

## Exilic Signifiers in 20th Century China: 1898, 1949, 1989

Anyone attempting to offer a basis for the assumption that the 20th century was indeed an independent era and a unique period of Chinese history would do well to realize that the 20th century, in contrast to the 19th century, was a century of exile.

Neither China's conflict with the West, nor its internal signs of decay and rebellion, nor the supposed dichotomies of tradition and modernity can themselves alone justify a distinction between the Chinese 20th and 19th centuries, since the late 19th century did much more than simply herald these kinds of future changes. Just as China's awareness of itself as a nation became more firmly established at the turn of the century, a new type of what might be called a "genuine" outside perspective opened up to Chinese intellectuals – a perspective gained from foreign nation states that had their own cultural, political, and historical weight. Where the universal claim of the cultural and spiritual *ecumene* (*tianxia* 天下) previously did not account for the borders of a nation state, "China" now found itself ever more the focus of "outside" attention as a nation, and indeed increasingly as a nation state. The exilic periphery of the 20th century, therefore, clearly differed from the places of banishment at the outer edges of the Chinese empire, where many scholars and public servants throughout the centuries were forced to seek either temporary or permanent refuge. The substitution of banishment within the *ecumene* with emigration to foreign nation states in the 20th century also left behind conceptual traces: For example, what would have been described as "*liu fang*" 流放 in pre-modern China generally had much more to do with "banishment" to the outer edges of the realm than with an exile outside the empire. Moreover, it was usually the case that such banishments were officially ordered. Indeed, occasionally a banishment order would be part of measures to expand the cultural sphere of the empire, since those punished with banishment would promote their culture in remote places.<sup>1</sup> Those affected could still regard banishment – in stark contrast

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1 See: Lee 1994, 226; Bauer 1990, 53. During the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) it also became evident that banishment served not only to promote the cultural presence of the Dynasty in new border areas, such as Xinjiang, but also the economic interests of the empire. Through banishing common criminals, or banishing the relatives of those condemned to death, a body of workers became available to help develop the border regions. After the death sen-

to exile – as a formative event, however unfortunate, that was firmly rooted in their life-long career as public servants. It could thus be interpreted as a direct expression of their commitment to the empire.

20th century China is conspicuously bracketed by two key dates, 1898 and 1989, both of which are associated with the violent state repression of reform movements and the subsequent emigration of intellectuals. In both cases, exile proved to be fertile ground for influential ideas, writings and even the political movements that helped give the above-mentioned dates their historical significance. Names of exiles from the turn of the century such as Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) and Liu Shiwei 劉師培 (1884–1919), and the titles of the publications they established such as the *Xinmin Congbao* 新民叢報, *Tianyibao* 天義報 or the *Qingyibao* 清議報, are still so well-known today that they are considered part of a basic knowledge of Chinese history. In the broader context of 1898 and the rebellion against the Qing Dynasty, we find further, no less prominent names from Chinese history, for instance Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan 孫中山; 1866–1925), the philologist and nationalist Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 (1868–1936) or social critic and later General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942). All of these historical figures were politically and culturally active while in exile in Japan. Many seminal programmatic writings were also produced in exile such as the *Three Principles of the People* (*Sanminzhu* 三民主義) by Sun Yat-sen, and political movements emerged such as the Revolutionary Alliance (*Tongmenghui* 同盟會), whose mouthpiece was the *Minbao* 民報, along with other, anarchist and socialist movements.

An equally intense phase of emigration occurred in the extended context of 1989, where equally prominent literati, academics and intellectuals were among the ranks of the emigrants. These included, for instance, Fang Lizhi 方勵之 (1936–2012), Wang Dan 王丹 (1969–), Liu Binyan 劉賓雁 (1925–2005), Bei Dao 北島 (1949–), and then later, Wei Jingshen 魏京生 (1950–). However, the largest Chinese emigration wave in the 20th century occurred in 1949, almost exactly halfway between 1898 and 1989, when the Chinese Civil War on the Mainland ended with the victory of the Chinese Communist Party and the proclamation of the People's Republic. In Hong Kong and Taiwan alone there were around three million people, who had fled the Chinese Mainland to seek a new home.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that 1949 differed from 1898 and 1989, not only in terms

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tence, banishment was considered the most severe form of punishment in the Qing period; cf. Waley-Cohen 1991, 1–11.

