

Alternative Representations of the Past

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The Politics of History in Modern China

Edited by
Ying-Kit Chan and Fei Chen

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This book is situated in the interstices of representations of the past on the one hand and political uses of historical writing on the other. More specifically, it examines, through the lens of “modern China,” how the past is first represented and then used for purposes that are ultimately political. As we bring this volume to print, we acknowledge our debt to the numerous scholars whose work has shaped our thinking on the subject. We thank our contributors, who strengthen our premise with their variety of specializations and topics and, of course, timely submissions. We are grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive suggestions for improving the chapters. We also thank our editors and staff at De Gruyter, especially Jana Fritsche and Rabea Rittgerodt, for their faith in our project and efforts in bringing the manuscript to press. The project originated in two panel sessions that we organized for the twenty-second biennial conference of the European Association for Chinese Studies (EACS) held at the University of Glasgow. We thank the organizers for providing a platform for a lively and stimulating exchange of ideas. Finally, we thank Q. Edward Wang, whom we greatly respect for his generosity and scholarship on Chinese historiography, for his encouragement and suggestions for improving the chapters.

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Ying-kit Chan and Fei Chen

Introduction: Politicized Histories in Modern China

This book is about representations of the past and what they reveal about their creators and their audience. Modes of representations arise and decline according to the shifting needs and tastes of the present. In eighteenth-century Europe, a Chinese-inspired stylistic trend known as chinoiserie followed a similar pattern. Travel to Asia was difficult and limited to a small group of explorers, missionaries, soldiers, traders, and colonial administrators, who fueled the imaginations of others with their accounts that described the splendor and oddities of Oriental civilizations. Inspired by these travelogues and the curios that appeared in increasing quantities in the marketplace, creators of art selected aspects of gardens, furnishings, and porcelains that they thought would fascinate patrons of their work. An example of such artwork is shown on the book cover. Created by a little-known Dutch painter who apparently had never visited China, the painting of what seemed to be the imperial palace—or Forbidden City—in Beijing featured motifs that would strike his audience as instinctively Chinese. With the benefit of hindsight, similar perhaps to the experience of nineteenth-century Europeans who had more direct and intense exchanges with the Chinese, we are sufficiently informed to determine how mistaken that representation was. But the goal of the painter was never about representing the “real” as accurately as possible—he would not have “dared” to produce his work if that had been the case. It had more to do with gaining the recognition and support of his audience, for reasons that were more practical than portraying a “realistic” China that he could only imagine.

This book presents a critical reflection on the relationship between the past and historical writing. At the risk of stating the obvious, whatever is written as “history” is not synonymous with the past, which is strictly a temporal concept alluding to things that existed or occurred prior to the historical present. As a book on representations, the present volume does not seek to ascertain the accuracy of writings about the past. All representations are almost by default a form of epistemic violence toward the past or text (both written and non-written) that they claim to inherit and are, depending on the context, definition, or perspective, “misrepresentations” based on the fluid benchmark of historical accu-

Ying-kit Chan, Leiden University

Fei Chen, Shanghai Normal University

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racy. Rather than focusing on historiography or historical moments, then, the book concentrates on representations of the past related to modern China—loosely defined here as the geobody of all the Chinese dynasties or empires combined.¹ It reveals and challenges the workings of two dominant modes of historical writing in modern China: state-centrism and nation-centrism.

