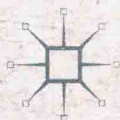


EDITED BY BART DESSEIN

INTERPRETING CHINA AS A REGIONAL AND GLOBAL POWER

Nationalism and Historical
Consciousness in World Politics

POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT
OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA



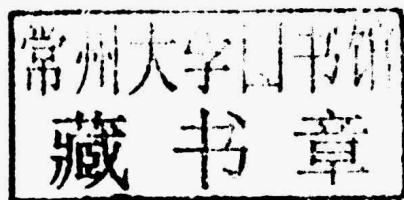
Interpreting China as a Regional and Global Power

Nationalism and Historical Consciousness
in World Politics

Edited by

Bart Dessein

*Professor of Chinese Language and Culture, Centre for Languages and Cultures,
Ghent University, Belgium*



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Contributors

Jean-Christophe Defraigne is Professor of International Economics at the Institute for European Studies of Saint-Louis University, Brussels, and Visiting Professor at the Louvain School of Management, Zhejiang University. He was a research fellow at Jingmao Daxue in 2003–2004 and has been an academic consultant for EU and Asian public institutions, NGOs and think tanks.

Bart Dessein is Professor of Chinese Language and Culture at Ghent University, and Senior Associate of the European Institute for Asian Studies, Brussels. His research focuses on traditional and contemporary Chinese philosophy, political philosophy, and the relation of religion to state.

Niall Duggan received his PhD from the Department of Government, University College Cork. Since completing his PhD, he has worked at the Department of Government, UCC, the Department of East Asia Politics, Ruhr University Bochum, and is currently Research Fellow at Ruhr-Universität Bochum.

Kristof Elsen studied Japanese and International Relations at Ghent University. He has focused on Japanese political theory and policy formation in the interwar period through the work of political scientist Rōyama Masamichi. Currently he is exploring these themes in a contemporary setting in his work on shifts and currents in East Asian regionalism.

Frank Gaenssmantel is Assistant Professor in the Department of International Relations and International Organisation at the University of Groningen. His research interests include foreign policy analysis, the foreign policies of China and the European Union, and China–EU relations. He received his PhD from the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence.

Bruno Hellendorff is Research Fellow at the Brussels-based Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security (GRIP) where he coordinates the ‘Peace and Security in Asia-Pacific’ research program. He

is also Research Associate at the CECRI, and PhD candidate at UCL, Belgium.

Tze-ki Hon is Professor of History at the State University of New York at Geneseo. He is the author of *The Yijing and Chinese Politics* (2005), *Revolutions as Restoration* (2013), and (with Geoffrey Redmond) *Teaching the I Ching (Book of Changes)* (2014).

Thierry Kellner is Lecturer at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (Department of Political Science), Member of the center 'Training and Research in International Politics' (REPI-ULB), and Associate Researcher at Brussels Institute of Contemporary China Studies (BICCS) and at GRIP (Brussels). His research concerns Chinese foreign policy (relations with Central and Western Asia).

Julia Schneider has studied sinology in Heidelberg, Berlin, Vienna and Beijing. She holds a PhD (Ghent/Göttingen) in Chinese Studies, and is Assistant Professor at the University of Göttingen. Her research focuses on historiography and nationalism in late Qing and early Republican times, non-Han conquest dynasties, and ethnic and cultural identity.

Tanguy Struye de Swielande is Professor of International Relations at the University of Louvain. He is Senior Researcher at the Centre d'étude des crises et conflits internationaux (CECRI) and Senior Associate Fellow at Egmont Institute. He specializes in geopolitics and geostrategy of middle and great powers and power transition theory.

Ady Van den Stock is a PhD candidate at Ghent University, funded by the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO). He is currently working on the thought of the contemporary Confucian philosophers Mou Zongsan, Tang Junyi, and Xiong Shili within the general context of the problem of modernity.

Tine Walravens is an Academic Assistant at the Department of Languages and Cultures at Ghent University. Her PhD research focuses on Sino-Japanese relations, and in particular the negative perception of Chinese imported food in Japan. Her other fields of interest are EU-Asia relations and regional integration.