2 Between 1937 and 1941 around 750,000 refugees from the Chinese Mainland arrived in Hong Kong, which almost doubled the population. As a result of the Communist seizure of power on the Chinese Mainland, the number of inhabitants of Hong Kong had risen to ap-

of the extent of the emigration, but also the emigrants' destinations. The different places of exile that were chosen resulted in unique forms of exilic experience. From 1898 onwards, Japan was the most important destination for emigration. As an Asian nation, it provided a more familiar role model for the type of development that was hoped for in China compared to a Western nation, such as the United States of America, where the linguistic barriers were also greater.

A quite different approach was taken to emigration after 1949, specifically with regard to Taiwan. As Wang Fu-chang makes clear in his contribution to this volume, a form of "exile" emerged in post-1949 Taiwan, which, judging from the propaganda of the then ruling Guomindang, actually should never have come about. After all, the Guomindang regime in Taiwan essentially considered itself, in the words of Wang Fu-chang, to be a "migrant regime in the last resort within the national territory". According to the official standpoint of the Guomindang regime, Taiwan did not exist outside of the state territory of the Republic of China, which was represented in the United Nations and was intended to serve as a foothold for the re-occupation of the Mainland. Wang Fu-chang identifies a contrary viewpoint among opponents of the ruling party in Taiwan, who exposed the Guomindang government as an "exilic regime" and tried to advance their own national imaginary against the one proposed by the regime.

With regard to language and daily life, Mainland Chinese emigrants would undoubtedly have found Taiwan or Hong Kong to be a much more culturally familiar experience than would have been the case in Japan or another South East Asian or Western state. Therefore, although it may seem self-evident, the suggestion that the term "exile" does not always refer to the same experience is in no way trivial in its implications.

The hope of return is inevitably a key aspect of the period spent in exile. The years 1898, 1949 and 1989 also differ quite markedly from each other in this respect. From the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, most emigrants had the opportunity to return to China within as little as a decade. In contrast, it had become evident in the decade that followed 1949 that the Guomindang regime's plan to reclaim power on the Mainland had failed and that emigrants needed to prepare themselves for a long-term absence. With regard to Hong Kong, research in the social sciences has identified a prevailing "refugee mentality", while the same might be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of Taiwan.<sup>3</sup> A global perspective reveals further differences in the sphere of exilic experience. At the beginning of the 20th century, China was still in fact under significant political and military

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prox. two million by 1950 due to the large number of immigrants. The catastrophic famine which struck China following the Great Leap Forward led up until 1962 to further refugees heading for Hong Kong; cf. Skeldon 1994b, 22–23.

3 Skeldon 1994a, 8–9.

pressure from foreign states and was only very tentatively integrated into the world order of national states. At that time, there was still no modern state on the Mainland. The condition of exile in Japan, on the other hand, as the example given by Liang Qichao shows, meant the opportunity to gain political experience in the constitutional structure of a modernizing national state. Chinese emigrants around 1949 choosing to live in Western countries had similar experiences, although admittedly under different circumstances. Numerous intellectuals and public figures that had left China had already personally experienced life in a modern nation state while on visits abroad or study trips.

