



# Collective Identity, Experiences of Crisis and Trauma

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New Approaches to Chinese Historiography  
and Historical Culture  
from a Comparative Perspective

變

edited by  
Achim Mittag,  
in collaboration with  
Martin Hanke

改革

危機

復活

亂

痛

怨



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Deutsche Ostasienstudien 16

OSTASIEN Verlag

The terms selected for the front cover design thematize some aspects of the semantic field of “crisis and traumata”:

*bian* 變 (change)

*luan* 亂 (chaos)

*gaige* 改革 (reform)

*weiji* 危機 (crisis)

*fubuo* 復活 (revival)

*tong* 痛 (pain)

*yuan* 怨 (mourning)

Bibliographische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek  
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliographie; detaillierte bibliographische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

ISSN 1868-3665

ISBN 978-3-946114-42-0

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Redaktion, Satz und Umschlaggestaltung: Martin Hanke und Dorothee Schaab-Hanke

Druck und Bindung: Rudolph-Druck, Schweinfurt

Printed in Germany

*Dedicated to the Memory of  
Georg G. Iggers (1926–2017)*



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## Foreword

The present volume grew out of a conference under the umbrella project “Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture from a Comparative Perspective”. Initiated by Thomas H. C. Lee (Chair Professor Emeritus, National Tsinghua University, Taiwan and Professor Emeritus, The City College of New York, CUNY) and supported by the City College of New York, the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, the Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut, Essen, and the National Taiwan University, Taipei, this project was generously funded by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange, Taipei.<sup>1</sup> The conference, the proceedings of which are now being published in this volume, was held at the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities, Essen, on June 17–20, 1998. Since then, more than twenty-five years have elapsed.

We live in times of rapid and ever-faster change. Usually, after such a long time the proceedings of any conference are considered “dead wood”. There must exist, beyond archival purposes, good reasons to have them eventually edited and published. I just want to name three.

Firstly, the volume offers a compelling framework to explore and understand crisis, traumata and collective identity in historical thinking. It combines general anthropological and psychological observations concerning crisis and trauma and theoretical considerations of the systematic interrelationship between the experiences of crisis and trauma in respect of historical identity formation with detailed case studies which delve into the Chinese past, from the deep political and social crisis in the Spring and Autumn period (722–481 BCE) to the catastrophic famine during the “three difficult years” (1960–1962). All authors who have contributed to this volume are keenly aware that research in the specific field of their contributions has progressed beyond the state of art that had served as their starting-point.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 The project was planned, organized and conducted as a series of three conferences; the proceedings of one of which were published in the volume *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism, and Ideology. Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture from a New Comparative Perspective*, edited by Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, Jörn Rüsen and Achim Mittag. Leiden Studies in Comparative Historiography, Vol. 1. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
  - 2 At the same time of the Essen conference an important and much-discussed monograph on *Bridges Across Broken Time: Chinese and Jewish Cultural Memory* (New Haven: Yale University, 1998) was published by Vera Schwarcz. Furthermore, I want to draw attention to only a few more works which have been published since then: *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*, by Michael Berry (New York: Columbia University, 2008); *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature*, ed. by Wilt L. Idema, Li Wai-Yee and Ellen Widmer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2005); “The Cultural Revolution: A Traumatic Chinese Experience and

Yet it is the unique architecture of this volume that will add to the adventure of studying historiography from a comparative perspective. Besides, the present volume does include in-depth studies which are by no means dated. Jan De Meyer's inquiry into the poetry of late Tang and early Five Dynasties scholars who failed in the metropolitan examinations, may serve as an example.

Secondly, we not only live in times of rapid and ever-faster change, but also in times that since the eruption following 9/11 seem to move in a spiral of conflicts, distresses, crises and traumatic events. Traumatization appears to occur on a daily basis, effecting thousands of people all over the world, seemingly inevitable as the climate change. The volume has thus gained a gruesome relevance beyond any expectation.

Thirdly, over the last twenty years a certain weariness over the culture of remembrance has set in and the interest in topics of historical culture has dwindled. From this perspective the present volume is like a bottle which sends a message from a brighter and more peaceful time than ours – the message that all participants in our discussions during the Essen conference, despite all dispute, were united in holding with passion and assurance to the idea of an intercultural dialogue in the field of historiography, historical thinking and commemorative practices. And this idea seems worthwhile to be upheld.

The volume is divided into four parts. Part I, “Theoretical Considerations and General Perspectives”, opens with Jörn Rüsen's outline of a conceptual approach to elucidate the interrelationship of crisis, trauma and identity, supplemented by a mini-essay, in which Rüsen presents his concept of “secondary traumatization” as a new mode of doing history. In his metahistorical argumentation, Rüsen is deeply influenced by the Holocaust as a trauma of historical experience. In a short article which preserves a streak of the creative freshness of our discussions, Georg G. Iggers (1926–2017), to whose memory the present volume is dedicated, takes issue with Rüsen's understanding of the Holocaust and his notion of identity. In the next two articles our understanding of “crisis” and “trauma” is widened, first by Klaus E. Müller (1935–2021), who as well has sadly passed

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Subsequent Transgenerational Transmission: Some Thoughts About Inter-Cultural Interpretation”, by Friedrich Markert (*International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 8.3, 2011, 239-248); *Traumatic Memory in Chinese History*, ed. by Lynn A. Struve (*History & Memory* 16.2, 2004. Special Issue, with contributions by Lynn A. Struve, Vera Schwarcz, Peter Zarrow, Klaus Mühlhahn and David B. Pillemer); *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-century China*, by David Der-Wei Wang (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2004); “Days of Old Are Not Puffs of Smoke: Three Hypotheses on Collective Memories of the Cultural Revolution”, by Yang Guobin (*The Chinese Review* 5.2, 2005, 13-41).

