

National Narrative and the Historiography of Chinese Science



The “Four Great Inventions of Ancient China” has been reified in the historiography of Chinese science and has long entered public consciousness through various channels. The People’s Republic of China issued a set of stamps featuring the “Four Great Inventions of Ancient China” as early as 1953. In 2005, Hong Kong issued a set of special stamps on the same theme with much fanfare. The “Four Great Inventions of Ancient China” was also a prominent theme in the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics this year.

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In this essay, I would like to show how national narrative has constrained the ways in which we think about the history of Chinese science. To do that, I shall examine the relationship between narratives of national history and narratives of the history of science. Although I will focus mainly on the history of Chinese science, I will refer to the histories of science in other East Asian nations when helpful.^❶ I see important similarities among these histories of science as they are usually written: they all invest in assumptions in the modern national narrative. After commenting on the existing historiography, I will briefly discuss a new perspective on the history of science in East Asia.

I.

We can identify certain salient features that have characterized the national narratives of modern East Asian nations. In its narrative form, national history has a beginning, a protagonist, and a plot. The founding myth is the beginning. “Myth” here doesn’t mean that it is simply a fairytale or is entirely fanciful; often, it is a creative remaking of history, memory, and tradition. The founding myths of the modern nation-states of China, Japan, and Korea, as constructed by their nationalists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, were highly selective appropriations of history and tradition. The myths of Emperor Jimmu, the Yellow Emperor, and Tangun, for example, fit in this genre.^❷ But of course the myth of national origins need not rest on one particular mythic hero. It can be a seemingly plausible history about a people in a particular place in the remote past. The textbook version of Chinese history I learned in school, for example, claims that the Chinese nation originated in the Yellow River region five thousands years ago. In a similar fashion, popular history in Korea asserts that the Korean nation originated in the Paektusan more than four thousand years ago. These origin myths thus define the identity of the nation by marking such attributes as ethnicity, geography (“homeland”), and the so-called “national character.” They also conveniently ignore certain crucial questions: for example, did the peoples who lived in the Yellow River region five thousand years ago have a collective identity? Could they have possibly seen themselves as one people who possessed the attributes that national history assigns to them? What are the assumptions that enable national history to connect these peoples and their identities to the

❶ Although this essay is written as a self-contained piece, it also tries to engage with Professor Yung-Sik Kim’s remarkable lecture printed in these pages.

❷ On the founding myths, see, e.g., T. Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires, 1895-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Shen Sung-chiao, “Wo yi wo xue jian Xuanyuan – Huangdi shenhua yu wan Qing de guozu jiangou,” *Taiwan Shehui Yanjiu Jikan*, 28 (December 1997), 1-77.

peoples, societies, cultures, politics, and identities that existed around them or that appeared after them? These are some of the questions that may challenge the assumptions of the origin myths. It is not surprising that they don't get asked very often in traditional national history.

Just as it has a beginning, national narrative also has a protagonist – that is, the hero of a story – and the protagonist is the nation itself. Here Liang Qichao's call for a new history comes to mind. Liang argued that traditional chronicles were records of dynasties, not the history of the nation. Dynasties come and go, the nation continues. In his new history, the protagonist (i.e. the nation) is essentially the same through time despite changes along the way. The nation is represented as an objective entity in history that is to be discovered or recovered by its people. This history is unilinear and ultimately teleological; everything leads to the final and full realization of the modern nation-state, when the nation awakens to self-consciousness and achieves modernity and liberation.

Such national narratives often share similar plots. The nation begins, develops, achieves glories, declines, falls asleep or becomes ill, experiences trials and tribulations, awakens, and marches toward liberation, independence, and self-realization. These turns of fate are turns of plot. The narrative can be a story of revival or renaissance. Early 20th-century Chinese nationalists declared that "China has fallen asleep," "China is sick," etc. The task they set for themselves was to "awaken" China. Korean nationalists of the early 20th century used a similar language. National narrative can also be a story of resistance. This is an example: the "Korean nation" has weathered many invasions, but it will never be subdued because of its indomitable "national character."

