

Chun-chieh Huang / Jörn Rüsen (eds.)

Chinese Historical Thinking

An Intercultural Discussion



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The editors

Prof Dr Chun-chieh Huang is National Chair Professor and Dean of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, National Taiwan University.

Prof Dr Jörn Rüsen is Senior Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities, Essen, and Professor Emeritus at the Witten/Herdecke University.

Global East Asia 4

The book presents Chinese historical thinking by four articles by addressing its ancient origin and its development to modernity. This presentation is commented by seven international experts. Presentation and comments find "second thoughts" by three other international scholars, and at the end the whole discussion is reflected by the authors of the first presentations. The complex structure of argumentation documents not only various ideas and interpretations of Chinese historical thinking, but represents the potentials and problems of intercultural comparison at the same time.

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11. Dogmas of Superficiality: The Episteme of Humanism in Writings by Taiwanese Historians Huang Chun-chieh, Wong Young-tsu, and Hu Chang-Tze

In his essay *On the Transformation of Historical Thinking in Modern China*,¹ the Taiwanese scholar Hu Chang-Tze (胡昌智 Hū Chāngzhì) identifies a series of conceptual developments that constitute cardinal nodes in the history of ideas of Chinese modernity. In essence, these include Zhāng Xuéchéng's (章學誠, 1738–1801)² new sense of 'historicism' with regard to the Confucian classics; Kāng Yǒuwéi's (康有為, 1858–1927) and Liáng Qǐchāo's (梁啟超, 1873–1929) progressivist theories of historical periodization; Liáng Shùmíng's (梁漱溟, 1893–1988) cultural 'pluralism' of contrasting Chinese culture against India and the West; and Qián Mù's (錢穆, 1895–1990) pioneering of a new Chinese historical writing style employing grand narrative.

These nodes reveal a growth of Chinese ideas that approximately resemble dominant concepts within the Occidental *episteme*³ of humanism, although this is not a topic that is directly discussed in Hu's essay. Zhāng Xuéchéng's historicism matches the secularism implicit in European classical and biblical philology. The progressivist vision espoused by Kāng Yǒuwéi and Liáng Qǐchāo mirrors Hegel's modernist historical teleology. Liáng Shùmíng's cultural pluralism brings to mind the global perspective of eighteenth-century European universal histories.⁴ Likewise, Qián Mù's use of grand narrative echoes the overarching historical causality embedded in much of Western nineteenth-century historiography.

1 Published in this volume.

2 In the present essay, traditional Chinese characters as used in Taiwan are listed first, given that the topic of discussion is a series of essays by Taiwanese scholars. For the sake of inclusivity and readability, simplified Chinese characters (abbreviated 'S') as used in the People's Republic of China are also supplied in those cases where the simplified characters differ from the traditional characters.

3 For the term *episteme* denoting a 'power-knowledge system', see Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris: Gallimard, 1966, p. 13.

4 For example, George Sale et alii, *An Universal History, from the Earliest Account of Time to the Present*, 65 vol. London: Edward Bate, 1747–1768.

The seeming correspondences between Western and Chinese thought raises the question of whether these conceptual developments in modern Chinese historical thinking resulted exclusively from internal factors rooted in the traditional, premodern Chinese power-knowledge system, coincidentally bearing a resemblance to similar Western ideas, or whether they emanated from the external agency of Occidental humanism as propagated through the growing sway of Western-style education. Although Hu briefly mentions the fascination with Western culture and political ideologies that fermented in China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the concrete extent to which early modern Chinese historians were exposed to and possibly influenced by Western historical thinking is left unexamined in his essay. The result is a characterization of modern Chinese historical thinking that to a certain degree visualizes the Chinese history of ideas as standing in relative isolation from the broader global context in general and from the epistemic force of the humanist history of ideas in particular.

Oppositely, two essays by the Taiwanese historians Huang Chun-chieh (黃俊傑, Huáng Jùnjié) and Wong Young-tsu (汪榮祖, Wāng Róngzǔ) concerned with identifying key features of classical Chinese history writing – respectively entitled *Historical Thinking as Humanistic Thinking in Traditional China* and *Humanism in Traditional Chinese Historiography with Special Reference to the Grand Historian Sima Qian*⁵ – opt to describe the ancient Chinese literary tradition of *shǐ* (史) comparatively in the language of humanism. While Huang does not qualify his use of the term ‘humanism’, Wong begins his article by recognizing that humanism signifies a specific historical mode in the European history of ideas that consists in seeking meaning in the study of human culture as opposed to the theological study of the divine.

