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Abstract
For roughly two decades now, Wang Hui has been a prominent voice within academic, cultural and political discourses in China, but increasingly also in Europe and the United States. Wang's still developing oeuvre might be understood as an attempt to 'provincialize Europe' (Dipesh Chakrabarty) from a political perspective and by drawing on historical and present-day China. In this article, the main focus is on one specific aspect in this attempt, namely Wang's view of Europe, and I shall investigate that aspect on the basis of an article by Wang on the concept of Asia: "The Politics of Imagining Asia" (2007). I first discuss Wang's genealogical analysis of Asia as a "European concept" before attending to what he perceives as derivations of it in Asia itself. I then engage with Wang's proposal to go beyond the framework of nation-state/empire, and argue that he fails to offer an attractive re-imagination of the concept of Asia. When finally turning to his view of Europe, I shall issue a criticism of some misplaced anti-Eurocentrism in his work on the conceptual level.

Wang Hui, anti-Eurocentrism, concepts, Europe, Asia

Zusammenfassung
Über die von Wang Hui entwickelte Re-Imagination Asiens und Europas
Seit nunmehr fast zwei Jahrzehnten ist Wang Hui in den wissenschaftlichen, kulturellen und politischen Diskussionen in China, zunehmend aber auch in Europa und in den Vereinigten Staaten, eine prominente Stimme. Die von Wang entwickelte Vorstellung könnte als ein Versuch der „Provinzialisierung Europas" (Dipesh Chakrabarty) in politischer Hinsicht und in Bezug auf das historische und heutige China verstanden werden. Der Schwerpunkt dieses Artikels liegt auf einem spezifischen Aspekt dieses Versuchs, und zwar auf Wangs Sichtweise von Europa. Diesen Aspekt untersucht der Autor auf der Grundlage eines Artikels von Wang über den Begriff Asien: "The Politics of Imagining Asia" (Die Politik der Imagination Asiens) (2007). Zunächst diskutiert der Autor Wangs genealogische Analyse Asiens als „Europäischen Begriff", bevor er auf Abweichungen von diesem Begriff in Asien selbst eingeht. Danach setzt sich der Autor mit Wangs Vorschlag auseinander, über den Rahmen des Nationalstaates/Reiches hinauszugehen, und weist darauf hin, dass Wang keine attraktive Re-Imagination des Begriffs von Asien anbietet. Wenn der Autor abschließend auf WANGS Sicht von Europa eingeht, kritisiert er einen gewissen deplazierten Anti-Eurozentrismus in dessen Arbeit auf begrifflicher Ebene.

Wang Hui, Anti-Eurozentrismus, Begriffe, Europa, Asien

In his new preface to *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty writes that "there must be many different locations […] from which one could provincialize Europe with different results."[1] For Chakrabarty, unlike Marxist scholarship in which "the 'local' is a surface phenomenon of social life [and], in the ultimate analysis, some kind of an effect of capital", locations and places clearly matter.[2] This is not to say that he is anti-Marxist. He himself argues for the importance of the local precisely by offering a "selective but close reading of Marx".[3] Chakrabarty embraces Marxist claims regarding the universality of capitalism. It is the very kind of universalistic thinking which underlies what he calls History 1, i.e. "the past posited logically by the category 'capital'."[4] Yet, taken by itself and as the only kind of thinking applicable to social life, it "evacuates all lived sense of place assigning it to what is assumed to be a deeper and a more determining level, the level at which the capitalist mode of production creates abstract space."[5] Chakrabarty quotes Marx as saying that capital also encounters "antecedents" not "established by itself, not as forms of its own life-process."[6] In Chakrabarty's view, Marx thus anticipates the relevance of singular and unique histories of places, but fails to develop the point.

Places and their histories, however, are crucial for the idea of provincializing Europe from different locations. These are the histories "that capital anywhere – even in the West – encounters as its antecedents".[7] Chakrabarty refers

[1] Chakrabarty, 2008, p. xviii.

[2] Chakrabarty, 2008, p. xvi.

[3] Chakrabarty, 2008, p. 47.

[4] Chakrabarty, 2008, p. 63. An example, which Chakrabarty offers, is the necessary severance of the connection between land/tool and labourers, without which workers cannot be available to capital in the first place.

[5] Chakrabarty, 2008, p. xvii.

[6] Chakrabarty, 2008, p. 63. In German: „… nicht als von ihm gesetzte Voraussetzungen, nicht als Formen seines eignen Lebensprozesses." See: Karl Marx, MEW 26.3, p. 460. Marx's examples are "money circulation" (Geldzirkulation) and "commodity" (Ware), both of which do not necessarily belong to capital's life process or to the past.