History, as a scholarly discipline manifested in “professional” historical writing, is not a contemporary reality. People who once lived left behind evidence of their existence, and the task of historians is to decipher the traces and produce coherent, credible accounts of human actions, behaviors, and consequences. Although many people would understand that history is not a mere mirror image of the past, history continues to be portrayed as an objective, truthful, and scientific representation of the past. In twentieth-century Europe and the United States, scholars of various disciplines reflected critically on the romanticized belief in history, with some of the most powerful critiques coming from the field of memory studies. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that, as literary scholar Richard Terdiman succinctly suggests, memory is the past made present.² For sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, memory, when articulated, is collective and located in social practices. Private memories are fleeting and last only in the group context. Halbwachs invokes the concept of “collective memory,” which is embedded within a web of symbols, traditions, and power relations.³ Historian Pierre Nora, in his seminal volumes *Realms of History*, suggests that the social implications of collective memory are wider. According to Nora, memory and history are antithetical to each other: memory is alive and in a state of permanent evolution while history is the reconstruction of what no longer exists in lived reality; memory is multiple yet specific, plural yet individual, while history has a universal vocation.⁴ By prioritizing the individual over the collective in memory studies and distinguishing more sharply between history and memory, Nora transforms Halbwachs’s concept of collective memory into a master narrative for modern historiography. For Nora, that historians have consciously selected memories

1 See Immanuel C. Y. Hsu’s *China’s Entrance into the Family of Nations: The Diplomatic Phase, 1858–1880* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); and also, his *The Rise of Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

2 Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 7.

3 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

4 Pierre Nora, “Introduction to Volume 1: Conflicts and Division,” in *Realms of Memories: Rethinking the French Past, Volume 1: Conflicts of Divisions*, ed. Pierre Nora, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), 3.

of the past for purposeful writing suggests that the formation of history eradicates memories that do not fit in the narratives of individual historians.⁵ History narratives endow otherwise unremarkable personal experiences and memories with depth and poignancy so that multiple lived experiences can be woven into a single national history. In response to what he sees as history's annihilation of memory and an increasingly fragmented world that is ruptured by the past and thus driven to consecrate sites embodying fading memories, Nora suggests that memories can be shared by a nation when they are emptied of any "real" significance and stop being divisive—in other words, when they are hollowed and homogenized for reinterpretations that justify the nation's origins and its linear, supposedly natural trajectory to its present state.

Notwithstanding his clarification of contradictory efforts by historians and nations to simultaneously destroy and rescue memories, Nora has inadvertently romanticized memory by equating it with authenticity and continuity while associating history with mediation and rupture. Inspired by the linguistic turn in humanities and social sciences since the 1970s, scholars such as Hayden White have tried to reveal the narrative or poetic nature of history, which can assume the form or presentation of memory. For them, both history and memory are invented traditions or mediated discourses.⁶ According to White, the doyen of philosophy of history who had, in fact, pioneered the linguistic turn in the study of historiography, historical work is "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them."⁷ Historians select, process, and arrange events into stories that are narrated via the plot structure of romance, tragedy, comedy, or satire and explained through formal, explicit, or discursive argument in order to express a certain ideology.⁸ As White's analysis of historians' rhetorical techniques suggests, historians invent history and maintain its validity.

Nevertheless, important differences exist between history and fiction, which are both constrained by the narrative format. The fundamental difference lies in whether either the creator or the audience believes that truth exists and can be conveyed through history, which, as the logic goes, is an objective restoration of the past. Historians are then responsible for ascribing truth or a mode of realism

⁵ Nora, *Realms of Memories*, 3–7.

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁷ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 2.

⁸ White, *Metahistory*, 5, 7, 11, 27.

to history and converting their readers into believers in an objective past, all the while insisting on viewing the past through the lens of coherence and linear development. A long tradition of historical writing exists in what today is China, offering one of the best examples for understanding uses of the past beyond a mere recording of facts. Bound to a moral mission, Chinese writers of history sought to establish moral imperatives by writing about past characters and events from which they could extract lessons.⁹ Historical writing, from which analogies between comparable events in the past and the present could be established, also offered crucial precedents for formulating policies in its creators' present.¹⁰ As illustrated by the obsession of dynastic rulers with producing official histories of their immediate predecessors, history supplied political legitimacy and continued to do so in twentieth-century China. Most Chinese dynasties had endorsed Confucianism as their state ideology, and Confucian ideology rests on the basic assumption that a state prospers when the ruler obtains the Mandate of Heaven and declines when the Mandate is lost.¹¹ Although scientific historiography introduced from the West phased out Confucian historiography in the twentieth century, history continues to lend itself to various political agendas. And although scientific historiography diminished the moral meaning of history, history remains relevant when used to justify contemporary policies or furnish political legitimacy. In our own present, for authors in a socialist China that enforces strict censorship of speech and writing through the use of modern technologies denied to its imperial predecessors, political criticisms couched in matters of a bygone era are always safer than direct attacks on the present government, and Chinese people's discussions of current politics are frequently turned toward historical analogy.¹²