The Second World War, the Chinese Civil War and, then, the Cold War had not only transformed China, but also changed the perception of places of exile for Chinese intellectuals. Japanese Pan-Asianism had been discredited and East Asia became a world divided along the fault lines of the Cold War. Along with Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South-East Asian states, such as Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia had become emigration destinations that were outside the direct sphere of influence of world communism. The pressing questions in exile were no longer about the ability of the dynastic order to reform and thus save China from imperialist influences. Instead, the primary focus of many intellectuals was a sweeping investigation into the reasons for the “loss” of the Mainland to communism, and the corresponding concern about the supposedly impending demise of Chinese culture. At the same time, the question remained of a possible political, social and cultural alternative to communist rule on the Mainland and to the authoritarian system of rule in Taiwan. A phenomenon emerged in Taiwan, which Lee Su-san describes in reference to Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1903–1982) as a “double exile”. This concept refers to the fact that many Chinese intellectuals in Taiwanese exile were forced by the repressive one-party system of the Guomintang regime to seek renewed exile, this time in Hong Kong, Japan, the United States or Western Europe. Moreover, part of the concept of a double exile, as Lee Su-san demonstrates, was the perception among the exiles that “China” as a “cultural category” had been driven into exile and that it was the task of the exile intellectuals to preserve cultural China in what they understood to be its authentic form. This idea did not, however, find consensus among exile intellectuals. By comparing two exile situations, Lee Su-san’s contribution sheds light on bitter controversies about political and cultural issues within the exile communities. Their intensity was probably caused, at least to some degree, by the increasing disillusionment of exile intellectuals about the prospects of returning home in their own life time.

Still, for those emigrants of 1949 who lived long enough to witness the end of the so-called Cultural Revolution and the subsequent era of reform in the People’s Republic, the possibility of returning to China did exist, at least for holidays and visiting relatives. The same was true for those Chinese emigrants who *chose* exile after 1989 and, therefore, had not been officially declared enemies of the communist revolution. In this case, a return was sometimes possible after just a decade. In a China undergoing rapid

economic modernization, a range of opportunities presented themselves to exiled individuals to make commercial use of the professional experience they had gained in the years spent abroad, mostly in Europe or the United States – without, however, having to entirely surrender their critical views. This resulted, at times, in forms of so-called inner exile which could also be found in individual cases in the Taiwan of the Guomindang era, and even on the Mainland after 1949.

### Exile in the Chinese Context

The preceding sketches of the different spheres of exilic experience and conceptual variety indicate the difficulty of arriving at a concept of exile: To what extent can we even refer to “exile” with regard to China in the 20th century? Understanding exile in the sense of exile presented in the Bible is problematic, particularly as this might lead to the conclusion that China did not actually have any equivalent of occidental ideas of exile. This objection, which suggests that exile is religiously linked, is not only historically counterintuitive, but it also ignores the self-awareness of Chinese emigrants, who define their own situation as being one of exile.

A culturally bound and exclusively occidental conceptualization of exile should be rejected. As the collected contributions in this volume testify, there is clear evidence of a fundamental exilic experience in the Chinese context. At issue here is the two-fold experience that is inevitably familiar to most emigrants, both intellectually and in their daily lives when they are forced to deal with cultural “otherness” and, at the same time, a sense of alienation from what they had always supposed was their “own”. This double estrangement might well be an inducement to a productive historical and cultural hermeneutics from the perspective of exile, but in exile itself there is a great deal more at stake. Cultural alienation in the place of exile, linguistic isolation, social marginalization and personal misfortunes may contribute to a situation in which emigrants lose their readers, their peers, and eventually their literary or intellectual voice. In his examination of Tang Junyi’s 唐君毅 (1909–1978) intellectual engagement with exile, Thomas Fröhlich demonstrates how particular perceptions of exile relate to the conceptualization of social modernity. It is by no means coincidental that intellectuals under the pressure of exile, such as Tang Junyi, have a dreadfully ominous sense of the downsides of modernity. Living as an exile in Hong Kong, Tang perceived the negative aspects of (global) modernity – most of all various forms of alienation and reification imposed on the individual – through the prism of his exilic experience. As Thomas Fröhlich argues, it is against this backdrop that Tang’s modern Confucianism addressed the need to improve the modern/exilic condition of life by situating the individual in an overarching cultural, ethical and metaphysical context. The modern Confucian agenda of delineating and reinterpreting a so-called Confucian “main current” within China’s “national culture” is therefore not so much a matter of narrow nationalism. It is rather a mani-

festation of the exilic intellectual's quest to provide his modern/exilic self with a means to retain an "authentic" type of self-expression and self-realization. In Tang's exilic thought, the notion of such authenticity becomes particularly dynamic: According to Tang, the exiles in Hong Kong were compelled to situate themselves within a global modernity that comprised the tensions of the Cold War, rapid social and economic modernization, the pending renewal of the Confucian "main current", various forms of colonial repression, and newly emerging pan-Asian currents.

