Book Reviews


The eighteen essays in this volume, divided into three parts, treat comparative historiography in many different ways. Part 1 in particular addresses the problem of historical truth, whether in premodern China or Europe. The essays in Part 2 explore the many faces of Chinese history-writing over time. Part 3 tries to tie together late imperial historiographical currents in China and Korea with contemporary historical writing and historical education in China today. It is difficult, however, to read a coherent vision from all the papers, although each essay explores the thin interface between historiography and ideology. The focus of most authors is on the role of ideology in historical criticism, particularly by presenting the political and cognitive dimensions of historical thinking. Overall, the essays point to the Chinese tendency—both premodern and modern—to produce single-minded, moralizing viewpoints of the myriad historical events and facts in official and unofficial narratives. Along the way, however, each author also occasionally conveys, through his or her own individual and often idiosyncratic take on “Chinese historiography,” how this simple, didactic mindset was not always dominant.

Petra Bahr’s opening essay compares religious claims and the use of critical methods in Western historiography. God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ, she notes, presented European Christians with a narrative of historical revelation through contingency, which inspired a rich tradition of bible criticism. The changing configurations of religious truth and critical methods allowed Lorenzo Valla, for example, to establish rules for understanding the coherence of a text that were more analytical and philological. During the Renaissance, the historical reliability of a text became the key issue. The “new criticism” of sources that emerged defended religion with new tactics to save it from distortions. When the Vulgate was increasingly compared with original sources, however, scholars innocently—at first—unraveled the dogmatism of biblical criticism.

Bahr notes that Martin Luther contended that religious meaning was read into the Bible by a believing subject. This subjective turn, which reminds us of a similar turn in Wang Yangming’s (1472-1529) classical focus on the inner mind rather than on external things, produced Schleiermacher, Bahr argues, and the
rise of modern hermeneutics. Hermeneutics and criticism became “inter-referential.” The crisis of exegetics would be resolved through critical examination. Spinoza thus appealed to the religion of reason, in which religious truth was detached from historical facts. This new skepticism freed Europeans from perfunctory ecclesiastical teaching. Accordingly, Schleiermacher could present religion as an independent symbolic form of meaning, while history became the voice of witnesses. This split, according to Bahr, provided the preconditions for the modern break between revelation and history.

In the next essay, Wolfgang Behr shifts the discussion to perceptions of language change in premodern China. He first introduces A. C. Graham's position on the structural simplicity of language in classical China and the comparative underdevelopment of a syntactically oriented philological tradition. Behr goes on to explore how, despite the extraordinary phonological stability of the classical language over time, some aspects of language change were reflected in the commentarial traditions of the post-classical periods, especially in terms of morphological change via graphic extractions or semantic shifts, which effaced many features of the original semantics of classical Chinese.

The process of demorphologization and the obsolescence or complete loss of derivational affixes characterized Old Chinese, according to Behr. These can be recovered through Middle Chinese reflexes, word games, glosses, and datable homophones. During the Shang-Zhou transition, the social or political consequences of this takeover were reflected in language change. The dialectical diversity evident during the Han expansion produced a shift from semantic and lexical accounts of the language to recognition of the sociolinguistic and phonological aspects of language change. Behr contends that such dialect diversity led to historical phonology in medieval China long before Qing “evidential” (kaozheng) studies.

He adds that it is unclear whether Lu Fayan (fl. ca. 600), for instance, had a concept of norms or any standards of language change. Indeed, it is unclear if there was a historical consciousness of language change in medieval times. Qing evidential scholars such as Yan Ruoju (1636-1704) and Qian Daxin (1728-1804) were clearly aware of diachronic changes and the possible retention of archaic features in conservative dialects. To bridge the gap, Behr presupposes a long development of phonological description and analysis from medieval to late imperial phonology. Phonological change and lexical horizons had to be integrated if pronunciation reassignments were not to be merely ad hoc. In the Southern Song, both Wu Yu and Zhu Xi accepted the notion of fixed natural standard pronunciations of a given period. They also noted that pronunciation changes over time disrupted the original rhyme schemes. Behr maintains that Zhu Xi entertained a sophisticated analysis of rhymes, which was based on rhyme groups similar to those developed by Wu Yu. So far so good, but can we agree with Behr that Zhu Xi was thus fully aware of sound change “despite all the inconsistencies in his analysis” (p. 36)?
By bracketing Zhu’s many inconsistencies, Behr may be engaged in a bit of Zhu Xi apologetics here. He contends, correctly, that Qing phonologists refined discoveries made in the Song, but goes on to say that the Qing added little methodologically. He also overlooks the Northern Song influence of Wang Anshi’s fanciful philology in his Zishuo 字說, which translated into an ahistorical account of a paleographically determined semantics that Wu Yu’s phonology was meant to correct. Wang’s style of glyphomancy, which reduced all graphs to compound ideographs, remained a popular form that peaked in late Ming times and influenced the fantastic reconstructions that marred the linguistic findings of Jesuits such as Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), who concluded that written Chinese derived from Egyptian hieroglyphs. Behr, for his part, concludes that mid-Qing advances in the reconstruction of initials and the kaozheng 考證 idea of periodization were the last discoveries in the history of sound change in China before European comparative reconstructions began in the mid-nineteenth century.