In addition to having a beginning, a protagonist, and a plot, national narrative often insists on one-to-one correspondence between the nation and a set of historical parameters, such as ethnicity, language, and culture. Thus, Japanese and Korean nationalists in the 19th and 20th centuries were eager to distance their written languages from classical Chinese. In their visions, the nation should be a well-defined entity that was homogenous inside with exact correspondences between ethnicity, language, and culture; the boundaries of the ethnicity of the people, their language, and their culture (should) perfectly superimpose on each other. This homogenous entity of the nation, then, could and should be sharply demarcated from neighboring nations. There were of course ethnic minorities within the nation – for example, the Ainu and the Ryukuan people in Japan – but their presence and voices disappeared in the Japanese national narrative. In the case of China, the challenge to this kind of national narrative was serious, because the modern Chinese nation-state inherited a multi-ethnic empire from the Qing dynasty. To consolidate nationhood, the Republican nationalists claimed that all the ethnic groups within the territory of modern China belonged to the same *Zhonghua minzu*; this nationalist discourse necessarily downplayed the notable differences in language, culture,

and historical experience of the various peoples. Instead, it insisted that there was something more fundamental, something primordial, that united these ethnic groups into one people, one nation, one collective identity. Differences were tolerated only insofar as they didn't pose a threat to the collective identity.

How can we understand these formations of national history? Most importantly, we must remind ourselves that national narrative does not exist prior to the interplay of power and knowledge. It comes out of the struggle among competing discourses, and the dominant national narrative strives to maintain its hegemony by suppressing alternative narratives or histories. The history of Taiwan is a telling example of how this works. Its history has been written in various ways by different historical actors from the Japanese colonial period, through the KMT era, to the present. Some of these histories or narratives are still locked in intense struggle with each other. Here is another example. In their efforts to create a modern nation, Korean nationalists at the turn of the 20th century championed a national narrative that privileged the mythic hero Tangun and ethnicity over an alternative narrative, popular during the Choson dynasty, that emphasized the legend of Kijia and Confucian civilization.^③

I have marked out a few features that have characterized major national narratives in East Asia since the late 19th century. The list of characteristics is not comprehensive, and not all of these characteristics were equally prominent at all times. Moreover, one cannot ignore other competing narratives which attracted notice in certain points of time – for example, Pan-Asianism, anarchism, liberal cosmopolitanism, and world socialist revolutions. Yet, the fact remains that none of them seriously challenged nationalism and the nationalist narratives described above.

II.

How do the national narratives inform the historiography of science? One common way is that they latch onto certain narrative assumptions of traditional histories of science.

For instance, traditional histories of science also tend to look for the origins, as embodied in the supposed “discoveries” or the “firsts.” The driving question of this kind of history is: Who first discovered or invented this or that? Furthermore, the question is often asked in this form: Who first discovered this biological phenomenon or that chemical process? This last

^③ Schmid, *Korea Between Empires*, ch. 5. One need not look far back in time to find an example of how national narratives get rewritten. Take for example the controversy between the People's Republic of China and the two Koreas over Koguryo and Parhae since the 1990s. Both China and Korea insist that the two ancient kingdoms were part of their respective national histories.

question not only looks for the origins, but also imposes modern scientific disciplines on past knowledge systems. This kind of history of science is typically a heroic narrative that dramatizes history; it treats the history of science as a series of critical moments of discoveries, breakthroughs, and inventions (and it does so with a strong positivist assumption of scientific progress). The moving force of science was the “scientific heroes” who made these discoveries and inventions, and who overcame the obstacles that had been blocking the advance of science. Such a hero doesn’t have to be an individual. It can also be a people or a nation. Consider such statements: “It is we Chinese who first discovered this.” One can substitute the “Chinese” with “Koreans,” “Japanese,” etc. This statement makes two assertions: one on the continuity of “Chineseness” in history and the other on science as discoveries and firsts.

There is good reason to try to find out where certain knowledge or technology first took shape, because such inquiries help us understand how certain knowledge came into being, how and why this knowledge got distributed and circulated (or not), and so on. Too often, however, this kind of history treats science not so much as a cultural activity and process, but as an entity that is removed from historical context. The impulse is to claim priority and credit rather than to explain a historical process; thus, once it’s claimed that a certain people (often as defined by the modern national narratives) first “discovered” or “invented” something, then the knowledge or technology somehow became inherently “Chinese,” “Korean,” etc., regardless of the historical context. We all have heard of these kinds of claims in the history of science and technology. Who first invented moveable-type printing, this or that metal technology, or even dumplings, sushi, and “Chinese” characters? The attention is usually on the “firsts” than on the formation, circulation, and appropriation of knowledge and practice in and across various societies, time periods, and places, although it is these latter inquiries that can actually explain science or technology in action.