Given that the focus of this book is representations of the past, contributors discuss how the past can be represented in different ways for a wide range of purposes. Against the common framework that understands histories, memories, and representations as competitive or as zero-sum struggles over scarce resour-

9 Chun-Chieh Huang, "The Ch'in Unification (221 BC) in Chinese Historiography," in *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Q. Edward Wang and Georg G. Iggers (Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press, 2002), 33.

10 On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), xi.

11 Q. Edward Wang and Georg Iggers, "Introduction," in *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Q. Edward Wang and Georg G. Iggers (Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press, 2002), 6.

12 See Jonathan Unger's introduction to his edited volume *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 1–8.

ces, we follow literary critic Michael Rothberg in suggesting that representations can be multidirectional, subject to ongoing borrowing, cross-referencing, and negotiation.¹³ And in the light of Rothberg's observations about memories, we do not see all representations as necessarily tainted; rather, they are necessary and often inevitable, given the political development of China in the past century.¹⁴ To understand representations of the past more comprehensively, the book discusses not only writings on history but also literary and media representations of the past. Contributors do not limit their discussion to either "China" or "Chinese" within the People's Republic of China. Malayan and Thai Chinese form the subject of analysis in the chapters by Isaac C.K. Tan and Sittithev Eak-sittipong, respectively. Other contributors venture beyond representations of China's past. Egas Moniz Bandeira examines Chinese impressions of the French Revolution while Tin Kei Wong explores the literary transformation of a female Italian character, created by English writer George Eliot (1819–1880), into a bearer of "Chinese" ideals by an American missionary translator. In short, this book does not restrict its inquiry to prolific authors of written texts and professional historians, as opposed to the existing literature that has obscured creators and subjects of history not working as professional historians and yet remaining part of the enterprise through their actions or mere presence.

Ultimately, then, the book contributes to the ongoing discussion on the politicization of history, focusing on the politics of interpreting the past and its many manifestations in both China and other societies since the late nineteenth century. It is thus much broader in temporal scope than Jonathan Unger's excellent 1993 volume *Using the Past to Serve the Present*, which focuses on the politics of the historiography of post-Mao (i.e., post-1978) China. Although our contributors also show how politics and political affiliations affected representations of the past, we have updated China's politicization of history not only backward but also forward in time, to the twenty-first century, when the communist ideology was losing its grip on the Chinese people and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rediscovered nationalism based on "distinctive characteristics of Chinese culture" to bolster its political legitimacy.¹⁵ To explain why such uses of the past were mostly political and to highlight the key features of this book, a broad sketch of historiography in twentieth-century China may prove useful. The rest of this introductory chapter will set the backdrop against

13 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.

14 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 4.

15 Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 6.

which contributors make their arguments and speak to one another. It first summarizes the professionalization of history as a discipline in the Republican and Communist eras and then explains how these changes generated two modes of writing on history, against which subsequent chapters will argue. It concludes by suggesting the kind of interventions that the book as a whole seeks to make.