He also discusses the consequences of a lack of awareness of language change. In the late Ming, Jiao Hong (1541-1620) worked on phonological reconstructions not only to determine textual authenticity but also for textual “curativeness.” Few Chinese before the Ming had used language change to adjudicate conflicting interpretations of the Classics. Similarly, Chen Di (1541-1617) studied language change to protect the authenticity of the classical canon. Neither Jiao nor Chen used language change as a medium for criticism. Behr has a point here, but he overdetermines the intentions of Jiao’s and Chen’s phonology and thereby misses the methodological influence of their late Ming phonological advances on Gu Yanwu (1613-1682) and later Qing evidential scholars. Intentions and unintended consequences, here, are analytically distinct.

In the end, Behr must admit the “lack” of exploitation of existing phonological knowledge for understanding language change in pre-Ming China. He concludes that this does not mean there was no critical reasoning on language change in medieval times. Many works on historical phonology were lost before or during the Song. The “lack” is thus not a result of extra-linguistic explanations based solely on social, philosophical, or religious change before the Ming. This is plausible, but Behr’s conclusions based on this hypothesis become so internalist that he is no longer able to gauge or explain the timing of changes in language studies. Behr claims that external motivations are neither necessary nor sufficient explanations. He favors a purely formal view of language as a “‘third-order phenomenon,’ an undirected and unintentional ‘invisible-hand process,’ by which individual speech acts involuntarily combine into an effect” (p. 42). He bases this convenient linguistic reductionism on Leipzig Neo-Grammarians who are the standard for the analysis.

What this internalism overlooks, unfortunately, is that recapturing the medieval world of language studies depends on a textual world that was reproduced in Song times via manuscripts and published books, which were then transmitted to the Ming and Qing and to us today. Except for reliable archaeological findings, we have no direct access to medieval writings on language that are not mediated by much later Song editions. Recent efforts by a phonologist as experienced as William Boltz to reconstruct the sophisticated phonological vision that Huang Kan (488-545) allegedly encoded in the preface to his commentary on the Analects (Lunyu yishu 論語義疏) to explain the meaning of the two graphs in the title “Lunyu” 論語, for example, depend upon surviving Kamakura (1185-1333) and Muromachi (1333-1573) era Japanese manuscript versions of the Lunyu yishu, a work that was lost in China in Song times. None of these surviving Japanese manuscripts take us directly back to the medieval world. Indeed, the phonological content in Huang Kan’s preface may turn out to be an eighteenth century reconstruction produced by Japanese evidential scholars who thought they were revisiting (in fact, inventing) medieval Chinese reasoning about language change. Behr often simply assumes the integrity of medieval texts.

Consequently, his conclusion that Chinese interest in phonology had nothing to do with the development of linguistics in China is useful but incomplete. Were syntax and semantics the only driving forces? Behr concedes that neither Aristotle nor the analytic philosophers understood comparative epistemologies either. But his ancillary thesis that the awareness of sound change during the Ming did not influence the explicit formulation of propositional truth is more reasonable. Hence, for this volume on historiography, Behr’s finding that there is no link between the linguistic encoding of temporality and cognitive dispositions towards historiography is more telling.

Martin Kern’s essay looks at the place of truth in early Chinese historiography in light of poetry and religion. He discusses the cosmology of the world the historian is describing and the related question of the correspondence between events and records. How are literary techniques used in historical narratives to claim the authority of truth? This approach leads Kern to explore the deep structure and aesthetics of early Chinese historiography. Confucius, for instance, sought the truth in the practical and concrete correspondences between language and its denotations in the world. He worried about the deceptive power of words to lead away from the performative power and moral efficacy of the spoken word. In Chinese early historiography, then, there existed an overlap between the religious impulse of truth with morality and the ritual order.

