

Conference on

**The Writing of History in 20th Century East Asia:
Between Linear Time and the Reproduction of National Consciousness**

Organization committee:

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Abstract:

Since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Chinese, Japanese and Korean intellectuals have thought about their traditions in new ways under the influence of the categories and disciplinary divisions prevalent in Western Universities. This conference will focus on how intellectuals expressed and theorized this change by negotiating indigenous concepts of temporal continuity with larger narratives of history. It is evident that under some description, scholars in East Asia have been writing histories since ancient times, often making reference to formative texts from their shared intellectual traditions such as the *Book of History (Shiji)* and the *Twenty Four Histories (er shi si shi)*. However, the term for history (*shi* – China and Japan) undergoes a transformation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and hence famous intellectuals such as Liang Qichao (in China) and Fukuzawa Yukichi (in Japan) can claim that there were no real histories written during the pre-modern period. These changes are of course partly made possible by a transformation of educational systems and, in particular, by the abolition of the imperial system of examinations (in China) and the creation of a modern university system (in Japan).

This new intellectual and institutional context would make even residual practices of figuring the past take on new meanings. Given this complex interaction and mutual imbrication of traditional practices, new conceptions of time and history and various conceptions of how to imagine China's, Japan's or Korea's place in the regional order and their place in the world more widely, there were of course many different interpretations of how to write history in 20th century East Asia. Some of these historical practices adopted elements of different competing ideological structures, such as linear time, historical teleology and national consciousness and others that resisted such ideologies while trying to rescue aspects of the tradition to imagine new political ideals. Moreover, despite, or even because of radical changes in political forms, East Asian intellectuals across the region have constantly returned to the problem of history throughout the 20th century and the various participants in this conference will examine the implications of the production of history during different periods of 20th century East Asia, from the late Qing (China) or Bakumatsu (Japan), through Imperial Japan, communist China, and even to the present day.

Description:

Since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Chinese, Japanese and Korean intellectuals faced the challenge of having to think about their traditions in new ways under the influence of, and in exchange with, ideas, categories and disciplinary divisions coming from Western philosophical and academic traditions. This conference will focus on how intellectuals met this challenge and how they expressed and theorized the ensuing changes by negotiating indigenous concepts of time and history and morality with new epistemologies, larger narratives of history and new functions of historiography coming from abroad.

It is evident that scholars in East Asia have been writing “histories” since ancient times, often making reference to formative texts from their shared intellectual traditions such as the *Book of History (Shiji)* and the

Twenty Four Histories (er shi si shi). However, the term for history (*shi* – China and Japan) undergoes a transformation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and hence famous intellectuals such as Liang Qichao (in China) and Fukuzawa Yukichi (in Japan) can claim that there were no real histories written during the pre-modern period. These changes are of course partly made possible by a transformation of educational systems and, in particular, by the abolition of the imperial system of examinations (in China) and the creation of a modern university system (in Japan).

This new intellectual and institutional context alone would have been sufficient to make even residual practices of figuring the past take on new meanings. Given the complex interaction and mutual imbrications of traditional practices, new conceptions of time and history and their relationship to morality, and various conceptions of how to imagine China's, Japan's or Korea's place in the regional order and their place in the world more widely, there were of course many different interpretations of how to write history in 20th century East Asia. Some of these historical practices adopted elements of different competing ideological structures, such as linear time, historical teleology and national consciousness, and others that resisted such ideologies while trying to rescue aspects of the tradition to imagine new political and moral ideals. Moreover, despite, or even because of radical changes in political forms, East Asian intellectuals across the region have constantly returned to the problem of history throughout the 20th century and the various participants in this conference will examine the implications of the writing of history during different periods of 20th century East Asia, from the late Qing (China) or Bakumatsu (Japan), through Imperial Japan, communist China, and even to the present day.

