Sinology: Chinese Intellectual History and Transcultural Studies

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The guest editors of this journal issue have kindly asked me to provide a short overview of the relation between transcultural studies and Chinese intellectual history in Euro-American academia. There was a certain risk in accepting this request, as it might be either too small or too big a task. It would be too small if I narrowed it down to a review of explicit references to transcultural studies within Chinese intellectual history; but it would be too big if I extended it to a study of all the questions, approaches, and methods that the two fields have developed in the last few decades. To overcome these difficulties, I decided to focus on the legacy of one shared methodological point: the critique of so-called "methodological nationalism," that is, of the assumption (explicit or not) that the nation is the ultimate framework of research.[1] This critique has become a constitutive principle of transcultural studies, while it came to represent only a particular approach within Chinese intellectual history. Still, the two fields have developed a shared agenda in this regard. This essay limits itself to pointing out the presence of this critique in both fields—which might be as much a sign of open scholarly exchanges as evidence of the parallel adoption of common references— and offers an illustration of the complex relations that exist between institutional labels, methodological agendas, scientific communication, and actual scholarly practice.

Chinese intellectual history and transcultural studies have resulted from a specific division of intellectual labor within the Euro-American academic world. Transcultural studies, a relatively new research field, has only taken institutional shape in the last few decades; it represents a critical response to the abuses of the concept of culture as a heuristic tool, and attempts, among other things, to overcome the institutional partitions and conceptual biases that area studies have fostered in the humanities and social sciences (although transcultural studies are, to a large extent, grounded

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1   This concept, undoubtedly inspired by "methodological individualism," seems to have first been used in the 1970s. The term has become more widespread in the last few decades, partly because of its critical use in global history and transcultural studies. For a discussion of this methodological assumption and a brief history of the expression, see Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences," *Global Networks* 4, no. 4 (2002): 301–334.

in the findings of area-based research). Chinese intellectual history is an older field. A particular branch of Chinese history, it has inherited many of its basic approaches and methodologies from a long tradition of area studies—Chinese studies—and from its immediate ancestors, "history of Chinese philosophy" and "history of Chinese thought." The respective scientific *habitus* of transcultural studies and Chinese intellectual history have been the ground of sympathetic but uneasy relations. Transcultural studies scholars find in Chinese intellectual history the necessary expertise on China-related questions, and have actually taken from it some of its debates and approaches (many transcultural studies scholars actually come from Chinese studies); but they do not feel at ease with the area-based definition of the latter's research objects. Chinese intellectual history sees in transcultural studies an attentive interlocutor and is in certain cases tempted to merge with it; but some of its practitioners fear that if they fully adopt transcultural methods, they might lose the institutional prerogatives they enjoy within area studies. The two fields therefore view each other with both interest and a certain mistrust.

In order to explain these tensions and convergences, and according to the guidelines of this themed section, I will first offer a historical overview of the two fields. After that, I will explain their respective attitudes towards methodological nationalism and give evidence from their recent history of some intersecting points in this regard.[2] This essay was originally supposed to encompass Chinese academia, but when I started, I soon realized that such a task demanded a different and longer text. For that reason, the picture I give below sets aside the interconnections between Euro-American and East Asian scholarship; neither does it explore the fundamental role that Chinese scholarship (and in many instances Japanese scholarship as well) has played in shaping the agenda of Euro-American Chinese studies; nor does it show how many methodological and theoretical approaches coming from Europe and America—transcultural studies included—have contributed to shape the agenda of Chinese historiography. A more complete picture should take this shared history into account. As a necessarily unsatisfactory compensation, I will, in some cases, refer to the way Chinese-speaking debates conditioned the development of a particular approach or advanced the study of a particular object within Euro-American scholarship.

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2   For Chinese intellectual history, I will only address research on imperial China (from the third century BC to the twentieth century), mostly because of its traditional association with classical sinology. Although the research on the empire increasingly shares its methods of inquiry with the study of contemporary China, it seems to me that the tradition of classical sinology has bequeathed to the study of imperial history particular features that justify this separate treatment. For lack of space, I also leave aside the studies on pre-imperial China.

Paradoxes of the transcultural approach and the Latin American origins of the field

As contributors to this themed section on transcultural studies, we were asked to explain, in the first place, what transcultural studies means for us—not as practitioners (I would not necessarily consider myself to be one), but as observers. This request is a highly relevant one because the term "transcultural" has multiple meanings. Its relatively recent consolidation as an institutional label, as well as the multiple uses it has been given in the second half of the twentieth century, make it necessary to clarify the sort of transcultural studies we have in mind.[3] I will thus start with a definition: transcultural studies is a methodological approach. This approach attempts, on the one hand, to overcome the idea, common in the humanities and social sciences, that cultures (or "civilizations") are homogeneous, well-bounded, self-engendered entities; on the other, it proposes research methods that shed a light not only on connections between supposedly disconnected human groups, but also on disconnections within supposedly homogeneous communities. In other words, transcultural studies sets out to study, as Monica Juneja suggests, "processes of relationality," that is, the ways in which human relations (mostly *asymmetric* relations) are constantly changing beneath, beyond, and across presumably fixed group boundaries.[4] A transcultural critique of methodological nationalism is related to this scientific agenda. For transcultural studies, the concepts of "nations" and "cultures"—not as legitimate objects of scientific inquiry, but as naturalized frameworks of research—are among the main obstacles to understanding the actual processes of group formation.

In this sense, it might be worth giving a short explanation of the (not necessarily explicit) social ontology that characterizes transcultural studies.

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3   An old example of these institutional uses (at least in English) is the section of Transcultural Psychiatric Studies at McGill University, created in 1955. "Transcultural" was at the time used for the field of psychiatry. Later on, the expression "transcultural studies" appeared in anthropology and literary studies, and, slightly later, throughout the humanities and social sciences. Recent examples are the different Centers of Transcultural Studies at the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, and Heidelberg University. For the migration of the word "transcultural" among disciplines and fields, see König and Rakow's "The Transcultural Approach Within a Disciplinary Framework: An Introduction," *Transcultural Studies* 2 (2016): 89–100.

4   Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna, "Understanding Transculturalism," in *Transcultural Modernisms*, eds. Fahim Amir (Vienna: Sternberg Press), 32. For some contributions to this field, see the overview by Christiane Brosius and Roland Wenzlhuemer, "Introduction—Transcultural Turbulences: Towards a Multi-sited Reading of Image Flows," in *Transcultural Turbulences: Towards a Multi-sited Reading of Image Flows*, ed. Christiane Brosius and Roland Wenzlhuemer (Heidelberg: Springer, 2011), 3–25; see also Königs and Rakow, "The Transcultural Approach Within a Disciplinary Framework."

This social ontology could be labelled both relational and kinetic. Relational, because it assumes that relations precede isolation; it takes for granted that even the most seemingly isolated culture is constituted by constantly changing relations that either endanger or simply make impossible any pretended insularity. Kinetic, because it assumes that everything moves and changes; it posits that stasis is only the momentary interruption of motion, and that the actual flows of persons, things, and ideas across the world prevent the definitive consolidation of any boundaries. Against an understanding of cultures that is built on the image of a world of juxtaposed, self-sustained, territorially bounded communities, and that consequently emphasizes the relative immobility of cultures in space and their self-engendering powers in time, transcultural studies focuses on those phenomena that show that even the strictest boundaries need the active collaboration of those within and those outside these boundaries, and that the creation of a closed space presupposes the (necessarily transitory) enforcement of limitations on human movement. In other words, transcultural studies presupposes that people are naturally inclined to move, even if it is from one room to another of their own house. Its question is how that movement is motivated, situated, oriented, and conditioned. In the relational and kinetic ontology of transcultural studies, what is usually called a "cultural" boundary—based on social relations, linguistic exchange, shared symbols, etc.—is seen not as the ultimate cause, but as the result of human activity, of a constant struggle to preserve and dissolve social configurations, and to shape the movement of persons and objects across the world. This approach has brought together trends that have developed in anthropology, sociology, and history;[5] it is on its basis that transcultural studies has developed its critique of methodological nationalism and its means to overcome it.

The name of this field, "transcultural studies," might contradict its fundamental approach. Indeed, the literal interpretation of the signifier "transcultural," along with "transculturality" (as a property of a phenomenon) and "transculturation" (as a process), does not necessarily suggest its kinetic and relational social ontology. This is due to the inevitable coexistence between older uses of the word and the meaning it was given by transcultural studies. In the 1940s, when Cuban cultural anthropologist Fernando Ortiz introduced the term "transculturation" to the humanities and social sciences, the term was actually complicit with a particular form of methodological nationalism.