Hung-jen Wang is Assistant Professor in the Political Science Department, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan. He received his PhD

in International Politics from ERCCT/Political Science Department, University of Tübingen, and was postdoctoral research fellow at Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research, University of Duisburg-Essen. His research focuses on international politics and China/Taiwan studies.

Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh is Associate Professor at the Institute of China Studies, University of Malaya, was the Director of ICS from 13 March 2008 to 1 January 2014, and is the Founder and Editor of the Scopus-indexed *International Journal of China Studies*.

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Introduction

Bart Dessein

This collection developed from a workshop held at Ghent University, Belgium on 28–29 March 2013 entitled ‘China’s Rise: Geopolitical Developments and Their Consequences for Global Stability’, funded by the U4 University Network (Gent, Groningen, Göttingen, and Uppsala). In an effort to provide a more complete interpretation of ‘China’s Rise’ than was presented at the workshop, this volume includes additional contributions from scholars who did not attend. The titles of both the Ghent workshop and of this volume were obviously inspired by China’s post-1970s economic and political growth – in China itself recently coined ‘China’s Revival’ (*faxing*), after a period in which this development had been called ‘Peaceful Rise’ (*heping jueqi*) and ‘Peaceful Development’ (*heping fazhan*) – and the question of what impact China’s increasing clout in global politics may have.

The validity of this question became tangible in political theory with the publication of Joshua Cooper Ramo’s *The Beijing Consensus* in 2004. As the concept of the ‘Beijing Consensus’ clearly presents China’s developmental model and its possible attraction for other developing countries as an alternative to the ‘Washington Consensus’, Ramo’s small but very influential book confronts ‘the West’ with the historical reality of China and questions values that have remained largely unquestioned since the beginning of ‘Europe’s rise’ in the 15th century, when the shift from Augustinian scholastic thinking to Humanism and the Renaissance set in and the path to Enlightenment thinking was prepared. Alongside the combined transfigurations of the Renaissance and the scientific revolution came the Reformation and the rise of capitalism.¹

Reflecting on the philosophical and socio-economic history of China and Europe, Max Weber argued that while Confucianism wants to preserve the *status quo* and therefore concentrates the individual’s attention

on the family and on regulating his or her own social behavior by means of a moral code, Protestantism asserts that trust in men can endanger the soul. It therefore provides the individual with direct access to God. Once the restraints of family bonds were cast off, the individual could strive for personal wealth. Weber further argued that a similar development toward the rise of capitalism and individualism was impossible in Confucian China, because the Confucian order is characterized by what he called '*Rationalismus der Weltanpassung*,' or social conformity.²

China's painful confrontations with Western powers in the 19th and early 20th centuries made the intellectuals of the Republican period (1911–1949) indeed regard Confucianism as a major obstacle to development. As a result, they shifted their focus away from the traditional identification with the moral aims and values of Chinese 'culture' toward a 'national identity' and the concomitant endeavor to create a Chinese nation-state (*guojia*). They perceived this undertaking as the only possible political option if China were to survive, and they believed that this 'New China' must be led by a new class of intellectuals schooled in Western sciences and ideologies.³

It is therefore remarkable that the contemporary People's Republic of China (PRC) is witnessing a revaluation of Confucianism, now called 'New Confucianism' (*dangdai xin rujia*). This revaluation is sustained by the fact that while in the Republican period and in the first decades of the PRC traditional Confucian culture was portrayed as an obstacle to development, in much of Southeast Asia (the so-called Asian Tigers Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea) the presence of elements of traditional Chinese culture, often labeled 'Confucianism,' is commonly seen as the very reason for the success of business and commerce among the Chinese communities in these regions.⁴ Recent economic and financial crises in Europe and the United States have further convinced an increasing number of Chinese intellectuals that Confucianism not only does not hinder economic development, but is even superior to Western models of development.⁵ Phrased differently, the Chinese Confucian model is increasingly perceived and presented as a possible alternative for global economic and political development.

As is the case for all countries, China's national historiography – a traditional prerogative of the Confucian elite – has shaped the identity of the nation, and this identity has determined how the other is perceived. The changing position of China in the global world and the revaluation of Confucianism thus prompt the question whether, and to what degree, traditional historiography and the concomitant Chinese

perception of the world are also affecting the country's national and international identity in the contemporary period.