[7] Chakrabarty, 2008, p. 69.

to them as History 2s. Their function is constantly to interrupt "the totalizing thrusts of History 1," i.e. capital's attempt "to subjugate or destroy the multiple possibilities that belong to History 2."[8] No global capital, in CHAKRABARTY's words, "… can ever represent the universal logic of capital, for any historically available form of capital is a provisional compromise made up of History 1 modified by somebody's History 2s. The universal, in that case, can only exist as a place holder, its place always usurped by a historical particular seeking to present itself as the universal".[9]

Hence, when CHAKRABARTY, for instance, sets out to investigate Bengali modernity by drawing up an affective narrative of human belonging around the social practice of *adda*, he is translating into his Marxist categories "the existing archives of thought and practices about human relations in the subcontinent," but is wholly aware that this also means to "modify these thoughts and practices with the help of these categories."[10]

It takes not much to see that WANG HUI (1959*) – a scholar of Chinese intellectual history, a figurehead of the New Left and one of the most prominent intellectuals in contemporary China – shares some sufficiently similar discursive space with CHAKRABARTY so that the former might easily be understood as an ally in the latter's effort to provincialize Europe.[11] For instance, WANG draws on similar historical and philosophical scholarship to reflect on global capitalism and local histories (such as the coming about of single aspects of 'Chinese modernity', e.g. the scientific worldview or taxonomies of knowledge). Also WANG insists that these local histories, and for that reason also the present, cannot be adequately understood only within the framework of European modernity (i.e. capitalism, liberal democracy and the nation-state), which is itself a local framework and a historical form.

Yet in spite of all similarities WANG very clearly occupies and writes from a very different location than CHAKRABARTY does. His four-volume *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought* has been widely acclaimed as a landmark publication, and is intriguing in its historical and epistemic scope as well as theoretical ambition.[12] In ZHANG YONGLE's opinion, it "can be safely said that nothing comparable to WANG HUI's work has appeared in China since the late Qing-early Republican period."[13] His developing oeuvre, generally speaking, is on the location(s) of China, its history and modernity, and its present condition in an age of neoliberalism and the 'war on terror'.[14] And writing from a different location may, as CHAKRABARTY suggests, also mean to arrive at different results. It is in this spirit and to this end that I seek to engage WANG's work and to assess his view of Europe. I do so from a philosophical perspective that is interested in concepts, which is both a perspective and an interest different from WANG's, but I think one that might profitably contribute to scholarship on Wang's work.

What I would like to suggest is that WANG's view of Europe may find one of its best expressions not in his scattered comments on Europe, but in an article of his which deals with the concept of Asia and, by implication, with the concept of Europe. The article is entitled "The Politics of Imagining Asia: A Genealogical Analysis" and has been published in 2007.[15] WANG's view of Europe is thus approached through an examination of his concept of Europe and of what he takes to be "European concepts" in this article. I proceed in four steps. First, WANG's genealogical analysis of Asia as a "European concept" is discussed. I then follow up derivations of that concept in Asia itself as WANG finds it in the work of several Japanese sinologists, Lenin, and Sun Yat-sen. In a next step, WANG's proposal of a political perspective beyond the nation-state is critically assessed with a view to how his concept of Asia relates to place. Although Europe will be present as a topic throughout the article, I address it explicitly only in the concluding step, when the consequences of WANG's reimagination of Asia on his view of Europe are examined. It will become clear that WANG views Europe mainly as an originator of concepts, which dominate the new imperial neo-liberal order and which only for the reason of their verbalization and use in 19th century European history he understands as definitely "European concepts". I will object to this conceptual anti-Eurocentrism, which I find philosophically problematic and which motivates esoteric political arguments of presumed traditional or cultural internality.[16]

It is important to be clear from the outset that WANG is here not understood as representative of China's intellectuals. His view is not 'the Chinese view on Europe'. One of the broader aims of this paper is precisely to show that while a view from nowhere is impossible, assertions of views from somewhere are all too possible, but highly problematic, as they easily turn on what are doubtful or undue simplifications (as when *a* view suddenly becomes *the* view). Given the diversity in the intellectual landscape of contemporary China, it seems clear that no one person could lay claim to such representativity. Even to call WANG's view 'a Chinese view on Europe' is problematic, for precisely what does one mean by the adjective 'Chinese' and why should that matter? It is because I would not know how to answer this question that I shall confine myself to assess 'WANG's view of Europe', which in some sense perhaps might be fancied as a Chinese view, but surely also is much more than that.

[8] CHAKRABARTY, 2008, pp. 65-66.

[9] CHAKRABARTY, 2008, p. 70.

[10] CHAKRABARTY, 2008, p. 71.

[11] A participant in the protests on Tiananmen Square in 1989, WANG HUI had to undergo one year of compulsory re-education. Besides his political engagement in the New Left (a label which he does not endorse partly because it sparks unwelcome associations with the Cultural Revolution and partly because it is a 'Western' term), he became prominent as co-editor (1996-2007) of the influential monthly literary journal *Dushu* 读书. He was a fellow at the prestigious Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and a guest professor in New York (at New York University and at Columbia University), Tokyo and Heidelberg. In 2008, the magazines *Foreign Policy* and *Prospect* listed him as one of the world's top 100 public intellectuals, notably as a "political theorist" (May/June, 61). He is a research professor at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Qinghua University in Beijing.