2) The key terms in Huang Kan’s alleged preface are shezi zhiyin 捨字制音 (setting aside the written form and establishing the sound) and sheyin congzi 拈音從字 (setting aside the sound and following the written form), both of which appeared in China via the Ningbo-Nagasaki trade only after the Qing court and southern scholars reprinted Chinese editions of the Japanese version of the Lunyu yishu, which was based on Kamakura-Muromachi manuscripts recovered and collated by Tokugawa scholars in the mid-eighteenth century.
Via the voices of rememberers and diviners, according to Kern, divination ossified into a predictable procedure controlling prognostications. No commemorations, for example, commemorated a defeat. Divination records and bronze inscriptions thus were more than carriers of historical information. They were self-referential and self-historicizing, and mainly pointed to the reasons for their own making, a sort of ritual performance that historicized itself. As acts of communication with the spirits to display piety and propriety, the inscriptions on oracle bones expressed spiritual and political authority. Because they were displays of the ruler’s power, they excluded what should not have happened. In praising the lineage of Zhou kings, for example, the scribes involved in effect constructed a linguistically parallel reality for a special audience to honor the donor and communicate his merit toward his ancestors. Early Chinese historical writing thus was not separate from performative texts.

In ritualized cases, poetic language aesthetically intensified speech to dignify the ruler in his kingly utterances. Accordingly, poetry was tied to religious practice, and poetic forms rhetorically expressed the ritualized communion of the ruler with his ancestors and cosmic forces. The scribe laced historical events with divination, omen interpretation, and astrology to express circumstances in the world. The cosmos spoke through natural portents, which scribes retold through poetry and singing. Ritual events were organized for the audience into a coherent homology between historical events and cosmological representation. By producing ritually correct language, scribes expressed historical truth in cosmological dress.

In his essay, Heiner Roetz maintains that Zhou philosophical thought was shaped by an anthropological rather than a historical argument, which he calls the “anthropological paradigm in Warring States thought.” Unlike Behr, who appeals to the incommensurable relationship between language and history, Roetz presents a simpleminded historical account of the complete breakdown of the Western Zhou feudal order. For him, the late Zhou feudal crisis touched off a “paradigm shift” in Chinese historical-mindedness, in which the typical reaction to the times was detachment, that is, a stepping back and looking beyond the present to a future that was dehistoricized. A new ahistorical, ethical paradigm emerged, which Roetz locates in Han sources such as the Huainanzi and Lunheng. Although he claims these Han works were “consistent with the atmosphere of the late Zhou” (p. 84, n. 28), this is not a convincing claim without more analysis. Similarly, he concludes that the late Zhou immobilization of history represented the triumph of a Daoist model of nature informing a new human anthropology. In the end, this author presents us with a largely ahistorical account to explain the emergence of a new paradigm for an ahistorical ethics.

Stephen Durrant’s essay presents an account of Sima Qian’s truth claims by focusing on his claims of accuracy or knowledge of a greater truth. Durrant notes that a “truth focus” per se to analyze Sima Qian is perhaps anachronistic. Sima Qian was more concerned with historical accuracy, and he saw the Classics as a touchstone for historical reliability. He rarely went beyond historical considera-
tions to elicit the more general principles of his historiography. Yet he used Confucius as a medium to transmit his own writing, and he saw his own historical account as a commentary that expanded on Confucius’ teachings.

A large portion of the Shi ji transmitted extant sources such as the Zuo zhuan, which Sima Qian depended on to account for the decades before his life. As a historian of specific events, he rejected empty discourses. At the same time, however, he thought his account, written under duress, should be hidden away for a future sage to read. In this appeal to a lineage of sages, Sima Qian followed the Gongyang zhuan account informing Confucius’s Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu). When he tried to address more general truths and meaning in history, he saw history as a mirror but with no infallible correspondences between the past and present, although it did carry a predictive power to explain any dynasty as a historical unit. He thus saw patterns in unfolding institutions.

For the final essay in Part 1, Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, one of the editors of the volume, notes how the question of truth is usually tied to the question of China. We often assume a specific “Chineseness” in dealing with the Chinese perception of reality and question of truth. Schmidt-Glintzer rejects the claim by Hall and Ames that the Chinese were uninterested in truth claims. For her, truth remained an open question throughout Chinese history. Historians typically prepared accounts of the ruling house. The waning of the gods in history led to a reinterpretation of sacrifices, which recognized their limited influence and power. Here Schmidt-Glintzer accepts Weber’s distinction between Christian other-worldly asceticism and Confucian accommodation to the world. Given the diversity of the Chinese Middle Ages, historians in this period failed to be consistent or to develop a widely accepted concept of truth. In the end, according to Schmidt-Glintzer, Chinese rulers have relied on history for legitimacy, not truth.

