

Zhaizi Zhongguo (Dwelling Here in China): Asking Questions Again about the Identity of China

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Why Does China Matter Now?

There recently have been heated discussions in the Chinese community of academicians, historians in particular, about China and Chineseness.¹ One may argue that the tendency is not particularly surprising considering that discussions about race, nation, gender, and other identity-related subjects have been important parts of the academic movements around the world since the second half of the twentieth century. The question, “What is China?” can, however, become a confusing, even challenging, question because “China” is, in fact, anything that is related with either

The Korean-language edition of this book is Ge Zhaoguang, *I Jungguk e geohara: Jungguk eun mueot inga e daehan saeroun tamgu*, trans. Yi Won-seok (Seoul: Geulhangari, 2012).

¹ Regarding the discussion and criticism of the concept of “Chineseness,” see Zhu Chongke 朱崇科, “Qu Zhongguoxing: jingxing misi ji qita: yi Wang Runhua he Huang Jinshu de xiangguan lunshu wei zhongxin” 去中國性：警醒、迷思及其他——以王潤華和黃錦樹的相關論述為中心, *Ershiyi shiji 二十一世紀* (wangluoban 網絡版) 17 (2003:8); Zhang Longxi 張隆溪, “Zhidi yousheng: ping Ge Zhaoguang xinzhū Zhaizi Zhongguo” 擲地有聲——評葛兆光新著《宅茲中國》, *Kaifang shidai* 開放時代 7 (2011).

the race or the ethnicity of Chinese people.

During the twentieth century the name “China” began to be used with the political, cultural, and national significances it retains today. According to Lydia Liu, who conducted a fine discussion on the subject, Chinese intellectuals at the turn of the nineteenth century were greatly concerned and anxious about the possibility of losing the name of their country.² Huang Zunxian, for instance, argued in 1898, “Every country on earth uses a name referring to its entire state, as shown by such countries as the United Kingdom and France. Only China has no such name.” He continued to say that the existing names used by foreign countries to refer to the Chinese country, such as “China,” “la Chine,” “Zhendan” (震旦), and “Jina” (震旦) could not become a proper name to cover all of China, and suggested “Huaxia” (華夏) as an official name for China.³ Meanwhile, Liang Qichao considered replacing the existing dynasty names with Zhongguo (中國), but Zhang Taiyan criticized this view by saying that the term “Zhongguo” is not appropriate to cover all of China because it has traditionally been used to refer to “the land of the Han Chinese” against the areas outside its border.⁴

The terms Zhongguo and Zhonghua have been used since ancient times. According to Liu, however, “The concept of either ‘Zhongguo’ or ‘Zhonghua’ has never had a stable and clear meaning in Chinese discourses throughout Chinese history, from the Warring State Period to the Qing Dynasty through the Han, Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties.” That is why Quin Mu gave up the concept of the continuity in the identity of Chinese people, and urged researchers to read historical materials more closely and not to follow the conventional Sinocentrism

² Lydia H. Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 75-81.

³ Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲, *Ribenguo zhi* 日本國誌, Xuxiu Siku quanshu 續修四庫全書 (Shanghai 上海: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1995), 745:49.

⁴ Zhang Taiyan 章太炎, “Zhonghua minguojie” 中華民國解, *Minbao* 民報 15 (1907:7), 2413.

that regards China as the center of the world and the peoples living outside its boundary as barbarians.⁵ It shows that the concept of China has been used in a very flexible and variable manner politically, culturally, and historically.

The question currently raised about “China” is, however, not simply about the name of the state, but a more fundamental question about the identity of China. That is, can we see China as a nation-state, which is the essential character of a modern nation? Or taking another step, is “China” a political concept, or is it a civilizational or cultural concept? How do we understand Chinese nationalism and national identity? There are multiple contexts related to these questions, including the following.

