serious debate concerning whether the various cultures/periods conventionally labelled "ancient" are distinctive enough, in terms of the dynamics of civilization, to share a single label, but there are hidden controversies over the issues as to whether Chinese thoughts and institutions should be seen as "unique" and whether the classics should be so rigidly defined as the recitations of the "scriptures" promoted by both the Occidentalists and the Confucians alike.

Pre-modern Chinese “previousness”, historiography, and classics

When we say “Antiquity and China”, we inevitably imply that Antiquity, at least the idea of it, is originally outside China. In a sense, this is quite true; for, strictly speaking, the word “Antiquity” is foreign to Chinese. Because Antiquity and China are apart, by making the pair, we also point at the direction of translation which is bound to make the original word “alienated”. In the previous discussions, I have considered Western priestly sinological “alienations” and modern Chinese “alienations” of Chinese Antiquity. It can be argued that these different “alienations” emerged from different mimeses, the early modern Western mimesis of China, and twentieth century Chinese mimesis of Europe. However, we should not see Antiquity as all external to the non-Western and the non-modern. There are two considerations: (1) as has been widely accepted, Antiquity represents a period of “classical history” in the East equivalent to that in the West millennia before the word Antiquity was introduced, and (2) as I will focus in the following, we can find in pre-modern China some systematic “indigenous” perspectives of “classical ancientness” and classical scholarship.

Regarding our first consideration, if we can take Liang Qichao’s point that the Antiquity of Central Kingdom refers to the history between the time of the Yellow Emperor and the establishment of the empire of Qin, then we can say that this is a three thousand years long period, beginning in the thirtieth century BCE and ending in the third century BCE. The “core phase” of this period can be described in terms of “bronze age” and “urban revolution”, but the whole period consists of a long late neolithic age, Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, and the age of the contesting Powers.⁴

⁴ Confucians attributed the contestations among different regional Powers during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods to the collapse of an archaic unified constitution; but in fact, such contestations had been originary to those living in the pre-Confucian stage. Even the so-called “unified” kingdoms of Shang and Zhou can only be said to be two alternating “confederations” constantly faced with the “internal” issues of separation and chaos. Of course, this does not mean that the kingdoms of the East Asian Continent did not share any cultural traits, it only means that such traits emerged out of the exchanges and combinations between different cultural areas and “regional kingdoms”.

Chinese historical chronology that emerged quite early, originated in Zhou's bronze ware inscriptions which substituted Shang's bones or tortoise shells divinational chronology in the Eleventh Century BCE. (Wang, 2015). Between the eight and the fifth centuries BCE, in the Spring and Autumn period, this kind of chronology got further refined. From the same period, "Axial Age" Chinese thinking emerged. Quite different from ancient Greek historians who, as Collingwood (Collingwood, 1962) postulates, radicalized themselves against mythical theocracy, the great thinkers living between the sixth and third centuries BCE in the East mostly derived their thinking from a return to the archaic, and intellectually they can be said to have pioneered a certain scholarship of Antiquity. Following Liang Qichao (2014:143-158), I group these thinkers into three kinds: sociologicistic Confucians, cosmic and reclusive Daoists, and the combinational socio-cosmic poets. To a great extent, these thinkers were all engaged in "returning to the archaic": Confucius always talked about his ideas as if they had been derived from Zhou, whose ideal kingly virtue had in turn stemmed from the "sovereigns" of what we now call the late Stone Age; Laozi and Zhuangzi talked about their concepts as if they had been from the age at which there had not been politics; Qu Yuan, the poet, often hunted in the deep and high mountains his ideal "Lady" as if the mountains without humans had been truer than the social world of humans.

Furthermore, although Antiquity has been translated as a Western word, the first Chinese historiography Sima Qian's Shiji (The Grand Scribe's Records), in which, as I mentioned earlier, the historicity of alternating linearity is explicitly extended, can be said to be a proper example of history of the "classical time" (Gu 古 ancientness, as contrasted with Jin 今 presentness).