[12] WANG, 2008a. For academic discussions in English, see: Murthy, 2006; Wang Ban, 2007; Huang, 2008; and especially Zhang 2010, which offers several forceful criticisms.

[13] ZHANG, 2010, p. 71.

[14] See: WANG, 2003; WANG 2009.

[15] WANG, 2007. The subject-matter of the article is discussed in more detail in Chinese in the second appendix of Wang 2008a, pp. 1531-1608.

[16] WANG's work has recently been the topic of heated discussion over accusations of plagiarism, as to the accuracy of which I cannot say anything – yet I should like to point out that such accusations in the complicated political situation in the People's Republic of China of course might express concern about scholarly standards, but are more likely to be a pretence for political manoeuvres, particularly given Wang's involvement in Chinese intellectual discussions. I should be clear that my criticism of WANG's work in this article is not to play into the hands of those interested in such manoeuvring. In fact, I believe that my criticism is a forceful one, whatever may be the case in terms of plagiarism as well as in terms of politically motivated accusations.

Asia as a "European concept"

Wang Hui is usually translated as treating the words 'Asia' and 'Europe' variously as labels, categories, notions, ideas or concepts. In his Chinese writings, he uses categories (*fanchou* 范畴) and concepts (*gainian* 概念) largely synonymously. Despite the vagueness introduced by this practice, it is clear that, in Wang's work, there is more to 'Asia' and 'Europe' than the seemingly innocent denotation of two geographical regions by means of proper names. For the purposes of this article, I consistently take these words to indicate either the proper name of geographical regions or some kind of concept. To understand how proper names are transformed into concepts, one may want to think of expressions such as 'Singapore is Asia's Switzerland' or 'Mopti is the Venice of Africa'. In the latter statement, the city of Venice is conceptualized by imputation of a quality, say, the one of 'being built on water', the point of which precisely consists in it not being applicable to Venice only. Venice thus becomes a concept and is readily applied to many Venices, of the West (Nantes), the North (Hamburg, Stockholm, Amsterdam, Birmingham, etc.) and the East (Suzhou). By the same token, Asia and Europe may be understood as concepts standing for one or another quality of 'being Asian' or 'being European', which by itself conveys little meaning but requires further paraphrase.

Concepts such as Asia and Europe seem to depend much – and much more or more clearly than other concepts – on language and linguistic practices. This makes it especially troublesome (and in many cases outright impossible) to distinguish between concept and word. Concepts of this kind are part of larger and shifting vocabularies, resist definition, and are further distinguished by the fact that they are "bearers of multiple 'meanings' at any given time".[17] They have been continuously and variously crafted by the imaginations of innumerable language-users – and have been put to many a use and purpose. Such crafting and use-making reveals an important political dimension. Recognition of that dimension suggests an investigation into the genealogies of Asia and Europe, i.e. the writing of a story of their crafting and uses with a special focus on power relations and exertions. And this is precisely what Wang Hui offers in his article "The politics of imagining Asia" – primarily for the concept of Asia but, by implication, also for the one of Europe.

Wang's genealogical analysis of Asia takes its starting-point in Europe and in fact reads across large sections much like a 'European history of ideas'. Thus he writes that "historically speaking", the concept of Asia "is not Asian but, rather, European."[18] Particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries, the concepts of Asia and Europe underwent considerable and lasting changes through the twin movement of new imaginaries emerging during the European Enlightenment and the tightening grip of European colonialism. The resulting concepts indicated a determining contrast at the core of European modernity and were the product of a new system of knowledge. Wang speaks of a "new worldview in every aspect" and mentions the burgeoning disciplines of "historical linguistics, race theory, modern geography, political economy, theories of state, legal philosophy, the study of religion, and historiography."[19] 19th century scholars working on these topics, he claims, all in one way or another embraced teleological views of history and on that basis advanced a "universalist narrative of European modernity" around the three central themes of "empire, nation-state and capitalism."[20]

But the self-image of Europe as the engine of 'universal progress', Wang explains, needed to be brought to terms with newly acquired insights such as the one by linguists into the historical links between the European languages and Sanskrit. Asia, in 19th century European texts, was thus presented as the starting point of world history. But how could Europe derive from Asia and at the same time find itself at such a different stage of development? Wang quotes Hegel who is reported in his lectures on the philosophy of history to have spoken of the "so dissimilar development of what had been originally related".[21] Wang also emphasizes the "internal relations" of Hegel's and Smith's depiction of stages in world history.[22] Stages in both authors are linked to taxonomies of regions and peoples and embedded in chronological narratives. Yet, while Smith takes the "market mode as both the result of historical development and the inner law of history", Hegel incorporates these economic factors into a "political framework concerning the state", which in the end becomes the main standard for evaluating the different stages.[23] Wang's genealogical analysis shows that Asia and Europe are hence presented as "two correlated organic parts of the same historical process", but at the same time "occupy two drastically different stages in this historical continuum."[24] And at the bottom of this diachronism, still in Wang's analysis, lurks the issue of state-formation. Asia had not yet developed states and thus not formed historical subjects. Were that to happen, i.e. the transition from empire to state, then Asia would no longer be Asian, as Wang succinctly puts it.