It ought to be realized, however, that the word ‘humanism’ in general implies a distinct Western intellectual tradition that utilizes an academic epistemology of historicism and moreover involves an explicit political project of secular liberalism. Nonetheless, both Huang and Wong not only conceive of the age-old Chinese tradition of *shǐ* as ‘history’ in accordance with the dominant connotation of the English word instead of conforming to any indigenous Chinese definition of the term, but they also proceed at length to essentialize the writings of Sīmǎ Qiān (司馬遷, c. 145–86 BCE) and other classical Chinese *shǐ* writers as being works of ‘humanistic’ thinking. Hence, in an utterly *anatotistic* and *anachronistic* manner, i. e., entirely out of place and out of time, they lift humanism out of its historical context and raise it to the status of a universal, timeless *topos* constituting an idealized yardstick against which to measure the value of Chinese culture.

5 Both published in this volume.

There can be little doubt that the felt need for apologetically appraising the Chinese *shǐ* tradition in terms of Occidental humanism results from the now global hegemony of the higher educational system of the humanities, which humanism underpins as its episteme. The Western-style humanities, which are socially and politically anchored in the institution of the modern university, have everywhere become the preferred – indeed even the compulsory – dogma for studying culture and the human past.

Yet, it must be stressed that the current intellectual climate is a historical outcome of the colonial as well as postcolonial epochs of modernity. Humanism and the humanities, in their multiple variant forms worldwide, are systems of knowledge production that are founded on the exclusion not only of theology but also of the epistemologies of premodern non-Western power-knowledge systems as, e.g., attested by the debarment of traditional Indian *paṇḍit* scholars from newly founded Western-style universities in nineteenth-century India.⁶ From this global historical perspective of modern knowledge production, it therefore comes as little surprise that the Chinese *shǐ* tradition in the essays by Huang and Wong is measured against Western humanism, especially since intercultural communication is subject to the language in which it is expressed, in this case English. For all that, it may be worth bearing in mind that if China prior to the wave of European colonization had capitalized on its invention of gunpowder and its highly developed maritime seafaring abilities and had thereby exploited other nations as colonies, world history would have taken a different turn in the tenth to fifteenth centuries and it would today probably be Western scholars attempting to typecast the epistemic values of Chinese Confucianism onto the Occidental traditions of historiography rather than the other way around.

Hence, extolling humanism as a universal ideal is not merely a product of the colonial and post-colonial history of ideas entailing a certain geo-political agenda, but is a hermeneutical program that is closely tied in with current trends in the humanities worldwide. These trends include the disciplinary move from *world history* to *global history*,⁷ the institutional move from *humanities* to *global humanities*, and the epistemic move from *humanism* to *global humanism*. In short, Chinese ‘historiography’ itself as well as the contemporary descriptions of Chinese historical thinking given by Hu, Huang, and Wong are all instances of “meaning-production [engaged] in an interpretive treatment of the past”,⁸ and as

6 See Sheldon Pollock, “Crisis in the Classics”, in: *Social Research* 78.1 (2011), pp. 21–48, p. 30.

7 See Okamoto Michihiro (岡本充弘), “An Answer to the Question, ‘Is There a Global Approach to History?’”, in: *Tōyō Daigaku Ningenkagaku Sōgōkenkyūsho Purojekuto Hōkoku* (東洋大学人間科学総合研究所プロジェクト報告), vol. 1 (2011), pp. 67–73.

8 Jörn Rüsen, “Historik: Umriss einer Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft”, in: *Erwägen, Wissen, Ethik* 22.4 (2011), p. 478. The quotation is translated from German: “... Sinnbildung im deutenden Umgang mit der Vergangenheit ...”.

meaning-production (*Sinnbildung*)⁹ they are constructions of a past ruled by present hermeneutical horizons¹⁰ of regimes of historicity.¹¹

1. Dependency and the Interplay of Power-Knowledge Systems

Hu's description of key conceptual nodes in modern Chinese historical thinking that tacitly resemble ideas known from Western thought as well as Huang's and Wong's characterizations of classical Chinese historical thinking as being humanist in the Occidental sense of the word are fundamentally concerned with how ideas have flowed in and out of the Chinese power-knowledge system. The flow is either thought to have taken place in the past in Hu's sense of borrowing foreign ideas or interpretively through Huang's and Wong's contemporary adaptation of the Western concept of humanism in their portrayals of Chinese historiography.