As we know, nationalism has influenced the way in which the history of politics, art, society, or migration, is written, should we also consider science to be simply one of many such subjects? Is there anything particular about nationalism and the historiography of science? It might be true that all such subjects are equally interesting, but it seems that there is something special about science in 20th-century nationalism in East Asia. For, by then, science had acquired a strong epistemological authority; nothing could compete with science in staking claims to objectivity, global validity, and universal application. Similarly, science had become a powerful marker of modernity. Science and technology represented progress and power. As nationalist discourse at the time was often permeated with desires for progress and power, it is not surprising that science was highly valued in nationalist discourse. Of course, not all of the nationalists shared the same definitions of science, progress, and modernity, and not all of them preferred the same approach in the pursuit of modern science. However, few disagreed that to be fully modern, the nation must possess science and technology.

III.

I have identified certain connections between national narrative and the historiography of science which, I believe, have heavily influenced the way in which the history of Chinese science has been written. In this section, I will now examine the history of Chinese science as it has been written since the 18th century (that is, from before the rise of modern nationalism). My purpose is not to provide a historiographic review of the subject, nor to identify the origins or the landmarks of the history of Chinese science, but to highlight the political meanings of Chinese science to its historians in different time periods.

For our purpose, we may say that the earliest efforts to write the history of Chinese science began with the encounter with Jesuit science. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the “Chinese origins” theory, which asserted that at least part of Western science had originated in China, helped Chinese scholars to cope with Western science. The theory became significant again after the mid-19th century, when the Chinese were faced with the threat of the Western powers and an influx of Western learning. Like a double-edged sword, the Chinese origins theory could cut both ways. On the one hand, the conservatives used it to downplay the value of Western science: the Chinese had previously owned the knowledge; if they had let it fall into oblivion, that was because it was a lesser knowledge compared to the other, greater learning. On the other hand, the reformers used the theory to support the position of accommodating Western science: since Western science had first come from the Chinese, it was properly Chinese; therefore, there was no reason to resist Western science, as the Chinese were the rightful owner of the knowledge. In the late 17th and 18th centuries, the Chinese origins theory led to a surge of interest among some scholars in astronomy, geography, and mathematics. And in the 19th century, it was used to justify the introduction of Western learning. We should note that when the Chinese literati of the 17th and 18th centuries championed the Chinese origins theory, they thought mainly in civilizational terms, which is to say that they used the two categories “zhong” and “xi” to refer to two different civilizations (rather than two nations or states). The “Western civilization,” represented by Christianity and Western learning, posed an unfamiliar challenge to the Sino-centric worldview of the Chinese scholars, and the Chinese origins theory enabled them to contain the unfamiliar.

This interpretive strategy was not unique to the Chinese literati. During the Bengal Renaissance in the 19th and the early 20th century, Indian intellectuals made a similar argument. Just as 19th-century Chinese scholars found in ancient Chinese texts, such as the Mozi, physics, optics, logic, etc., their counterparts in India claimed that many modern scientific theories, including Newtonian physics and Darwin’s theory of evolution, corresponded to ancient Vedic knowledge. Some even argued that European science and mathematics had descended

ultimately from ancient Vedic knowledge. (Extreme Hindu nationalists today still make the same claims.) In this way, they returned to the archaic to claim originality and ownership of a foreign body of knowledge.⁴ However, the closest Chinese cousin of the Indian search for Hindu science was the “western origins” theory popular among Chinese nationalists at the turn of the 20th century. The “western origins” theory claimed that the Han Chinese and their civilization had originated in ancient Babylonia. This people subsequently migrated to the Yellow River region. There, they defeated the Miao, conquered the land, and settled down. If this history appears parallel to the Hindu nationalist history of the Aryan invasion and conquest, it is because they both appropriated European Orientalist scholarship, which first proposed the theories, and because both shared the discourse of modern nationalism.