First, the questions are based on critical views related with academic influences from postmodernism, post-colonialism, and orientalism reacting to the ideas of modernism, the nation-state, and nationalism formed in the nineteenth century. These critical views offered new methods of thinking regarding the social system and the identity of a state or nation by converting various phenomena related with modernity into mixed categories through concepts such as interaction, inter-connectedness, and hybridity. The new methods have been particularly helpful in producing new research on China among Western scholars as well as Chinese scholars in the West and in Southeast Asia. What is common in their studies is the shift of view from “China as a unified whole” to questions of ethnic minorities in China, Tibet, and Uighurs, resistance of the Mongol people, Taiwan breaking away from the continent, and the democratic movement in Hong Kong. In his book on the denaturalization of “Chineseness,” Rey Chow used the expression “epistemological transition” to capture academic trends in the

⁵ Qian Mu 錢穆, *Zhongguo xueshu sixiangshi luncong* 中國學術思想史論叢 (Taipei 臺北: Dongda tushu youxian gongsi 東大圖書有限公司, 1979), 8:77-200.

studies of China.⁶ But Allen Chun offered a better example of the latest trends in scholarship. He argued in an article titled “Fuck Chineseness,” “There was in China neither a concept of the same nation prior to the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, nor an idea regarding states as political entities divided by ethnicity.” He took one step further and argued that the concept that all Chinese people are of the same nation is “basically a modern creation originated from the idea of the nation itself.”⁷

Second, there have been challenges to the historical identity of China based on Chinese Studies in the West, the New Qing History School in particular. Scholars in this school turn to the Qing Dynasty of Manchu people to criticize the conventional unified historiography of China centered on the Han people. Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, for example, argued that the Great Qing Dynasty is different from China, while Pamela Kyle Crossley believed that the imperial ideology of the Qing Dynasty objectified China and regarded it as part of the Great Qing Dynasty. Mark C. Elliott had similar questions, and wondered if it would not be right to identify the Qing Dynasty with China and whether the dynasty was actually a Manchu Empire and China was just a part of the empire.⁸ Such questions posed a serious challenge to the conventional idea of “China” and its historical legitimacy.

Third, there have been efforts to emphasize nationalism and Chinese people’s own culture following the emergence of China as a world superpower in the post-Mao period, the 1990s in particular, and to

⁶ Rey Chow, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁷ Allen Chun, “Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity,” *Boundary 23*, no. 2 (1996), 111-138.

⁸ Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, “Qingdai Manren de Zhongguo renting” 清代滿人的“中國認同,” *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究 1 (2011); Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 341; Mark C. Elliott, “Manwen dang’an yu ‘xin Qingshi’” 滿文檔案與“新清史”, *Gugong xueshu jikan* 故宮學術季刊 24:2 (2006).

reconstruct Chinese identity through, among others, government-sponsored history projects. The effort to establish a unified ideology for the multiethnic country following the decline of the One Great Family of Socialist Nations has led to the development of an ideology that regards the Chinese nation as a unity of multiple origins and, gradually, a theory of China as an integrated special civilization where the Han cultures play a key role.⁹ Currently, efforts to write Chinese history from new viewpoints based on China's current territory and population have begun to be highlighted as an important issue regarding academic discourses in China, often raising criticism from and conflict with international academic circles outside China.

Finally, there also have been efforts to create concepts for the description and interpretation of China based on Chinese history rather than views established by scholars in the West and effectively handle the new academic challenges facing China as well as changes brought regarding its status in the world today. These efforts are largely related to the first academic trend. But the difference is that unlike the first, which tends to move toward deconstruction from a stance critical of China or Chineseness, these are aimed at establishing a new definition of the nature of the special historical route that China has trodden and the nature of its political systems while raising questions about the basic concepts that formed perceptions of the world and China in the

