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EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

Ge Zhaoguang, *Dwelling in the Middle of the Country: Reestablishing Histories of "China"* [宅兹中国:重建有关"中国"的历史]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2011.

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Ge Zhaoguang is one of the preeminent historians in the fields of intellectual history and history of scholarship in China. This collection of his recent academic writings crystallizes his reflections on changes in paradigms in the field of Chinese history both inside and outside China. The title of the book, *Zhaizi Zhongguo*, or “Dwelling in the Middle of the Country,” is a phrase from the inscription on a bronze vessel from more than 2,700 years ago. As far as we know, this was the first time that the word *zhongguo*, which later became the name for China, appeared in writing. Ge uses this phrase to allude to the thesis question of his book: “As scholars ‘dwelling in China,’ how should we hold on to our Chinese standpoint while transcending our Chinese limitation, so as to reconstruct a historical narrative about ‘China’ against the backdrop of the whole world or Asia?” (3–4).

Ge’s research and reflections in this book are to some extent a reaction to Prasenjit Duara’s proposition of “rescuing history from the nation.” He agrees with Duara that we need to promote studies on transnational history and culture in order to transcend the political boundaries of nation-states. For this reason, when Ge was appointed to direct the National Institution for Advanced Humanities Studies (*Wenshi yanjiu yuan* 文史研究院) at Fudan University in 2006, he proposed two research agendas: to understand China from the perspectives of its neighbors and peripheral regions (*cong zhoubian kan zhongguo* 从周边看中国) and to study the history of intertwined cultures (*jiaocuo de wenhuashi* 交错的文化史), both of which he skillfully demonstrates in this book. Nevertheless, he is also worried that Duara and scholars inspired by Duara’s thesis might exaggerate the heterogeneity of ethnicities, religions, and local histories

within China, thereby undermining the unity of China as a historical and cultural entity. Thus, he explicitly takes upon himself the responsibility of constructing a Chinese national identity and doing solid research to compete with foreign scholars for the authority of interpreting China.

Ge organizes the chapters, most of which have been previously published, into three interrelated parts. Part One, “Understanding China in History,” examines how the Chinese understood China as a nation and the world around it before their direct contact with Westerners in the seventeenth century. In Chapter One, he argues that as early as the Song dynasty, the notion of “China” as a nation had emerged from the vigorous but troublesome international relationship between the Han Chinese and other ethnic sovereignties, such as Liao, Jin, Xia, Korea, and Japan. For Ge, the efforts of the Song literati to prove the orthodoxy and legitimacy of the Song or *zhongguo* as a political, ethnic, and cultural entity serve as a distant origin of Chinese modern nationalism. In Chapters Two and Three, Ge scrutinizes the images of “foreigners” and the world outside China as it was imagined by Chinese literati. He examines their imagination of domestic and international spaces as illustrated by ancient maps, before missionaries such as Matteo Ricci brought accurate knowledge about the world to China in the seventeenth century. Ge argues that, in terms of knowledge, the images and maps do not correctly describe the reality, but as cultural constructions, they provide valuable primary sources for scholars of intellectual history.

In Part Two, “Intertwined Asia, East Asia, and China,” Ge explores transnational history with a particular focus on cultural and academic exchanges among scholars in China, Japan, and Korea. In Chapter Four, through the viewpoints of Korean and Japanese visitors to China during the High Qing period, Ge observes the international system and interactive principles at work in East Asia before the arrival of Westerners. He argues that the self-consciousness of these Korean and Japanese visitors as the real inheritors and guardians of Chinese cultural orthodoxy revealed the cultural identity shared by the three countries in the seventeenth century. However, their explicit national identities, as demonstrated during their trips to China, also indicated that the sense of nation-state already existed by then. Chapter Five examines the complex political and cultural forces behind the rise of the discourse of “Asianism” among Japanese intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Ge, modern Japan obtained wealth and power through Westernization, but it also suffered from anxiety about its cultural dislocation

as the periphery of the West. Therefore, Japanese intellectuals brought forth the discourse of “Asianism” to construct a “modern Asia” represented by Japan to counterbalance the hegemony of the West. In contrast, Chinese intellectuals were unenthusiastic about “Asianism” because China’s national crisis was so overwhelming that most of them were convinced that Westernization was the only way to save the Chinese nation as a race from failure and extinction. In Chapter Six, Ge reviews the controversy in twentieth-century Japanese academia about whether Shinto was influenced by Chinese Taoism. He concludes that there was a political motivation behind this seemingly historical discussion and that, in this context, “Chinese studies” in Japan should be understood first of all as “Japanese studies”; in other words, the studying of China as an object was constructed using Japanese perspectives, standpoints, and problematics.