The studies in this volume consciously avoid common stereotyping of the kind which insists that we cannot speak of "exile" unless emigrants are named on death lists and thus could only have remained in their homeland at the cost of their own lives. Whether or not the emigrants discussed here faced direct threat to life and limb cannot be the exclusive criterion for justifying our use of the term "exile". Even those who *chose* to emigrate for moral or other reasons considered themselves to be in exile.<sup>4</sup> The suspicion that those who proclaim themselves "exiles" in cases where a death list was not a reason to emigrate might abuse this status for selfish motives should be expressed with great care, however, for it easily creates the false impression that the condition of exile resembles a kind of scar that can be proudly displayed for personal profit or prestige. Testimonies in which exile begins with an escape from a certain death clearly do not support such an image<sup>5</sup> and death lists cannot possibly be accepted as the exclusive criterion for true exile. As for the criterion of moral valency, it is also of fundamental importance for understanding exile in the 20th century, though it is in itself no more an absolute means for judging all historical instances of exile than the threat of death would be. While the failure of emigrants to resist their expulsion demonstrated their impotence, it reflected, on the other hand, their inner certainty that they were morally superior to the perpetrators. This moral dimension of exile obviously also applies to cases in which there were death lists and the moral decision to flee was, in the first instance, not even a consideration.

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4 Ralf Dahrendorf (2006, 142) recalls Peter de Mendelssohn, who pointed out that there might be, beyond the death lists, moral reasons which make exile "unavoidable in a deeper sense". In addition, in the contemporary Chinese context there are so-called re-entry ban lists, whose purpose is to block the re-entry into China of any Chinese citizen who has been critical of the regime while abroad. The re-entry ban can also come into effect in cases where the domestic Chinese authorities propose an end to the imprisonment of dissidents in exchange for a one-way trip abroad.

5 Cf. Adorno's (2005, 32) perceptive sentence: "Every intellectual in emigration is, without exception, mutilated, and does well to acknowledge it to himself, if he wishes to avoid being cruelly apprised of it behind the tightly-closed doors of his self-esteem."

## Intellectual Perspectives in Exile

It should be emphasized, however, that the physical aspects of suffering, the stripping away of dignity and the consequent loss of trust in the world (as documented, for example, by Jean Améry<sup>6</sup>) are mentioned at most tangentially by the authors who are the focus of this collection of essays. Their thoughts mainly center on administrative marginalization and the associated persecution driven by political and ideological motives. These particular circumstances did not, however, ever actually give rise to a catastrophic view on history. On the contrary, the opportunity to deal with history and culture provides the intellectuals in exile with a basis for claiming their own future. The experience of life on the margins is decisive in this process.

The significance of losing one's homeland becomes acutely apparent after several years in exile. From the mid-1950s, intellectuals living in Hong Kong, the USA and Taiwan began to realize that an increasingly radical ideologization, along with the emergence of a systematic re-education and elimination of alternate views, made a return to the social and political centers of power in the People's Republic of China and a reunion with family members unthinkable for the foreseeable future. Added to this is the dwindling hope of a united opposition in exile. The radical nature of political, social and ideological change makes clear the reality of what is now considered an exile situation and conveys the feeling that the role of the intellectual is becoming ever more restricted. This circumstance is true both of the society of the land of origin, as well as of the social surroundings of the host country. This two-fold estrangement is reflected in a heightened awareness of crisis, which finds its expression in an affirmation of the intellectuals' authority to preserve a national culture or history. Accompanying this affirmation of a subjective authority is, despite any individual privations, an almost indefatigably optimistic view of historical and cultural developments. Suffering, expulsion and isolation do in fact converge with an awareness of crisis over the past century of Chinese history and culture. Yet, the history of China is not conceived as fundamentally one of deprivation, damage or continuing repression and the modern view of a progressive development of humanity is never fundamentally challenged. This requires, however, that the so-called spirit of Chinese history and culture, which currently appears to have relinquished its actual content, be inscribed into the cultural memory. The fact that the