Jörn Rüsen, in the opening essay of Part 2, addresses the problem of historical judgment and shows how the past becomes history through interpretation. A historical sequence of events depends for narrative significance on a set of criteria to judge the meaning of those events. The criteria for such narratives derive from cultural context, what Rüsen considers a synthesis of values and experiences. This synthesis of norms and facts is made possible by a reflective perspective, which also informs historical judgments from a comparative perspective. The tension between generalization and individualization is a constant feature of historical comment and criticism. In addition, according to Rüsen, the principles of political legitimation are tied to normative elements in daily life, which relate historical narratives to the culture in place. Political legitimation requires cultural confirmation and critique. To gain a handle on the universals in historical thinking, without negating cultural difference, Rüsen stresses the need to combine meta-historical with empirical research. For Rüsen, the historical comparative approach, presumably in both China and Europe, recognizes abstract universals.

Kai Vogelsang’s is the only essay in this group that explicitly takes a comparative approach to explore Sino-Western historical judgments. He begins by noting the paradox of historical judgment in early imperial China, where the Spring and
Autumn Annals also served as a handbook for lawsuits. Moral judgments were an integral part of Chinese historiography. In the History of the Former Han Dynasty (Hanshu), such judgments were a controlled way to assign a certain meaning to historical phenomena. These criteria were immanent in history. Before this, as Kern has noted in his essay, history was merely a reservoir of instructive stories. In the early empire, human action produced history.

In Germany, however, Ranke and his followers prioritized the fact and sought to allow the sources to speak for themselves. Via historicism and scientism, historians were trained to analyze facts instead of just narrating them. In this way, they would create a value-free historiography. Chinese historiography, however, remained throughout a tradition of history-writing imbued with moral judgments. This has led to a Western view of Chinese works of history as subjective and lacking objectivity. But objectivity was irrelevant to the nature and purposes of Chinese historiography. Unlike Ranke, Chinese did not intend to “show how it actually has been.” History was taught to the princes so they could learn ethical lessons about what was exemplary. The historical narrative was secondary and supplementary. Indeed, Ban Gu critiqued the Shiji and Sima Qian’s lack of moral standards because he preferred Huang-Lao Daoism over Confucius’ Six Classics. But Vogelsang also points out that the Shiji made scrupulous use of sources to present past events, in contrast to “praise and blame” moral criticism. The rise of the Shilu as the “veritable record” of a particular reign represented a new type of history focusing on factual historiography.

In the Chinese Middle Ages, Vogelsang contends, there was no clear separation between history and fiction. Style, in addition to accuracy of research, became a yardstick for the enduring value of historical works. Tang dynasty efforts to codify truth by compiling a dynastic history renewed the emphasis on narration and prioritized the historian as an artistic writer. Value judgments remained inseparable from history into the late imperial era, when the facts were subordinated to moral expectations. In the end, according to Vogelsang, Chinese history is what the Chinese think it is. Past events have become history through interpretation and narration. Vogelsang argues that since the linguistic turn, history can be treated as literature and that all history is a “patterned past.”

David Schaberg’s essay singles out the junzi’s comments in the Zuo zhuan as a form of self-referential historiography, which reproduced ritualized speeches and deliberations rather than relating a narrative of events. Schaberg contends that no self-conscious genre of historical writing emerged before Sima Qian. Written anecdotal accounts, like writing, reveal the importance of historical narration in elite conversations, persuasion, and commemoration, but the goal of transmitting anecdotal lore was not to preserve the truth about the past per se. Instead, the passion for substantiated judgments can be attributed to the nature of the participants in the events themselves. Through speeches and poetry, teachers such as Confucius became prominent figures whose learning justified the narrations about them.
The *Zuo zhuan*, for instance, originated in multiple collections of anecdotes from the Spring and Autumn period, which carried on a tradition of retelling moralized and polemical anecdotes. Sima Qian used his personal authority as the Han court historian to bring unprecedented coherence to the records from the *Zuo zhuan*. The canonization of Confucius as the *junzi* depended in part on the *Zuo zhuan*, which provided the historical judgments concerning Confucius through its citations.

Yuri Pines focuses on speeches and their authenticity as historical narratives in ancient Chinese records such as, again, the *Zuo zhuan*. Pines analyzes how the *Zuo* author edited earlier historical works, which parallels the inquiries into how Sima Qian utilized his sources. We cannot assume that the *Zuo* speeches were verbatim transcriptions of Spring and Autumn era statesmen because we find multiple records of original speeches with many abridgments or embellishments, although their basic content was not distorted.

Pines refutes May Fourth “doubters” who described the *Zuo zhuan* as historical fiction. Although it is impossible to establish a single political thread in the *Zuo* narrative, the *Zuo* speeches display a pattern of change from beginning to end that could not have been built in by the *Zuo* author/compiler. Major concepts were reconceptualized throughout the Chunqiu period. Pines also describes the impact of the *Zuo zhuan* on Warring States historiography. Historical speeches satisfied the need for succinct historical lessons that rulers and advisors required to detect successful from failed policies. Pines compares the *Zuo zhuan* and *Guoyu* versions of the same speeches deriving from a common source. He finds that the *Guoyu* version is not interested in historical accuracy but rather in editing speeches to extract their ideological clarity.