Ge discusses potential approaches to studies of Asia and China in Part Three. Chapter Seven, which can be fruitfully juxtaposed with Chapters Four and Five, discusses the political background of East Asian studies, or *toyogaku* (東洋学), by Japanese scholars in the same time period. In order to compete with Western scholarship, as Ge keenly points out, Japanese scholars adopted Western methods and followed Western research interests to study East Asia as an entity comparable to the West. By shifting the focus of East Asian studies from the Han Chinese to the surrounding ethnic minorities, namely the Manchus, Mongols, Muslims, Tibetans, and Koreans, Japanese intellectuals expressed their imperialist and nationalist ambition to replace China and be the leader of all the nations in East Asia. However, Chinese historians at that time did not pay enough attention to their peripheral regions and lacked the self-consciousness to prove the legitimacy of the Chinese “nation” and its “boundaries.” Learning this lesson from the past, Ge proposes to extend the horizon of Chinese studies in order to understand the heterogeneous history, culture, and geography of the areas surrounding China so as to “rewrite and demarcate a united *zhongguo* more clearly” (253). In Chapter Eight, Ge suggests that scholars observe the intertwining cultural exchanges in East Asia through a new research field, which would have as its object of study the Eastern Seas. As the studies of the Western regions transcended the limitation of national boundaries and facilitated research in history, religion, linguistics, art history, archaeology, and so on in the past century, Ge believes that the studies of Eastern Seas will also generate a fertile field for transnational and interdisciplinary studies.

The concluding chapter “Mainstream, Standpoints, and Methods: The Search for New Perspectives on Humanities Studies” was originally the inaugural address Ge presented in 2006 as director of the National Institute of Advanced Humanities Studies. In this speech, Ge proposes three paradigm changes in Chinese history and culture. First, he advocates that researchers surpass the dichotomy between China and the vague notion of the West by adopting a global perspective. Using “multiple mirrors,” namely impressions of China recorded by its neighbors, researchers would be able to understand China more accurately. Second, he insists that Chinese scholars hold a Chinese standpoint and “study tradition with the purpose of constructing history and shaping the present by providing memories, building consensus, and confirming identity” (292). Third, Ge promotes historical studies of the intertwining cultures between China and other nations to observe transformation and interaction of ideas in different contexts. Since his 2006 address, Ge Zhaoguang has led the National Institute of Advanced Humanities Studies toward these goals and, together with his colleagues, gained considerable international recognition.

Wennan Liu is editor of the Journal of Modern Chinese History at the Institute of Modern History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

葛兆光 *Ge Zhaoguang* is a specialist in medieval Chinese religion and history. He is a leading scholar of the intellectual and institutional history of Chan (i.e., Zen) Buddhism in China, but is well known to scholars of history, literature, and religion in general. A graduate of Peking University, Professor Ge taught at Tsinghua University. He is known for many important publications, including more than fifteen books. His studies of 禅宗与中国文化 [Chan Religion and Chinese Culture] (1986) and 道教与中国文化 [Daoist Religion and Chinese Culture] (1987) have been particularly influential in historicizing the important role of Chinese religion in medieval Chinese state and society. His 中国禅思想 [Intellectual History of Chan Buddhism] (1995) is the definitive work on Chan thought in China from the sixth to ninth centuries, along with his two-volume 中国思想史 [History of Chinese Thought] (2001). Professor Ge has reached out to broader audiences with works like 古代中国社会与文化十讲 [Ten Lectures on Ancient Chinese Society and Culture] (2003). He is the founding director of the National Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, an organization that promotes interdisciplinary work, advances the study of Chinese culture within a global perspective, and engages actively in the collection and curation of newly discovered texts.