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5   Among the anthropological ancestors of this approach is Fredrik Barth's *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1969); Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

Ortiz's intention was to substitute the term "acculturation," which dominated English-speaking anthropology in the 1930s and 1940s. In his opinion, "acculturation" was an unsuccessful term because it suggested a process of acquiring a new (superior) culture and substituting an old (inferior) one, and thus stood for cultural replacement. On the contrary, "transculturation" supposed cultural loss, cultural mixture, and cultural creation, that is, the fusion of elements from several cultures into a new one.[6] In a context of deep reflection about "national cultures" in Cuba and, more generally, Latin America—indeed, a strong methodological nationalism pervades the Latin American cultural anthropology of those years—many Latin American scholars embraced the concept of "transculturation" to think about "national cultures" in their societies, which consisted of aboriginal populations, migrants from different parts of Europe, and descendants of African slaves as well as Spanish and Portuguese colonizers. The new concept certainly changed the perception of national cultures in Latin America, but it did not entail a rejection of essentializing definitions of cultures. "Transculturation" was intended to conceptualize a transformation from a particular culture to another through the interaction of different traditions; it was the name of a process which did not happen to all the cultures of the world, and which ideally presupposed the existence of a bounded nation (such as Cuba) both at the beginning and at the end of the transformation.[7] In this sense, the word "transcultural," in

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6   There was a transatlantic debate on the term "acculturation." Even though Malinowski used it in his work, he thought it had ethnocentric and colonialist implications: the word suggested the idea that a supposedly "primitive" group had to leave its own "inferior" culture to assimilate the "superior" one of the colonizer. On the contrary, for Melville Herskovits (one of the three authors of the 1936 *Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation*), who actually shared Malinowski's and Ortiz's positions, the term "acculturation" did not necessarily suppose that one of the two cultures in contact is superior to the other. On this debate, see Armando Martí Carvajal, "Contrapunteo etnológico: El debate aculturación o transculturación desde Fernando Ortiz hasta nuestros días," *Kálathos* 4, no. 2 (2010–2011): 1–22; on Fernando Ortiz, the concept of *transculturación*, and reflections on culture and national cultures in Latin America around the 1940s, see Enrique Rodríguez Larreta, "Cultura e Hibridación: Sobre algunas fuentes latinoamericanas [Culture and hybridization: On some Latin American sources]," in "La batalla conceptual en América Latina: Hacia una historia conceptual de los discursos políticos," *Anales-Instituto Ibero Americano* 7–8 (2005): 107–123.

7   Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar* (1940; repr., Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1983), 90. This is the paragraph where Ortiz explains the virtues of the neologism "transculturation" to describe the complexities of cultural transformation in Cuba: "Entendemos que el vocablo *transculturación* expresa mejor las diferentes fases del proceso transitivo de una cultura a otra, porque éste no consiste solamente en adquirir una distinta cultura, que es lo que en rigor indica la voz angloamericana *acculturation*, sino que el proceso implica también necesariamente la pérdida o desarraigo de una cultura precedente, lo que pudiera decirse una parcial *desculturación*, y, además, significa la consiguiente creación de fenómenos culturales que pudieran denominarse de *neoculturación*. Al fin, como bien sostiene la escuela de Malinowski, en todo abrazo de culturas sucede lo que en la cópula genética de los individuos: la criatura siempre tiene algo de ambos progenitores, pero también siempre es distinta de cada uno de los dos. En conjunto, el proceso es una *transculturación*, y este vocablo comprende todas las fases de su parábola." Ortiz, *Contrapunteo*,

its original sense, contradicts the border-crossing kinetic and relational ontology of transcultural studies. The morphology of this word requires our capacity to imagine stable cultures before we can conceive them in motion through the prefix "trans-," and it is perfectly compatible with an idea that present-day transcultural studies strongly contests: that the world is populated with contiguously set homogeneous cultures which in some cases, and only some, develop intersections between them or influence each other.[8] This is, so to speak, the "old regime" of the word, and it coincides with the use of terms like "cross-cultural." Three important figures—Ángel Rama in Latin America, and Wolfgang Welsch and Mary Louise Pratt in the Euro-American world[9]—have, to a certain extent and in various ways, followed this definition and contributed to the consolidation of this term in literary studies and philosophy.

In the last few decades, however, the word "transcultural" has been given a new meaning and used to label the kinetic and relational agenda of transcultural studies. The practitioners of transcultural studies claim that every human phenomenon is transcultural, and that there is only one reality, not two: there is nothing cultural that is not at the same time transcultural. In this new use—the one that characterizes the "new regime" of transcultural studies—a

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102–103. ("I am of the opinion that the word *transculturation* better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word *acculturation* really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation. In the end, as the school of Malinowski's followers maintains, the result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them." Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, 2nd ed. [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947; Durham: Duke University Press, 1995].) The 1995 republication of the 1947 English version of Ortiz's work (which had little impact at the time) was the product of and fed into a resurging interest in transcultural interaction beyond Cuba and Latin America.

8   It is indeed on the basis of this old use of the word "transcultural" that Umberto Eco and Alain Le Pichon founded the Institut International TRANSCULTURA in 1988. See the presentation on the institute's website: http://transcultura.org/?q=node/2 [Accessed on 17. August 2016]. In Wolfgang Welsch, "Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today," in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage, 1999), 194–213, the author claims that transculturality is a more appropriate concept than culture to describe modern societies, and in this sense he shares an approach with transcultural studies. However, he is closer to Fernando Ortiz than to the later developments of transcultural studies, because in his view some societies are "transcultural" and others are not. In this sense, transculturality is for him a historical phenomenon, not an ontological assumption.

9   Ángel Rama, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* [Narrative transculturation in Latin America] (Buenos Aires: Ediciones El Andariego, 2007); Welsch, "Transculturality," 194–213; Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," in *Ways of Reading*, ed. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky, 4th ed. (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 528–542; Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

literal interpretation of "transcultural" as "trans…culture" would be misleading: transcultural studies does not focus on cultural intersections or—as Mary Louise Pratt put it—on "contact zones," because all human relations are themselves a zone of contact and a cultural intersection. Transcultural studies focuses on the processes of formation and dissolution of human configurations that create the moving boundaries of what we see as self-sustained cultures. This new use of "transcultural" has not yet been generally accepted. Indeed, the inevitable coexistence of the new and the old meaning, together with the ambiguity motivated by the literal composition of this word (coined, as we saw, in an anthropological debate in the 1940s), make it difficult for transcultural studies to prevent misunderstandings: for even if the practitioners of transcultural studies claim that the transcultural should ontologically precede the cultural, other scholars can still use the same word to claim that the cultural logically precedes the transcultural.[10] If transcultural studies, despite this inevitable semantic ambiguity, still sticks to this word, it is because they see in it the possibility of imposing their agenda through a rhetorical strategy. Instead of finding a new word, they employ this prestigious old term to improve rhetorical effectiveness; they use it as a device for intervention, and not necessarily for conceptual description. By evoking a tradition with the purpose of enhancing rhetorical efficacy, and by claiming that the transcultural precedes the cultural, the field assumes the contradiction inherent to the literal interpretation of the term, as if it intended to produce perplexity through aporia. This rhetorical procedure, which simultaneously puts into crisis the concepts "cultural" and "transcultural," should eventually lead to the abolition of both concepts as heuristic tools— and therefore questions the idea that practices and concepts are shaped by one single belonging.[11] In this sense, although the label "transcultural studies" might not be fully appropriate from a conceptual point of view, and although the ambiguities of this label might lead to some premises that contradict the agenda they encompass, the practitioners of this field use it to take part in more general endeavors in the humanities and social sciences to overcome the limitations of the concept of culture as a self-engendered and tightly bounded entity.[12]

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10   For the coexistence of this new approach with previous ones, see Afef Benessaieh and Patrick Imbert, "Conclusion: La transculturalité relationnelle," in *Transcultural Americas/Amériques Transculturelles*, ed. Afef Benessaieh (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010), 231–242.

11   Another important aspect of the label is the word "studies." The choice of this word is probably related to the fact that strong disciplinary names like "history," "sociology," or "anthropology" would favor some approaches and questions over others. But it might also be meant to mirror area studies: instead of the national or regional labels of the "areas" (which, as I mention below, also enjoy some disciplinary flexibility), we find a processual and relational label, "transculturality," as the single object of research.

12   For some examples of this transcultural approach, see König and Rakow, "The Transcultural Approach Within a Disciplinary Framework."

Indeed, the critique of the limitations of the concept of culture is not an exclusive feature of transcultural studies. Actually, this field seems to have combined existing approaches and methods taken from other fields in the humanities and social sciences combined in a new way. Many of these approaches and methods were produced with the explicit purpose of overcoming insular understandings of culture; others were developed for different purposes but nevertheless found a new life within this field. In the following, I will only mention those tools that have been mobilized by transcultural studies with the sole aim of critiquing methodological nationalism. In this regard, transcultural studies has developed a twofold imbrication with the rest of the humanities and social sciences. From the point of view of its connection with other fields, transcultural studies shares some concerns with *Transfergeschichte*, global history, connected history, and *histoire croisée*, all of which feature approaches to overcome nation-based historical narratives;[13] from a methodological point of view, they have been strongly influenced by actor-network theory, network sociology, and microhistory—though the influence is not always apparent. The connection with the neighboring fields is clear enough: in most of them, the critique of methodological nationalism is a constitutive task. The relation with actor-network theory, network sociology, or microhistory, however, deserves an explanation. These three approaches could actually be perfectly compatible with methodological nationalism; however, when used against it, they become powerful tools to deconstruct it. Scholars in transcultural studies have indeed employed them to "denationalize" their objects of inquiry; their analyses stick to the actual relations, networks, or associations (also "assemblages") that constitute their objects, no matter whether they go beyond or remain within national boundaries, and mobilize different scales of observation to trace evidence of long-distance and short-distance relations.[14] In other words,

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13   For these similar agendas, see for example Daniel Rodgers, Bhavani Raman, and Helmut Reimitz, eds., *Cultures in Motion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Caroline Douki and Philippe Minard, "Histoire globale, histoires connectées: Un changement d'échelle historiographique? Introduction," in "Histoire globale, histoires connectées," special issue, *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 54–4bis (2007): 7–21; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735–762; Carol Gluck and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Words in Motion: Towards a Global Lexicon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Roger Chartier, "La conscience de la globalité," *Annales* 56 (2001): 119–123; Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 30–50. Global history and anthropology have undoubtedly played a key role in developing the transcultural agenda. For a review of some of these shared debates, see Laurent Berger, "La place de l'ethnologie en histoire globale," *Monde(s)*, 3 (2013): 193–212.