Sima Qian, born into a court astrologist's family some three centuries after Herodotus and Thucydides in the second century BCE, worked as a court official and astrologer at first, before he became devoted to historiography. He conducted historical research not only through archival research but also through fieldwork in oral history. With the materials he gathered, and the intellectual project he developed, he wrote Shiji into a large book, 526,000

Chinese characters long. Unlike Herodotus and Thucydides, his forerunner in the West, he did not write a history to break with “myth”, and did not narrate it in terms of a human world forming around an event; rather he wrote to incorporate all sources available at his time, and structure them in the framework of annals and biographies he derived from earlier forms. He in turn situated such annals and biographies in the wider geo-cosmic world.

Sima Qian placed the “clash of civilizations” between the civilized and the barbarians, the issue which would obsess both Herodotus and Thucydides, in a minor place, in the section for biographies of important persons and the “barbaric” neighbors of the Chinese he defined as the “four kinds of the collective relatives in the surrounding (四裔)” (Wang and Qiu, 2008). In the *Shiji*, the writing of history thus began in the section of basic annals devoted to the five sovereigns before the inauguration of the first dynasty (Xia) (equivalent to late neolithic age), was continued in the three classical dynasties (equivalent to “theocratic” and axial ages in the West), and was achieved in the construction of the first and second empires (Qin and Han). The five sovereigns were not politico-militant kings, and did not need to have royal blood, but were inventors of technologies such as agriculture, astrology, writing, and irrigation; the kings of the three dynasties advanced their “political societies”, but they acted in accordance to heavenly fate which the sovereigns had foretold and the sages continued to inform the kings about; and the emperors of the first and second empires became both more powerful and less certain about the shape of the geo-cosmic propensity of things.

Following the Basic Annals (*benji* 本纪), Sima Qian rendered the Tables (*biao* 表), as one genealogical table and nine chronological charts, which showed trajectories of reigns, events, and royal lineages. Then, he added a section of Treatises (*shu* 书), these being “files of discourses” concerning the historical evolution of ritual, music, pitch pipes, the calendar, astronomy, sacrifices, rivers and waterways, and financial administration.

Shiji is known as the prime example of the genre called “jizhuanti (biographic style)”, understood to be the prime characteristic of traditional Chinese historiography. However, its biographic sections only emerge after all the annals, tables, and treatises are presented. Sima Qian divided the “biographies” into two sorts, one for the feudal lords and their kingdoms, the other for the ranked persons (including the “four kinds of collective relatives”). In the section on Hereditary Houses (shijia 世家), Sima Qian offered chronicle-like accounts of the leading feudal states, or the archaic regional kingdoms. In the section on Ranked Biographies (liezhuan 列传), Sima Qian included a large number of life histories for as many as 130 ranked persons, ranging from the earliest renouncer 隐士 to Sima Qian's contemporaries. Not all biographies are about particular individuals, some of them are about small sums of figures sharing certain roles, assassins, virtuous officials, or good scholars.

In explaining how he had approached history and why he had done so, he famously said the following:

仆窃不逊，近自托于无能之辞，网罗天下放失旧闻，考之行事，稽其成败兴坏之理，凡百三十篇；亦欲以究天人之际，通古今之变，成一家之言。

The first sentence of the paragraph explains how he collected all the “hearsays”, and correlated them with facts, then, thought through them as to what would explain the causalities of the accomplishments and failures of the activities of history; the second sentence explains his historical ambition as “exploring in the intermediaries between heaven and man, understanding the changes through ancient to modern, in order to achieve a school of discourse”.

In Sima Qian’s narrative, history formed at the point where horizontal time axis and vertical geo-cosmic axis met, and consisted in a sequence of changes along the time axis, whose

regularities were determined by the ecology of relationship between the vertical triads of heaven, man, and earth.

If behind Martini's narratives of China, there was a Christian project of mapping the whole world, then, behind Sima Qian's much older narrative of early China, on the basis of which not only priestly sinologists such as Martini but also modern social scientists such as Marcel Granet advanced their theories of "Chinese society", there was a certain enterprise of civilizational reconstitution of the Chinese world. We should not mistake the distinction between ancient and modern as a modern invention, because in Confucius's Analects it had existed⁵, and so it had in Sima Qian's Shiji. The difference is that, for Sima Qian, it meant neither understanding the changes occurring between the ancient and the modern to signify viewing the two poles as opposed and the process as discontinuous; nor did it mean all historical events were only to do with humans. As both a historian and astrologer, Sima Qian looked at history as a composite thing, a world in which humans and non-humans, ancients and moderns, dead and living were all related.