In the Warring States period, scribes finally lost their monopoly on writing historical texts. The task was appropriated by leading statesmen and thinkers. Mozi used historical texts that drew on the authority of past sages to justify his doctrines. Modifying or inventing a speech by a former sage was easy, which is what post-*Guoyu* thinkers did. By the middle of the Warring States, it was common for thinkers—even Mencius—to attribute their views to past thinkers and leaders, whether as real or imaginary paragons. Ideological needs trumped the need for accurate presentation. Han Fei ridiculed such manipulations of past worthies. Pines shows that historical lessons were prone to multiple interpretations and thus unreliable. Speeches were increasingly turned into extracts of wisdom that were modified to enhance their didactic value. Historical accuracy gave way to manipulations of the past to serve the present. This led to a decline in the authenticity of speeches and lessened their reliability for contemporary affairs.

Joachim Gentz goes in a different direction in his essay on the early *Gongyang* tradition and the sacralization of the past. Gentz maintains that no abstract philosophical or historical notion of truth was possible in pre-Buddhist China. He sees the *Gongyang* as a messianic vision of the past that informed historical thought via the exegetical practices that grew up around it. The *Gongyang* tradition’s strategies of sacralization culminated in the early Han when the *Gongyang*
zhuan became canonical. Although interpreters of the Gongyang zhuan assumed its sources were reliable, the correct interpretation, rather than the critical use of sources, took precedence. According to the Gongyang tradition, the moral guidelines in cases of regicide, for example, were enunciated as silences in the Spring and Autumn Annals. For the Gongyang, unlike the Zuo zhuan, ritual reports, rules of taboo, and “praise and blame” mattered more. Its messianic vision was due to its Han interpreters such as Dong Zhongshu. According to Dong, Confucius wrote the Annals for political reasons, for transmitting the Way, and for a later sage.

The priority of the messianic vision in the Gongyang zhuan meant that changes in the historical text were often needed to transmit the vision that should be expressed through it. This was called using the past to serve the present and points to the inherent contradiction in the Annals and the Gongyang interpretation. Gentz analyzes the rules of interpretation used to recognize Confucius’ hidden messages in the Annals. For him, this system of exegetic rules seems modern and philological; in fact he calls it a “scientific attitude” (p. 244). But since this ideal was betrayed in practice, arbitrariness seems to be a better depiction. Because the Gongyang provided the main guidelines for historical judgment, and not correct historiography, Dong Zhongshu in the Han used it to develop the Annals as a Canon guiding legal judgments. The success of the Annals in later periods depended on its canonization, which then provided the verifiable rules of exegesis required to understand contemporary matters on an abstract and general basis. These rules of exegesis were interpreted in light of the Gongyang zhuan’s principles and authoritative precedents. The historiographer became a sort of priest and diviner who guided the ruler to make the right decisions.

Thomas H. C. Lee’s essay on Hong Mai and the boundary between the worldly and otherworldly concludes the six papers in Part 2. He analyzes the standards literati used to select historical materials during the Song dynasty. Hong Mai’s many works reveal a keen interest in historical materials. His attention to detail and information allow us to evaluate how he separated reliable from unreliable facts in light of these worldly versus otherworldly considerations. Lee shows that Song literati held a different notion of truthfulness, which was based more on moral than on rational principles.

Lee focuses on Hong’s collection of xiaoshuo (lit., “little talk”) materials, which include records of dreams, divination, physiognomy, and extraordinary events. Did Hong believe in such stories? He seems to have been very careful in selecting his informants, and he was not any more credulous than his contemporaries. He accepted the accounts he had heard and recorded based on a Song world view that saw such fabulous events as credible. Lee notes that the category of xiaoshuo was the place to collect such materials because they had less credibility. More reliable accounts usually were recorded in biji (lit., “casual notes”) and orthodox history based on Confucian principles, which demanded more rational criteria for selection. The Song in fact marked the rise of the biji form for accounts of social and
institutional life, which as miscellaneous writings were more trustworthy than the materials contained in *xiaoshuo* collections.

Lee concludes that the case of Hong Mai reveals that the boundary between miscellaneous and orthodox histories was important since the Northern Song but always remained permeable. This suggests to him that a chasm existed between the real and the ideal. Orthodox history was the ideal based on moral criteria rather than rational considerations. Morality was the supreme guiding principle for the Song historian and thus also guided Hong’s *Yijian zhi*. Hong remained a moralist at heart, one who recognized the limits of orthodox history to present unusual events that were better placed in the genres of *xiaoshuo* and *biji* to be collected for posterity.