14   On actor-network analysis, see for example Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, "Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How Actors Macro-structure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them to Do So," in *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology*, ed. Karin Knorr-Cetina and Aaron Cicourel (London:

although transcultural studies employs network sociology, actor-network theories, and microhistorical tools in different ways, there usually is a clear purpose: when applied to the strongly nationalized societies of the contemporary world, these tools disclose the internal disconnections and external connections that denaturalize national boundaries, and show how national institutions are shaped by larger, non-national relations across the world. When applied to the non-nationalized societies in both the contemporary and the non-contemporary world, they reveal alternative patterns of group and institutional formation—thus questioning the applicability of nation-based narratives to societies which have not needed the nation to build their own institutions.[15]

Chinese intellectual history, its ancestors, and the spectre of methodological nationalism

This subchapter offers a brief historical outline of the study of pre-1911 Chinese intellectual history and, more generally, of Chinese studies. It is a necessary step before we can identify the convergences and divergences of this field with transcultural studies.

Schematically speaking, Chinese intellectual history has had to deal with three traditions within Chinese studies. Two of these emerged from the nineteenth-century discipline of classical sinology: the first is characterized by a strong textual and philological approach (in the restricted sense that it seeks to establish the meaning of texts, mostly with translation purposes), the second by the incorporation of analytical tools from the social sciences and humanities. Despite recurrent tensions, the two traditions have kept fluid relations, probably because they grew from the same roots. The philological tradition is the older of the two; philology and textual analysis were one of the main features of sinology when the discipline was founded in the first half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, although sinology inherited the philosophical,

Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 277–303. For an introduction to the different approaches in network sociology, see Pierre Mercklé, *Sociologie des réseaux sociaux* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011). On microhistory, see Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things that I Know about It," in *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 193–214; Jacques Revel, "Micro-analyse et construction du Social," in *Jeux d'échelles: La micro-analyse à l'expérience*, ed. Jacques Revel, (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1996), 15–36.

15   For the presence of these methodological tools within transcultural studies, see the above quoted interview between Christian Kravagna and Monica Juneja, "Understanding Transculturalism," 23–33; and Monica Juneja, "Global Art History and the 'Burden of Representation'," in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. Hans Belting, Jakob Birken, and Andrea Buddensieg (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 274–297; see also König and Rakow, "The Transcultural Approach Within a Disciplinary Framework" in this journal issue (especially definition 4 of their different meanings of "transcultural").

religious, and literary discussions about China among Enlightenment philosophers and Catholic (mostly Jesuit) missionaries, its constitution as a discipline had strong philological roots.[16] This almost exclusively philological orientation of sinology, which extended from the French *sinologues de chambre* and the *Altertumswissenschaft*-inspired German sinologists to many of the American and British missionaries who marked the English-speaking sinological agenda,[17] was questioned in the first half of the twentieth century. Some sinologists, though not necessarily against philology, attempted to bring the discipline closer to other social sciences, and therefore subordinated philological studies to wider methodological discussions and to new research questions. This was the beginning of a second tradition in Euro-American sinology. Edouard Chavannes, for example, renewed the sinological agenda with methods from European history and archeology; Marcel Granet, with methods from Durkheimian sociology; Otto Franke, with methods taken from German historiography (he studied with J. G. Droysen). This second tradition, though sometimes critical of the philological orientation of the first professional sinologists, did not dispute philology's right to exist; on the contrary, it often resorted to its tools in order to better understand the textual corpus on the basis of which it raised its hypotheses. A remarkable feature is the unassuming attitude many of its practitioners had toward China as an object of inquiry; although they considered themselves, like classical sinologists, specialists on China, they often defined themselves in disciplinary terms, as sociologists or historians.[18]

The strongest break with the philological bias, which paved the way to a third tradition in Chinese studies, came from the United States: it was the creation of "area studies." After World War II, during the Cold War period, figures like

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16   David Honey, *Incense at the Altar: Pioneering Sinologists and the Development of Classical Chinese Philology* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2001), xi.

17   An exception should be made regarding what David Honey calls "sinological orientalism," a thorough examination of which would go beyond the scope of this essay. I will only mention that sinology, since its foundation, has had an ambiguous relation with sinological orientalism. The tensions between the two did not emerge from the more general attack on orientalism inspired by Edward Said's book; they probably existed already in the nineteenth century. When sinological orientalism was represented by a parallel field, for example among philosophers, the tensions with sinology did not spring from ideological and cultural critiques, but mostly from the opposition between "scientific" and "non-scientific" methods of inquiry. From a historical perspective, however, we can say that some orientalist perceptions were common to both sinology and non-sinological inquiries about China. These ambiguous relations within and beyond the discipline are actually part of the history of both Chinese studies and sinological orientalism. Indeed, we should not ignore the fact that even the sometimes silent, sometimes open tensions between the two have to a certain extent determined each other's agendas, even when the two have seemed to follow separate paths. On sinological orientalism, see Honey, *Incense*, 35–39.

18   For Franke, see Honey, *Incense*, 139; for Granet, see below.

John King Fairbank openly dismissed the philological concerns of traditional sinology and worked to develop an approach based on area expertise.[19] This expertise certainly included language training, but it also required a combination of other social sciences in order to obtain an accurate knowledge of modern China. The new orientation was marked by a strong modernist bias; the Chinese imperial past, though certainly not rejected, was only taken into account as either the germ of modern China or as the tradition to be overcome.[20] The difference between this area expertise and the second sinological tradition mentioned above lay in the use it made of scientific methods: while someone like Marcel Granet would see himself as a Durkheimian sociologist whose research object only happened to be in China,[21] the area specialist privileged the figure of the "China expert" and pragmatically subordinated the use of scientific methods to the general purpose of understanding the "area."[22] The success of this tradition has led to the definitive consolidation of "Chinese studies" as the general name for the discipline. And although the labels "sinology" and "Chinese studies" can now be used interchangeably to refer to the study of China, "sinology" is sometimes used as a pejorative term for the old philological approach.[23]

Chinese studies—its three traditions confounded—offers both strict limitations and some generous privileges to its practitioners. Of its limitations, I will only mention two. The first is that the scholars of the three traditions, though often members of the same departments, have sometimes lived in separate worlds. Since they often (not always) differ in their interests, theoretical frameworks, and methods of inquiry, they have trouble establishing scientific communication with each other. The second limitation, a more relevant one for the purpose of this essay, is related to the delimitation of the area, whether or not it is the individual scholar's primary concern. The area, in principle, is China. But what is China? What languages, groups, or practices should

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19   Fairbank had an explicitly anti-philological approach, and he wrote a history of Chinese studies. See Honey, *Incense*, 269–273. The turning point in this regard was probably the launch of Sputnik in 1957; thereafter, Russian and Chinese area studies departments were established in many institutions.

20   For modernization theory in East Asian history (mainly in Japanese studies), see Krämer's contribution in this issue.

21   Maurice Freedman, "Marcel Granet, 1844–1940, Sociologist," in *The Religion of the Chinese People*, ed. and trans. Maurice Freedman (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977).

22   These two poles of the relation between area studies and "systematic disciplines," with examples taken from sinology, are well explained and put into historical perspective in Michael Lackner and Michael Werner, *Der* cultural turn *in den Humanwissenschaften: Area Studies im Auf- oder Abwind des Kulturalismus?* (Bad Homburg: Programmbeirat der Werner Reimers Konferenzen, 1999), 51–54.

23   In the next few pages, unless otherwise specified, we will use both "sinology" and "Chinese studies" for the same discipline.

be included? And how much can the study of China be kept apart from the study of East Asia, South Asia, or, in modern times, Europe and America, which have all contributed to shape the "Chinese world" as we know it today? It is true that few China scholars would claim that the "China" they study is an isolated, self-sustained object. The area studies tradition, grounded to a large extent in modernization theory, pointed out supposedly universal tendencies that downplay Chinese singularity; it also resorted, like the philological tradition, to comparative history, precisely with the intention of identifying not only differences and shared features, but also relations between areas; and, more importantly, it was largely based on the now obsolete "impact-response" theory, which assumes that Chinese history has been shaped by external influences and that, in Paul Cohen's words, "the confrontation with the West was the most significant influence on events in China."[24] In short, area studies, like the philological tradition, did not entail parochialism; it studied China in a global perspective. But methodological nationalism was precisely rooted in this perspective, whether in practice or in theory. Each area, usually a nation, was considered as the fundamental unit of research; the impact-response theory, which pointed to cross-border interactions, assumed that area boundaries were the fundamental borders where the endogenous ended and external influence started. Area studies, in this sense, have inscribed methodological nationalism in the institutional division of academic labor. This might have been one of the reasons why many practitioners, generally aware of the existence of transregional dynamics, feel a tension between the institutional constraints their departments impose on their work and the inherent non-national dynamics of their research objects—and, perhaps, one of the reasons why a significant number of transculturalists are area studies scholars who decide to overcome these limitations.