away, and second by Werner Bohleber. Whereas Müller outlines a typology of reaction to crises in traditional horticultural village societies, Bohleber turns an eye toward two basic texts of psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud and Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich. These pieces are followed by two short articles on Chinese historical thinking and historiography by Thomas H. C. Lee and Hu Chang-tze. Lee points out that among the Chinese elite throughout the ages a persistent belief in the ultimate supremacy of Chinese culture was nurtured and that this belief fostered a fatalistic attitude towards historical change. Hu focuses on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, highlighting the transition from the “exemplary mode” to the “genetic mode” in Chinese historiography.

Part II contains seven articles on “The Shaping and Transformation of Chinese Historical Identities”. The first three texts, by Heiner Roetz, Thomas Jansen and Monika Übelhör, respectively, discuss the formations of historical identity in a specific historical setting: in Eastern Zhou society, gripped by a deep moral-spiritual crisis in the Chinese Axial Age (Roetz); in the southern aristocracy in early Medieval China (Jansen); and in the late Ming elite which was challenged by the teachings of the Neo-Confucian eccentric Wang Gen (1483–1541). The following three articles, by Christine Moll-Murata, Barend ter Haar and Huang Chun-chieh, respectively, have a regional take, focusing on the prefectural gazetteers of Hangzhou (Moll-Murata), the migration narratives of the Hakka and other ethnic groups of non-Han Chinese origin (ter Haar), and on the nostalgia for cultural China in Taiwan in the period from 1895–1950. Finally, Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer charts the shaping of Chinese modern national identity against the backdrop of Chinese identity formation in the past, which was to a large extent shaped by China’s many confrontations with other cultures.

Part III (“Historical Memory in the Face of Crises and Humiliations”)<sup>3</sup> features four articles, in which various historical experiences of crisis in Chinese history are discussed. The topics range from the personal and political crisis, with which Sima Qian (c. 145–90 B.C.), the “father” of Chinese historiography, was confronted (Hans van Ess), to the loss of the cultural heartland after the collapse during most of Medieval China’s period (fourth through sixth centuries) and the attempts to deal with this loss in historiography (Martin Hanke), to the personal crises of the failed exam candidates in the ninth century (Jan A. M. De Meyer), and to the “national humiliation days” in Republican China (Paul A. Cohen).

The final part, Part IV (“On the Fractal Structures of Historical Consciousness: Traumata and Forgetfulness”) also comprises four case studies, which dis-

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3 For this issue, see now also *Chinese Visions of Progress, 1895 to 1949*, ed. by Thomas Fröhlich and Axel Schneider (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

## Foreword

cuss how historical traumata in premodern and twentieth-century China were treated in historiography and other literary sources – traumata that were caused by military subjugation of the Nan Yue Kingdom under Han Wudi (r. 141–87 BCE) (Hermann-Josef Röllicke), the Mongol conquest of entire China after decades of warfare (Hoyt Cleveland Tillman), the uprising of the Taiping and the bloodshed, destructions and unrest following the establishment of the Taiping Kingdom (Achim Mittag), and the disastrous famine after the Great Leap in the late 50s and early 60s (Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik).

With gratitude I acknowledge the great effort by Professor Dr. Army Schweiger (Stockholm), who did her best to compile the papers in a draft manuscript. As with the first volume (see fn. 1), Ms. Caroline Mason (Durham) saw to the correction and improvement of the papers authored by non-native English speakers. Yet this volume would have never seen daylight were it not for the tenacity and tireless work of Dr. Martin Hanke in the editorial process. Finally, I thank Jörn Rüsen and Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer for their enthusiasm for the Historiography Project and their immeasurable support over many years. Last but not least the generosity of the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation must be acknowledged.

Achim Mittag  
(Tübingen, December 2023)



The present volume grew out of a conference under the umbrella project “Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture from a Comparative Perspective”. Initiated by Thomas H. C. Lee and supported by the City College of New York, the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, the Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut, Essen, and the National Taiwan University, Taipei, this project was generously funded by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange, Taipei. The conference, the proceedings of which are now being published in this volume, was held at the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities, Essen, on June 17–20, 1998. Since then, more than twenty-five years have elapsed. Yet, as Achim Mittag writes in his foreword, we are living in times that, especially, since the eruption following 9/11, seem to move in a spiral of conflicts, distresses, crises and traumatic events. Traumatization appears to occur on a daily basis, effecting thousands of people all over the world, seemingly inevitable as the climate change. The volume has thus gained a gruesome relevance beyond any expectation, which justifies a publication even after such a long time.

The conference volume to which more than twenty authors have contributed comprises four parts: I: “Theoretical Considerations and General Perspectives”, II: “The Shaping and Transformation of Chinese Historical Identities”, III: “Historical Memory in the Face of Crises and Humiliations”, and IV: “On the Fractal Structures of Historical Consciousness: Traumata and Forgetfulness”.

All authors who have contributed to this volume are keenly aware that research in the specific field of their contributions has progressed beyond the state of art that had served as their starting-point. Yet it is the unique architecture of this volume that will add to the adventure of studying historiography from a comparative perspective.

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ISBN 978-3-946114-42-0



ISSN 1868-3665