Theoretically speaking, these in- and outflows of ideas may be designated as an *interplay* between different power-knowledge systems. The word *interplay* is here meant to suggest a process of intellectual appropriation,¹² where an idea derived from one episteme is adopted by a second episteme reigning on an equal or submissive cultural-political footing. That is to say, in the phrase "Chinese historical thinking" the label 'Chinese' singularizes a power-knowledge system in nationalist cultural terms, which sets this system apart from but also in contradistinction to foreign power-knowledge systems of other national cultural spheres.¹³

In some earlier scholarship,¹⁴ this interplay of ideas has been viewed as a dynamic of uneven dependency whereby new ideas invariably are obtained from

9 It should be noted that Rösen's own English translation for the German term *Sinnbildung* is "sense generation" or "historical sense generation". In the present essay, the English euphemism "meaning-production" shall be used instead, as a counterpart to the Foucaultian term "knowledge production", in order to indicate that semiotically-based 'meanings' of the past always remain ephemeral and unstable due to their perpetual production and reproduction through academic and non-academic discourses.

10 Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, New York: Crossroad, 1992, pp. 438–491.

11 Cf. François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: Présentisme et expériences du temps*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003.

12 For a theoretical discussion of the term 'appropriation' in terms of subjectivity but not, as here, between larger power-knowledge systems, see Ulrich Timme Kragh, "Appropriation and Assertion of the Female Self", in: *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 27.2 (2011), pp. 85–108.

13 For the singularity versus contradistinction of cultures with regard to literatures, see Haun Saussy, *Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China*, Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001, p. 16.

14 Roberto Schwarz, "Misplaced Ideas: Literature and Society in Late Nineteenth-Century Brazil", in: *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*, London: Verso, 1992, pp. 19–32.

a favored cultural core and are then displaced, or even misplaced, in a disfavored cultural periphery. The favored cultural core is said to be comprised of the economically more developed Western nation states, whereas the disfavored cultural periphery consists of economically dependent, less developed non-Western states.¹⁵ Accordingly, it would have to follow that use of the Occidental terms ‘humanism’ (人文主義 *rénwénzhǔyì* or 人本主義 *rénběnzhǔyì*), ‘academic thinking’ (學術思想 *xuéshù sīxiǎng*), and ‘history’ (i. e., modern Chinese 歷史 *lìshǐ* as opposed to classical Chinese 史 *shǐ*) in a discourse dealing with the Chinese history of ideas tacitly implies an inevitable predominance of a superior West as well as the episteme of the European history of ideas and the dogma of global humanism. Interplay would consequently have to be interpreted as a displacement that entails a certain degree of artificiality amounting to ‘kitsch’,¹⁶ since it involves a cultural imitation that places something outside its normal context, thereby producing a deformed false consciousness.¹⁷

However, construing interplay as dependency and misplacement must be criticized for remaining superficial and insufficient. While the dependency theory of ideas (依附思想理論 *yīfù sīxiǎng lǐlùn*) offers a suitable starting point for discussing the question of what role the Occidental history of ideas plays in Chinese historical thinking when Hu identifies developments in early modern Chinese history writing that seem to correspond to Western ideas and when Huang and Wong portray classical Chinese historiography using European terms, the theory at the same time overlooks four successively deeper layers of meaning-production, including the *ideological*, the *cultural*, the *semantical*, and the *syntactical*.

2. The Ideological

On the most general level, the dependency theory of ideas assumes that ideas from the dominant core episteme are consistently accepted outright by members of the alternative, so-called ‘peripheral’ power-knowledge systems. New Western ideas are thus thought invariably to be viewed as ‘progressive’ or even ‘revolutionary’ within non-Western societies. Nonetheless, even a cursory historical

15 Ibid., pp. 23–24. For a broader post-colonial critique of the supremacy of Western thought, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

16 For kitsch as one of the distinct forms of culture, see Ulrich Timme Kragh, “Of Pop, Kitsch, and Cultural Heritage”, in: *The Newsletter* 62 (International Institute for Asian Studies 2012), pp. 8–9, p. 9.