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6 Heidelberg-Leonard 2006, 92–94. The lost trust in the world which he bemoaned in 1965 was lost by Améry in 1943 when he took part in the Austrian resistance movement in Brussels and was arrested. The consequence of the social and psychological irretrievability of a past that lay in ruins, as well as the moment of unforgettable destruction, became imperatives for analytical deconstruction and shaped his engagement with exile.

essays presented in the current volume may be described as exile writings is reinforced in these very attempts to shape in the symbolic form of a text that particular cultural space which – beyond the geopolitical reality – ought to be an imaginary view of the homeland. The exilic perspectives of the collection are, moreover, characterized by this interaction between homeland and reality, between an overarching identity concept and the spatio-historical loss of this identity. This also applies to the criticism of a foreign ideology such as communism, which was seen as distant from the homeland as well as from tradition.

It is worth noting that the writings of the respective authors share a basic belief in the essayistic text as the preferred means for reflecting historical, social and cultural relations. Another common experience is the exposure to a new linguistic environment, one that often provides greater freedom of expression.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, they are able to continue to publish their writings in Chinese. To see such gains as merely positive experiences, however, may be problematic. Exiles seek to turn experience into language and use language to record their interpretation of the past. In such moments, exiles have great faith in the power of language and its ability to help shape human understanding and memory. On the other hand, exiles also attempt to rectify language when it is manipulated by ideology.

For intellectuals in Hong Kong the question of language was a constant concern. They knew from first-hand experience – not only on the Mainland, but also from the colonial government – that language is tied to relations of power that have real consequences in the external world. Though they taught, researched, and published extensively in Hong Kong, only few could find positions at more privileged institutions of higher education that were either recognized or funded by the British administration and which used English as the official language. Although Hong Kong in the 1950s and early 1960s was still a repressive colonial society in many respects, with strict police control, no democratic elections, and no open participation in any influential governmental body, many intellectuals nevertheless described the city as part of the so-called free world and as a safe retreat for “Free China” (*ziyou Zhongguo* 自由中國).<sup>8</sup> For them, exile in Hong Kong meant holding on to their language as they had the freedom to continue to write in Chinese.<sup>9</sup> Given their emphasis on Chinese culture, history, and

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7 Derrida (1978, 68–69), for example, equates exile with writing: “We must be separated from life and communities, and must entrust ourselves to traces. [...] Absence attempts to produce itself in the book and is lost in being pronounced.”

8 Law Wing Sang 2009, 133. According to Law, they posed a strong challenge to the previous predominance enjoyed by the pro-CCP leftist cultural establishment.

9 Ip Iam Chong 1997, 20–25.

philosophy rather than political interference and the fact that the Chinese language remained their main medium of communication, it is not surprising that they seldom addressed the rather frustrating colonial experience of Hong Kong's everyday life or the denial of democratic participation under British rule. Nevertheless, the issue of Standard Chinese became one main focus of criticism and interference with the colonial administration. In the case of Lao Sze-kwang 勞思光 (1927–1912), the question of language includes some general reflections on its use in exile. Moreover, in the early 1950s it is still important for Lao to assert the May Fourth *baihua* 白話 movement and additionally the systemization of a modern Chinese grammar in the form of the national language, *guoyu* 國語. Like other exiled writers, he insists while writing in Hong Kong on using the national language based on the vernacular. This is not because he opposes the use of the classical style of writing, *wenyanwen* 文言文. Indeed, in several of his early essays he still uses a “semi-classical style of prose”, sometimes even alongside the national language. Instead, this emphasis seems to relegate Cantonese and its influence on local cultural forms to a marginalized status. A closer look reveals that the insistence on the use of the national language was not so much aimed at excluding the local perspective, but at criticizing the colonial education and language system of Hong Kong. For many, British rule left room for rather decadent works of mostly Cantonese writers, who were forced to write for money under economic hardship and produced a popular culture inferior to the nationalistic culture of the Mainland before 1949. Tang Junyi also used an idiosyncratic literary style of writing, while continuing to disapprove of the academic dependency on English for Chinese Studies at New Asia College and later at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