In sum, 19th century European constructions of the concept of Asia according to Wang exhibit the following traits: multi-national empires, political despotism, and nomadic and agrarian modes of production. Under the premise of a teleological view of history with the European nation-state and the expansion of the capitalist market system as its *telos*, Asia was consequently constructed as located at a backward stage. Wang writes: "In this context, Asia was not only a geographic category, but also a form of civilization: Asia represented a political form defined in opposition to the European nation-state, a social form defined

[17] Geuss, 2001, p. 7.

[18] Wang, 2007, p. 2.

[19] Wang, 2007, p. 4.

[20] Wang, 2007, p. 4.

[21] Wang, 2007, p. 4. In the original German: „die zugleich so disparate Ausbildung einer uranfänglichen Verwandtschaft", in: G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Einleitung.

[22] Wang writes: „Because his account of civil society, market and commerce derives from the Scottish school of political economy, Hegel's notion of a despotic Asia is linked to a certain economic system. If we contrast Hegel's historical philosophical account of the four stages – the Orient, Greece, Rome and the Teutonic peoples, with Adam Smith's delineation, from the perspective of economic history, of four historical stages – hunting, pastoral, agricultural, and commercial, it is not difficult to discover internal relations between Hegel's historical description centered on political forms and Smith's historical stages centered on productive forms." See: Wang, 2007, p. 5.

[23] Wang, 2007, p. 5.

[24] Wang, 2007, p. 4.

in opposition to European capitalism, and a transitional stage between prehistory and history proper."[25]

For WANG, Asia "or China" (as he most tellingly adds) in Montesquieu, Hegel and Marx develop on the basis of an imaginary of a contrasting civilization. To construct Asia in this way, "it was necessary to elide its internal development and change". In this imaginary, Asia becomes a static historical form that displays eternal characteristics and thus quintessentially is void of any history of its own. It hence is thought of as lacking the "historical conditions or impetus for producing modernity" on the basis of "the 'state' and its legal system, its urban and commercial way of life, or its mechanism for economic and military competition based on nation-states."[26] It is this imaginary to which WANG objects, and which leads him to set out to re-imagine Asia.

Asian derivations of Asia

The fatal opposition of empire and state for WANG is the key to any understanding of history and global capitalism and also for the further ramifications of the concept of Asia in Asia. WANG sees two dominant derivations of the concept in Asia. One of these derivations prompts WANG to propose a new reading of the Meiji Japanese 'theory of shedding Asia'. The other manifests itself in the social revolutionary visions of agricultural capitalism in Lenin and Sun Yat-sen. In fact, the claims that go with WANG's argument are strong and surely questionable. But their validity is not primarily what is at issue here. His claims in any event illustrate the enormous influence he attributes to the question of traditional or cultural internality vs. externality, and give us an access point into one important aspect of his view of Europe.

WANG begins his analysis of the Japanese case by quoting Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910-1977), who in a 1948 article on "What is modernity?" wrote: "[If we want to] understand East Asia (Jpn. Tōyō), [we must appreciate that] what constitute Asia are European factors existing in Europe. Asia is Asia by dint of its European context."[27] This view finds itself in somewhat more negative terms already in Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) and his call to 'shed Asia' of 1885 (later expanded into the slogan 'shed Asia and join Europe'). Asia in this slogan in WANG's view includes two references, one to "a region with a high degree of cultural homogenization, i.e. Confucian Asia", and one, on more political terms, to the "China-centered imperial relations".[28] The shedding of Asia in this context implied the construction of a European-style nation-state and invoked a cluster of terms such as 'freedom', 'human rights', 'national sovereignty', 'civilization', and 'independent spirit'. From this perspective, Asia is actually thought of as "internal to European thought" and the proposals to 'shed Asia', as WANG writes, "derive from the nineteenth-century European conception of 'world history'."[29] The analogy on which WANG's strong claim rests is the following: "Just as European self-consciousness required knowledge of its 'outside', 'shedding Asia' was a way of forming self-consciousness through differentiating Japan from Asia. From this perspective, 'shedding Asia', this proposal of early modern Japanese particularism, in fact derived from early modern European historical consciousness. In other words, Japanese particularism derived from European universalism."[30]

The questionability of the claim, I would submit, is in notions such as "European self-consciousness" and "European universalism" for it is unclear whether the weighty act of differentiating an outside is particularly tied to the historical formation of European self-consciousness or proper to just any forming of self-consciousness. For WANG, there is indeed evidence for that this Japanese Asia is by and large a replication of the European Asia. Drawing on Perry Anderson, WANG seeks to illustrate how the contrast between European nation-states and Asian empires (as in Machiavelli, Bodin and Montesquieu) finds itself in much a similar fashion in the self-understanding of Meiji Japan as "the contrast between a single-ethnicity Japan, mutating from feudalism to a modern state, and a multi-ethnicity China, trapped in Confucian empire systems."[31]