One cannot understand the transformations in historical consciousness in China and Japan independently, since their relation to globally circulating discourses was intimately connected to their views of each other. Traditionally, Japanese culture has been largely influenced by Chinese concepts and views of history are no exception. During the Tokugawa period, a number of scholars, such as Yamaga Sokū and Hayashi Gahō modeled their view of history on the Song dynasty Confucian writings of Zhu Xi and Sima Guang. For example, Hayashi Gahō modeled his *Honchō tsugan* (The Comprehensive Mirror of this Court) on Sima Guang's *Zizhi tongjian* (The Comprehensive mirror for Aid in Government). From the titles of these works, we can see that in both pre-modern China and Japan the narrating of past events were intimately connected to the reproduction of power relations and this political dynamic was couched in Confucian terms. To a large extent, the above mentioned histories took the ancient world of the sage kings of the Three Dynasties (approx. 2100 BC to 256 BC) as a standard, and described a process of political and moral decline, while using the symbolic power of the moral origin to legitimate their own reign. For example, the Tokugawa scholars, such as Ogyu Sorai would legitimate their discourse by appealing to the ancient Chinese sage-kings and he claimed that the Qing dynasty, which was his contemporary, had totally lost its connections to its moral roots.

Towards the end of the Tokugawa period, scholars of “national learning” (*kokugaku*) began to break away from China and stress indigenous Japanese identity. However, they would continue to narrate events from the past to their present as one of decline. It is only after the consolidation of the modern state after the Meiji Restoration (1868) that Japanese scholars began to narrate history as a progressive process that reached ideals that broke from the past. The Meiji period is extremely important in understanding the theme of our conference, since it formed a model for the late Qing and because a number of Chinese intellectuals were deeply influenced by Meiji thinkers. The Meiji presents us with an opportunity to examine intellectuals who were largely educated in traditional forms of thought and then faced a global world of nation-states. With this new world the role of China would also differ considerably. After Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese war (1895), many Meiji intellectuals, would shift from seeing China as the center of civilization to conceiving of it as a country less civilized than Japan. For example, Fukuzawa Yukichi claimed that although China was not a barbaric country, it was a semi-civilized country as opposed to the West, which represented civilization. There were of course voices of resistance, such as that of the popular historian Yamaji Aizan. Yamaji lamented the loss of feudal system in Tokugawa period and used this perspective to formulate a criticism of Meiji modernization. His aim was of course not to go back to the past and what he admires about the feudal past is precisely the patriotic feeling that emerges in small communities and he sought ways to inculcate this feeling in the large bureaucratic state of the Meiji. Such a tension between say Yamaji and Fukuzawa should be understood not so

much as a conflict between traditionalists and modernizers, but as a conflict between different ways of dealing with the legacies of the past in response to a new world.

Late Qing intellectuals would be influenced by various types of Japanese intellectuals, but perhaps those who stressed progressive history and specifically dealt with China, such as Fukuzawa Yukichi, Taguchi Ukichi, Shirakawa Jirō and a host of others, left their mark more prominently than others. In the early 20th century, many Chinese intellectuals found in Japanese texts an easily accessible expression of modern views of temporality, since Japanese intellectuals often baptized ancient Chinese character compounds to signify modern terms. For example, the term civilization (*bunmei*, *wenming*) originally served to separate people who performed the rites from barbarians in Confucian discourse but in Fukuzawa's texts, the term began to be associated with the West and in particular with an evolutionary view of history. Intellectuals would begin to use the term civilization in its modern sense and the term is used by Chinese thinkers and the government today.

However, from the beginning the baptism of classical Chinese terms could never completely purge ancient meanings, which would continue to haunt the discourse of evolutionary civilization and present alternatives. For example, late Qing anarchists, especially those who resided in Tokyo, would constantly invoke traditional practices and Confucianism to resist any simple narrative of development. Zhang Taiyan most forcefully presents such a critique of progressive history and the distinction between civilization and barbarism and juxtaposes the modern concept of civilization with civilization (*wenming*) in the ancient classic, *The Book of Changes*. Zhang attempted to reevaluate Chinese history and envision a new response to global modernity by appealing to various traditions of Chinese thought, such as Daoism and Buddhism. In so doing, he no longer conceived of Japan as an Asian model of development; rather he thought of Japan as an imperialist nation that imitated Western domination.