We do not mean here that Sima Qian's ontology of history is a precise model derived from historical specificities he sought to recover. Nonetheless, it is apparent that the characteristics of Shiji were integral to the patterns that shaped the history of "early China". Sima Qian described the history up to his time in terms of 古今之变, the changes occurring between the ancient and the modern. In Western style archaeology and history which a lot of Chinese scholars have adopted, such changes have been described in terms of early China's being through "stone age", bronze age, iron or "axial" age, and empire. These periods are basically correspondent to the transformations occurring before Sima Qian. If we are rigid modernists, then, we would see Sima Qian's phrase 天人之际 or what connected between heaven and man as a "religious" or even a "shamanic" idea. However, it cannot be denied that from

⁵ Confucius famously said: "I for my part am not one of those who have innate knowledge. I am simply one who loves the ancient and who is diligent in learning it." (Analects 7)

“stone age” to the emergence of empire, historical actors made history with their own “cultures”. If Sima Qian was, as he claimed, exploring the intermediaries between Heaven and man, then, those making the history were also doing the same. Sacrifice 祭祀, what operated as the intermediary between “heaven and man” to the divinities and things continued to be practiced by kings and their subjects; while the “axial age” thinkers were speculating about their “sociologism” or opposite, for inspirations, they constantly looking outward into the sky and the landscape.

Whether the ancient Greeks were all that different from the ancient Chinese cannot be easily determined; but it seems to be clear that Sima Qian’s three-dimensional geometry of temporality was quite “different”, when compared with Herodotus’s and Thucydides’s historiographies of war.

After having said that the dichotomy of ancient and modern had emerged very early on, in early Han, and gained a systematic expression in Sima Qian’s Shiji, we must add that what has been known as “classical scholarship” has its equivalent in ancient China.

The Chinese character for the classics is Jing (经), which originally referred to warp weaving, and metaphorically refers to keeping something in a straight order. But in Confucius’s time, the character had been used to refer the six categories of ancient books, the six Jing 六经, which were 诗 Classic of Poetry, 书 Book of Documents, 礼 Classic of Rites, 乐 Classic of Music, 易 Book of Change, 春秋 Spring and Autumn Annals; and because 乐 Classic of Music got lost in the turmoil of history, only five classics were left by Han period. In fact, the character Jing did not become so important until early Han. The Han intellectual tendency to collect and interpret Jing did not come about in a vacuum; it was to do with a Confucian reaction to the First Emperor’s burning of books. Having adopted Legalism as its state ideology, to prevent other schools endangering orthodoxy, taking the advice of Li Si 李斯, the First Emperor had most of the books related to Confucian thoughts burnt and 400 scholars

buried alive. Because of “burning of books and burying of scholars” 焚书坑儒, in early Han, in their study of the classics, scholars had to depend on scattered sources and oral tradition survived the Qin destruction (Wood, 2007: 78-88). In late first century BCE, however, some more systematic written sources were discovered in Confucius’ manor and in the court. Upon the basis of these newly discovered ancient books, Liu Xin (刘歆, 50BCE-23AD), the one in charge of collation of ancient book created a new collection. Liu advocated the interpretation of the classics in accordance with the so-called “old text classics”, which he opposed to “new text classics” and thus induced lasting controversy between old and new text classics 今古文经学 (Wang, 2004). The characters applied to refer to old and new were precisely the same as those applied to describe ancient and modern in Shiji. The debate in Han classical scholarship was thus, among others, a “theoretical battle” between the philologists who insisted that the newly discovered “ancient versions” of the Five Classics were more authentic to the surviving archival fragments and oral history and those philologists who opposed the opinion.

Related to the idea of Jing, there has been another fact. Since late Sui and early Tang, between the sixth and the tenth centuries AD, the four-fold divisions of ancient books as 经史子集, “classics”, historical records, philosophical writings, and literary and miscellaneous works were rendered by Wei Zheng 魏征. Clearly, in pre-modern time, a strong priority was given to Jing, the classics. But the classics consist in a great variety.