History in Twentieth-Century China

Historical study predated classical studies in imperial China, hence the claim among ancient scholars that “the Six Classics are all history.” But prior to the twentieth century, history did not exist as an independent discipline,¹⁶ and it never quite achieved the status of classical studies, whose contents were memorized for the civil service examinations, implemented in state policies, and endorsed by emperors for acceptance of their Mandate of Heaven by the elites. In the early years of the Qing dynasty, evidential learning (考據 *kaoju* or 考證 *kaozheng*) arose as a reaction to the somewhat dogmatic Song Learning, which comprised Song-dynasty (960–1279) commentaries on Confucian classics that the imperial state had endorsed for centuries in the civil examinations as orthodox knowledge.¹⁷ Evidential scholars eschewed rote memorization and uncritical adherence to the classics and adopted the use of evidential methods (考辨 *kaobian*) to analyze texts in order to grasp the original meanings of the classics. As Chinese intellectuals became exposed to Western scholarship, they identified the similarities between evidential learning and what Westerners referred to as “method.” The study of evidential methods and ways of researching *shi* 史 was thus a precursor of Chinese historiography.¹⁸

16 Liu Longxin 劉龍心, *Xueshu yu zhidu: xueke tizhi yu xiandai Zhongguo shixue de jianli* 學術與制度：學科體制與現代中國史學的建立 [Scholarship and institutions: The formation of disciplines and the construction of modern Chinese history] (Taipei: Yuanliu chuban gongsi, 2002), 2.

17 Benjamin A. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984).

18 Zhitian Luo, “The Marginalization of Classical Studies and the Rising Prominence of Historical Studies during the Late Qing and Early Republic: A Reappraisal,” in *Transforming History: The Making of a Modern Academic Discipline in Twentieth-Century China*, ed. Brian Moloughney and Peter Zarrow (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011), 53–54. See also Zhang Qing 章清, “Zhong Xi lishi zhi ‘huitong’ yu Zhongguo lishi de zhuanxiang” 中西歷史之“會通”與中國歷史的轉向 [The confluence of Chinese and Western histories and the transformation of Chinese history], *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, no. 2 (2005): 75–95.

During the last decades of the Qing period, historical study experienced a dramatic rise in status and became a truly independent discipline. Persistent Western imperialism after the mid-nineteenth century led to the collapse of the imperial order and the transformation of Chinese historiography, “stimulating an internal dialogue with the indigenous historiographical tradition that was crucial in determining how the modern discipline [of history] developed.”¹⁹ Chinese literati then revisited their own historiographical tradition vis-à-vis Western learning and “rediscovered” that they had something that resembled the burgeoning discipline of history in Western scholarship—the *shi*, which mainly comprised annals, biographies, and chronicles compiled by court historians. Traditional or imperial Chinese scholarship was divided into the four basic categories of classics (*jing* 經), history, philosophy (*zi* 子), and literature (*ji* 集), each with its own historical trajectory and constituting a historical subject in its own right. For the old literati, the categories were interrelated and formed a syncretic body of knowledge.²⁰ In contrast, Chinese elites of the late Qing era started to permanently separate history from classical studies. They sought to establish history as a modern, Western discipline so as to negotiate the “trauma of accommodation” produced by imperialism and war.²¹ Historical study continued its ascent in the early Republican period and became the mainstream of scholarship, eclipsing most other forms of traditional knowledge.²²

But the separation of history from classical studies did not disassociate it from political discourse. The new historians of the time assigned an even greater political mission to history, increasingly deploying it as a key strategy for the making of loyal citizens for national salvation. Chinese historical thought and writing, once dominated by imperial diaries (起居注 *qiju zhu*), veritable records (實錄 *shilu*), and dynastic histories (正史 *zhengshi*), had shifted in space and focus by the early twentieth century. Leading intellectuals, such as Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), urged their contemporaries to turn their attention from dynastic chronicles to the history of the Chinese nation.²³ As a result, historians

19 Brian Moloughney and Peter Zarrow, “Making History Modern: The Transformation of Chinese Historiography,” in *Transforming History: The Making of a Modern Academic Discipline in Twentieth-Century China*, ed. Brian Moloughney and Peter Zarrow (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011), 1.

20 Luo Zhitian 羅志田, *Jindai Zhongguo shixue shilun* 近代中國史學十論 [Ten essays on modern Chinese historiography] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2003), 7.