In the second decade of the 20th century this complex relationship between global capitalist modernity, Chinese and Japanese traditions, and the writing of history continued with language reform. Both Chinese and Japanese intellectuals emphasized unifying their spoken and written language (the *genbunichi* and *baibua* movements) and some would say that this further removed them from traditional modes of thought, which were not expressed in plain speech. While in Chinese studies, much has been said about the way in which the May 4th Movement (1919) represented a shift in ideas in the West, such studies often overlook the new forms of resistance to modern historical writing and progressive history during the 1920s and 30s. In fact, people who are championed as initiating the modern writing of history, such as Wang Guowei and Gu Jiegang, often had a great traditional dimension to their historical worldview. It is just that these elements fall through the cracks of contemporary frameworks of analysis. One of the aims of this conference is to examine what has fallen through these cracks and attempt to reconstruct the historiography of the 20th century.

The same types of issues are present in Japan, but in a different political context. One can distinguish various trends in Japanese historical writing in Taisho- and early-Showa Japan. Perhaps the most famous of these trends in writing history, and one that continues today, was one developed by Maruyama Masao, who writes history with liberal sensitivities and is often searching for elements of liberalism in Japanese thought. Hence, in his famous book on Tokugawa intellectual history, he highlights Ogyu Sorai as presenting something like the sprouts of liberalism in Japan. Maruyama's interpretation of Ogyu Sorai as an early modern thinker is inextricably linked to his view of China as pre-modern. In Maruyama's view, it is precisely Sorai's ability to break from Song Confucianism and stress individual judgment that proves his modernity.

On the other hand, conservative philosophers such as Inoue Tetsujirō and Buddhist-influenced intellectuals such as Inoue Enryō grappled with questions of history and its nature in an indigenous Japanese tradition. Others, such as Watsuji Tetsurō actively investigated the embeddedness of history in the Japanese landscape itself. A movement around the so-called Kyoto School of Philosophy started to talk about the need for (or sometimes the fact of) an 'overcoming of modernity.' In this vein, Takeuchi Yoshimi is renowned for presenting China as an alternative modernity, a modernity of resistance (*teikoku*) as opposed to Japan's modernity of imitation. As a scholar of Chinese literature, Takeuchi was extremely familiar with Chinese history and drew inspiration from the famous Chinese writer Lu Xun and continued Lu's own ambiguous response to Western modernity. Based on his interpretation of China, Takeuchi would also develop a pan-Asianist view of history.

After Second World War, such a view has become controversial and there are intense debates about Takeuchi in both contemporary China and Japan.

These debates often relate to a tradition of historical writing that was quite prevalent until recently, namely, Marxism. Especially after the War, Japanese Marxists constantly debated about the causes of Japanese Fascism as to whether such causes lie in feudalism or modernity itself. Like Takeuchi, some Japanese Marxists, such as Mashita Shin'ichi and Amakasu Sekisuke believed that Maoism could serve as a humanist alternative to the formalist tendencies of Japanese Marxism.

The contemporary Chinese historian Wang Hui and the Japanese historian Mizoguchi Yūzō critically continue Takeuchi's legacy in thinking of Chinese modernity as resisting the global tendencies towards capitalism. Wang contends that the failure of the Communist Movement in China resulted partly from the incompleteness of their resistance, which was in turn connected to an insufficient understanding of the Chinese tradition. He has recently written four-volume work on Chinese history and historiography and we are lucky to have him attending our conference. Nakajima Takahiro of Tokyo University will present an essay on Takeuchi Yoshimi's vision of history from a perspective that tries to break free from the binaries that usually govern the study of nationalism. These topics are especially vibrant today given the tense relationships between Japan and China as each accuses the other of being nationalistic and over-looking "history."

Although the conference will focus on history writing in Japan and China, the problematic with which we are engaged is global. The relationship between indigenous traditions, modern temporality and historical narratives is a general theme for modern societies and we are lucky to have a theorist of Western Europe, William Egginton, who will help us bring out conceptual issues related to our discussion and facilitate cross-cultural dialogue.