Although early Chinese nationalists took the “western origins” theory to suggest that Chinese occupied an equal footing with Europeans in humanity and civilization, the theory lost favor among the next generation of Chinese intellectuals. By the mid-1920s, the theory had become incompatible with a new wave of Chinese nationalism and anti-imperialism. The new credo insisted that Chinese civilization and the Chinese nation were *sui generis* and that their birthplace was firmly located in the Yellow River region. This doctrine profoundly influenced generations of Chinese historians, archaeologists, and paleoanthropologists, whose interpretations tended to minimize influences from central and western Asia on China, and not until recently did it start to soften.⁵

In the Republican period, major historians of Chinese science were themselves professional scientists (e.g. Zhu Kezhen and Qian Baocong). They began their research into history in part because a genuine curiosity about Chinese achievements in their respective disciplines; historical research grew out of their professional interests. However, there was also a nationalist underpinning to their historical research. These scholars developed their intellectual outlook during the May Fourth era, influenced by the national studies movement (*zhengli guogu*), and they shared with their contemporaries the same concerns about the fate of the Chinese nation. Many believed that nationalism was a political doctrine that could most effectively unite the people and resist imperialism. In this, they were children of their time. They knew the world situation of colonialism, racism, and nationalism. They were also faced with the expedient political reality of Western and Japanese imperialism in China. Not surprisingly, many of them believed that science was a crucial part of nation-building and

⁴ Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), ch. 4.

⁵ Fa-ti Fan, “How Did the Chinese Become Native?: Science and the Search for National Origins in the May Fourth Era,” in Kai-wing Chow, et al., eds., *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Book, 2008), pp. 183-208.

modernization, and they took it upon themselves to disseminate science. Their efforts contributed to the growth of the Science Society of China and the many popular magazines on science that appeared during this difficult time. In this view, the history of Chinese science was useful because it served practical purposes; historical research could help recover “national learning”, assist science dissemination, as well as help instill a sense of national pride in the mind of the Chinese. I am not saying that these scholars’ historical research aimed solely to boost national pride and confidence in doing science. The more scholarly of their works were clearly driven by intellectual obsession than political causes. Nevertheless, these scholars operated mainly within the framework of national history of science. Also, being scientists trained in particular disciplines, they tended to impose modern scientific categories on the past.

IV.

That generation of Chinese scholars also helped Joseph Needham embark on serious research into the history of Chinese science. During his stay in China in the 1940s, Needham learned a good deal from Chinese scientists and engineers who were interested in the history of Chinese science and technology; they opened for him doors into vast amounts of historical material. Nevertheless, Needham’s project was truly monumental and his historical outlook intensely personal. His historical view grew in part from his political conviction, a Marxist-influenced cosmopolitanism, but also from his highly romantic view of China and the history of Chinese science. By recovering Chinese achievements in science and technology, Needham helped cut Europe down to size in the historiography of science. Yet, Needham probably didn’t go far enough, for he accepted certain principal parameters of the Euro-centric historiography, such as the overgeneralized notions of Eastern and Western worldviews and the “why didn’t China” questions. Consequently, he was fighting within the ring drawn by his opponents. Another problem with Needham’s approach is that he imposed modern scientific categories on the past; the volumes dedicated to topics like chemistry and botany treat Chinese knowledge traditions almost as though they meant or tried to do the same thing as modern science. Furthermore, his work paid only cursory attention to the social and cultural environment in which particular scientific practice and knowledge were produced.

It is worth emphasizing that Needham studied the history of Chinese science in civilizational rather than national terms, reflecting his general idea that different scientific civilizations merged into the single stream of modern science in the era of the Scientific Revolution. As a historian, he talked about Chinese culture, Chinese thought, Chinese society, and the Chinese state, but he wasn’t particularly interested in China as a nation; his cosmopolitanism prevented him from extolling the value of the nation. His approach and

perspective, however, resonated to some extent with the nationalist historiography of Chinese science. For example, Needham was interested in the origins and was prone to emphasize the firsts in science and technology that the Chinese had scored. In addition, because he believed that different scientific traditions converged and brought about what we call modern science, one of his goals became to recover Chinese contributions to the scientific legacy of the modern world. In this sense, Needham was a diffusionist; he believed that scientific transmission from China (and India) to Europe had contributed to the formation of modern scientific culture.