Horst Walter Blanke opens Part 3 with a valuable essay on the professionalization of history in nineteenth century Germany. Unlike those of earlier volumes in this series, the editors of this one made little effort, despite the contributions by Chow and Mittag in the essays discussed below, to include an account of the professionalization of classical studies in China during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Had they done so, they would have provided readers with a more balanced account of historical criticism and comparative historiography in China and Germany. Blanke notes that the transition from pre-scientific to scientific historical studies goes back to the early modern age and early humanism. He claims that such “scientificisation” and professionalization first took place in Germany, where the meta-theoretical reflections on source editions, the rise of specialist journals, and the emergence of a canon of ancillary historical sciences converged and led to a “paradigm shift of the historical method” to focus on source criticism. In fact, similar, precocious shifts in historiography had occurred during the philological revolution in late eighteenth century Chinese classical and historical studies.3

Blanke presents Enlightenment assessments of Alexander the Great as his key example of the rise of Enlightenment source criticism, which refined the individual critical standards of the Late Humanism. German scholars examined the authenticity and accuracy of the evidence by arranging a chronological sequence of sources, what Blanke calls a “science of authors.” The German study of classical antiquity became modern through the efforts of Winkelmann, Wolf, and Heeren to develop source-critical studies in the late eighteenth century. The new historical method took hold in the 1830s in Bonn where Ranke used historical exercises to direct his students in reading texts. Droysen summarized the accruing analysis of literary records about Alexander, and he questioned the nature of the documentary material used by classical authors. This close link to philological textual

3) See the pioneering work by Du Weiyun, *Qing Qian-Jia shidai zhi shixue yu shijia* (Historians and historical studies in the Qianlong and Jiaqing eras) (Taipei: Wenshi congkan, 1962), passim. See also Elman, *From Philosophy To Philology: Social and Intellectual Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, 2001).
criticism gave hermeneutics a new function as a historical discipline. Scholars thereby dismantled the sources into individual layers of records to separate out later additions. They focused on the historical reconstruction of the events in the sources.

Blanke also describes the role of dissertations and theses in the professionalization of history, which took hold in the last third of the eighteenth century. The new procedure for setting up and appointing people to history chairs in German universities challenged the monopoly of the Jesuits in Catholic universities. In Protestant universities, historians became authors of specialist works. In the 1760s and 70s, history developed into an independent form of academic teaching with Göttingen as its center. Those who did not hold professorships engaged in secretarial work for a rich professor by proof-reading, writing excerpts, finding references, and drawing up library catalogs. The proportion of historians from non-academic families was very high, at forty-five percent in the second half of the eighteenth century, when compared to only twenty-eight percent for the entire century. Only thirty-six percent came from the clergy at the end of the eighteenth century.

In Germany, history left behind its ancillary role vis-à-vis other fields and became a profession in which classical philology was the preferred subject linked to history. The new historians historicized an ever widening field of learning and sources. For academic appointments, their technical expertise now took precedence over collegial relations. The academic historian no longer started his career as a tutor. The doctoral degree became an indispensable prerequisite for an academic career. According to Blanke, the openness of the enlightenment created a new “caste” of historians cum philologists; but few came from the working-class.

I have argued in an article that appeared in an earlier volume in this comparative historiography series that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Confucian Classics and imperial Dynastic Histories were carefully scrutinized by a growing and increasingly professionalized community of textual scholars in the Yangzi delta urban centers. The slow but steady emergence of evidential research studies (kaozhengxue) as a self-conscious field of academic discourse was predicated on the centrality of philological research to: 1) determine the authenticity of classical and historical texts; 2) unravel the etymologies of ancient classical terms; 3) reconstruct the phonology of ancient Chinese; and 4) clarify the paleography of Chinese characters. These trends began in the seventeenth century, but climaxed in the eighteenth. All of these philological techniques had important historical components.

Although evidential scholars proposed changes in historical research, they reaffirmed that classical learning remained the starting point and unquestioned constituent for new beliefs and patterns of historical research. They had not yet reached a concept of objectivity in the modern sense or demonstrated a full understanding of what German professional historians called “historicism,” but evidential styles of empirical research were important stepping stones to a historicized vision of politics and culture. It is impossible to think of China’s “New History”
in a modernist vacuum. Many of the building blocks came from Qing evidential research, and building further on them Chinese in the twentieth century adapted modern European historicist views to unravel the facts posing as truths in imperial history.⁴

Kai-wing Chow’s useful account of Yao Jiheng’s (1647-1715?) new historical science helps us better contextualize Blanke’s account of the rise of German historicism comparatively. According to Chow, ideology and history went hand in hand in the rise of China’s “New History.” Yao Jiheng tried to disprove the truths of others in order to record the past in new ways. Later, the rediscovery of Yao Jiheng by Hu Shi and others in the early twentieth century provided them with native precedents for the Republican era “New History” they advocated. Hu Shi’s rediscovery of Yao also served him to lend historicity to efforts at debunking the past. The historical approach of the New History focused on a critical spirit and empiricism, which allowed Republican scholars anachronistically to invent Cui Shu as a scientific historian and Yao Jiheng as pioneering classical scholar.