To conceive Asian modernity as an outcome of European modernity is also a pattern that WANG detects in a second derivation of the European construction of Asia along the binary state-empire and that he sees exemplified in Lenin's writings. Lenin of course took Russia to be an Asian country, but, as WANG comments, "this orientation is not defined from the perspective of geography but from the degree of capitalist development and the process of Russian history."[32] The creation of conditions for an agricultural capitalism, the appropriate and necessary next step for China and Russia, hinged on its being closely tied to the nation-state. WANG quotes Lenin as saying that "the national state is the rule and the 'norm' of capitalism; the multinational state represents backwardness, or is an exception."[33] In WANG's analysis, Lenin's Asia is not unlike Smith's Asia or Hegel's Asia, i.e. largely without a history of its own and, in Lenin's words, "standing still for centuries."[34]

WANG's genealogy of Asia really culminates in the work of Sun Yat-sen, which is also the part where WANG's genealogical analysis turns into a more explicit presentation of his own arguments. Although the European Asia is still partly present in the prominence Sun accords to the nation-state, in WANG's analysis Sun eventually transcends the framework of state-empire to lead the way to the conditions for formation of the 'active subject' in revolutionary politics. In Sun's proposal of 'Great Asianism', WANG finds two contrasting Asias: "one was the 'birthplace of the most ancient culture,' but which lacked 'a completely independent state'; the other was the Asia about to be rejuvenated."[35] This rejuvenation in Sun's opinion had to follow the example of Japan insofar as it had become the first independent state in Asia. Sun's vision of Asia was one that stretched all the way from Japan to Turkey and that contained independent nation-states. WANG appends two important qualifications, which signal Sun's transcendence of the European-derived framework of state-empire. First, these looming Asian nations were to be outcomes of "national independence movements and not an

[25] WANG, 2007, p. 4.
[26] WANG, 2007, p. 5.
[27] WANG, 2007, p. 2.
[28] WANG, 2007, p. 3.
[29] WANG, 2007, p. 3.
[30] WANG, 2007, p. 3.
[31] WANG, 2007, p. 6.
[32] WANG, 2007, p. 8.
[33] WANG, 2007, p. 10.
[34] WANG, 2007, p. 11.
[35] WANG, 2007, p. 12.

awkward imitation of European nation-states", because they were carrying with them an Asian culture based on the principle of the kingly way (*wang dao* 王 道) and opposed to the hegemonic way (*ba dao* 霸道). The former was part and parcel of Sun's Asia, while the latter he saw embodied in Europe. Secondly, and in Wang's view despite the Confucian origin of the distinction between kingly and hegemonic ways, Sun's Asia does not build upon some core of cultural homogeneity, neither Confucian nor other, but rather upon cultural heterogeneity, i.e. a "political culture that accommodates different religions, beliefs, nations, and societies"; the "category of nation provides the vehicle for the heterogeneity inherent in the idea of Asia."[36] In the writings of Sun, national self-determination weighs strongly but is balanced by an internationalism that is as much based on an alliance of the masses as it is on nation-states.[37] Sun's Asia, it seems, would have to be a combination of the pluralism of the tributary model, socialism, and the new relations among nation-states.

A political perspective beyond the nation-state and Asia

Returning to Chakrabarty's distinction between History 1 and History 2 and recalling the close connection between capital(ism) and the nation-state in Wang's account, one might be tempted to understand the emphasis on the pluralistic tributary model in the face of the new historical conditions of nation-states as a version of History 2. In Sun and Lenin, Wang sees formulated "a revolutionary perspective on Asia's social characteristics", and in some interpretative statements he indeed seems to pit the historical particular against the universal logic of capital: "In this perspective, what makes Asia Asia is not any cultural essence abstracted from Confucianism or any other type of civilization, but rather the special position of Asian countries in the capitalist world-system. The special position is not produced by a structural narrative of world capitalism, but by a dynamic analysis of the class composition and historical traditions internal to Asian society."[38]

Wang claims his re-imagination of Asia to be different from those based on "various culturalisms, statisms, and theories of civilization that emerged from early modern history."[39] He accords Asia a "unique position" in the midst of world capitalism and imperialism. This uniqueness stems from internal "social forces and their relations", which become only visible once one adopts a social revolutionary perspective and subjects international relations and different societies to a dynamic and "political analysis."[40]

To adopt a social revolutionary perspective means to embrace a "political perspective", which according to Wang requires "both the placement of conscious subjects within this perspective and the discernment of various active subjects – discernment of friends and enemies, and assessment of the direction of social movements."[41] By thus discerning different "political forces within and among societies" along a Left-Schmittian line, Wang seeks to overcome the framework of statism and international relations.[42] In particular, he opposes the vulgar view of equating the state with the political. From a social revolutionary perspective, "the political" exists beyond the state in various active subjects. To equate the state with the political, however, since the late 1970s has become the standard perception of a reality which Wang much deplores and which to him denotes "an era of 'depoliticization,' a process in which state mechanisms have gradually appropriated active subjectivity or subjective agency into 'state rationality' and the tracks of the global market."[43]