I will come back to this complicity between "arealized" research and institutionalized methodological nationalism. But before I do, I would like to mention a positive dimension of area studies that might have opened the door not only to transcultural studies, but to very different methods and approaches: the tendency to dissolve disciplinary compartmentalization. Although the area focus has sometimes imposed artificial limits on the objects of enquiry, it has granted the scholar, especially in Europe, much freedom to overcome disciplinary boundaries. The area-based studies, and Chinese studies in particular, often stay away from interdisciplinary disputes in the humanities

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24   See Paul Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 9. Cohen gives as an example John K. Fairbank's *China's Response to the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954). This focus on the relation with the West might have been an effect of the scant archival materials available at the time, most of them related to foreigners and missionaries.

and social sciences, or only take a small part in them. Precisely because Chinese studies do not have a clear disciplinary identity, but mostly an "area" identity (even when they reject it), sinologists feel free to draw on methods and questions from the wider humanities and social sciences. Although they may appropriate them in a somewhat unruly way, and may sometimes be unaware of the specific debates and traditions that ground each discipline, they enjoy a higher degree of disciplinary flexibility and can therefore concentrate on how productive a particular question, approach, or method proves to be when applied to their area-defined objects of inquiry. In this sense, if Chinese studies might sometimes develop their own "disciplinary ethnocentrism"— that is, a parochial defense of their own traditions and approaches—they do not force it to coincide with the sort of disciplinary ethnocentrism sometimes developed within sociology, anthropology, philosophy, history, or economics.[25] Paul Cohen's "China-centered" approach was an attempt at developing this positive dimension of Chinese studies; although it was later associated with methodological (and not only methodological) nationalism, its starting point was to deliver research from the deductive universalism of modernization and impact-response theories.[26]

Intellectual history, like transcultural studies, has penetrated sinology through these interstices of disciplinary freedom. It is hard to ascertain when exactly the label "intellectual history" was first used in the humanities, or when it came to designate a distinct research field. The expression can be traced as far back as the nineteenth century. What is important for the purpose of this essay is that in the 1980s, when the expression was increasingly used in the English-speaking world and was consolidated by academic journals, book titles, and university chairs and departments, the term "intellectual history" was often used to indicate something other than the more traditional "history of ideas" and "history of thought." After a decade of relative marginalization during the 1970s (at least in the English-speaking world),[27] intellectual history revived with a methodological critique of these traditional associates; it claimed that ideas and thought could not be studied independently from

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25   See Bernard Lahire, "Des effets délétères de la division scientifique du travail sur l'évolution de la sociologie," *SociologieS*, discussion, La situation actuelle de la sociologie, http://sociologies. revues.org/3799 [Accessed on 28. July 2016]. The expression "disciplinary ethnocentrism" is taken from Norbert Elias. For the relation between disciplinary labels and methodological traditions in social and human sciences, see Jean-Claude Passeron, *Le raisonnement sociologique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006), 73–85.

26   See Cohen, *Discovering History in China*.

27   For the general decline of intellectual history in this period, see Anthony Grafton, *Worlds Made by Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 205.

the practices, institutions, and social relations that embodied them. The label "intellectual history" was therefore associated, on the one hand, with the endeavor to overcome unhistorical histories of thought, and, on the other, with the attempts to study the material and social conditions in which intellectually active persons, in different social and historical circumstances, developed and transmitted their ideas.[28]

The use of the label "intellectual history" in Chinese studies seems to be related to the same scientific endeavors. It is true that, in the field of Chinese studies, the expression "intellectual history" has been used since at least the 1940s, and that some major figures in Chinese intellectual history, like Benjamin Schwartz and Joseph Levenson, employed and sometimes even thoroughly defined this expression to characterize what they were doing.[29] However, it was most likely during the 1980s and 1990s, when intellectual history regained vitality in the humanities and social sciences in general, that Chinese intellectual history started marginalizing the more traditional "history of Chinese thought" and "history of Chinese philosophy." Actually, the scholars who, like in the older history of ideas, only present the internal logic of a discourse without historical context have been a minority in the field; in the United States, they seem to have been even rarer than in other places. This has facilitated the convergence between Chinese studies and recent developments in intellectual history—even if there does not seem to be a direct dialogue between the two. Conferences, book titles, and university chairs have given Chinese intellectual history relative autonomy as a research field, and although it has sometimes overlapped with cultural history (as was also the case beyond Chinese studies), its methodological lineage, indebted to the Schwartzian or Levensonian histories, seems to have given it a recognizable identity.[30]

In this sense, Chinese intellectual history lies at the crossroads of two fields. As part of intellectual history, it focuses on the history of intellectual

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28   For how leading historians understood "intellectual history" in the 1980s, see Stefan Collini's discussion in *History Today* 35, no. 10 (1985), with opinions given by himself, Michael Biddiss, Quentin Skinner, J. G. A. Pocock, and Bruce Kuklick. For earlier discussions on intellectual history and on different historiographical trends, see Samuel H. Beer, Lee Benson, Felix Gilbert, Stephen R. Graubard, David J. Herlihy, Stanley Hoffmann, Carl Kaysen, Leonard Krieger, Thomas S. Kuhn, David Landes, Joseph Levenson, Frank E. Manuel, J. G. A. Pocock, David J. Rothman, Carl E. Schorske, Lawrence Stone, and Charles Tilly, "New Trends in History," *Daedalus* 98, no. 4 (Fall 1969): 888–976.

29   See for example Benjamin Schwartz, "A Brief Defense of Political and Intellectual History… with Particular Reference to Non-Western Cultures," *Daedalus* 100, no. 1 (1971): 98–112.

30   See Benjamin Elman, "The Failures of Contemporary Chinese Intellectual History," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43, no. 3 (2010): 371–391, esp. 380.

procedures and activities without dissociating them from social and historical circumstances; this made it very receptive to approaches and methodologies from different fields and disciplines—transcultural studies among them. As part of Chinese studies, it focuses on the specific features of China, whatever groups, practices, and institutions that area may label. Through this area-based heritage methodological nationalism—though not always manifest—constantly threatens to shape the field.

Methodological nationalism has not always been a threat within Chinese studies, at least not in scholarly practice. Sinology came about and evolved during the nineteenth century, a time when the concept of nation, like the concepts of proto-national "cultures" and "civilizations," shaped European political and historiographical discourse.[31] Nevertheless, like New Qing historians today, the founding fathers of sinology, including Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat and Stanislas Julien, knew that to understand Qing China it was necessary to have a working knowledge of Manchu or Mongol and not only classical and vernacular Chinese. Their discourse on China was strongly marked by a national perspective,[32] but, in practice, they recognized the multi-ethnic dimensions of the Qing dynasty and, more generally, imperial Chinese history. The national perspective within Chinese studies became increasingly important during the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, and it arguably culminated in the development of area studies.[33] This nation-based approach might look somewhat suitable for the nation-state called "China" in the twenty-first century (although Pamela Crossley has already pointed out the complexity of this issue)[34]; however, when applied to Qing China, it inevitably shows its limitations. How could the "Chinese nation" be the framework to study the empire if, at least as an institutionally accepted name, it was only used in the early twentieth century? Before then, there was only a series of non-national processes of group formation and institutional framing, ranging from the imperial court to Tibetan populations, or from peasant villages to

31   Jörg Fisch, "Zivilization, Kultur," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, vol. 5 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992), 679–774, esp. 705–774.

32   See Abel-Rémusat's first lecture at the Collège de France (16 January 1816) in Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat, "Sur l'état et les progrès de la littérature chinoise en Europe," in *Mélanges Asiatiques*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Orientale de Dondey-Dupré père et fils, 1825), 295–307.

33   See Honey, *Incense*, 269–277. Chinese historiography certainly played an important role in the consolidation of this nation-based perspective. As I say above, I leave the complex relations between Euro-American Chinese studies and sinology for a future article.

34   Pamela Crossley, "Nationality and Difference in China: The Post-Imperial Dilemma," in *The Teleology of the Modern State: Japan and China*, ed. Joshua Fogel (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 138–158.

foreign concessions in nineteenth-century ports. The same applies to the term "Chinese culture." Where was that "Chinese" culture in this heterogeneous empire, where was that proto-national culture that justified the creation of the modern nation called "China"?[35] The connections between the different constituencies of the empire, only sometimes guaranteed by the institutional framework of the Qing, could only be subsumed under the label "China" when they were reinterpreted either by Chinese nationalist historiography in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century or by nation-oriented Euro-American narratives of Chinese history. Since then, the area framework, and with it methodological nationalism, continues to shape the institutional constraints of the field and is sometimes explicitly justified by some practitioners, regardless of the historical evidence of the empire's non-national nature, which a great number of sinologists have pointed out.[36]

Methodological nationalism is not only strong in Chinese intellectual history and Chinese studies overall: it has affected most of the field of area studies, which were institutionally built on the implicit assumption that their respective geographical areas of expertise only contain area-bounded histories. The area framework does not itself produce methodological nationalism, but facilitates its development. A well-known debate will illustrate the high level of consensus that such an approach still enjoys in area-based intellectual history. There is an exchange between J. G. A. Pocock and Reinhart Koselleck, the former a prominent representative of the Cambridge School of intellectual history, the latter a founder of the German *Begriffsgeschichte*. In their debate, the two scholars, despite the differences in their methodologies, agreed on a significant point: social and political concepts or languages are "nationally specific."[37] This assertion looks all the more paradoxical because in their

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35   This was not only pointed out by New Qing historians, who showed how the Qing emperors used different languages and practices to communicate with "nationally" different subjects. As we show in the following section, many intellectual historians of China have held that the boundaries of intellectual activity do not coincide with national boundaries even after the creation of the modern Chinese nation-state.