Although Shiji and the new and old texts Confucian classical scholarships seem to have sprang from the self-contained world of the Han, they emerged at a time when the world was open to “external” impacts from all directions: as I have elsewhere (Wang, 2014) indicated, prior to Han, the direction in which the Chinese sought to find the ultimate source of life was reoriented from the West to the East, meanwhile the nomadic empires advancing in the North and the West pressed the Han empire to move Southward in search for its “relatedness” with the exterior, and the South was still full of the Yue Kingdoms attached to Han largely in name. In Shiji, Sima Qian totalized the sequences of the five archaic sage-kings, the three

classical dynasties, and the early emperors into a history; but he had to admit the fact all the Powers stemmed in different regions; he had also to inscribe, into his records, not only the systems of rites and aristocracy but also the Powers of the kingdoms surrounding the middle. While Sima Qian was diligently compiling his records, his emperor, Wudi of Han 汉武帝, was busily engaged in absorbing all available traditions - ranging from magic to religion, from classical Zhou rites to necromancy - from different sources into his Virtue. Not long after Shiji was completed, Buddhism got solidly established in the country, and “mixed up” with Confucianism, Neo-Daoism, and folk beliefs. While the new and old texts classists were debating about Confucianism, other Chinese classical philosophies, cosmologies, and ontologies were reviving, and the “world religions” were coming into China. Originally, Chinese “classics” consisted of ceremonial handbooks, official documents, geographic books, philosophical works, and so on, and they were not all “sacred books”. However, after Han, the same character Jing was adopted to translate the sacred books of the “world religions”. When Buddhism was translated into Chinese, Buddhist scriptures were named fojing 佛经; and other sacred books of other world religions - ancient Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Manichaeism - also bore the name Jing.

After the Western ideas of Antiquity and the classics were introduced, Chinese intellectuals, who can be said to have lived in certain situations not so radically different from late Han, have adopted seriously self-contradictory attitudes toward Sima Qian’s synthesis of history and geo-cosmic knowledge and pre-modern Chinese definitions of Jing. Since Liang Qichao, Sima Qian’s kind of historiography has been seen as a source of all the ills of traditional historical narratives. From time to time, it has also been critiqued of being a Han forgery of pre-Han history. However, there have also been certain archaeological movements targeted at discovering “solid facts” in order to prove all the details of history provided by the grand scribe. Moreover, when time approached the end of empire, the old debates of old and new texts schools of Confucian classics in fact revived in the rival definitions of the ancient history of the Central Kingdom, with the Monarchist Kang Youwei insisting on the

combination of the Han new texts and political pragmatism, and Republicans such as Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869-1936) inclining toward turning Jing or the classics into history, remaking them as the history of the Chinese national future. Between the two modern schools of the classics, the new text worshipped Confucius and regarded him as the philosophical king, whilst the old instead worshipped the Duke of Zhou who legendarily invented all the confederational constitution which Confucius sought to revitalize, and treated Confucius as an intellectual master. The new treated the Jing as all accomplished by Confucius himself, the old dealt with them as historical materials; the new relied on the Spring and Autumn Annals, the old depended on the Zhou Book of Rites; the new was derived from Han court scholarship, the old stemmed from Han “popular antiquities”; the new sought meanings in the mythical, divinational, and fortune-telling books forged in Han, the old rejected them old as “forgeries of history” (Tang, 1989). In the past decade, along with the re-emergence of 国学 Nation-ology, or the Study of Ancient Chinese Civilization, all the ancient classical scholarships have been narrated once more as a part of Chinese civilization, and the rivalry between new and old texts of Confucianisms, which in fact continuously framed previous “internal” theoretical and political controversies for centuries, has unfortunately given way to a much less colorful and lively “unified national worship of history”.