21 Moloughney and Zarrow, “Making History Modern,” 1.

22 Luo, “The Marginalization of Classical Studies,” 48–49.

23 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, “Zhongguo shi xulun” 中國史敘論 [A discussion of Chinese history], in *Liang Qichao Quanji* 梁啟超全集 [The collected works of Liang Qichao], ed. Zhang Pinxing 張品興 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1999), 448–454.

pegged history to national survival, emphasizing its role as the repository of current society and future greatness. *Shi* became a key component of “national essence” (國粹 *guocui*) and “national learning” (國學 *guoxue*). All citizens (國人 *guoren*), as renowned historian Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990) claimed, should take interest in understanding their “national history” (國史 *guoshi*; or 通史 *tongshi*) and discern the patterns of China’s past. The “Chinese nation,” as political scientist Suisheng Zhao suggests, was basically a concept of recent history; Republican-era Chinese historians were hard-pressed to find the term “Chinese nation” (中華民族 *Zhonghua minzu*) in classical writings.²⁴ The politicization of history for national identity conditioned the emergence of modern Chinese historiography. The “Chinese Enlightenment” of delivering objective, rational, and scientific solutions to China’s problems was thus riddled with contradictions at its inception and was never fulfilled in modern Chinese historiography.²⁵ In the practice of nationalistic historiography, “the past was no longer viewed as a guidance but as a genesis of one’s imaginary of a nation.”²⁶

In the twentieth century, new research institutions, where professional historians trained their protégés in advanced methodologies that they themselves had acquired from foreign universities, helped shape historical study.²⁷ From the founding of the first history department at Peking University in 1917, history started to be institutionalized at Chinese universities.²⁸ By referencing one another’s syllabi—particularly that of Peking University—and using the same canonical works as coursebooks, history departments across China inadvertently set in motion the standardization of historical methods and pedagogies.²⁹ In 1928, with the objectives of improving Chinese scholarship on history, competing with West-

24 Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction*, 44–46.

25 Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).

26 Q. Edward Wang, *Inventing China Through History: The May Fourth Approach to Historiography* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001), 2.

27 Moloughney and Zarrow, “Making History Modern,” 2.

28 This paragraph is largely informed by Xin Fan, “The Lost Intellectual Autonomy: State, Society, and Historical Writing in Republican China,” in *State, Society, and Governance in Republican China*, ed. Mechthild Leutner and Izabella Goikhman (Zurich: LIT, 2014), 64–76. Zhu Xizu 朱希祖 (1879–1944) was the first and longest-serving head of Peking University’s history department. A look at his life and research reveals interesting details about the beginnings and growth of the department. See Wang Aiwei 王愛衛, *Zhu Xizu shixue yanjiu* 朱希祖史學研究 [A study of Zhu Xizu’s historiography] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2018).

29 Liu, *Xueshu yu zhidu*, 97–216. See also Cha Shijie 查時傑, “Sili jidujiao Yanjing daxue lishixisuo chutan (1919–1952)” 私立基督教燕京大學歷史系所初探 [A preliminary study of the history department of Yenching University (1919–1952)], *Taida lishi xuebao* 臺大歷史學報 20 (1996): 617–648.

ern historians, and elevating the status of history to match that of the natural sciences,³⁰ Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896–1950) founded the Institute of History and Philology (IHP) within the new state institution Academia Sinica. With the assistance of history departments across China—again, that of Peking University was significant—the institute completed projects such as the compilation of an official “national history,” the collation of Grand Secretariat documents from the Ming and Qing dynasties, the excavation of relics, and the dissemination of knowledge through academic journals and public seminars.³¹ Although the institute lacked funds, it offered young archeologists, ethnologists, and historians direct experience in working with primary sources and unearthed artifacts.³² The institutionalization of history led to the ascendance of two schools of historians. One was the School of Historical Sources (史料學派, *shiliao xuepai*), headed by Fu Sinian, Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980), and Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969), which emphasized source criticism in historical study. The other was the School of Historical Explanation (史觀學派, *shiguan xuepai*), led by Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978), Fan Wenlan 范文瀾 (1893–1969), and Jian Bozan 翦伯贊 (1898–1968), which sought universal theories to explain history.