17 On false consciousness in the context of kitsch and musicological aesthetics, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 239.

examination reveals that this has far from always been the case. Alien ideas are regularly viewed with suspicion and met with resistance, and this also goes for the basic principles of historicism and secularism that lie at the heart of the humanities. In the Islamic world, for example, ‘Occidentalism’ – understood as the reverse of Western ‘Orientalism’ – has remained an enduring mode of ideological defiance against the rootlessness of *Garbhzadegi* (غربزدگی, variously translated as ‘Westernization’, ‘Westoxification’, or ‘Occidentosis’), as, e.g., pointedly voiced by Iranian critic Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923–1969) and Indonesian philosopher Syed Muhammad al Naquib bin Ali al-Attas (السيد محمد نقيب العتاس, b. 1931).¹⁸

Opposition to Western ideas and a search for ideological alternatives were likewise witnessed in China during the epoch of early modernity. These were intellectual crosscurrents against the novel and possibly Western-derived Chinese ideas of historicity mentioned by Hu. One such counterculture arose from the ranks of Buddhist scholars who created a revivalism of Indian and Chinese Buddhist Yogācāra philosophy (唯識 *wéishì*) in order to set forth an advanced Asian phenomenological alternative to the epistemology of Western science and the humanities.¹⁹ It was as part of this broader trend in Buddhist studies that Chinese historian Zhāng Tàiyán (章太炎, 1868–1936) attempted to formulate a new Chinese theory of history in the early twentieth century based partly on the doctrinal principles of Buddhist Yogācāra thought.²⁰ Notably, resistance to the tacit secularist premises of the Western humanities is still subtly present today in much of the scholarship of Buddhist historians in South Korea and possibly in other parts of East Asia.²¹

18 For more on the critical views of Al-e Ahmad and al-Attas, see Carl W. Ernst, “The West and Islam? Rethinking Orientalism and Occidentalism”, in: *Ishraq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook* 1 (2010), pp. 23–34.

19 For detailed historical accounts, see Chen Bing (陳兵), “Reflections on the Revival of Yogācāra in Modern Chinese Buddhism” and Eyal Aviv, “The Root that Nourishes the Branches: The Role of the *Yogācārabhūmi* in 20th-Century Chinese Scholastic Buddhism” both published in: Ulrich Timme Kragh (ed.), *The Foundation for Yoga Practitioners: The Buddhist Yogācārabhūmi Treatise and Its Adaptation in India, East Asia, and Tibet*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013, pp. 1054–1076 and pp. 1078–1091.

20 For Zhāng Tàiyán’s contribution to Chinese historical theory, see Axel Schneider and Stefan Tanaka, “The Transformation of History in China and Japan”, in: *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, vol. 4, pp. 506–517, and further Viren Murthy, “Equalisation as Difference: Zhang Taiyan’s Buddhist-Daoist Response to Modern Politics” in: *The Newsletter* 44 (The International Institute for Asian Studies 2007), pp. 24–25.

21 Seongcheol Kim, “A Brief History of Studies on the Yogācāra School in Modern Korea”, in: *The Foundation for Yoga Practitioners: The Buddhist Yogācārabhūmi Treatise and Its Adaptation in India, East Asia, and Tibet*, p. 1265. For a more detailed discussion, see Jaekwan Shim (심재관), *Talsigminsidae uliui bulgyohag* (탈식민시대 우리의 불교학) [Korean Buddhism in the Postcolonial Period], Seoul: Chaeksesang, 2001.

Given the presence of dissent arising from deep within the non-Western power-knowledge systems against the influence of foreign ideas, it is evident that it is neither right to view the development of new ideas within these epistemes as simply being peripheral derivatives of Western core ideas, nor is it wholly appropriate to characterize premodern traditions of non-Western thought as conforming to or being included in a universal humanism, as it is for example done in a recent book on the worldwide history of the humanities.²²

3. The Cultural

On a slightly deeper level of analysis, the dependency theory of ideas presupposes that there exists a clear and discernible separation between disparate cultures, which would allow for the theory's fundamental distinction of a core and a periphery. The conception of such self-evident cultural rifts – whether assumed to exist based on linguistic, national, or racial differences – imposes on the theory a dogma of ethnocentrism. While it may be true, as argued by some, that every discourse set in a particular historical cultural circumstance is burdened by an inextricable sense of ethnocentrism,²³ it is conspicuous that the superimposition of said cultural boundaries erects a sinister imagination of the notorious, ever-independent clash of civilizations.²⁴ Markedly, Huang's use of humanism as an epistemic category for characterizing traditional Chinese historical thinking leads him in some passages to introduce certain comparisons between Chinese and European cultures and religions which seem intended mainly to underscore China as being the superior, older civilization also with regard to the idealistic principles behind humanism.