Chow ably shows how such tactics legitimated China’s new historical science, but he also reveals that Yao Jiheng had his own agenda, namely the defense of the classical tradition against heterodox elements and interpretations. Yao was a purist in his defense of an antiquity that could be recovered via critical scholarship. Hence, Yao would have been at odds with Hu Shi’s rejection of the Chinese literary tradition. Yao’s own goal was to purify classical doctrine, but Hu Shi and others read his work on forgeries out of context, thus ignoring his intentions. Instead, Hu Shi teleologically invoked the consequences of Yao’s research for his (Hu’s) own view of history. Yao’s purism, however, unintentionally threatened the entire canon, and this aspect of Yao’s approach allowed Hu Shi and Gu Jiegang to read into his works on authenticity and the classics a deconstructionist message.

Achim Mittag’s essay on Zhang Xuecheng and moral integrity adds to Chow’s account of Chinese historiography in the eighteenth century. In an era of evidential research Zhang stressed the historian’s trustworthiness and appealed to his moral integrity. During the Ming dynasty, the rise of unofficial histories had been paralleled by the growth in historical criticism, particularly in the Yangzi delta. Under the succeeding Qing, however, the court revived the official patronage of history and again made it primarily a state endeavor. Works of historical fiction were relegated to low-brow literature. In this political environment, which deprecated unofficial history in favor of official historiography, Zhang Xuecheng disapproved of earlier historiographical views, such as Liu Zhiji’s, which left out moral integrity. Zhang appealed to Zhu Xi’s official teachings of moral philosophy, which underlined the mind as key to reaffirming the public spirit of the Way. Thus, Zhang defended Sima Qian from earlier charges of libel, while he was

critical of Wang Anshi for his loss of moral direction. Zhang’s stress on restraining one’s temperament and emotions for history writing was meant to convey to contemporaries that literary fame had been a false ideal for the ancients. According to him, until the Warring States era writing had been secondary to the message it conveyed. Thereafter selfishness had eclipsed the public spirit. Zhang also stressed the era from Confucius to the Han dynasty when historical writing moved from mere chronicles to dynastic history. Zhang’s idealized Sima Qian in this formative period as the pre-imperial historian who had an independent and critical voice. In the end, Zhang Xuecheng favored narrative history and was critical of both official history and the kaozheng focus on historical details.

Marian Eggert’s essay enlarges the discussion in Chow’s and Mittag’s chapters by addressing the truth claims in Korean empiricist historiography. As in China, there was a tension in Korea between history and ideology during the rise of evidential research. Korean historiography remained bound to the political and ideological struggles at court and royal attempts to define ethnic identity. Based on factional politics, the Samguk sagi (Three kingdoms history) of Koryó (mid-twelfth century) had focused on both the sinocentric legend of Kija as Korea’s first ruler and the indigenous Tan’gun myth of Korea’s origins from the gods. As the oldest of the extant histories of Korea, it employed Chinese history as its frame of reference. Thus, the Koryó’s binocular account of its past was tied heavily to identity building.

Chosón historiography sought to declare Korean equality with the Manchu Qing state. The impact of kaozheng studies in Korea prioritized the empiricist views that informed Sirhak historiography in the eighteenth century. With the rise of source criticism, Korean historians also committed themselves to historical truth over ideology. But their appeal to Korea as the “second Rome,” and thus more true than Qing China to the ancient classical ideal, positioned Korea as the inheritor of the essence of Chinese civilization. Hence Chosón’s stress on the lines of Korean descent from Kija and the Shang dynasty solidified this claim. Official history continued to stress moral and political convictions in historical accounts, but at the same time a more intellectual orientation to historical knowledge emerged that mirrored the rise of a more professionalized history in China. By appropriating that “new” history, however, the Korean stress on identity politics and stability of group self-consciousness remained in place.

Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik in her essay on Chinese Marxist historiography successfully applies the volume’s overall themes of truth and criticism to contemporary times. For her, Marxist historiography in Maoist China was a way to focus intellectual debates on morality and politics. Nothing new here, but she shows how issues of party leadership were also debates about history, identity, and philosophy. The debates functioned simultaneously as a means of propaganda and an academic field of inquiry. In their search for answers in theory or in historical records, communist historians drew on the tension in Marxism between the poles of Marx’s utopian appeals and his historical determinism. These tensions were in
part a reflection of power and patron-client relations in Maoist China, but they were also real intellectual positions that were staked out to establish the truth in history writing.

Weigelin-Schwiedrzik also shows how socialist history writing since the 1930s reflected the different political sectors in the academic world. These groups focused on debates over the relation between historical theory and historical materials to make their claims. From 1957 to 1960, one group attacked the other as “right-wing” for focusing on sources instead of Marxist-Leninist theories, and thus opposing Marxism to understand history. During this period, however, Fan Wenlan emphasized that Chinese historians must gain independence from Soviet interpretations. This debate about writing history was also a debate about who should hold positions at Chinese universities, namely party members or non-party historians. It was also a debate over who in the party should provide the guidelines for the writing of history.

Between 1961 and 1963, Fan became critical of those who stressed Marxist theory at the expense of historical sources. He called for bringing together historical materials and theoretical viewpoints. Wu Han emphasized textual criticism to decipher texts, and Feng Youlan pointed to the unique events of history. They were criticized for failing to apply the objective reality of Marxism-Leninism and its dialectical principles to historical materials. Indeed, given the Chinese historiographical legacy outlined in the earlier essays, Weigelin-Schwiedrzik notes that Feng was quite radical when he contended that historiography should be independent of politics and philosophy.

In the period from 1964 to 1967, Chinese Marxists restructured their history via attacks on the historicist approach, which they associated with anti-Marxist counter-revolutionaries. They sloganeered that theory—now Maoism—always took precedence over historical materials. Because historiography was not an autonomous scholarly realm, they claimed, this meant that power positions inside the academic field of historiography must be reshuffled to favor the Marxists. The latter in turn belittled the older, sources-oriented historians for reviving Qing textual criticism, and demanded a generational change in favor of the younger generation.

Between 1981 and 1989, however, nostalgia and remorse over the politicization of history took hold in China. Historians somewhat depoliticized history writing by making it a discourse of professionals. For example, Tan Qixiang stressed the need to focus on historical records themselves and not pure theory. He and others revived Wu Han’s early 1960s slogan that theory and interpretation must be derived from historical materials. Hence, the science of history as a multidimensional set of fields now had to be separated from the single-minded claims of historical materialism, that is, facts versus theory.

Nicola Spakowski’s final essay describes the contemporary focus on quality education and history teaching in China. Those favoring the didactics of history teaching in the PRC have built on a notion of human nature as a tabula rasa (drawn from Mao). They have been opposed by others who favor a reformist view
of human nature that is based on the need to deal with the reality on the ground. In this battle between normative versus individualizing didacticism, history teachers are turning away from the collective focus in Maoism to spotlight the individual championed by reformists. The stress on the normative form of didactics in the notion of *suzhi jiaoyu* (quality education) in mid-1990s still promotes political ideals and social norms, however. This emphasis on moral and ideological education in the name of the collective/nationalist outlook of the state still promotes patriotism. Spakowski concludes that the clash between normative versus individualizing didactics is occurring in the midst of the Chinese Communist Party’s efforts to promote its legitimacy through cultural conservatism and a new nationalism. Instead of a dynasty, official history is now about the Chinese nation.

In conclusion, we may say that the editors have done yeoman’s work in putting this complicated set of articles together. But given the rich content and the many complicated angles of historical vision provided by the many authors, have they provided an adequate conceptual framework within which these contributions, a few of them exceptional, can shine? I think not. For abiding themes, we are in the end left with the predictable tensions between knowledge and morality or squabbles over facts and theories.

Nor are the findings in the individual papers properly contextualized overall, although some authors do better than others in this regard. A history of historiography that boasts of comparativism is all to the good, but when the editors fail to provide the concrete ties of historiography to social, political, cultural, and economic structures and processes, then we are unfortunately led back to exercises in intellectual history in which questions of historiography and human agency are primarily internalist in scope. The approach here is not quite “immaculate conception,” but—ironically—it is not cutting edge historiography either. Nathan Sivin has been critical of contextualization, if it does not bind “technical work and its circumstances” together as “parts of a single complex phenomenon,” which he calls a “cultural manifold.” Cultural history today represents an intellectual history informed by social, political, economic, and religious context, which tries to interweave Thomas Kuhn’s dated but still useful notions of “internal” and “external” history. To put it another way, we have many fine articles in this volume, but what the many faces of history in China might mean in aggregate have not been elucidated adequately. The editors could have done better with the rich material they were provided with here.

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