But given that this perspective can be applied to just any location, what would it mean to apply it to Asia? To what Asia? In other words, what is the relation of the location(s) of Asia to Wang's concept of Asia? Wang opposes "essentialist perspectives in understanding and constructing 'Asian' identity", particularly those that exhibit "strong culturalist overtones", such as the attempts to delineate a unitary and modern East Asia by the Japanese Kyoto-school sinologists Nishijima Sadao (1919-1998) or Miyazaki Ichisada (1901-1995).[44] Their search for an Asian modernity, in Wang's opinion, results in historical narratives of East Asian history that merely reproduce the "inherent standards of the Hegelian world order" which they have set out to deconstruct. When Miyazaki argues for a Song Dynasty capitalism and thus for an East Asian early modernity, he constructs a historical narrative that establishes a parallel development with the West and thus rests trapped in teleology and "various European concepts".[45] Wang is more sympathetic to the more recent narrative offered by Hamashita Takeshi who stipulates an "inner organicity" of Asia along a centre-periphery perspective and economic and political factors, particularly the maritime commercial relations and distinctive tributary networks.[46] However, also that account in Wang's view reproduces the binary of empire-state. For him, what is required is a narrative that includes wars and revolutions and a focus on continental relations besides maritime commercial networks. For the tributary system is not "a simple economic relation", but "encompasses ritual and political relations among various social groups with differing cultures and beliefs."[47] It cannot be described along a hierarchical relation between centre and periphery, but its complex meanings and uses point to a considerable "overlap or conflict with modern capitalist relations."[48]

Wang proposes a more entangled view of Asia and Europe, in which the question of Asia's modernity and the relationship between Asia and Europe is taking the communication and transpor-

[36] Wang, 2007, p. 12.

[37] Wang, 2007, p. 13.

[38] Wang, 2007, p. 14.

[39] Wang, 2007, p. 14.

[40] Wang, 2007, p. 14.

[41] Wang, 2007, p. 14.

[42] Wang bases much of his discussion of 'the political' on Carl Schmitt. While he explicitly references and argumentatively draws on Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* and his *Theory of the Partisan*, it should be noted that he himself does not explicitly subscribe to the label of 'Left-Schmittianism'. That label refers to a group of political theorists and philosophers (e.g. Chantal Mouffe, Gopal Balakrishnan) who use Carl Schmitt and the concept of 'depoliticization' for markedly left-wing political ends.

[43] Wang, 2007, pp. 17-18. See also Wang 2002 and 2006.

[44] Wang, 2007, pp. 18-19.

[45] Wang, 2007, p. 19. In my view, all concepts should be universally available for historiographic purposes. Contra Wang, I would hold that one does not necessarily see more or less using one or the other concept, but one sees different things, which is not to say that all such efforts should be equally valued.

[46] Wang, 2007, p. 20. An English translation of Hamashita's work has just appeared: Takeshi Hamashita, *Trade and Finance in Late Imperial China: Maritime Customs and Open Port Market Zones, Singapore*, 2010.

[47] Wang, 2007, p. 25.

[48] Wang, 2007, p. 25.

tation not as "the stiff bundling together of two worlds", but more like "two gears connected with a belt: when one turns, the other must turn as well."[49] Yet, still, what is the role of locations in his Asia? How to re-imagine Asia? WANG explains that in his vision of "an interactive narrative of history, the validity of the idea of Asia diminishes, since it is neither a self-contained entity nor a set of self-contained relations… [and] neither the beginning of a linear world history nor its end."[50] New imaginings of Asia, in WANG's opinion, must provide space for considerable cultural and political plurality and must heed "institutional experiences common to Asian cultures".[51] WANG's talk of Asian cultural commonality, however, remains undetermined, vague and eventually unsatisfying.[52] How would this concept of Asia relate to the geographical region Asia? Could it still possibly stretch from Japan to Turkey? WANG does mention one more commonality which, however, also fails to provide clarity: "The commonality of Asian imaginaries partly derives from the imaginers' common subordinate states under European colonialism, the Cold War, and the present global order, and the trends of national self-determination, socialist, and democratization movements."[53]

One wonders whether many African imaginaries could not claim much the same subordination. What about some European imaginaries (given inner-European colonialism)? Does it in the end all hinge on a claim of continuing colonialism?

Somehow and somewhere along the argument, WANG's Asia seems to have become smaller and larger at the same time, more like East Asia or, rather, China on cultural terms and more like 'anything but not Europe' in terms of subordination. There is clearly a tension in WANG's work between on the one hand the acknowledgement of the cultural heterogeneity of Asia, East Asia, and even China and on the other hand a reliance on a cultural continuity which WANG labels Confucian and which gives substance to his many claims of internality.[54] Perhaps, the reason for all this is that WANG lacks CHAKRABARTY's firm commitment to the universality of capital. Perhaps, as I will argue, there is still too much of a misplaced conceptual anti-Eurocentrism and reliance on a specific concept of Europe in WANG's post-revolutionary vision.