⁹ Fei Xiaotong 費孝通, *Zhonghua minzu duoyuan yiti geju* 中華民族多元一體格局 (1988); Fei Xiaotong 費孝通, ed., *Zhonghua minzu yanjiu xintansuo* 中華民族研究新探索 (Zhonghua shehui kexue chubanshe 中國社會科學出版社, 1991); Chen Liankai 陳連開, *Zhonghua minzu yanjiu chutan* 中華民族研究初探 (Zhishi chubanshe 知識出版社, 1994); Chen Liankai 陳連開, ed., *Zhongguo minzushi gangyao* 中國民族史綱要 (Zhongguo caizheng jingji chubanshe 中國財政經濟出版社, 1999); Zhang Lei 張磊 and Kong Qinglong 孔慶榕, eds., *Zhonghua minzu ningjulichue* 中華民族凝聚力學 (Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 中國社會科學出版社, 1999); Lu Xun 盧勳 and Yang Baolong 楊保隆, eds., *Zhonghua minzu ningjulichue de xingcheng yu fazhan* 中華民族凝聚力的形成與發展 (Minzu chubanshe 民族出版社, 2000); Lu Xiaoheng 盧曉衡, ed., *Sanjiao yuanrong liang'an yiti* 三教圓融兩岸一體 (Beijing 北京: Jingji guanli chubanshe 經濟管理出版社, 2003); Ma Rong 馬戎, *Minzu shehui xuedaolun* 民族社會學導論 (Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大學出版社, 2005).

nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Scholars who have offered fine books that represent the latter tendency include Wang Hui, who wrote *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi* (*The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*, 現代中國思想的興起, 2004), and Ge Zhaoguang, the author of *Zhaizi Zhongguo* (*Dwelling Here in China*, 宅茲中國, 2011). In his voluminous book, Wang raises questions regarding implications about China, modern China in particular, and discusses how the modern identity of China, concepts of regions, and the sense of sovereignty were formed or constructed. He then raises a question—how do we understand modern China?—in trying to learn about the foundation that formed the self-identity of Chinese people as modern people.¹⁰

The “Nation-State” in Chinese History

The basic starting point for discussion in Ge’s *Zhaizi Zhongguo* is a reflection upon the description of Chinese history based on the perception frame set by the West. His special interests in this book are focused on “research methods on regions,” “discourses on Asia,” “the ‘concentric circle’ theory of Taiwan,” “Mongolian history,” and “New Qing History.” According to Ge, research trends have moved from the concept and history of a single, unified China and raise questions regarding whether there exists identity in Chinese history, civilization, and philosophical ideas. There has been research that describes traditional China, and those descriptions are largely divided into two groups. The first group describes China as an “empire” that is different from the modern nation-state, while the second group depicts China as a nation-state retaining the elements of a modern state. A key factor in the conventional description of history has focused on the question of

¹⁰ Wang Hui 汪暉, *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi* 現代中國思想的興起 (Sanlian shudian 三聯書店, 2004), volume 1, part 1, see “Daolun 導論”

whether China in the past “was an ‘empire’ which had no clear boundary as a ‘nation-civilization-community’ and changed constantly or was a ‘nation-state’ which had, from the start, a clear boundary, a sense of unity, and a consistent tradition.” As for the question, the new research trends noted above stress a history of multiple ethnicities and the influence of foreign races upon the Han Chinese rather than the other way around during the course of history. This research trend tends to deny the current China dominated by the Han and explores the history of decentering by going back to early history. As criticisms became widespread about the methodology of the unilinear history description in the late twentieth century, the dualistic view of Chinese history focused on “empire” and “nation-state” also came under criticism as represented by, among others, Prasenjit Duara’s *Rescuing History from the Nation*. According to Duara, the method of describing history based on the view that nation is the subject of history is a product of the process of forming modern states, that is, the process in which another current of real history is suppressed and concealed.¹¹