The IHP, history departments, and other learned societies constituted a structure, or intellectual network, through which the state could influence historians.³³ The Ministry of Education required historians to obtain a diploma from accredited universities in order to qualify for an academic position. Pressure for placement was great. Some historians found only part-time employment in middle schools and earned meager wages.³⁴ Others, such as Qian Mu and Chen Yinke, were recognized for their expertise but did not have the credentials for a position. They could teach at a university only by recommendation. Profes-

30 Zhang Shuxue 張書學, “Fu Sinian yu Zhongguo xiandai shixue de kexuehua” 傅斯年與中國現代史學的科學化 [Fu Sinian and the scientification of modern Chinese historiography], *Dongyue luncong* 東岳論叢 15, no. 6 (1997): 74–79.

31 Shang Xiaoming 尚小明, *Beida shixuexi zaoqi fazhanshi yanjiu (1899–1937)* 北大史學系早期發展史研究 (1899–1937) [A study of the early development of Peking University’s history department (1899–1937)] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010).

32 Hu Fengxiang 胡逢祥, “Zhongguo xiandai shixue de zhidu jianshe jiqi yunzuo” 中國現代史學的制度建設及其運作 [The construction and operation of modern Chinese historical science], *Zhengzhou daxue xuebao* 鄭州大學學報 37, no. 2 (2004): 66–72.

33 Liu Longxin 劉龍心, *Zhishi shengchan yu chuanbo: jindai Zhongguo shixue de zhuanxing* 知識生產與傳播：近代中國史學的轉型 [The production and circulation of knowledge: The transformation of historiography in modern China] (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 2019), 221–274.

34 Fu Sinian himself never received a degree. Another notable exception is Lü Simian 呂思勉 (1884–1957), who taught at a high school before accepting his friend’s invitation to lecture at Kwang Hua University (later East China Normal University).

sionalization thus created authority and hierarchy. Historians, whether or not they were trained abroad, developed a strong sense of solidarity. They identified with one another and with the institutions on which their profession relied. This collective identity, shaped in no small measure by the state, “illustrates an important facet of the nature of Chinese professionalization.”³⁵

Fu Sinian’s idea of the Chinese nation reveals the politics behind the writing of history in Republican China and, perhaps more importantly, the rise of national history and the impact of the party-state on historical writing. Early in his career, Fu Sinian had insisted on the historian’s vocation “to arrange materials in order for the facts to become naturally revealed” and steered his institute away from political controversies.³⁶ But new demands were heaped on historians during the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), and even Fu had to present a systematic yet teleological account of China’s past to safeguard discursively his embattled country’s national integrity and territorial sovereignty.³⁷ When Gu Jiegang proposed to discard the term “China proper” (中國本部 *Zhongguo benbu*) because it was invented by the Japanese to distort Chinese history, sever their puppet state of Manchukuo from the Chinese republic, and claim all territories populated by the Han race, Fu Sinian responded that the term should not even be mentioned.³⁸ While praising Gu Jiegang for his scientific methods and use of empirical evidence,³⁹ he maintained that the *Zhonghua minzu* possessed a single spoken language and written script, common culture, and collective ethic. He urged Gu Jiegang to reconsider *Zhonghua minzu* as a singular race that comprised the Han. For him, Japanese scholars, for highlighting in-house differences in culture, ethnicity, and language and for goading the Manchus—and the Mon-

35 Fan, “The Lost Intellectual Autonomy,” 66. But we should not exaggerate or romanticize such unity; geographical divides in the form of local networks and personal relationships, for example, had hampered the development of the Chinese Historical Association. See Sang Bing 桑兵, “Ershi shiji qian banqi de Zhongguo shixuehui” 二十世紀前半期的中國史學會 [The Chinese Historical Association in the first half of the twentieth century], *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, no. 5 (2004): 116–139.