When Needham was laboring on his project in the 1940s-80s, he received help from many scholars in China, who answered his queries, sent him their publications, and supplied him with references to primary sources. These and other Chinese scholars of course also produced their own works. Their technical expertise and empirical research were tremendous (as demonstrated particularly by the works in the history of astronomy and mathematics). Unfortunately, however, state politics often intruded into their research, writing, and careers, so much so that their works were often burdened with political imperatives. It was during this time that enormous efforts were made to erect icons in the history of Chinese science, e.g., Zhang Heng and Li Shizhen. This focus and emphasis may be explained in part by the promotion of earthquake studies, barefoot doctors, and other scientific programs at the time, but there was also the impulse to laud Chinese achievements in science. Scientific heroes shared the stage with iconic inventions. Pictures of Huangdi's south-pointing chariot and Zhang Heng's seismoscope flooded scholarly and general publications, although those were simply models built in the 20th century and nobody knows if they even remotely resembled the original objects. Moreover, there were the so-called "four great inventions" – the compass, papermaking, gunpowder, and printing, which became icons of Chinese contribution to world science and civilization.⁶ This claim to contribution rested on the assumption that the origins of such technological inventions were definable and that the origin, whatever it means, was more important than other aspects of technological development. Yet, one can reasonably argue instead that intellectually it would be more rewarding to examine how and why these technologies were developed, transmitted, received, appropriated, and renovated in particular historical, social, and cultural contexts. In some ways, the focus of the Chinese scholars wasn't too different from Needham's. Needham also frequently credited the Chinese with inventions and scientific firsts. The difference is that Needham was talking about Chinese civilization, whereas in the works of Chinese scholars, civilization easily blurred into nation.

⁶ Iwo Amelung, "Die Vier Großen Erfindungen. Selbstzweifel und Selbstbestätigung in der Chinesischen Wissenschafts- und Technikgeschichtsschreibung," in Iwo Amelung, Song-U Chon, Joachim Kurtz, et al., eds., *Selbstbehauptungsdiskurse in Asien: China, Japan, Korea* (Munich: Iudicium 2003), pp. 243-274.

V.

This brings us back to the problem of imposing national narrative on the past: the spatio-temporal trajectory of science is conditioned by the national narrative, and the spatio-temporal boundaries of the nation determine who and what are in and who and what are out of the history. Thus, scientific activities that occurred outside the territories of modern China are left out of the picture. Conversely, anything happened within the territories of modern China is automatically Chinese. A recent example of this kind of enterprise is the multi-volume series on the history of science and technology of the ethnic minorities, titled *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu kexue jishu congshu* (Guangxi kexue jishu chubanshe, 1996-), edited by a team of distinguished scholars. It is, of course, very important and timely to study the history of the sciences of these ethnic groups. They have been severely neglected and marginalized in the mainstream history of science, and any effort to reconstruct and examine the history of their scientific activities is laudable. However, there are fundamental conceptual problems with the series.

First of all, like Needham's project, the series is divided by scientific disciplines. Although it does not entirely disregard the traditional Chinese knowledge system (there are volumes on *fangzhi* and *tianwen lifa*), the overall scheme still imposes modern categories on the past. At any rate, even the traditional Chinese knowledge system may not fairly represent the knowledge systems of the minority groups. Admittedly, there is practical difficulty organizing the material according to the minority groups. There are, according to the official policy, 55 ethnic minorities in China. Since so little is known about the history of so many of these groups, it is not surprising that the editors of the series decided against organizing their studies by ethnic groups. Yet, the authors dutifully employed the official designations of the ethnic groups throughout the volumes.

This leads to a second conceptual problem. Can one apply the classification of ethnic groups today to the past? Even though I advocate using cultural groups in history rather than modern scientific subjects to organize the historical material, I doubt very much that the official designations of ethnic groups are a useful guide to history. The officially defined groups today may not apply to the situation dozens of years ago, let alone hundreds or thousands of years ago. For one thing, the official classification is a political product of state policy and, increasingly, ethnic movements. Moreover, ethnic boundaries and identities are never fixed; they change over time. Instead of reading the present back to the past, we should start from the historical period into which we are investigating. In fact, from the perspective of history of science, it probably makes more sense to study cultural groups than ethnic groups *per se*. A cultural group could be only part of an ethnic group, but it also could include several ethnic groups or simply transcend ethnicity. This leads to my next point.