The complex condition of exile under the British colonial rule – which included alienation from one's homeland, the possibility of continuing to write in one's native language, and the exposure to theories originating from the United States and Europe – inspired exiled intellectuals in Hong Kong to specifically react to the historical conditions that forced them to be in exile in the first place. Standard Chinese – or the national language – remains the means of communication, while alienation, resulting from the communist nomenclature and colonial influence, is consciously combatted to produce alternative visions of a Chinese nation, culture and history at a crossroads where many ways of resistance and interpreting intersect.

Brigit Knüsel's essay shows the extent to which ambivalence affects Lao Sze-kwang's description of his exile experience in Hong Kong from the mid-1950s. In exile, the homeland as a spatial reality stimulates the act of writing, which is revealing on two levels: First, the act of writing constitutes an attempt to reflect on the very dislocation of the subject, a dislocation which has been anticipated through a break in history and in personal biography. Second, the moment of writing supports the author's recognition that he needs to accept responsibility despite his absence. The implication is that, although the dangers of the exile situation and the threat of the Communist regime repre-

sent the current frame of reference, these two concerns represent only a limited aspect of the actual object of study. At the core of Lao Sze-kwang's early writings is a normative cultural analysis and, closely associated with this, an interpretation of values. Values, however, are not to be preserved in a purely conservative sense, but rather exist in an interpretative continuum. This notion of a continuity of values that will be established by intellectuals challenged the prevailing ideas of traditionalism and of an iconoclastic break with values. A precondition of such intellectual undertakings was unrestricted access to a variety of intellectual positions, which was possible in Hong Kong exile in sharp contrast to Mainland China.

The consequences of the exile intellectuals growing awareness of their peripheral existence include, on the one hand, a retreat from their previous involvement in party political activities (Xu Fuguan) and, on the other hand, a prominent role in teaching at academic educational institutions. Involvement in education, and, above all, teaching in Chinese at higher education institutions or universities, becomes an important area of influence for the emigrant intellectuals. For example, Tang Junyi was actively involved in the founding of the New Asia College (*Xin Ya Shuyuan* 新亞書院) in Hong Kong, and he and Lao Sze-kwang played a significant role, not least through their teaching activities, in the establishment of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.<sup>10</sup> Concern for China could thus be freed from the social reality of the People's Republic of China and transferred to the academic fields of cultural, historical and political philosophy. The intention to exert influence on social reality and, at the same time, on public opinion was never abandoned. In fact, it was given further expression in numerous open lectures, and primarily in a range of public activities in the field of education dealing with subjects from popular science and popular philosophy, which were offered in publications aimed at reaching the widest possible audience. Beyond this, a sense of a mission in exile to preserve a national culture compensated for the awareness of having left behind one's own people and homeland. The firm belief in the possibility of salvation for the nation through scholarly interpretations of history, culture, and philosophy also converged with proactive involvement in the field of education. Culture was perceived as a marginal notion, since the loss of cultural presence simultaneously allowed for the possibility of a symbolic treatment of cultural meaning. Through writing, publishing and education, exile intellectuals were able to rescue history and culture by bringing them up to the present.

Irene Eber's contribution on Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962) also addresses the question of the role of the subject in relation to the process and interpretation of history. Based on a series of public lectures given by Hu Shi at the University of California in Berkeley,

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10 Chen Fangzheng 2000, 11–31.