Conference program

Monday June 4 2007:

12.00 – 13.00	–	Registration
13.00 – 13.15	–	Opening of the conference
13.15 – 15.00	–	Keynote Speech: William Egginton – What Does Theatricality Have to Do with Writing History: Presence and Theatricality in the Modern World
15.00 – 15.30	–	Coffee break
15.30 – 17.00	–	Panel 1: History and linear time
	Takahiro Nakajima	Eschatological view of History: Yoshimi Takeuchi in 1960's
	Stefan Tanaka	Modernization: Time and the Delimitations of History
	Kuo Ya-pei	Narrating Modern Temporality into Chinese Culture: Liu Yizheng and History Writing in Early-Twentieth-Century China
	Comment:	Naoki Sakai

Tuesday June 5 2007:

09.00 – 10.30	–	Keynote Speech: Naoki Sakai Negativity and Historicist Time: A Comparative Historical Project in wartime Japan
10.30 – 11.00	–	Coffee break
11.00 – 12.30	–	Panel 2: Identity and time
	Eddy Dufourmont	New histories for new national consciousness: Shiratori Kurakichi and Choi Namseon
	Viren Murthy	The Conundrums of Linear Time and Evolution in the Late Qing: Tan Sitong's <i>Renxue</i> and Zhang Taiyan's Critique
	Sun Ge	Takeuchi Yoshimi and History
	Comment:	Christian Uhl
12.30 – 13.30	–	Lunch break
13.30 – 15.00	–	Panel 3: Radicalism, conservatism and restoration
	Hon Tze-ki	Revolution as Restoration: The Meanings of 'National Essence' and 'National Learning' in the <i>Guocui xuebao</i> (1905-1911)
	S. Weigelin-Schwiedrzik	Linear versus cyclical time: The problem of restoration in Marxist Chinese historiography
	Peter Zarrow	Identity and Narrative Time in Late Qing History Textbooks
	Comment:	Arif Dirlik
15.00 – 15.30	–	Coffee break
15.30 – 17.00	–	Panel 4: Interrogating Marxist Views of History
	Els van Dongen	Reading Yan Fu in a 'Neo-Conservative' Key: Xiao Gongqin's Historical Escapade
	Wang Hui	Reinterpreting the Cultural Revolution: The Politics of De-politicization, the multidimensional restructuring of hegemony and the Disappearance of the 60s
	Chiara Brivio	'Climatology and Historical Materialism': Watsuji Tetsurō's critique of the historicity of the Marxist human being
	Comment:	Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik
18.30 – 22.00	–	Conference dinner

Wednesday June 6 2007:

09.00 – 10.30	–	Keynote Speech: Arif Dirlik – Post-Revolutionary Historiography: Paradigm Conflicts in Contemporary Chinese Historiography
10.30 – 11.00	–	Coffee break
11.00 – 12.30	–	Panel 5: Alternative visions of East Asian history I
	Brian Moloughney	Mythical time and Historical Time: The <i>Gushibian</i> movement and the construction of History
	Pang Ming-fui	“The Southern Academic Network” of Modern Chinese Historiography (1911-1945)
	Achim Mittag	Rivaling Eschatologies of Modernity: From ‘Renaissance’ to ‘Enlightenment’ in Twentieth-Century Chinese Intellectual History
	Comment:	Hon Tze-ki
12.30 – 13.30	–	Lunch break
13.30 – 15.00	–	Panel 6: Alternative visions of East Asian history II
	Axel Schneider	History and Ethics: The choices of post-imperial historiography
	Wang Fan-sen	Social Darwinism and the formation of a linear view of history
	Qiao Zhihang	Modernity and Political Criticism: Wang Guowei and New Historiography
	Comment:	Kuo Ya-pei
15.00 – 15.30	–	Coffee break
15.30 – 17.00	–	Panel 7: Nation and history
	Henry Em	Sovereignty and Modern Korean Historiography
	Chang Lung-chih	Nationalism, Post-colonialism, and Historical Revisionism in Contemporary Taiwanese Historiography
	Marc A. Matten	The worship of General Yue Fei (1103-1142) and his problematic creation as a national hero in the historiography of 20 th century
	Comment:	Koen de Ceuster

Thursday June 7 2007:

09.00 – 10.30	–	Panel 8: Beyond academic history
	Liu Long-hsin	Popular Readings and Historical Writings in Sino-Japanese Wartime period
	Lee Haiyan	Figuring History and Horror in a Provincial Museum
	Thomas Saul	Some Social Aspects of Historical Knowledge in Reform Era China
	Comment:	Viren Murthy
10.30 – 11.00	–	Coffee break
11.00 – 12.30	–	Concluding plenary session
12.30 – 13.30	–	Lunch