36   This is the case for some (not all) defenses of the concept of "sinicization," which can refer to different phenomena according to the period of Chinese history in question. For a criticism of the sinicization approach in Qing studies, see Pamela Crossley's *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1–9; and Evelyn Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Chinese Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1–13.

37   See J. G. A. Pocock, "Concepts and Discourses: A Difference in Culture?" in *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts: New Studies on* Begriffsgeschichte, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and Melvin Richter (Washington: German Historical Institute, 1986), 58. The critical analysis of this debate and, more largely, of the methods of conceptual history at large, has been the starting point of a three-year project "Towards a Global History of Concepts" at Heidelberg University.

works, these two scholars show that "English" and "German" ideas are intimately connected with "French" and "Italian" ones; they also show that the assumptions of the actors are in some cases radically different, or even disconnected, from the assumptions of their spatially close neighbors, and are in some other cases astonishingly similar to—because often connected with—those of people living thousands of kilometers away.[38] In this debate, Pocock and Koselleck stick to methodological nationalism; in their historiographical practice, they usually contradict it. Chinese intellectual history has remained largely unaware of this debate; however, its stakes are similar: since a contradiction between an institutionalized methodological nationalism and their actual "transcultural" practice is pervasive among its practitioners, transcultural studies has provided, and probably will continue to provide, important means of methodological clarification.

Chinese intellectual history and the transcultural agenda

If Chinese intellectual history now shares some elements with transcultural studies, it is because the two fields have developed intersecting points in the last few decades. There are at least two reasons for these intersections. First, transcultural studies put a strong emphasis on the non-European world, and maintained that, in order to study it, the research and institutional training of area studies—in this case, Chinese studies— is indispensable. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, many discussions in transcultural studies seem to have taken up arguments already developed by intellectual historians of China. Transcultural studies certainly owe many of their assumptions to the methodological discussions in global history, microhistory, and the other fields mentioned above; but they also owe them to the critical reflections produced by area scholars themselves, who have the necessary expertise to study documents from outside the Euro-American world. It is therefore unsurprising to find, among the main practitioners of transcultural studies, many historians of China or scholars who were originally trained as China specialists: they brought to transcultural studies their "area" expertise and the critiques addressed to their field from within. Nourished by the same debates in the humanities and social sciences that gave birth to transcultural studies, these specialists have produced historically grounded arguments that transcultural studies took as their constitutive principles. What were scattered critiques in area studies became systematic methodology in transcultural studies.

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38   The early modern "republic of letters" is an early example of intellectual circulation on a non-national basis. See David Mervart, "The Republic of Letters Comes to Nagasaki: Record of a Translator's Struggle," *Transcultural Studies* 2 (2015): 8–37.

Since at least the 1980s, Chinese intellectual history has been very sensitive to the "turns" that have helped establish transcultural studies as a field. This sensitivity did not mean passive reception; Chinese intellectual history not only made a selective appropriation of the new methods and approaches, but in some cases actually helped produce these "turns."[39] The first is the "global turn," which must be understood as a methodological agenda—that is, including even those scholars who criticize the use of the term "global" or refrain from using it at all. As Frederick Cooper suggests, the key issue for a "global" intellectual history is "who talks to whom"[40]—or, more precisely, what is connected to what, and how it is connected, in the world. The underlying idea is that the historian should follow evidence no matter where it leads her or him, and fully assume the implications of this methodology. Such an approach to global history, explicitly or not, has had a definite impact in Chinese history at large, and Chinese intellectual history is no exception.[41] The idea of "who talks to whom" is a point of methodological convergence with transcultural studies: it pushes the historian of China to analyze intellectual phenomena both beyond the nation, sometimes on a transcontinental scale, and within the nation, by pointing out the internal phenomena that contradict the presumed homogeneity of Chinese culture. The dialogue with the history of empires, a close ally of global history in its enterprise to denationalize history, has made it easier for Chinese studies to conceptualize their objects of inquiry in a non-national way.

Other turns have predisposed the field to focus on the processes of relationality that constitute the basis of transcultural studies. The material turn, which focuses on material culture and on practices of reading and writing, has drawn scholarly attention to the physical mobility of ideas or, more precisely, to the physical supports of ideas, be it books, pictures, or brains.[42] The history of

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39   Grafton, *Worlds Made by Words*, 212

40   Frederick Cooper, "How Global Do We Want Our Intellectual History to Be?" in Moyn and Sartori, *Global Intellectual History*, 283–294, esp. 292. In this sense, microhistory is not the opposite of global history: indeed, it is a necessary tool. See for example Carlo Ginzburg's recent essay, "Microhistory and World History" in *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 4, *A World with States, Empires, and Networks, 1200 BCE–900CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 446–473.

41   For examples of global history in Chinese and Western historiography on China, see for example Liu Xincheng, "The Global View of History in China," *Journal of World History* 23, no. 3 (2012): 491–511 (though not all the examples in this article correspond to the same conceptions of global history). For more examples, see below.

42   For an overview of different trends in the history of the book, see Cynthia J. Brokaw, "On the History of the Book in China," in *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3–54.

the book, quite successful in Chinese studies, is part of a general endeavor to reconstruct the material supports of ideas; the reconstruction of book circulation, translation, and reception beyond national boundaries has been one of the major tools mobilized in Chinese intellectual history against methodological nationalism. The impactful spatial turn has brought to the fore the spatial embeddedness of knowledge and therefore sensitized the China scholar to the particular features of the physical places involved in the production of ideas—whether those places lie within or outside of China.[43] The study of the "spaces of daily life" and of "sites of knowledge" are examples of this approach. The material and spatial turns have therefore brought resources into Chinese intellectual history to escape the deductive rhetoric of methodological nationalism (deductive, because it takes for granted that all intellectual exchanges are nationally bounded)[44] and has incited it to focus on the actual spatial and material circuits of intellectual transmission without assuming any national belonging. Finally, it must be noted that Chinese intellectual history was fed by the post-structuralist and postmodern waves that, since the 1970s, have dissolved unquestioned boundaries, approaches, and methods in the humanities and social sciences, with varying degrees of success. If Chinese intellectual history shares many points with the transcultural agenda, this is partly related to the fact that both have been fed by the same intellectual atmosphere since the 1980s.[45]

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43   For a review of this bibliography, see Yves Chevrier, "En introduction: De la cité problématique à la ville habitée; Histoire et historiographie de la société urbaine chinoise au XXe siècle," in *Citadins et citoyens dans la Chine du XXe siècle*, ed. Yves Chevrier, Alain Roux, and Xiaohong Xiao-Planes (Paris: Éditions de la MSH, 2011), 59–67. The "spatial history" in Chinese history, especially republican, is represented by Christian Henriot and Yeh Wen-hsin; in intellectual history, a recent example of the spatial approach can be found in Marc André Matten's works. For an overview of the "spatial turn" in the humanities and social sciences, see Christian Jacob, *Qu'est-ce qu'un lieu de savoir* (Marseille: Open Edition Press, 2014), esp. 43–57. It should therefore not be surprising to see that Christian Jacob's *Lieux de savoir* contains some chapters about Chinese history. Finally, although it does not belong to intellectual history, William Skinner's regional approach is worth mentioning, as it showed that the "nation" cannot be a research unit in late imperial Chinese economic and urban geography, because imperial society was organized in autonomous core macro-regions. See William Skinner, "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China," pts. 1–3, *Journal of East Asian Studies* 24, no. 1 (1964): 3–44; no. 2 (1965): 195–228; no. 3 (1965): 363–399; and William Skinner, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977).

44   On deductive rhetoric, see Maurizio Gribaudi, "Échelle, pertinence, configuration," in Revel, *Jeux d'échelles*, 113–139.

45   We are not going to deal with the complex role of postcolonial studies. In the case of Chinese history, the postcolonial approach, though indebted to poststructuralist radicalism, has sometimes reinforced methodological nationalism: its critique of Eurocentrism and its attempts at "provincializing" the Euro-American world are perfectly compatible with the idea that the ultimate form of human organization is a nation or a nation-like culture. For transcultural studies, however, postcolonial studies represents an early attempt to revalorize the study of the non-European and non-modern world.

There are several representative works of Chinese intellectual history that have addressed transcultural questions and deserve mention. There are, first of all, some authors who conduct research on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China. For example, Lydia Liu's *Translingual Practices*, which has had a lasting impact on Chinese intellectual history, attempts to place the transformations of early twentieth-century Chinese literature in the context of linguistic interactions between China, Europe, and Japan.[46] Rebecca Karl's *Staging the World*, Theodor Huters's *Bringing the World Home*, Tang Xiaobing's *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, Prasenjit Duara's *Rescuing History From the Nation*, and the China-related works of Douglas Howland also offer many examples of a transcultural approach in Chinese intellectual history.[47] These authors mostly work in American academia. As for European authors, two explicitly subscribe to the transcultural approach: Joachim Kurtz, especially in his *The Discovery of Chinese Logic*, and Rudolf Wagner, both in his works on the Chinese press and in his most recent research on the circulation of images and metaphors.[48] These two intellectual historians of China have played an important role in establishing a center of transcultural studies at Heidelberg University.[49] All of these authors represent, explicitly or not, a larger institutional impulse in the Euro-American academic world to develop a transcultural approach to Chinese intellectual history. It is not by accident that many elements of the transcultural agenda are particularly prominent in the historiography of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: it would indeed be impossible to understand this period of Chinese history without taking into account its

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46   Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity; China, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

47   Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Theodor Huters, *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2005); Tang Xiaobing, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Douglas Howland, *Borders of Chinese Civilization: Geography and History at Empire's End* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995). This is of course only a limited selection of some representative works.