Eber shows how Hu attempts to redefine his own role in China's ongoing modernization process during his American exile. However, because this process had failed, the need to re-examine his and others' roles in Chinese intellectual history became an existential need as well as a pressing obligation. Hu Shi's re-examination is closely associated with a reinterpretation of intellectual history, in particular with an identification of those influences which, by way of a new methodology, made the secular search for the meaning and continuity of tradition possible. Hu Shi not only identifies himself within this tradition of intellectual history as both heir and purveyor, but he also recognizes it as a mainstream trend which continues up to the present day and has not been entirely interrupted by the Communist ideology. Once again, Eber's contribution demonstrates that while exile provides a paradigm for an individual experience, the role of the subject is more precisely defined through a particular interpretation of history. Within this process, the concept of the subject is as important as the concept of the nation, culture or history of China.

Irene Eber's account of the exile of Jewish intellectuals and Yiddish writers in Shanghai suggests that they were engaged in a similar manner with the preservation of familiar traditions. And yet their strategies, motives or means reveal remarkably few commonalities in terms of how they coped with exile. The significance of these indicated differences should not be underestimated: They prove that, even for the same generation of exiled intellectuals or writers, the primary research focus should be not on the coherence or universality of the exile experience, but rather on the discrepancies between people and places.

### Research on Exile with a Focus on China

It goes without saying that research on exile in relation to 20th century China, which was quite different from banishment in pre-modern China, is still at an early stage. The research has so far devoted little attention to types of reflection – besides literary forms – that deal with the exilic experience that was characteristic of the 20th century. The exile perspective has reflected on politics and history, culture and society, modernity, the Chinese nation, its relationship to the West and its traditions, as well as on the fragility of human subjectivity in the experience of estrangement from modern processes of rationalization and secularization. Chinese intellectuals in exile entrusted their thoughts on these issues not only to literary texts in the narrow sense. They also revealed them in publications from the field of the humanities and social sciences, which is the analytical focus of the contributions collected in the present volume.

That is not to say that research on exile literature does not exist. Indeed, it is possible to gain an impression of the individual conditions of exile of a great many authors.<sup>11</sup> The experience of exile has been described in a number of literary works of high repute.<sup>12</sup> Outside the field of literature, however, the picture is very different. In terms of exile research on China that is *not* in the first instance about exiled writers, but rather about philosophers, intellectuals in the humanities or social sciences, journalists, and party politicians, we must by and large content ourselves with biographical accounts or surveys of the contemporary context. With regard to particular well-known exiled intellectuals, current research generally informs us about how they coped with life in exile, about their academic and political activities, and the groups and organizations to which they belonged. Such considerations are not the focus of the contributions gathered here, however. The essays in the present volume center on the exile experience post-1949 using a variety of methodological approaches applied to a broad range of different topics and texts. A strictly biographical orientation would miss the larger aim that unites all the contributions in this volume: To determine whether specific exilic perspectives can be identified within the sheer variety of thought produced by Chinese emigrants. Do the interpretations of culture, views of history, political ideas, and notions of modernity and colonialism, which emerged in the emigrant community following 1949, refer to a range of exile experiences? Indeed, the question of whether exile might have formed a meaningful backdrop for reflection on China in the humanities and social sciences, social criticism or positions of political idealism has, as yet, barely been addressed.

There are many reasons for this. For example, Chinese academics and intellectuals who emigrated seem for the most part to have deliberately refrained from presenting themselves explicitly as exiles. This was especially true once it became clear towards the end of the 1950s that their place of exile would probably be their only refuge for the foreseeable future, making integration into the exilic environment considerably more important. In the People's Republic of China, emigrants were either ostracized for a long period for politico-ideological reasons, or they were only partially accepted, since criticism

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11 By way of example, we refer the reader to the following works, which combine the issue of exile with considerations on the biography of the authors: Kubin 1996, 95–97; *idem* in Bei Dao 2001, 79–81; Brady 1997; Huang Weiliang 1997, 541–548.