Ge’s historical awareness is a critical reflection upon the view that denies the existence of ethnic community in Chinese history, regarding it as a simple result of modern imagination. He raises a question about whether Duara’s view in *Rescuing History from the Nation* overly stressed differences between racial, religious, and regional histories or, further, treated too lightly the historical continuity and cultural homogeneity maintained by “China” or “China of the Han Chinese.” He then argues that there is a historical difference between the nation-state called “China” and European nation-states. He believes that Benedict Anderson’s view that a nation-state as an “imagined community” emerged only in the modern period is based on an analysis of Western

¹¹ Prasenjit Duara, *Minjok euro buteo yeoksa reul guchul hagi: Geundae Jungguk ui saeroun haeseok*, trans. Mun Myeong-gi and Son Seung-hui (Seoul, Samin, 2004).

history, and maintains that China formed by the Han Chinese as a modern nation-state had already been established during the Song Period. His view is similar to those of Naitō Konan, Miyazaki Ichisada, and other historians of the Kyoto School in Japan. These scholars in the Kyoto School continued to be interested in their own narratives of modernity of the East in a structure competing with that of the West. As an effort to subvert and overthrow the frame of the European “world history,” the Kyoto School reflected nationalist viewpoints, maintaining that the early modern period started in the eleventh century.¹²

Ge’s interest in the social changes that started from the Song period focuses on the formation of the Han community in terms of territory, culture, and politics, as well as Song society’s similarity to a modern society. He asserts that China after the Song Dynasty maintained cultural homogeneity, common history, and ethics, and clearly defined state organizations and political system. In addition, China had a clear space under its jurisdiction, and a rudimentary sense of “nation” in the areas of the international environment, territorial change, a trade-based economy, and a sense of unity among the people.

Focused on its cultural significance, China’s territory based in the regions dominated by the Han Chinese and a sense of nation made the Chinese “nations” after the Song period comparatively more mature. In addition, the institutionalization, secularization, and common sense-ness of Confucianism pushed through a collaboration of three groups. Elites in the state and the government, and the literati class further developed and expanded a sense of civilization based on Confucian ethics from metropolitan areas to rural areas in Song China, from the center to the borders, and from the top to the bottom, helping China achieve

¹² Naitō Konan 内藤湖南, “Gaikatsu-teki tōsō jidaikan” 概括的唐宋時代觀, *Naitō Konan zenshū* 内藤湖南全集, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō 筑摩書房, 1976); Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定, “Tōyō-teki kinsei” 東洋の近世, *Miyazaki Ichisada zenshū* 宮崎市定全集, vol. 6 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten 岩波書店, 1992).

civilizational homogeneity early in its history. Therefore, this undoubted “nation” laid a foundation for the historical memories of the Han Chinese and a space for the description as well as the identity of a nation and a state.

It is in this context that Ge sums up the characteristic features of China as a nation-state by comparing it with modern nation-states in the West and Japan which consisted of a single language, race, and culture.

China was an extension of its past imperial dynasties from first to last when it established a modern nation-state, and inherited the traditional heritage while continuing to change. Therefore, the theory that China can be divided into two periods, one of the traditional empires and the other, when it is a modern nation-state, accords neither with Chinese history nor with the awareness of Chinese people of their nation and the history of its origin. China did not proceed from empires to a nation-state, but maintained a concept of a finite ‘nation’ within the awareness of an infinite ‘empire’ and, at the same time, preserved an imagination of an infinite ‘empire’ within the awareness of a finite ‘nation.’ The modern nation-state broke away from the centralized traditional empires, but both make an intertwined, coexisting history because there is in the modern nation-state awareness of the centralized traditional empires.¹³

What is notable in Ge’s discussion is that he does not see China in the past as belonging to any of the empires or (nation-)states, but as something containing overlapping aspects of both entities. His view is in line with Wang Hui, who maintains that the Chinese empires in the past contained in them the form of a modern state. Wang criticized the conventional dualistic description of Chinese history, one facet of which describes China as an empire and the other as a nation-state. The