Yet, strong belief in the disjunction between cultures proves mistaken. The absence of any absolute separation is not solely an ethical concern of “different skin colors, same suffering”. Rather, it is a matter of the fictionality of a homogeneous cultural identity, which the notion of a monoculture presupposes.²⁵

22 Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

23 Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy, and Steven G. Yao, “Sinographies: An Introduction”, in: *Sinographies: Writing China*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. vii, xx.

24 For the full assertion of a civilizational clash, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations: Remaking of a World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

25 On the problem of cultural homogeneity in the dependency theory of ideas, see Elías José Palti, “The Problem of ‘Misplaced Ideas’ Revisited: Beyond the ‘History of Ideas’ in Latin America”, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67.1 (2006), pp. 149–179, p. 175. Further, on the artificiality of the historical construction of the notion of nationality, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991.

The problem that lies in thinking along the lines of artificial cultural boundaries becomes apparent, when it is brought into consideration that many of the key arguments of resistance against Western culture that have been employed by contemporary non-Western critics have been derived from within Western culture itself, whether these arguments be nihilist, Marxist, existentialist, or postmodern.²⁶

4. The Semantical

A consequence of cultural disjunction is semantic conjunction, referring to the coexistence of two or more distinct elements within a single time and place. When the cultural-ideological dogmas ‘Occident’ and ‘Orient’ lose their absolute signification, the result is a fusion of ideas, where periphery and core, old and new, native and foreign meet and merge. Bhabha has argued that colonialism created a hybridity of cultures involving mimicry and bastardization, which led to the estrangement and ambivalence of original symbols and ideas.²⁷ Similarly, in her work on early modernity in Japan, Gluck has compared global conjunctural modernity to a universal grammar that takes on different inflections around the world resulting in particular local ‘historical blends’ that make up what she calls ‘blended modernity’.²⁸

However, with ‘hybridization’ and ‘blending’ there is, in fact, no longer any semantic basis for speaking of a distinct power-knowledge system of any given culture, neither Western nor non-Western, in the era after the onset of colonialism, modernity, post-colonialism, and the global information society. Although “China and the world” remains a literary trope that began to be negotiated already in early modernity,²⁹ the ultimate ramification of hybridization and blending is that it is just not possible to describe a “Chinese historical thinking” after the eighteenth century, because there no longer exists a distinct, inalienable entity that might be defined as being purely ‘Chinese’. With the vacancy of any stable feature definable as ‘Chinese’, the very topic in Hu’s essay of locating and describing Chinese historical thinking in modernity becomes an empty category (*śunya*, 空 *kōng*), and consequently the whole question of

26 For a convincing analysis thereof, see Ernst, “The West and Islam?”, p. 29.

27 Homi K. Bhabha, “Sign Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817”, in: *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 102–122, p. 112.

28 Carol Gluck, “The End of Elsewhere: Writing Modernity Now”, in: *American Historical Review* (June 2011), pp. 676–687.

29 For a detailed historical and literary analysis of the trope, see Haun Saussy, “China and the World: The Tale of a Topos”, in: *Modern Language Quarterly* 68.2 (2007), pp. 145–171.

whether modern Chinese historical ideas are native or imported vanishes along with the related problem of whether there exists a dependency of ideas between cultural cores and peripheries.

5. The Syntactical

Beneath the overall ideological, cultural, and semantical layers of analysis, there lies an even more rudimentary stratum of meaning-production, which pertains to the basic linguistic principles by which words come to be attributed with meaning. Linguistic signs are not reducible to positive terms possessing inherent meaning.³⁰ Rather, the assigned signification of a given word only remains stable for as long as the linguistic convention (*vyavahāra*, 世俗語言 *shìsú yǔyán*) associated with the word endures. Since linguistic conventions presuppose larger social contexts that are defined by traditions, education, and ideologies, meaning-production is always contextual. That is to say, ideas of historical thinking should not exclusively be viewed on the semantic level as enduring conceptual entities whose histories may be traced diachronically but must simultaneously be regarded on the syntactic level as contextually-defined notions whose meanings need to be understood synchronically. Hence, humanism may either be viewed as having a stable meaning derived from the European history of ideas or as being contextually defined, in which case the word, in fact, does not at all carry the same connotations when it is used in the three different contexts at hand: classical China, early modern Europe, and present-day Taiwan.