Third, the series adopts an approach that subsumes the history of science under the national narrative. The territorial boundaries of modern China determine the ethnic groups that are included in or excluded from the history. As a result, the approach doesn't consider if historically those ethnic groups (assuming that they did exist in historical times) had less to do with "Chinese civilization" than with other cultures in, say, today's South Asia, Southeast Asia, or Central Asia. Nor does it care if many of them were historically more remote from "Chinese civilization" in their identity, literature, and culture than were, say, the Korean or Japanese or Vietnamese elite. Subsequently, the historical groups are classified as Chinese and studied as such historically for no other reason than the one that their alleged descendants now live within the political territories of the Chinese state.

VI.

By the same token, the historical logic of national narrative demands that the Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese elites be excluded from historical accounts of "Chinese" science, because they did not live within the territories of modern China and because they have been written into national histories of Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Hence, despite the obvious interests of the Vietnamese and Korean elites in Chinese or Han learning, they are rarely mentioned in the history of Chinese science. This drastic compartmentalization of scholarship runs against the historical fact that classical Chinese served as a lingua franca among scholars in China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam for more than one thousand years until the 19th century, much like Latin in Medieval Europe or Arabic in Islamic civilization. (The power of the Chinese imperial states in the region over a long period of time contributed to this cultural dominance.) In intellectual terms, the scholarly elites in these countries had more in common with each other than with the socially lower people in their respective societies. This fact should be fundamental to our understanding of the history of science in this transnational civilization. It may be more fruitful to see science in the four societies as local varieties of a shared intellectual tradition and discourse.

To be sure, local or native consciousness could inform interpretations of the shared literature or elite knowledge. For instance, the Japanese kokugaku movement of the 18th century aimed to challenge Sino-centric learning and promote native identity and consciousness.⁷ (This movement would eventually merge into modern Japanese nationalist

⁷ Harry D. Harootunian, *Things Seen and Unseen: Discourse and Ideology in Tokugawa Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

ideology in the 19th century). However, it is worth emphasizing that these identities were not fixed across time. They were always comparative, relational, and therefore changing. We can speak of identities only in particular historical context. A Korean scholar in the 17th century could feel simultaneously Korean (in terms of ethnicity or state loyalty) and more Chinese than the Chinese living under the Manchu dynasty (in terms of civilization).

We should thus pay due attention to the ideas and practices that took shape in a particular intellectual and cultural environment as well as that arose from interactions among learned communities and discourses that sometimes occurred across state boundaries. It would be important to ask how scholars appropriated or reinterpreted scientific knowledge and practices according to their particular needs and purposes. A physician in Ryukyu who had received medical training in China was eager to find out how the Chinese medicine he knew could be adapted to the local environment of Ryukyu. Similarly, a physician in southern China would need to figure out how to adjust canonic medical knowledge from the north to local circumstances. The similarities between these two cases are not so much national than regional. In such cases, it would be important to consider the networks circulating information and knowledge, the local receptions and interpretations of such information and knowledge, and the innovations produced by the locals in connection to the information and knowledge they appropriated. Such processes took place not only in places outside the political dominion of China, but also within it. China (or Korea or Japan or Vietnam) has never been a homogeneous whole. Far from it. And there is little reason to assume that scientific knowledge and practices in various parts of China were always more similar or closely related to each other than to those of a neighboring country.

As I have shown in this essay, national narrative has profoundly shaped the way we think about the history of Chinese science. It is evidence of the power and pervasiveness of nationalism in the historiography of Chinese science that often we are not even aware of its influence. We should be more reflective about this issue. Even though we probably cannot do without such terms as Korea and China in writing history, we should remember that these terms are often too vague, too loaded, and too imprecise for our inquiries. When we use the term China, for example, we have to be very careful about what it is meant to refer to. Is it a nation, a state, a civilization, an ethnicity, a society, or a culture? It is crucial to make distinctions between these categories, especially because, too often, they have been used interchangeably and carelessly.