Conclusion

Situated in the two ends of Eurasia, West and East are at the same time both foreign and familiar to each other, and living in our shared and divided world, we can be said to have a shared paradox. Both being “hot societies”, we have driven our civilizations forward, anxiously pushing them toward the negation of the time prior to ours, but we have also made all possible efforts, through different ways of “return” - mythical, religious, historical, philosophical, and poetic, to “go back” to the age in which a common ground could be located. The paradox has stemmed from our related situations. Horizontally, along the lines of

longitude, circulations of ideas, humans, and things between us took place via the extensive intermediary belts ranging from the West's "near East" and the East's Western frontiers; in such an Eurasia, neither of us could claim to be the Central Kingdom; along the lines of latitude, circulations took place between the South and the North, in which both West and East became both the North and what sandwiched by the South and the further North (the shamanic world of the hunters); we became both "middle kingdoms"; to both directions, each of us has sought to push the "primitives" to the margins, but from the same directions, each of us has also drawn spiritual and material vitalities on which each "fed" its civilizations.

The dynamics coded in the geo-cosmic terms have defined the conditions under which our cultural translations have taken place.

The difference in historicities, as we have just evoked by means of a history of "translations" where a "comparative metaphorism" is implied, by revisiting the ancient perspectives and explains the related transformation of meaning of the word "Antiquity". One may describe the transformation of meaning in terms of "betrayal". But let us not deny that, brought back to its home, the "betrayal" of Chinese "Upper Ancient History" becomes more truthful to what has been "betrayed". In the West, the idea of Antiquity has been understood as both an objective perspective of some periods of history and a subjective perspective of their values. In the "confused" conception, Antiquity means history and our respect - even if our respect has sometimes been expressed as "critiques" - for the wonders of ancient creativities, of the Greco-Roman politics, philosophy, sculpture, literature, theater, education, architecture, and life style. These are the things that can be said to be "up in the higher," precisely as the Chinese "betrayal" of the word conveys.

Like our identities, which can only be said to be variations of each other, our Antiquities are both at once indispensable of each other and "self-contained". In the previous paragraphs, I have sought to suggest a few points, including (1) "Antiquity" is both external and internal to China, (2) in the modern culture contacts between East and West, some of the dynamics of

civilization, can be seen as interactions between different periodizations of history, and (3) these interactions have been intense and sometimes violent, and they have created a transformation of historiography, but they have not resulted in the loss of meaning of the pre-modern ways of “returning to the archaic”. My point is simply that Antiquity is both at the same time outside and inside us, East or West. Though the circulation of ideas has been the process of constant inter-civilization interactions, such interactions have not necessarily resulted in the substitution of sameness for difference. Thus, in the past two decades, after a long century of nationalization or Occidentalization, we have witnessed the return of “All under Heaven” in Chinese “silk road” politics, and the rejuvenation of ancient perspectives of history.

References

- Chen, Hongbo陈洪波, Zhongguo Kaoguxue de Xingqi: 1928-1949 Nian Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo Kaogu Shi (中国科学考古学的兴起 : 1928-1949年历史语言研究所考古史The Rise of Chinese Archaeology: A History of Archaeology of the Institute of History and Philology, 1928-1949), Guilin: Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2011.
- Collingwood, R.G., The Idea of History, Frome: Hillman and Son LTD, 1962.
- Du, Zhengsheng杜正胜, Wang, Fansen王泛森eds., Xin Xueshu Zhilu: Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo Qishi Zhounian Jinian Wenji (新学术之路——中央研究院历史语言研究所七十周年纪念文集A New Academic Road: A Collection of Essays Celebrating the Seventieth Year Anniversary of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica), Taipei: Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo, 1998.
- Fu, Sinian傅斯年, Yixia Dongxi Shuo (夷夏东西说A Thesis of the Distinctions between Yi and Xia, East and West), in Zhongguo Xiandai Xueshu Jingdian Fu Sinian Juan (中国现代