48   Joachim Kurtz, *The Discovery of Chinese Logic* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Rudolf Wagner, "China 'Asleep' and 'Awakening': A Study in Conceptualizing Asymmetry and Coping with It," *Transcultural Studies* 1 (2011): 4–139. The latter's works on the Chinese press can also be included in the transcultural approach.

49   Many scholars directly or indirectly related to this center, like Barbara Mittler in her work on the *Shenbao* and Gotelind Müller-Saini on Chinese anarchism, approach Chinese intellectual history from the perspective of transcultural studies. See Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai's New Media, 1872–1912*, Harvard East Asian Studies Monographs 226 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Gotelind Müller-Saini, *China, Kropotkin und der Anarchismus* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001).

tight relations with its Japanese, European, and American counterparts. The intellectual history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has also converged with so-called "diaspora studies" because many important intellectuals in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China shaped their ideas in the Chinese neighborhoods of Southeast Asia, Europe, Oceania, nd the Americas.[50]

Some research on this period is therefore unintentionally transcultural. Although, in many cases, the relational approach of transcultural studies is absent. Instead, trans-national history is much more wide-spread, in the sense that many studies keep the nation as the basic unit of research. Nevertheless, the works mentioned above, like many others, deal in explicitly relational terms with Chinese intellectual history and, in so doing, often converge with transcultural studies.

Not all the quasi-transcultural works on Chinese intellectual history focus on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, Anne Cheng, who holds the Chaire d'Histoire Intellectuelle de la Chine at the Collège de France, the only chair in Western Europe to have adopted the label "Chinese intellectual history," has been moving in a transcultural direction in her courses on what could be called the "global lineages" of Confucius between the sixteenth and the twenty-first centuries. Somewhat earlier but also in the French-speaking world (and beyond), Denys Lombard, a specialist of East and Southeast Asia, has followed a transcultural direction as well. Although he has used the label "global history" for his own work on East and Southeast Asia since the sixteenth century, and although his major book, *Le carrefour javanais*, focuses on Java, his research has opened Chinese studies, and Asian studies in general, to many issues of the transcultural agenda, intellectual history included.[51] In the United States, the New Qing history, concerned with the relation between Manchus and Han, provides many examples of a transcultural approach in different domains of Chinese history since the seventeenth century. Because it conceives the Qing empire as a multicultural polity shaped by the Jurchen/Manchu emperors, it is compelled to question methodological nationalism—especially the sinocentric one—and to adopt a relational approach that enables it to understand the circulation of languages and practices through the different constituencies of the empire,

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50   See, for example, Gloria Davies, "Liang Qichao in Australia: A Sojourn of No Significance?" *East Asian History* 21 (June 2001): 65–111.

51   *Le carrefour javanais* certainly focuses on Java, but Lombard also analyses "la question chinoise," which approaches the question of "sinicization" from a different point of view. The book, which touches on many questions of intellectual history, goes far beyond the boundaries of this field. Denys Lombard, *Le carrefour javanais: Essai d'histoire globale*, 3 vols. (Paris: Édition de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1990).

be they Manchu, Han, Mongol, Uyghur, or Tibetan populations. From this perspective, Chinese intellectual history is compelled to take into account the way the Qing combined linguistic and ritual elements from the different groups of imperial subjects in order to define their own institutions.[52]

Moving backwards in time to the historiography on the Mongol empire in China or the history of intellectual networks (especially Buddhist) between India, Central Asia, and China since the third century, we also find many examples of a transculturally-minded approach. Valerie Hansen's *The Open Empire*, which covers different aspects of Chinese imperial history, and Liu Xinru's works on religious exchanges along the Silk Road, contain many examples of how a transcultural intellectual history could be extended to these earlier periods.[53] The intellectual history of the relationship between Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism in early medieval China is particularly rich for a transcultural approach. Buddhism and Taoism have mutually defined each other to the extent that the history of one cannot be separated from that of the other.[54] Another example is the relationship between Buddhism and "Confucianism."[55] Although the fusion between Buddhist and Confucian language started taking place in the late eighth century, Buddhism had managed to shape the social life of the empire, especially its intellectual life, since the early medieval period. Educated early medieval Confucian literati[56] would sometimes become monks, adopt rituals and languages from

52   See Pamela Crossley's *A Translucent Mirror*, a major work in New Qing historiography.

53   Valerie Hansen, *An Open Empire: A History of China Through 1600* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000); Liu Xinru, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988); Liu Xinru and Lynda Norene Shaffer, *Connections Across Eurasia: Transportation, Communication, and Cultural Exchange on the Silk Roads* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2007). As these works show, intellectual history can also take into account groups that are not part of a predefined intellectual canon. See also the reconstruction of the life of Sogdians in medieval China in Étienne de la Vaissière, *Sogdian Traders: A History* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

54   See, for example, Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

55   In the last few decades, the label "Confucianism" has been called into question. A more accurate term for this ideological phenomenon is "classicism," because the common reference was not the figure of Confucius, but the classical books inherited from ancient times. Since the word "classicism" might be confusing for a reader who is not familiar with the discussions in Chinese studies, in this essay I will stick to the more traditional words "Confucianism" and "Confucian."

56   This class had a name of its own, *shi* 土, which was used throughout pre-imperial and imperial history until 1911. *Shi* certainly changed meaning many times, but the sort of scholar-gentry, degree-holders, and imperial officials that the name *shi* came to designate in late imperial times started taking shape by the end of the early medieval period. For this reason, this essay uses the more neutral term "literati" for the early medieval period. The abolition of the imperial examinations ended with one important self-defining institutional product of this class, and the fall of the empire dealt the final blow to its institutional role (though not, of course, to its social codes, which persisted well into the twentieth century).

their Buddhist fellows, and engage in critical or friendly exchanges with them.[57] Some commentarial practices among the medieval literati might have been inspired by Buddhist exegesis.[58] Even though the traditions of the medieval literati had not yet incorporated Buddhism in the way neo-Confucianism (though usually in an unassuming way) would do in the Song dynasty, this convergence between South Asian and East Asian traditions led the intellectual history of these earlier periods to adopt some elements of the transcultural approach.

The historiography of the early modern period has played an important role in introducing transcultural elements into Chinese intellectual history, especially through the history of the Society of Jesus in China. Between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, the Jesuits built a strong network that extended through different continents, east and west, and constituted an important channel of intellectual transmission between China and other parts of the world. Many works have focused on how the Society of Jesus facilitated the circulation of ideas between Europe and East Asia, particularly China; research on this period has also attempted to include possible intellectual circulations between China and Latin America.[59] The writings of the Jesuits in

57   For the intimate relationship between literary culture and Buddhism, see for example Tian Xiaofei, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Thomas Jansen, *Höfische Öffentlichkeit im frühmittelalterlichen China* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2000); François Martin, "Les joutes poétiques dans la Chine médiévale," *Extrême Orient—Extrême Occident* 20 (1998): 87–108.

58   See for example John Makeham, *Transmitters and Creators: Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 148–168.

59   Regarding the Jesuit networks, here are a few examples from a long list: Catherine Jami, *The Emperor's New Mathematics: Western Learning and Imperial Authority During the Kangxi Reign* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); David Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500–1800* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009); Urs App, *The Cult of Emptiness: The Western Discovery of Buddhist Thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy* (Rorschach: UniversityMedia, 2012); Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984); Liam Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Nicolas Standaert, *Funerals in the Cultural Exchange Between China and Europe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008); see also the contributions by Catherine Jami and Antonella Romano in Laszlo Kontler, Antonella Romano, Silvia Sebastiani, and Borbala Zsuzsana Török, eds., *Negotiating Knowledge in Early Modern Empires: A Decentred View* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2014); for the connections between China and Latin America, see Ana C. Hosne, *The Jesuit Missions to China and Peru: Expectations and Appraisals of Expansionism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), and Antonella Romano's contribution in *Negotiating Knowledge*. For Chinese intellectual history, Jacques Gernet's book, *Chine et Christianisme: Action et Réaction* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), translated into English, German, and Spanish, has been highly influential, and even though it cannot be included in a transcultural approach, it has raised questions of intellectual history which are discussed in transcultural studies. To contextualize this book in a more transcultural problematic, see two reviews: Michael Lackner, "'Kultur Chinas', 'Kultur des Christentums': Wie vereinbar sind sie? Gedanken zu Jacques Gernets *Chinas Begegnung mit dem Christentum*," *China*

China have become essential for those who want to understand the circulation of ideas between East Asia, Europe, and the Americas in the early modern world. This is why many intellectual historians of China (especially those who work on the history of science), even if they are not specialists of the Society, usually attest to the importance of Jesuit writings. Research on the Society of Jesus has thus made important (though not always explicit) contributions to the development of a transcultural approach in the intellectual history of religion, science, literature, arts, politics, and ethics in China. To a lesser extent, but with a similar approach, the history of Protestant and Catholic missionaries in nineteenth-century China, which is sometimes part of larger historical pictures (as in the history of the press and of modern science), became the subject of monographs,[60] and thus helped push Chinese intellectual history in a transcultural direction.[61]

These examples evidence deliberate differences and convergences between Chinese intellectual history and transcultural studies. In conclusion it is worth pointing out a paradoxical fact: although these transcultural tendencies represent a reaction against methodological nationalism, some of the latter's key assumptions have actually helped Chinese intellectual history to move in

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heute 32, no. 2 (2013): 104–109; Denys Lombard, "Chine et Christianisme: Action et Réaction," *Annales* 38, no. 2 (1983): 317–320.