Re-imagining Europe and conceptual (anti-)Eurocentrism

Although WANG's main concern is with the concept of Asia, he leaves no doubt that a re-imagination of that concept on the basis of an "interactive narrative of history" includes the re-examination of the concept of Europe.[55] WANG's concept of Europe, i.e. the quality which he imputes to 'being European', seems largely to consist in his account of 19th century European history and its proliferating use of concepts which he deems influential up to the present day. His re-imagination of Europe aims at challenging "Eurocentrist historical narratives" and criticizing "Eurocentrism" more generally.[56] WANG's critique of Eurocentrism is hence intimately linked to contemporary politics, for his call to re-imagine Asia (and Europe) targets the lingering continuities of European colonialism as well as what he calls the new order of "neoliberal empire/imperialism".

That 'new empire', in WANG's view, has been a product of the 'war on terror' and "follows naturally upon the heels of neoliberal globalization."[57] Whereas neoliberal globalization "seeks to restructure various social traditions" along "marketist principles such as the legal protection of private property, the state's withdrawal from the economic sphere, and the transnationalization of productive, commercial, and financial systems", the 'war on terror' makes use of "violence, crises, and social disintegration" that come with neo-liberalism as "pretenses to reconstruct a military and political 'new empire'."[58] The aim of the 'new empire' is no less than "the construction of a total order at all levels."[59] The link between WANG's criticisms of Eurocentrism and of the 'new empire' is manifest in the following quote: "The critique of Eurocentrism is not an affirmation of Asiacentrism, but rather a rejection of that sort of egocentric, exclusivist, and expansionist logic of domination. In this sense, revealing the disorder and plurality within the 'new empire', breaking open the taken-for-granted notion of Europe, is not only one of the preconditions for reconstructing the ideas of Asia and Europe, but also the necessary path for breaking out of the 'new imperial logic'."[60]

What to think of WANG's re-imagination of Asia and Europe? WANG's criticism of Eurocentrist historiography and its Asian derivations is suggestive and his studies on the rise of modern Chinese thought, particularly his discussions of *junxian zhi* 郡县制 ("rational bureaucracy"), *fengjian zhi* 封建制 ("feudal system"), *shishi* 时势 ("the trend of times") and *tianli* 天理 ("heavenly principle"), offer rich conceptual resources for critical thought and for new avenues in historiography.[61] He often presents these conceptual resources as internal to the Chinese tradition.[62] In fact, as one commentator highlights, Confucianism, in WANG's view, "did not wait for modernity to have a self-critique of domination and inequality".[63] In the light of DIPESH CHAKRABARTY's question in the opening pages of this journal about what "terms of criticism" the emerging superpowers of India and China will offer the victims of their domination, WANG's work might thus be understood as a forceful answer (although WANG, as I said before, is not representative for China – and a fortiori not for the China presented in the imaginary of a superpower).[64] WANG's answer, however, suffers from several problems, which need to be addressed.

[49] WANG, 2007, pp. 26-27.

[50] WANG, 2007, p. 27.

[51] WANG, 2007, p. 28.

[52] The dissatisfaction is reinforced by the fact that in his *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*, WANG builds his argument on a cultural continuity along Confucian ritual and morality. It is unclear how WANG's Confucianism relates to his re-imagination of Asia.

[53] WANG, 2007, p. 29.

[54] See: WANG, 2007, p. 28; WANG, 2008b, p. 118 and p. 122.

[55] WANG, 2007, p. 27.

[56] WANG, 2007, pp. 28-29. WANG, for instance, finds "philosophical analysis of Song dynasty within the framework of ontology, realism, and epistemology" dissatisfying, for "such a method itself is external to Song thought; it is an interpretative system based on the concepts, categories, and theoretical frameworks of European philosophy." See: WANG, 2008b, p. 118.

[57] WANG, 2007, p. 1.

[58] Wang, 2007, p. 1.

[59] WANG, 2007, p. 1.

[60] WANG, 2007, p. 29.

[61] Cf. WANG, 2008b, pp. 120-123.

[62] He, for instance, repeatedly speaks of "Chinese traditional categories". For an important qualification, where WANG speaks out against "a simple reliance on traditional conceptions and paradigms", see: WANG, 2008b, p. 115.

[63] WANG BAN, 2007, p. 226.

[64] CHAKRABARTY, 2011.