¹³ Ge, *I Jungguk e geohara*, 316.

description of China as an empire portrays traditional China as a non-modern and despotic (that is, undemocratic) political system, with a production system linked to the agricultural (that is, non-urban, non-commercial, or non-industrial) culture widespread throughout its vast territory, and as an “imagined community” (that is, non-national and lacking political identity) relying upon multi-ethnicity and cultural stagnancy, and as a self-centered world system or continent based on the tribute system (rather than on formally and equally agreed treaties). By contrast, the description of China as a nation-state maintains that the country has maintained a model of nationalist identity since at least the Northern Song period, a commerce-based economy, an advanced urban civilization, a highly developed administrative system, a model of social mobility replacing social stratification, a society and culture centered on common people, a long tradition of science and technology, a secularized Confucian world view, and international exchange linking all corners of the region.¹⁴

The empire-(nation-)state dualism appeared along with a view that accepted a modern (nation-)state as the only rational system that accorded with our time, defining the past periods with empire, or a system of negative values. Accordingly, an empire was not regarded as a unique system of governance, but as a pre-modern and old-fashioned system that should be overcome, and was combined with the despotism of the East in the dualism of East and West. In this context, the contrast between an empire and a (nation-)state should naturally be ended with the subjugation of the former by the latter. In other words, for modern China to be recognized as a modern state, it must deny its own empirical character or status. In response, Wang regarded an empire as a unique, historical political system that is clearly different from a (nation-)state and saw Chinese society as a mixture of empire and (nation-)state, thus

¹⁴ Wang, *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi*.

proposing a new viewpoint for the understanding of the meaning of empire.¹⁵

According to Wang, the scale and stability of the Chinese empires form a truly exceptional phenomenon compared with all other pre-modern empires. It is the “exceptional” character that helped the Chinese empires to maintain long-term stability in its regions, populations, and political unification in the “pre-modern period.” Even in the twenty-first century, China has been able to – and is the world’s only country to do so – maintain the territory, population, and political culture it had as an empire in the nineteenth century within the frame of a sovereign state and nation-based society. Unlike as in all other empires that dissolved into sovereign nations, the nationalist movements and the foundation of a nation in modern China were able to directly convert some of the characteristic features and contents of the universalistic imperial system before the nineteenth century to the inner structure of a nation-state. Accordingly, one cannot but pay attention to the historical overlapping of an empire and (nation-)state to understand the nature and identity of China, whether it is traditional or modern, and give answers to the questions raised due to its imperial system.¹⁶

As discussed to this point, Ge and Wang criticize the movement to define China based on the modern concepts of an empire and a nation-state formed by the West. They have not yet been able to actively propose new concepts that can free them from the existing concepts, but they are sharpening their concepts that can help break away from the modern meaning of an empire and give China, that in the past or that in the present, a more appropriate definition. While Wang pays attention to modern China, which is building a new nation based on the heritage of an empire, Ge is more interested in the process in which China’s national

¹⁵ Wang, *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Wang, *Ibid.*

community was formed and changed throughout history. As a result, Ge defines China in history as follows. First, viewed from a historical context, “China” is still in the stage of fluidity because Chinese dynasties in the past were constantly being divided and united, and the spatial area ruled by the central government of these dynasties often changed. However, this does not mean that there has been no central territory that can support the concept of “China” historically. That is why Ge asserts, “There were always changes around the borderlands, but the capital areas were comparatively stable, formed a basic territory complete with political, national, and cultural zones, and constituted a whole world of history.”