In contradistinction to the world view that characterizes Roman historiography – the idea that history is a progressive movement towards Roman domination of the world through expansion,⁶ the traditional Confucian world view centers around the concept All under Heaven (*tianxia*), – the culturalistic idea that the beginning of human civilization coincides with the emergence of *tianxia* as body politic, and that the ultimate aim of politics is the unification of All under Heaven according to the Confucian model.⁷ The question of China's contemporary national and international identity is also impacted by the discussion whether, as claimed by Joseph R. Levenson, a radical rupture occurred in early 20th century China when a culturalistic concept of the world made place for a 'national' identity,⁸ or, on the contrary, the culturalistic concept was continued. As defined by Prasenjit Duara:

Nationalism is quintessentially a politics of culture [...] because different views of the nation seek to validate and moralize their positions by appealing to a narrative or language that defines or specifies the scope of national history and culture.⁹

National identities in the modern era therefore are 'a product of negotiation between remembered historical narratives of community and the institutionalized discourses of the modern nation-state-system'.¹⁰ Acknowledging this historical reality is important for understanding contemporary China's identity.

In the conviction that, 'as always, the history of the past inevitably continues to be the history of the present',¹¹ and that 'historiography is a form of symbolical representation of the world, helping us to understand it by (re-)constructing it',¹² this volume is divided into three main parts. In the first part, 'Historical Consciousness,' the rise of Chinese nationalism in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the continuation of the All under Heaven concept and the contemporary revaluation of Confucianism in the PRC are discussed. The second part, 'China and Her Periphery', discusses contemporary developments in China's economic and geopolitical policies towards its neighboring regions (Japan, the regions of the South China Sea and the East China Sea, Central Asia, and the special situation of Taiwan) as these are the regions that, in the past, were directly involved in the traditional All under Heaven concept. The third part, 'China and the World at Large', discusses how China functions within organs of global governance (the World Bank, International

Monetary Fund) and China's relations with the European Union. The volume concludes with an evaluation of China's position in the global world and a historical assessment of the erosion of British hegemony in the world economy after the *Gründerkrise* of 1873 and the rise of Germany in the late 19th century and its adoption of a *Weltpolitik*, in an attempt to determine whether China's development marks a turning point in the US's current economic and geopolitical hegemony.

Notes

1. On the important consequence of this development, that man was seen as a creative actor in history and that personal freedom was understood to be a universal value and the necessary requisite for man to act creatively, see: E. Casirer ([1927] 1994) *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), p.46.
2. M. Weber (1951) *The Religion of China* (Glencoe: The Free Press), p.277. See also R. N. Bellah (ed.) *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia* (New York: The Free Press), p.193.
3. This 19th century Chinese nationalism can be defined as 'reactive nationalism'. See M. H. Chang (2001) *Return of the Dragon. China's Wounded Nationalism* (Boulder: Westview Press), p.24.
4. See U. Bresciani (2001) *Reinventing Confucianism. The New Confucian Movement* (Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute for Chinese Studies), p.423; H. Harrison (2001) *China. Inventing the Nation* (London: Arnold), p.262.
5. *The Economist*, 1 March 2014, p.44.
6. A. C. Yu (2005) *State and Religion in China. Historical and Textual Perspectives* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court), p.34.
7. A. Mittag and F. Mutschler ([2008] 2009) 'Epilogue', in F. Mutschler and A. Mittag (eds.) *Conceiving the Empire. China and Rome Compared* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.439.
8. J. R. Levenson (1964) *Modern China and its Confucian Past: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
9. P. Duara (1993) 'Provincial narratives of the nation: Centralism and federalism in Republican China', in H. Befu (ed.) *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia – Representation and Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press), p.9.
10. P. Duara (1995) *Rescuing History from the Nation. Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (London: University of Chicago Press), p.71.
11. B. Schwartz (1985) *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), p.1.
12. Mittag and Mutschler, 'Epilogue', p.434.

Part I

Historical Consciousness