Wang's call for re-imagining Asia and Europe in terms of criticism is a double blow against the historiography of "world history" from the 19th century onwards and against the 21st century global political order, which he epitomizes as the "'new imperial' order and its logic".[65] For Wang, these two matters are so closely related that the Eurocentrism in the former can only be part of the problem in the latter. Yet, and here comes the critical distinction I want to foreground, for Wang this seems to hold also at the conceptual level as regards both historiography and political argument. In other words, there is a conceptual anti-Eurocentrism in Wang's work manifest in his talk and criticism of "European concepts" and in his search for and advocacy of concepts and categories internal to the Chinese tradition. This seems philosophically and politically problematic. In terms of philosophy, I think that an argument could be produced which would show that the notion of a "European concept" is either nonsensical or an inattentive shorthand to refer to some "European" history of verbalized use of the concept in question. Wang's emphasis on the 19th century European historical formation of these concepts suggests that he uses "European concepts" in just such a shorthand manner. To draw a distinction between a concept and its use is however crucial, as there is no necessary connection between Europe and these concepts. The use of concepts is historically contingent, and Wang is mistaken if he takes some verbalized uses in 19th century European history – however dominant and influential they may have been – as a definitive marker for the quality of 'being European'. For one thing, this is so because any so-called "European concept" is at best the result of a historical process that is itself based on various power differentials and readily traceable to earlier verbalized uses in more specific locations. Given Wang's skepticism of the concept of state, why does he not talk of the "Italian" or "Florentine" concept of the state, say Machiavelli's *il stato*, and oppose Italocentrism rather than Eurocentrism? Put provocatively, it seems as if talk of "European concepts" turns Europe into a "static historical form" in no less deficient a manner than 19th century European scholars have done when conceptualizing Asia.

Although the notion of 'travelling concepts' is currently championed by many, I would think of it as a useful notion only if it is to say that concepts travel inasmuch as their use does. Whether something counts as a use of a travelled concept (whose meaning is thereby confirmed, altered or changed) or as a use of some other new concept is in each case a contested and inconclusive matter and certainly subject to argument. Anybody of course is free to argue that some use of a concept is linked to some conceptualized geographical region, or, for that matter, to some culture or tradition. If, however, such a link is argued to be conclusive and henceforth unbridgeable with the consequence that concepts are opposed or endorsed on that basis only, then one risks to buy into the use of these concepts as mere shibboleths (surely a 'Hebrew concept'?). Concepts thus easily become the esoteric prerogative of some guardians of a presumed tradition, culture or civilization, as if the use of a concept by an 'outsider' would be at all impossible or, if possible, would be inadequate. More often than not, talk of "European concepts" merely means to offer abridged arguments and to cover political agendas. In Wang's re-imagination of Asia and Europe, the one political agenda of Left Schmittianism is fairly explicit. But arguably there is a second, more implicit political agenda which is manifest in arguments drawing on a presumed Chinese tradition or Confucian culture. How the two political agendas relate to each other is unclear. That Wang asserts a diminished validity to the concept of Asia while re-imagining it in the form of Confucian East Asia or China should receive further critical attention.

Wang's re-imagination of Asia and Europe were to profit – I would venture to suggest – from getting rid of anti-Eurocentrist traces on the conceptual level, lest his rightly criticized "culturalisms, statisms, and theories of civilization" risk re-entering through the backdoor. In that sense, if there ever is to be a Chinese superpower, the sought terms of criticism, though likely to be expressive of and questioned for location-specific genealogies, are in political argument profitably understood as employing concepts which are neither the prerogative nor the burden of any conceptualized geographical region, civilization, culture, or tradition. If anything, the concepts on which terms of criticism draw should be universally available. To promote such critical use perhaps is what is required if the meaning of 'being Asian' or 'being European' in the 21st century is not to repeat the inadequacies of the insular politics in the past.

[65] Wang, 2007, p. 29.

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Neuerscheinung

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Das aus Anlass des 60-jährigen Jubiläums des „Deutschen Verbands für Angewandte Geographie (DVAG)" erschienene Heft beschäftigt sich mit der Geschichte des „Verbands deutscher Berufsgeographen", der Vorläuferorganisation des DVAG. Nach einer Einleitung, die eine methodische Reflexion enthält und einen kurzen Überblick über die Untersuchungsergebnisse gibt, wird im ersten Kapitel die Vorgeschichte des 1950 gegründeten Verbands, insbesondere im Hinblick auf die durch die NS-Zeit stark beeinflussten Prägungen im Selbstverständnis der Gründergeneration, beschrieben. Im zweiten Kapitel wird die Formierungsphase des Verbands vor dem Hintergrund der Rekonstituierung der westdeutschen Geographie nach 1945 und den damit verbundenen Machtkämpfen analysiert. Ein weiteres Kapitel beschäftigt sich mit den langwierigen Diskussionen um die Einrichtung von Diplomstudienstudiengängen und dem damit einhergehenden wachsenden Selbstbewusstsein des lange Zeit marginalisierten Verbandes. Das Abschlusskapitel dreht sich um den gescheiterten Versuch der Etablierung eines Einheitsverbandes der westdeutschen Geographie und den daraus resultierenden Neubeginn der nunmehr als „Deutscher Verband für Angewandte Geographie" arbeitenden Organisation. Kurzbiographien der ersten Mitglieder, ein Quellenanhang und das Literatur- und Quellenverzeichnis runden die Publikation ab.

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