Second, the Chinese culture that formed in the course of history is plural, and not a single fixed, unchanging tradition. That is, China has formed its culture through a process of fusion between the Han culture and a variety of foreign cultures. This is, however, far from saying that Chinese culture is a simple hybrid and that Chinese people shared no clear sense of community in terms of culture. Although “China” is a (multi-)national state that expanded from the center (that is, the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River and the Yangtze River outward), it was able to form a cultural community through a gradual fusion of the Han cultures with various cultures of foreign origin. There were periods of “Conquest Dynasties” or “Rule by Foreign Races” (that is, the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the Five Dynasties, Mongol Yuan, and Manchu Qing), but the cultural tradition based on the cultures of Han people continued to be preserved in the area, helping people share a clear sense of cultural community. China is, therefore, a single body of civilization.

Third, viewed from a political sense, “China” is not the same as any “dynasty,” nor is it the “government” of any one family. A government, or a regime, can never be the same as a “state.” This means that China, unlike dynasties and governments that continued to be replaced and changed, has been a comparatively stable and uninterrupted political and

cultural community.

In sum, China is a nation of common identity that stably maintained its territory and culture with those of the Han at the center throughout the history of changes and diversity.

Politics of History

As mentioned above, the core of China's tradition of "nation-state" discussed by Ge is related with a political and cultural community sharing a common identity. It shows that there is a certain difference between Ge and others who interpret the continuity of China in terms of culture. The culturalist method aims at overcoming the denial of the continuous legitimacy caused by the diversity and continuous changes brought to the population, regions, and political structure, and assigns great importance to the cultural continuity transcending ethnic identity and dynastic changes. The culturalist method in the description of Chinese history tends to regard China as a society lacking national homogeneity and maintained by the imperial traditions (that is, Confucian culture and the Chinese writing system as part of the imperial language). By contrast, in a community sharing a sense of common cultural identity, which Ge stresses as a cultural foundation for a "nation-state" in the traditional society ethnicity, the Han culture plays a key role. This view is similar to that of Fei Xiaotong, who stresses the fusion of multiple ethnicities with the Han Chinese at the center.¹⁷

In Ge's view, however, one may find that he tends to stress only the continuity of cultural elements or to perceive culture as if they are natural phenomena. This is, in a sense, a non-historical attitude because the discovery of the continuity in cultural elements and using continuity as a boundary between groups can easily ignore the fact that such continuity

¹⁷ Fei, *Zhonghua minzu duoyuan yiti geju*.

and characteristics forming a community can be formed through the history of a certain period. In this context, we still must pay attention to the view of Duara, his “bifurcation of history” theory, in particular. According to Duara’s explanation of the term “bifurcation of history,” some of the memories of the past are suppressed or forgotten while others remain to be transmitted or transformed.¹⁸ Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner, who understand “nation” as an imagined community of the modern period, also assert that the “nation” is a product and invention of the modern period. Considering Duara’s assertion that words such as “race,” “family,” and “lineage” and various symbols correspond to the modern concept of nation and hence are translated into that word, and that understanding China through history signifies that the historical reality is the same as the reality of the real world, the historian’s function should be giving answers to the questions of the real world on the basis of historical materials through consideration of both the historical heritage remaining with us today and the history already buried in oblivion. It is in this context that one can argue that historical studies of the modern period have played the role of politics’ vanguard.

In fact, reading the politics of history, or existing historical research in the context of politics or time, forms another important aspect of Ge’s book. He vividly portrays the ordeal today’s historical research is put to between politics and the academic world by closely analyzing the historical context in which movements of “state learning,” such as Shinto in Japan, Asianism, and East Asian historiography, emerged. An academic discourse cannot be completely freed from the contemporary political discourses and demands whether a researcher wants so or not. Ge’s academic achievements, including the book under review here, are not exceptional. He once stated regarding the significance of his studies in literature and history that they are “aimed to establish a solid

¹⁸ Duara, *Minjok euro buteo yeoksa reul guchul hagi*, chapter 2.