36 Fan-sen Wang, *Fu Ssu-nien: A Life in Chinese History and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 146.

37 Tze-ki Hon, “Ethnic and Cultural Pluralism: Gu Jiegang’s Vision of a New China in His Studies of Ancient History,” *Modern China* 22, no. 3 (1996): 315–339.

38 For how Gu Jiegang ultimately yielded to the intellectual pressures of Chinese nationalism and nationalistic historiography, see Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China’s New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

39 For Gu Jiegang’s scientific use of historical sources, see Yang Guorong 楊國榮, “Shixue de kexuehua: cong Gu Jiegang dao Fu Sinian” 史學的科學化：從顧頡剛到傅斯年 [The scientificization of historiography: From Gu Jiegang to Fu Sinian], *Shilin* 史林 3 (1998): 91–101.

gols—to liberate themselves from Han control, threatened the Chinese nation and had to be discredited. By the end of the war, in response to the rise of separatism in the frontiers and the continuing support by the Nationalist government of his research, Fu Sinian would claim that China had an uninterrupted cultural tradition, which fitted the Nationalist government's version of national history.⁴⁰ That someone as staunchly supportive of objective historiography as Fu Sinian succumbed to state imperatives indicates the powerful grip of politics on historical production and writing.

After the CCP replaced the Nationalist Party to rule mainland China in 1949, Marxism arose as the academic orthodoxy and was adopted to reshape history as a discipline. According to historian Wang Xuedian 王學典, the restructuring of the discipline began with the defeat of the School of Historical Sources by the School of Historical Explanation.⁴¹ The School of Historical Explanation enjoyed a slight advantage over the former in terms of membership, popularity, and reception during the Republican era, but it did not dominate the discipline of history. But by 1958, Marxist historians in the School of Historical Explanation had indeed prevailed. In retrospect, although Marxist historiography has been criticized for its teleology, which reduces history to a mere reflection of and reaction to material conditions, it complemented the School of Historical Sources by enabling Chinese historians of the Republican era to understand the relationship between class struggle and historical change.⁴² As a paradigm of historical writing, Marxist historiography is probably no more teleological than those endorsed by the pre-1949 Nationalist government. But the ultra-politicization of history, which repressed other paradigms of historical writing and subjugated the discipline of history under Marxist interpretations of human society, diminished history as a discipline. Like its predecessors, the communist regime was eager to justify its legitimacy after taking over China by proving the superiority of communism over all previous forms of political organization. To achieve this, it enlisted the Marxist theory of the universal progress of human society toward communism. Chinese historians were thus encouraged to divide their past into five periods, each of which was mapped onto the five stages of historical development as per Marxist theories—primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and communism. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), history became a bourgeois pursuit to be eradicated. History journals were banned, and

⁴⁰ Wang, *Fu Ssu-nien*, 194.

⁴¹ Wang Xuedian 王學典, “Jin wushi nian de Zhongguo lishi xue” 近五十年的中國歷史學 [The study of Chinese history in the past fifty years], *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, no. 1 (2004): 166.

⁴² Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History: The Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919–1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978).

history departments and institutes were shut. The past was only useful for its historical allegories in attacks on political adversaries.⁴³