The need for moving beyond a strictly static view of enduring ideas as presupposed by the dependency theory and instead studying histories of ideas in a manner where ideas are variously understood according to their individual contexts is a critical point, as argued by Palti.³¹ Yet, Palti's solution does not afford a precise explanation of meaning-production that would account for the simultaneity of diachronic continuity and synchronic discontinuity. When a term is interpreted strictly according to its synchronic context, there is risk of losing the term's diachronic continuity of meaning. For instance, when Huang and Wong characterize classical Chinese historical thinking as being humanist, a purely contextual hermeneutics demands the word 'humanism' to be disassociated from its meanings in other power-knowledge systems, enforcing a signification specific to the modern Taiwanese context rather than European

30 On the absence of positive terms in language, see Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 1916, p. 166.

31 The need for contextualization in the dependency theory of ideas was raised by Palti, "The Problem of 'Misplaced Ideas' Revisited", pp. 169–173.

thought. The negative consequence thereof is a disjointed and too austere reading of humanism wholly devoid of diachronic dependency of the term on the Occidental history of ideas without allowing for any interplay across epistemes.

It is therefore exigent to suggest a different approach to the study of the history of ideas that equally emphasizes diachronic dependency and synchronic interdependency. What is needed is to operate with a sense of meaning-production that considers meaning as being ‘transformative’ (*pariṇāma*, 變異 *biànyì*). Transformative meaning-production implies that ideas are interpreted synchronically as possessing new meanings which are specific to their syntactic context, but their new meanings are diachronic transformations of earlier meanings of the terms which reach back to previous semantic instances forming a series of discursive prehistories.

For example, in case of Huang’s and Wong’s uses of the word ‘humanism’ to characterize classical Chinese historiography, the word humanism needs, on the one hand, to be read synchronically from within the specific context of twenty-first-century Taiwan, which ultimately is a meaning-production that only can be understood from the interior semiotic meaning-structures of Huang’s and Wong’s essays. On the other hand, the Taiwanese meaning of the English word ‘humanism’ is a transformation of an idea reaching back to a series of earlier instances of the term, including the premodern and later European senses of the term, the Chinese adaptations of the idea that evolved during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the new senses with which the word has come to be imbued on Taiwan in the post-1949 Republic of China. The principle of transformative logic allows for a reading that is sensitive to the individual hermeneutic parameters of Huang, Wong, and Hu while concurrently permitting each idea introduced in their essays to be viewed as standing in diachronic relationships to a history of past discourses, whether Chinese, Taiwanese, Western, or non-Western.

6. Transformative Meaning-Production in Chinese Historiography

Being a fundamental approach to studying cultural interplay, the principle of transformative meaning-production can be applied to forms of interplay occurring between different epistemes, as shown above in the dependency between Occident and Orient in Taiwanese discourses on humanism. Parallely, when applied to histories of ideas within a single power-knowledge system, the principle highlights how given ideas are contextualized transformations of earlier ideas and how these transformations entail dependencies on closely aligned

epistemes. Within Chinese historical thinking, transformative logic may thus not only reveal continuities of Chinese intellectual history but also connections to inter-Asian histories of ideas.

For instance, in the essay *Historical Discourses in Traditional Chinese Historical Writings: Historiography as Philosophy*,³² Huang draws attention to an important turn that Chinese historiography took in the twelfth century, when the Neo-Confucian thinker Zhū Xī (朱熹 1130–1200) introduced a new theory of “principle and event” (理事 *lishì*). In the ensuing centuries, Zhū Xī’s theory led Chinese historians to regard the moral principle behind a given historical event as being the driving force behind historiography, thereby rendering history writing into a form of moral critique. This remained the dominant interpretation of history in China until the onset of modern Chinese historical thinking in the eighteenth century, when Zhāng Xuéchéng rejected the view that the moral principles of the Confucian classics were guiding historical events and instead began to view the Confucian classics as historical events in and of themselves.

Nevertheless, while arguing for the importance of Zhū Xī’s theory in the Chinese history of ideas, Huang limits his analysis to the specific Neo-Confucian context of the twelfth century and thereby ignores the fact that Zhū Xī’s notions of “principle and event” are transformations of earlier ideas. In failing to account for the diachronic prehistory of Zhū Xī’s notions, Huang falls into the predicament of narrow synchronicity in the strict sense of Palti’s contextualized reading.