60　See, for example, Alvyn Austin, *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and the Late Qing Dynasty* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2007). For a larger overview of the Christian presence in China, see Daniel Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). Paul Cohen's early works on missionaries in nineteenth-century China (such as *China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Antiforeignism, 1860–1870* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978]) remains highly influential in this field.

61　The field of "transcultural studies" exists in China as well (*kua wenhua yanjiu* 跨文化研究), particularly in the intellectual history of China, although its approaches are very different from the one explained in this article—the same phrase could be translated as "cross-cultural studies." In China, "culture" is usually understood as a self-sustained, internally coherent entity, and the prefixes "trans-" (or "cross-") as the entanglement of two such predefined entities. The academic situation in China is different from those of Western Europe and the United States; the weight of methodological nationalism in Chinese academia, for reasons related to twentieth-century Chinese history, has been bigger than America and in post-World War II Western Europe. This fact, however, has not prevented "transcultural" research from developing in the field of intellectual history in China. To mention once again works on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China, Liu Dengge and Zhou Yunfang's works have attempted to show the "mutual influence" between East Asia and Europe, and major historians like Luo Zhitian and Sang Bing have been working with this approach as well. See Liu Dengge 劉登閣 and Zhou Yunfang 周雲芳 eds., *Xixue dongjian yu dongxue xijian* 西學東漸與東學西漸 [The Eastern dissemination of Western knowledge and the Western dissemination of Eastern knowledge] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan, 2000). For a review of this bibliography, see Sun Qing 孫青, *Wan Qing zhi "xizheng dongjian" ji bentu huiying* 晚清之西政東漸及本土回應 [The Eastern dissemination of Western political science and the local responses] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2009), 1–37, esp. 3–15.

a transcultural direction. Indeed, some adepts of methodological nationalism share an important premise with the transcultural approach: they stand on a historicist foundation; they assume that everything taking place in history possesses an irreducible singularity, that each time and each place has to be understood on its own terms. For the transcultural approach, the implicit scale of this historicism is human history as a whole; it supposes that, since everything moves, boundaries never remain stable—neither those created by practices and institutions, nor those created by representations and feelings of belonging. The historicist adepts of methodological nationalism have a similar approach, but the scale of their historicism is defined by nations or by nation-like cultures; they focus on national singularities, on anomalies, on everything that does not fit pre-established schemes developed for other nations or cultural areas; they understand national histories as the containers of ever-changing relations between individuals and groups. This form of methodological nationalism held, long before the transcultural approach, that the intrinsic instability of relations in time and space constantly creates new and unique historical configurations; in this sense, at least within the limits imposed by national boundaries, it has created or refined research tools that transcultural studies still embrace.

This being said, methodological nationalism forsakes historicism in one particular point: national boundaries themselves. Explicitly or not, these boundaries are kept intact as transcendental boundaries of research and are consequently deprived of their historical character. For this reason, methodological nationalism represents a *partial* historicism, because it views the boundaries of nations and of nationally conceived cultures sub specie aeternitatis, that is, as if these boundaries had no history.[62] Transcultural studies, on the other hand, is built on *pure historicism*, because no historical boundary is taken as definitive and transcendent.[63]

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62   A clever essay by Ge Zhaoguang tries to defend this projection of the nation on earlier periods of Chinese history and makes a critical assessment of English- and Japanese-speaking bibliographies on this question. See Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *Zhaizi Zhongguo. Chongjian youguan Zhonguo de lishi lunshu* 宅茲中國. 重建有關中國的歷史論述 [Dwelling here in the Central Kingdom: Reconstructing the historical narrative about "China"] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011).

63   Xu Jilin wrote an article to criticize the "historicist" trends in China in the last ten years, which, in the name of "Chinese values," go against universalism and strengthen nationalism. He refers to nineteenth-century German historicism, which was indeed intimately related to nationalism. But, as we say here, this was only a partial historicism, based on a relativist conception of the historical development of national cultures. See Xu Jilin 許紀霖, "Pushi wenming, hai shi Zhongguo jiazhi—jin shi nian Zhongguo de lishi zhuyi sichao zhi pipan," 普世文明, 還是中國價值一近十年中國的歷史主義思潮之批判 [Universal civilization or Chinese values? A critique of Chinese historicist trends of the last decade] *Kaifang shidai*, 5 (2010): 66–82.

Two examples

The editors of this themed section requested examples from the authors' current research to show how transcultural studies impacts their work. In what follows I offer two cases, neither of which should be taken as an illustration of how to apply transcultural studies to Chinese intellectual history. If it is true that I share many concerns with transcultural studies, at least regarding the relational, non-nation-oriented sense of my approach, it is also true that I also borrow from microhistory, connected history, and from other fields in the humanites and social sciences. In this sense, I would hesitate to call my own approach "transcultural." Actually, I would even hesitate to call it "intellectual history"; although I work with the objects of this field, I am not sure whether this label really describes the sort of historiography I practice.[64] This being said, I must acknowledge that many methods and approaches of both intellectual history and transcultural studies are undoubtedly present in my work.

I have worked on both medieval and late imperial China. In my work on medieval China, I focus on the rationalization of writing in fifth- and sixth-century Jiankang (Nanjing), and more specifically on the ways in which a single generation of ministers, active at the imperial and princely courts of the southern dynasties (420–589), produced texts and rationalized writing techniques in imperial institutions. My purpose is to show that the early medieval courts did not distinguish between the literary and the political, and that writing practices, along with the rationales to explain them, were closely interconnected with conflicting perceptions of what good writing meant for a good minister and a good official. Through this focus on conflicting views, which were at the same time literary, ethical, political, and religious, I employ certain tools from the methodological agenda of transcultural studies to show that what we tend to see as a single literati culture in the Chinese Middle Ages becomes two different cultures once we focus on the splits among factions of officials. Each group of ministers, often with powerful family backgrounds, held their particular conceptions and practices of writing; they used the same languages and conceptual resources, but they gave texts different roles, different forms, and, accordingly, different rationales. Some of them, for example, saw highly ornamented forms of writing as a sign of virtue; others, as a sign of moral weakness. The boundaries between these factions were constantly moving and with them social and institutional configurations; seen through this particular scale of analysis, the concept of "culture" itself, which might be useful in other contexts, loses its heuristic value—especially to analyze how seemingly insignificant divergences could become the cause

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64   This is exactly what J. G. A. Pocock, who would sometimes characterize himself as an intellectual historian, said regarding this label. See Pocock's text in *History Today* 35, no. 10 (1985).

of a great divergence in space and time. In this sense, I happened to deal with so-called literati culture from a transcultural perspective, albeit not deliberately: my point was to prove that, at a particular scale of analysis, the concept of culture hides more than it reveals, and that the focus on situated relations is more productive for understanding the historical process.

The transformation in the relation between Confucian and Buddhist scriptural traditions will serve as an example. In late fifth-century Jiankang, many officials were interested in Buddhism, but not all of them in the same way. For some time during the late fifth century, Buddhism played an important role in some princely courts, while the imperial court, though not necessarily against it, was more concerned with Confucian or classicist traditions. When a new dynasty was founded in the sixth century, the new emperor, Emperor Wu of Liang, declared himself a Boddhisattva, and Buddhism played a substantial role in the reorganization of some imperial institutions. This brought Buddhist sympathizers into better positions and compelled officials to obtain new textual knowledge, cover new writing topics, and produce new polemical texts. In other words, the Buddhist inclinations of the princely court in the late fifth century finally became a major pillar of the empire in the sixth. If we depart from the notion that two stable, enclosed cultures existed— Buddhist and Confucian—and if we consider that the former replaced the latter, we are unable to understand the historical process. We also cannot see that Buddhist and Confucian elements already commingled in the fifth century and Emperor Wu merely reconfigured the hierarchy between the two in the new institutions he created—to the extent that even the labels "Buddhism" and "Confucianism" lose their value as concepts of two distinct intellectual configurations. The sometimes silent, sometimes more explicit presence of Buddhist texts at court also prevents me from understanding literati culture as a Chinese phenomenon. The importance of Buddhism among fifth- and sixth-century literati was a sign of the increasing power and intellectual attractiveness of the Buddhist monastery, and, in a wider context, of the role played by larger social and intellectual networks between South, Central, and East Asia. That is why I have attempted to describe the processes of relationality that shaped literati controversies, and why I have avoided an a priori definition of literati "culture."[65]

In my research, I also investigate issues of intellectual history and transcultural studies that concern the networks of reform-minded scholar-officials of the late Qing period, from the aftermath of the Taiping Wars in the 1860s to