Historical dynamics was revived only after the 1980s. By deemphasizing the notion of class struggle, Deng Xiaoping not only reformed the Chinese economy, but also opened the doors for alternative historical interpretations of China's past. But historiography in post-Mao China remained bound to political ideologies as the CCP started to explore and endorse other forms of historiography and representations of the past for the legitimacy to rule China. Consequently, writings on history that interpreted the Chinese nation as the most important subject of history and portrayed the party-state as the key driver of significant historical progress reemerged. Marxist historiography might have lost its appeal to both professional historians and the general public, but the "New Enlightenment" movement they launched to achieve a myriad of objectives after experiencing the trauma of the Cultural Revolution—civil liberties, cultural pluralism, democratic ideals, freedom of speech, and protection of human rights, among others—remained committed to the idea of nationalism. Chinese historians could be simultaneously professionals in adopting nonpartisan, scientific methods of inquiry and nationalists with a strong aversion to foreign criticism of their nation and overt doubt about its territorial integrity.⁴⁴ Their studies often reflected a compromise between a reluctant conformity with Marxist ideology and a genuine intention to foreground events and figures that fit into a liberal schema of historical interpretation.⁴⁵ Notwithstanding the contradictions between liberalism and nationalism, the discourses on modernization returned to repudiate the Cultural Revolution and its radical ideology. Since the 1980s, Chinese historians, now optimistic about their national future, have re-narrated modern Chinese history as a story of the slow yet steady growth of modernity in China that was interrupted by Maoist radicalization but resumed in the post-Mao period through the opening-up reforms led by the patriotic CCP.⁴⁶

The chapters that follow have more to say about present or more recent uses of the past. Historian Q. Edward Wang has identified a distinct group of May Fourth scholars who shared a mixed classical-Western educational background, sought to implement the ideas of liberalism and constitutionalism, and tried to

⁴³ Wang, "Jin wushi nian de Zhongguo lishi xue," 168. For the use of allegory as political attack in Chinese politics, see Lucian W. Pye, "Aesopian Language in Chinese Politics," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 122, no. 5 (1978): 336–339.

⁴⁴ Huaiyin Li, *Reinventing Modern China: Imagination and Authenticity in Chinese Historical Writing* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), 170–171.

⁴⁵ Li, *Reinventing Modern China*, 172.

⁴⁶ Li, *Reinventing Modern China*, 234–235.

construct a “scientific” historical narrative for the Chinese nation-state.⁴⁷ Historian Huaiyin Li has highlighted how Chinese historians combined traditional and modern elements in May Fourth historiography; however, his real interest lies in analyzing the development of two master narratives—modernization and revolution—from the 1930s to their ultimate decline by the beginning of the twenty-first century.⁴⁸ Despite differences in focus and political inclination, both the modernization and revolution narratives are premised on the inevitability of the nation-state and the idea of elite-directed change. By narrowing the scope of inquiry to state and nation, this book identifies and pinpoints two other modes of writing Chinese history that also emerged during the Republican era but have persisted to the present, thanks to China’s resurgence as a global power and intensified exchange with overseas Chinese and the outside world at large. The nation-centric mode regards the formation of the *zhonghua minzu* as integral to all representations of China’s modern past. Events or persons deemed unrelated to the idea or reality of the *zhonghua minzu* are sidelined or simply ignored in the representations. The state-centric mode conflates the state and the ruling parties of China—first the Nationalist Party (1928–1949) and then the CCP (from 1949 to the present). It credits the state—or party-state—for being the driving force behind all meaningful changes.

The Nation-Centric Mode and Its Alternatives

Nation-centrism in twentieth-century China is best illustrated by the posthumous life of Zheng Chenggong. No better word than “transnational” can be used to define Zheng’s life. He was born to a Japanese mother and a Chinese father and raised in Japan. He maintained a vast commercial network linking China, Japan, Macau, the Philippines, Siam, Taiwan, and Vietnam. He also led a military campaign against the Manchus and ruled Taiwan after retreating from the mainland.⁴⁹ However, after his death in 1662, he became the subject of nationalistic imaginations and portrayals in East Asia. Amid the surge of nationalism in Meiji Japan, he was transformed into a patriot loyal to the Japanese emperor, a Japanese hero who defeated the Dutch, and a Japanese conqueror of Taiwan. After the Japanese assumed control of Taiwan in 1895, they converted

⁴⁷ Wang, *Inventing China Through History*.

⁴⁸ Li, *Reinventing Modern China*.

⁴⁹ For a discussion on the legacies of Zheng Chenggong, see Xing Hang, *Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia: The Zheng Family and the Shaping of the Modern World, c. 1620–1720* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 22–145.