In fact, prior to Zhū Xī’s application of the “principle and event” theory (理事 *lishì*) to historiography, the binary pair already existed as a well-established analytical mode of “principle and phenomena” (理事 *lishì*) in the Buddhist thought of the Korean Yogācāra exegete Wonhyo (元曉, S: 元曉 617–686) and the Chinese Buddhist Huáyán (華嚴) and Tiāntāi (天台) schools.³³ More remotely, these Chinese ideas reach back to the West, albeit a different ‘West’; not the Occidental West (西方 *Xīfāng*) but another West (西域 *Xīyù*) that was historically important to China, namely India and Central Asia.³⁴ Accordingly, the Chinese Buddhist idea of ‘event’ or ‘phenomenon’ (事 *shì*) was ultimately derived from the Indian Buddhist notion of concrete phenomenon (*vastu*). In light thereof, Zhū Xī’s contribution to Chinese historical theory ought not to be seen as synchronically limited to its Neo-Confucian context but should additionally be

32 Published in this book.

33 For a detailed analysis of the Buddhist background to the Chinese theory of principle and event, see Brook Ziporyn, *Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought: Prolegomena to the Study of Li*, Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2012 and *Beyond Oneness and Difference: Li and Coherence in Chinese Buddhist Thought and Its Antecedents*, Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2013.

34 For a similar problem of ambiguity of the word ‘West’ in Arabic, see Ernst, “The West and Islam?”, p. 25, fn. 6.

viewed diachronically as a transformative meaning-production dependent on a series of earlier Indian and Chinese Buddhist ideas.

As maintained previously, dependencies elicit reactions of intentional or unintentional ideological resistance, and Zhū Xī is no exception in this regard, for by asserting a Confucian pedigree of his ideas, he circumspectly avoids acknowledging reliance on Buddhist sources. Notwithstanding that “principle and event” first became conjoined as a binary analytical pair in the Buddhist literature of the seventh to tenth centuries, his kowtow to the Confucian intellectual heritage, the *Book of Changes* (易經) in particular, intimates dependencies in Zhū Xī’s thought being transformations of even older layers of the Chinese history of ideas. These primordial strata in the knowledge archaeology of Chinese historical thinking have recently been excavated in Wai-yee Li’s thorough study of the *Zuǒ zhuàn* (左傳), one of the earliest Chinese historical chronicles dating to the fourth century BCE, traditionally regarded as a commentary on the Confucian classic the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (春秋 *Chūnqiū*).³⁵

Stepping back into the mindset of the earliest Chinese chronicles uncovers relics of an ancient Chinese historical consciousness that differs fundamentally from the emphasis on moral principles found in Neo-Confucian thought as exemplified by the writings of Zhū Xī as well as the historical analyses of Huang. Li’s study reveals the dominant principle for historical meaning-production in the *Zuǒ zhuàn* to be prognostication, given the text’s underlying concern with foreboding signs and omens, where small apparently inconsequential causes in the form of gestures, words, dreams, or actions were interpreted as giving rise to momentous and often ominous consequences.³⁶

Notably, the Chinese preoccupation with prognostication and divination dates right back to the very earliest extant sources of Chinese writing, i. e., the Bronze Age turtle shell oracle bones (甲骨 *jiǎgǔ*), and is likewise predominant in the *Book of Changes*, which Zhū Xī takes as the point of departure for his ideas of “principle and event”. Hence, unlike Huang’s and Wong’s suggestion of an everlasting spirit of humanism in Chinese historical thinking, what is at hand is a series of transformative meaning-productions starting with instances of viewing historical causality as ruled by prognostic laws, via Chinese Buddhist ideas of higher principles and concrete phenomena, over to Neo-Confucian ideologies of the driving force of morality.

A given idea, whether Huang’s and Wong’s humanism in Chinese historical thinking or Zhū Xī’s Neo-Confucian theory of “principle and event”, may thus be read synchronically within its own specific disjointed context as well as dia-

35 Wai-yee Li, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007.

36 See Li, *The Readability of the Past*, pp. 85–171.

chronically as being a transformation of meaning that stands as the continuation of multiple discursive prehistories. In conclusion, the meaning-production of Chinese historical thinking seems out of reach for any characterization that reduces it either to a mode of dependency on Occidental dogmas, such as the episteme of humanism, or to an isolationist mode of Oriental dogmas viewing it purely as an independent Chinese intellectual tradition that is perpetually endowed with originality.