

History or Shixue: How much of a Historian is Qian Mu?

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Tuesday April 14th, 2009

15.00 - 17.00

Lipsius building, LUF room (148)



Abstract

Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895-1990) was one of the most prolific Chinese writers in the 20th century. Like all intellectuals of his time, he was substantially affected by the clash of Western and East Asian cultures that shattered cultural values, reshaped Chinese humanities, and led to a redefinition of the boundaries between different academic fields. In Qian's works we find a challenging combination of both traditional and modern approaches to various fields of scholarship. On the one hand he was influenced by modern source criticism, which he even applied to some cornerstones of the Confucian heritage. On the other hand, he demanded from his students a high degree of morality and respect towards their native culture.

Due to the broadness of Qian's learning, it is impossible to narrow him down to a certain discipline. In the 1940s he had published a very influential book, the General Outline of Chinese History (Guoshi dagang 國史大綱); consequently, he has oftentimes been characterised as "historian" (or Chinese lishixue jia 歷史學家). However, Qian Mu himself never contentedly accepted this kind of assessment. Of course it is impossible to give an easy answer, whether Qian Mu was a historian or not. However, we can analyze to which degree his writings conform to traditional Chinese "shi" (史) and to "history" in the Western sense. By examining this question we will also be able to observe a development in the course of his life, reflecting his own historical background.



Christian Soffel is Assistant Professor ("Wissenschaftlicher Assistent") at the Institute of Sinology, University of Munich. Recently, he worked as visiting scholar at Arizona State University and at Academia Sinica, Taipei. In his research he focuses on the history of Confucianism from the Song dynasty to the 20th century.

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