12 Wolfgang Kubin warns against a possible instrumentalization of the exile situation in the context of certain authors involved in literary projects following the Cultural Revolution, and in so doing exposes the use of the apparent status of dissident or (self-)exile, as, for example, in the cases of Bei Ling or Gao Xingjian as a tactical manoeuvre. Equally, he points to those authors who regard exile as a challenge used to enrich their own language. See Kubin 2005, 373; 2005a, 241–244.

of the regime was naturally particularly irritating to the ruling powers. Doubtless a further element is the fact that the picture painted by modern Confucianists, but also by other emigrants, of China as *one* nation in the decades following 1949 gradually faded in the light of the political reality, namely the animosity between two Chinese nation states, and its appeal accordingly waned. One important aspect of exile was the continuing orientation of the emigrants towards “China” and the accompanying mental distancing from the place of exile, its history and its culture. In Taiwan in particular, as Hsiao A-chin demonstrates in his contribution, there was a post-war generation of young intellectuals who, from the 1970s onwards, began to question the “exile mentality” of the older generation. As a new social force, these younger intellectuals prioritized the political reforms of a “return-to-reality” and a cultural and attitudinal shift epitomized by a “return-to-native-soil”. The passivity of the older generation of exile intellectuals, which had deepened as a result of political, social and cultural repression under the Guomintang regime in the 1950s and 1960s, now gave way to the new intensified activism of younger intellectuals. As a result, social and intellectual movements evolved in which constructs of collective, specifically Taiwanese identity were played out against an exilic consciousness that was strongly oriented towards China. Taiwanese circles opposed to the Guomintang regime shared – albeit implicitly and for very different reasons – the latter’s critical stance toward exilic consciousness in Taiwan. They thus rejected any characterization of Taiwan as a place of exile. However, the politicized agenda of an alleged “return-to-reality” was prone to one-sidedly depict the exilic experience of people from the Chinese Mainland as a trigger for the marginalization of the local (“Taiwanese”) social reality in post-war Taiwan. In a highly debatable, though implicit conclusion, exilic experience was seen as one of the causes that effectuated a politically and culturally repressive mentality in Taiwan which was bolstered by the authoritarian rule of the Guomintang regime.

When we recall that for many decades after 1949 Chinese academics in the emigrant community made considerable contributions and were often an impetus for Chinese studies in the West, then the exclusion of exile as a meaningful point of reference in the humanities and social sciences proves to be quite concerning. To date, relatively little consideration has been given to the possibility that the influential ideas, categories and interpretations from Chinese studies introduced by Chinese intellectuals in exile not only reflect familiar dichotomies of tradition and modernity, of Chinese culture and Western civilization and certain political leanings (e.g. anti-communism), but that they were also shaped against the backdrop of exile. We thus also run the risk of failing to recognize that, in the wider context of 20th century exile, the experiences of thinkers such as Hu Shi, Lao Sze-kwang, Tang Junyi and Xu Fuguan were exilic, and that they were specifically modern thinkers. As such, their reflections on the phenomenon of cultural hybridity as well as on the prerequisites for and the conditions of cultural understanding can no longer be simply organized within the customary schematism of

China's social, political and cultural unity or in terms of China's position in the world with regard to politics or civilization. Their thoughts ultimately anticipated certain developments in Western Chinese studies. For proof of this, we can turn to a thesis whose significance has now been strongly relativized: that China was only able to find a productive connection to social modernity thanks to the West's civilizational challenges. This picture of a China that was apparently characterized by the tension between its own cultural traditions, on the one hand, and Western modernity, on the other, became untenable in light of the exilic Chinese intellectuals, as did the model of the largely hidden Western-European/North American – and thus ethnocentric – processes of rationalization and modernization.<sup>13</sup> This schematic model of “Western challenge and Chinese response” proved to be inadequate, not least because exilic experiences seemed to encourage openness toward hybrid cultural formations on an intellectual level and at the level of practical existence.

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13 Even discussions within the field of contemporary North American Chinese Studies on the so-called “cultural China” contain numerous concepts and terms which shaped earlier debates among intellectuals in exile. However, the subsequent generation freed these ideas from the contexts of exile and the corresponding hermeneutic references, which were, for example, still relevant to Hu Shi, and introduced their own discourses, such as the one on the power relation between the periphery and the center. Cf. Tu, “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center”, pp. 1–34.

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