perception of the state and nation in the cultural sense, not a government in the political sense, in addition to offering a feast of knowledge and training people's intelligence. That is, while a modern state requires setting up history and minting the present, the tradition of the past provides memories, forms common perceptions, and establishes a sense of unity."¹⁹ He separates government from state in the political sense, but this does not deny the political significance of his academic activities. As mentioned above, one can say instead that both Wang and Ge involved themselves in practical politics actively enough in that they explored the meaning of "China" at a time when the issues of the Chinese nation and regional affairs had developed into a disruptive factor in and outside China just as the country began to rise as a superpower and when nationalism began to appear in China along with the voices of warning against the country. Such a relationship between politics and academic activities, and between politics and history, should not be viewed negatively. On the contrary, as pointed out by Michel Foucault, it is necessary to perceive the relationship between discourses and power as the way that knowledge exists and always examine ourselves in a critical manner.

It would not be very different from a simple research of past history if Ge's exploration of the Chinese nation sharing a sense of common identity throughout history ends just with demonstrating the Chinese nation's existence in history. His exploration would retain its value as historical research only when it could give answers to questions such as the following: Why is the Chinese nation sharing a sense of common identity so important? What meaning does this have regarding the modern Chinese people? How is this related with the direction in which China should move?

¹⁹ Ge, *Ibid.*, 314.

China Seen by Neighboring Countries

Ge's academic research is largely focused on the history of Chinese culture and philosophy, including Daoism and Buddhism. In his latest publications, however, he is interested in understanding China through the interrelationship between China and its neighbors. This is not carried out simply to expand the scope of his research activities and academic interests, but it has a more significant meaning that can be summed up as a shift in China's epistemology.

Critics have often pointed out that many Chinese intellectuals of our time lack Asian viewpoints.²⁰ One might wonder with respect to the expression "Asian viewpoints" whether Asia can be summed up with a single concept. Similar to Europe or China, Asia seems to lack standards or boundaries, except for those drawn on the map, with which it can tie together all of its differences. In addition, it is also difficult to guarantee that any theory on Asia, or East Asia, offers a more objective historical approach that transcends individual nation-states, ethnicities, and cultures. As Ge points out, academic discussions on Asia to date have not been made by Asia, but by a specific nation-state such as Japan or Korea. Despite this situation, the criticism that China lacks Asian viewpoints hits the mark in pointing out that there is a problem in the way modern Chinese people perceive the world. In other words, they revealed that a majority of modern Chinese people are confined to the simplistic structure of China versus the West when they try to understand the world and themselves. Accordingly, Chinese people formed their identity by imitating, or separating themselves from, the West, which is their Other. Such a fragmentary perception of the self creates an image gravely distorted by the dualistic (that is, West versus Non-West) tool of

²⁰ Baek Yeong-seo, *Dong Asia ui guihwan: Jungguk ui geundaeseong eul mudneunda* (Seoul: Changbi, 2000).

perception created by the West. The image of China reflected in such a mirror, therefore, cannot be very different from the one wanted by the West.

Regarding this situation, Ge proposed “looking at China from the viewpoints of its neighbors” as an effort to break away from the conventional perception of China for which it regards the West as its Other, and creating a multifaceted image of China. Considering that, unlike studies on the approaches to China from the northwestern region, there has been little research conducted on the approaches to China from its northeastern region, and Ge asks that researchers pay more attention to the images of China made on the basis of views from the northeastern areas. He has recently discovered from materials related to the Joseon envoys visiting Beijing that the Joseon dynasty had its own image of China which was uniquely different from that China made for itself, trying hard to reform the image of China through its Other (that is, Joseon) in Northeast Asia.

One may conclude that the fresh exploration of China by Ge is not a passive measure to handle the questions raised regarding the unified community of identity of China in the postmodern or postcolonial discourses in the West, but rather an active effort to rebuild the meaning of China from the various viewpoints formed by neighbors which have closer historical relationships with China. These are mutual viewpoints not limited to Chinese history, but they can be profitably exploited to describe the histories of its neighbors such as Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asian countries and promote multifaceted joint research between scholars across the region.