65   For an analysis of the Emperor Wu of Liang, see Andreas Janousch, "The Emperor as Boddhisattva," in *State and Court Ritual in China*, ed. Joseph McDermott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 112–149.

the New Policies (or "Reform of Governance")[66] and the constitutionalist movement before the fall of the empire in 1911–1912. Various reasons led me to focus on this period. From the point of view of historiography, many of the categories modern scholars use to talk about the Chinese Middle Ages emerged during this time. When I started researching the Chinese Middle Ages, I became aware of how deeply late Qing categories had shaped studies of medieval China, and how, for that reason, historiography in late imperial China was sometimes more related to the immediate concerns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than a scholarly-mediated interpretation of the Middle Ages. I therefore decided to historicize modern Chinese historiography, that is, explain the specific historical motives of its categories and tools in both late imperial literati discourse and modern sinology. This object of inquiry did not divert me from my studies of the imperial literati. On the contrary, after having analyzed in my previous work what a major Japanese scholar, Miyazaki Ichisada, called the "prehistory" (*zenshi*) of the examination system (which turned the old, literati aristocracy into a bureaucracy of degree-holders),[67] I now was interested in the same class of people, the imperial literati, who were largely responsible for our received ideas about the imperial past. They were not the only ones to shape our reception of the Chinese Middle Ages, but they played an important role. The late Qing period was indeed the last stand of the celestial bureaucracy: in 1912, degree-holding officials disappeared as an institutionally recognized class. The study of medieval historiography thus led me to understand the features, practices, and discourses of this class in the *longue durée*.

Another, more fundamental reason to focus on the late imperial period was that it offered a decentering perspective on modern institutions. This perspective was decentering in two respects. First, it decentered Euro-American history—usually taken as the implicit model for any "modernity." The late imperial literati were an example of what modernity looked like when embodied in groups and institutions from outside the Euro-American world. Second, it decentered modern history itself, because it showed how modernity was embodied in a class that ultimately did not survive in the

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66   New Policies is a standard translation of *Xinzheng*, but since *xin* is actually a verb, "Reform of Governance" seems to better convey its meaning. See Milena Dolezelová-Velingerová and Rudolf Wagner, "Chinese Encyclopaedias of New Global Knowledge (1870–1930): Changing Ways of Thought," in *Chinese Encyclopaedias of New Global Knowledge (1870–1930). Changing Ways of Thought*, ed. Milena Dolezelová-Velingerová and Rudolf Wagner. (Berlin: Springer, 2014), 14.

67   Miyazaki Ichisada 宮崎市定, Kyûhin kanjinhô no kenkyû: kakyo zenshi 九品官人法の研究: 科挙前史 [Studies on the rule of appointing officials according to the nine ranks: A prehistory of the examination system] (Kyoto: Tôyôshi kenkyûkai, 1956).

modern world. I had already intended to produce this decentralizing effect by studying a world, the medieval court, which had not known Euro-American ("modern")-inspired institutions. Now I had access to a world that was not only in touch with these institutions, but had used them as models when they transformed the empire. It was in this context that transcultural questions arose. I was interested in two research objects: the lexical and discursive resources that the late imperial literati devised to rationalize writing and imperial institutions (a question that enabled me to see differences, but also continuities, with the medieval "prehistory" of this class of degree-holders and office-seekers), and the socio-political institutions of the empire between the 1860s and 1912 (the fall of the empire). In both cases, I found that imperial literati and officials mobilized intellectual resources not only from the imperial past, but also from many other places and periods of world history. In other words, analyzing transcultural concerns in my research showed that the languages and institutions created by the late Qing literati cannot be ascribed to a single "culture."

This research project gave me the opportunity to address fundamental problems in transcultural studies. My leading question was (and still is): what was the relationship between language transformations and institutional reconfiguration in late Qing China? As a general hypothesis, I assumed that the former was necessary to facilitate the latter, and that the latter in turn fostered the former. To prove this, I had to reconstruct not only "who talked to whom," but also where, when, and how they "talked." I therefore focused on the connections and disconnections, conflicts and agreements, impositions and resistances, geographical locations and social positions of groups of scholar-officials—that is, on social, institutional, and spatial channels of intellectual activity. As in my book, I adopted microhistorical methods to explore how socially and spatially "close" and "distant" elements interacted among scholar-officials; how texts and practices from different periods and places in the history of this class, as well as from different geographies, groups, and institutions, were recombined to justify or transform political institutions. One of those elements was the concept of nation itself. This concept was a fundamental concern among late Qing nationalist scholar-officials, precisely because the nation was not a given entity, but a concept that needed to be produced and a set of institutions that needed to be built. Thanks to my focus on the nation as a historically situated concept, I was able to avoid the widespread bias inherent in the modernist foundations of methodological nationalism: the anachronistic projection of national representations onto the older institutions of the imperial polity. This does not mean a disregard for the continuities between the concept of nation and previous social and institutional concepts during the Qing dynasty. Instead I intended to point out the plural dimensions of the language of political

cohesion that the new concept of nation conveyed in late imperial China—a concept which, in itself, resulted from the increasingly interconnected history of East Asian and Euro-American languages since the late nineteenth century.

One particular debate on Chinese modernity seemed to require a transcultural solution: were the Chinese scholar-officials "westernized" or were Western institutions "sinicized" by Chinese scholar-officials? The transcultural solution was to drop "sinicization" and "westernization" as research tools. These concepts are harmless, and even useful, when it is necessary to summarize the complex process that led to the formation of modern Chinese institutions. As long as these terms are only used to describe, for example, how a European institution or practice served as a model in China, speaking of "sinicization" or "westernization" is perfectly plausible; if we refuse these terms their right to exist, we should also refuse many others, including—for reasons mentioned above—the word "China." A problem arises when the terms "sinicization" or "westernization" (just like "China" as a name of a transhistorical nation) become the conceptual pillar of more developed historical narratives. The idea that both "Chinese" and "Western" cultures are clearly-definable entities, and that each of these areas contain self-engendered histories, contradicts historical evidence. When one studies the networks of Chinese reformers in the early twentieth century and traces intellectual exchanges and concept production, it is not difficult to see that contemporary Chinese intellectual history did not only happen in China. Many important reform-minded bureaucrats elaborated many of their ideas in cities like Tokyo, Paris, San Francisco, or even Mexico City. One could even say that Chinese national concepts and institutions (with all the different meanings the word "national" conveys) were not the cause, but, at least in part, the result of ideas and practices that some leading reform-minded literati elaborated or developed either in places within the nation—for example in literati circles in Canton or in the treaty ports—or beyond the nation—for example in business circles in the Americas. After all, "nation" and "culture" were late nineteenth-century neologisms in Chinese (though these neologisms were built with ancient notions), and, at least in their modern meanings, they were not that old in European languages either.

Conclusion

To sum up, any intellectual history of "Chinese" literati in medieval or late imperial China must take into account that their discourses and social experiences were shaped by forces from both within and beyond China. "China" as a national entity was as much a fiction as any other supposedly homogeneous culture. This fiction has certainly produced strong, cohesive institutions in contemporary history, but in the late Qing dynasty the national

community was only beginning to be imagined. The transcultural approach can ill afford to hide the powerful effects of the concepts of nation or of a (nationally defined) culture on social life, especially when they are adopted by large groups or given legal status, and cannot ignore the cohesive social devices, institutions, and boundaries that are created in the name of nations and nationally-defined cultures. However, transcultural studies should maintain, as other neighboring fields do, that these devices and institutions depend on political and social relations between groups inhabiting different places of the world, and that the boundaries of those groups, especially of the nation-builders, are not themselves necessarily national or "cultural."

If this transcultural approach is systematically applied to Chinese intellectual history, we can imagine that two sorts of boundaries will be gradually erased: on the one hand, the national boundaries as a natural framework for research on phenomena that have taken place in the present Chinese territory; on the other, the disciplinary boundaries between intellectual history and other branches of the humanities and social sciences. This is a natural consequence of the transcultural approach. National boundaries, even when they take the form of political borders, necessarily fade away when we analyze the shifting relations that produce social and political institutions; and intellectual history loses its autonomy when we study the multiple objects, social relations, and spaces that are involved in intellectual activity, because it is difficult to understand intellectual processes without understanding the social, linguistic, iconographic, material, and spatial processes that make them possible. In other words: "Chinese studies" and "intellectual history" will become just "studies"; and if other "area studies" become "studies" as well, "transcultural studies" should in principle come to coincide with them and therefore disappear as an autonomous field. This does not mean that the institutional labels will disappear (though they might, or might at least be reconfigured) or that the particular expertise transmitted in area studies (such as language training) will be abolished. On the contrary, institutional labels might become the names of entry points to old or new sets of problems, and the old area training, now delivered from institutionally imposed boundaries, will multiply its research possibilities.

This is hopefully the direction of Chinese intellectual history: a strict adherence to a relational approach in the study of intellectual phenomena, a rigorous pursuit of evidence from one place to another, from one time to another, without presupposing or deducting the boundaries of intellectual transmission. The risk of going backwards, to return to the idea that nations are self-engendered and self-sustained entities, has not disappeared from the landscape of this research field. But if the strictly relational approach

is successful, and if Chinese intellectual history takes this approach as a constitutive methodological procedure, we can be certain that we will have a deeper understanding of historical processes that still, in some cases, are lazily ascribed to the magical powers of national cultures.