- 学术经典傅斯年卷The Fu Sinian Volume of Modern Chinese Academic Classics), pp.187-240, Shijiazhuang: Hebei Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1996.
- Gong, Shu-duo 龚书铎, Li, Wen-hai 李文海, Ershi Shiji Zhongguo Lishi Fenqi Bianlun (二十世纪中国历史分期辩论 Debates over the Issue of Chinese Historical Periodizations), Tianjin: Beihua Wenyi Chubanshe, 2004.
- Granet, Marcel, Chinese Civilization, translated by Kathleen Innes and Mabel Brailsford, London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co. LTD, 1930.
- Granet, Marcel, Right and Left in China. In Rodney Needham ed. Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification, pp.43-58. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.
- Gu, Jie-gang 顾颉刚, Zhongguo Shanggushi Jiangyi (中国上古史讲义 Introduction to China's Antiquity), Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2009.
- Gu, Zhun 顾准, Xila Chengbang Zhidu (希腊城邦制度 The Greek Polis Institution), Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1982.
- Hsiao, Kung-chuan 萧公权, Modern China and a New World: K'ang Yu-wei, Reformer and Utopian, 1858-1927, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975.
- Lach, Donald and Edwin Van Kley, Asia in the Making of Europe, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude, Anthropology Confronts the Problems of the Modern World, Jane Todd trans., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Liang, Qichao 梁启超, Xinshixue (新史学 New History), Xia Xiaohong 夏晓虹, Lu Yin 陆胤 Annotators, Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 2014.
- Liu, Yi-zheng 柳怡徵, Zhongguo Wenhua Shi (中国文化史 Culture History of China), 2 volumes, Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe, 2008.
- Mungello, David, Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989.
- Qian, Mu 钱穆, Xiandai Zhongguo Xueshu Lunheng (现代中国学术论衡 Treatises of Modern Chinese Disciplines), Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 2005.

Qu, Jingdong渠敬东, Fanhui Lishi Shiye, Chongsu Shehuixue de Xiangxiangli: Zhongguo Jinshi Bianqian yu Jingshi Yanjiu de Xinchuantong (返回历史视野, 重塑社会学的想象力: 中国近世变迁与经史研究的新传统Returning to Historical Perspectives, Reshaping Sociological Imagination: Change in Modern China and the New Classical Historical Traditions), in Shehui (社会Society), issue 1, 2015, pp.1-25.

Said, Edward, Orientalism, New York: Penguin, 1978.

Schwartz, Benjamin, "Some stereotypes in the periodization of Chinese history", in his China and Other Matters, pp.18-29, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Spence, Jonathan, The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998

Sun, Jiang孙江, Lakeboli "Zhongguo Wenming Xilai Shuo" zai Dongya de1 Chuanbu yu Wenben Bijiao (拉克伯里“中国文明西来说”在东亚的传布与文本之比较, Terrien De Lacouperie's Thesis of the Western Origin of Chinese Civilization and its Transmission in East Asia, with Textual Comparisons), in Lishi Yanjiu (历史研究Historical Research), issue 1, 2010, pp.116~137.

Tang, Zhijun汤志钧, Jindai Jingxue yu Zhengzhi (近代经学与政治Modern Textual Classical Scholarship and Politics), Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1989.

Wang, Baoxuan王葆玟, Gujinwen Jingxue Xinlun (今古文经学新论A New Study of Old and New Texts Confucianisms, Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2004.

Wang, Hui王晖, Lun Xizhou Jishi Yuci ji Dashi xi "Nian" de Shixue Yiyi (论西周记时语词及大事系“年”的史学意义A Study of the Words for Time and the Chronological Definition of "Year" in Western Zhou, in Beijing Shifan Daxue Xuebao (北京师范大学学报Beijing Normal University Bulletin, issue 1, 2015, pp.122-132.

Wang, Wenguang王文光, Qiu Xueqin仇学琴, (Shiji Siyizhuan yu Qinhan Shiqi de Bianjiang Minzushi Yanjiu (史记四裔传与秦汉时期的边疆民族史研究The Biographies of the Four

Relatives in Shiji and the Frontier Ethnohistorical Studies of Qin and Han), in Sixiang Zhanxian (思想战线Ideological Front), issue 2, 2008, pp.25~29.

Wang, Mingming王铭铭, The West as the Other: A Genealogy of Chinese Occidentalism, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2014.

Wood, Frances, The First Emperor of China, London: Profile Books Ltd., 2007.

Wu, Wenzao吴文藻, Shehuixue Renleixue Yanjiu Wenji (社会学人类学研究文集A Collection of Research Articles in Sociology and Anthropology), Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 1990.

Yu, Zheng俞政, Yanfu Zhuyi Yanjiu (严复著译研究A Study of the Writings and Translations of Yan Fu), Su Zhou: Suzhou Daxue Chubanshe, 2003.