

# A Historian's Ethical Duty

## *Chen Yuan's 'Illumination of the Subtle' in Occupied Beiping*

Yuan Yidan

Capital Normal University, Beijing, China

roundalt@163.com

### Abstract

In the wake of Japan's occupation of Beiping (now Beijing) in 1937, the historian Chen Yuan's choice between staying in or leaving the city (which would imply accommodation or resistance) was regarded not merely as a personal decision but also as a symbolic stance for the ethical principles of the Chinese intelligentsia. Based on a close reading of Chen's historical writings during the Japanese occupation, this paper focuses on the inner world of this historian, and argues that a salient rhetorical feature of Chen's wartime work was its role as a mechanism which he referred to as 'illuminating the subtle'. This involved historical facts being cited and interpreted in a way that demonstrated the historian's attitude and feelings towards contemporary events. It is proposed that the 'illumination of the subtle' is not accepted at face value as academic research, but rather that it is treated as a rhetorical device, in order to understand the inner logic and dynamism of this expressive mechanism.

### Keywords

Chen Yuan – Beiping (Beijing) – occupation – historiography – ethical dilemma

## 1 Introduction

After the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, which broke out on 7 July 1937, the fate of Chen Yuan 陳垣 (1880–1971),<sup>1</sup> stranded in Beiping (now Beijing), became the

1 For a brief overview of Chen Yuan, see Howard Boorman and Janet Krompart (eds), *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 261–264.

centre of attention in intellectual circles, as well as in the public sphere. A historian who had enjoyed an international reputation before the outbreak of war, Chen was an exemplar of scholarly integrity among his contemporary intellectual peers. His insistence on ethical principles in the period of the Japanese occupation therefore assumed a degree of symbolic significance. For intellectuals in wartime, to stay or to leave was a choice contingent on each individual's particular situation. As the president of Fu Jen Catholic University, Chen spoke of his daily life thus:

I do not concern myself with household duties or money matters. I take reading at home as work, and teaching or fulfilling administrative duties as relaxation. Thankfully, our school is a Catholic university, and has the personnel to take care of everyday administration. As a result, I can take advantage of this benefit to relax or idle around—this would be impossible in any institution other than Catholic universities. I am just making use of the environment, going with the flow, and reading my own books when there is time.<sup>2</sup>

Since Fu Jen was a Catholic university with German sponsorship, it was still able to run normally in the occupied region while gaining sympathy from both the Republican government and intellectuals who had moved to the south. The city of Beijing during the Japanese occupation might seem monolithic, but in fact there were a few relatively free 'islands'—similar to the *gudao* 孤島 ('solitary island') of the Shanghai International Settlement before the attack on Pearl Harbor—within it. In the wake of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, Catholic universities served as political shelters for scholars who remained in Beijing. Since Peking University and Tsinghua University moved southwards one after the other, Fu Jen Catholic University and Yenching University became the most-desired institutions of higher education among young students left in occupied north China. After the Pacific War broke out, Yenching University, because of its American background, was forced to disband; enrolling in Fu Jen thus became the only option for young people who did not wish to receive a 'colonial' education.

In early 1944, Zhou Guoting 周國亭, an alumnus of Fu Jen, returned to Beijing. Seeing that Chen Yuan's circumstances had been much reduced, he tried

2 Letter from Chen Yuan to Chen Lesu 陳樂素, 3 February 1946, in *Chen Yuan laiwang shuxinji* 陳垣來往書信集 (Collection of Chen Yuan's Correspondence) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2010), 1136.

to persuade Chen to move south. Chen replied: 'If I go back to the south, who instead is going to teach the thousands of youth at Fu Jen University? Who instead can sustain and advocate the spirit of righteousness (*zhengqi* 正氣) in the occupied region?'<sup>3</sup> After the war, the image of Chen Yuan in occupied Beiping has been described by one of Chen's own students, Fang Hao 方豪, as that of a 'patriotic historian'. However, this overly generic term in fact obscures Chen's identity as a scholar. The bottom line of morality Chen upheld during the eight-year occupation can be better characterised in terms that are less charged with ideology, such as 'carrying on one's scholarship without serving the occupation regime'. Not serving in the government was the basic and only non-negotiable requirement for a scholar during a time of dynastic transition, and carrying on one's studies during an age of chaos was a scholar's way to contribute to his homeland. The meaning of scholarship during the occupation could be modest or significant. In a modest sense, it was merely a tool to extricate oneself from worries or boredom; in a grander sense, we might elevate it to the level of saving culture and the nation—that is, 'preserving the seed of scholarly tradition'.

Chen Yuan's gesture of adaptation did not begin when Beiping was occupied. After the Mukden Incident of 18 September 1931, Chen's son remarked in a letter that the brutality of the Japanese troops was outrageous and that total war was imminent: 'given the current situation, this is not a time for learning and scholarship'.<sup>4</sup> Chen Yuan immediately replied: 'What can we do otherwise?' He went on, 'besides learning and carrying out scholarship, what else is there for us to do? "Through the wind and rain all looks dark; yet the rooster crows without ceasing"—this is precisely our secret of learning.' As the president of Fu Jen University, Chen Yuan did not approve the decision of a large number of students to relocate to the south and fight Japan. Instead, he understood the relationship between scholarship and a chaotic age in the following way: a scholar is not much use to the state anyway, but each individual has their own duties. If everyone can fulfil their obligations, the country will not be fated to perish. Should patriotism for every individual be narrowly defined as joining the military and fighting battles? More than one student recalled that Chen remarked in his class that, whenever he received articles on Chinese his-

3 Zhou Guoting 周國亭, 'Beiping lunxian qijian tanxian ji' 北平淪陷期間探險記 (Adventures in Occupied Beiping), *Zhengyi bao* 正義報 (Justice Newspaper) (Kaifeng), 22–23 December 1946.

4 Letter from Chen Yue 陳約 to Chen Yuan, 24 November 1931. In *Chen Yuan laiwang shuxinji*, 946.

tory from Japan, he felt as if a bomb had been thrown on his desk, and (the articles) motivated his resolution to defeat Japan in historical scholarship.<sup>5</sup> As Chen Yuan saw it, the decline in the affairs of the state was not something that occurred in a single day but was, instead, the result of the inner logic of history. As a historian, Chen understood this logic and assuaged his worries as an ordinary citizen, while rebelling against his pessimistic insights based on historical precedence. In a letter to his family, Chen said that he could not drink; when he was dejected, he did not feel like reading newspapers and simply kept reading his books, 'to the extent that I got dizzy and lay down as if I were very drunk'. Moreover, he told his aged grandmother that he was not wearing thick socks at the end of the year because he never stepped out of his own home.<sup>6</sup> While substituting reading for drinking was not a very ostentatious way to alleviate one's worries, this choice revealed Chen's true inclinations as a scholar.

Because of the reclusive nature of Chen Yuan's life under occupation, we can learn more about his innermost thoughts by exploring his writings rather than his deeds. Fortunately, Chen Yuan not only engaged in reading at home during the occupation but also left many academic works to posterity. These works represent important materials with which to probe his thoughts and feelings during the war. To close-read Chen's historical scholarship as primary texts, I am not focusing on the historical topics that Chen actually dealt with in his scholarship, but rather his personal concerns, and especially the way he adeptly utilised the craft of the historian to impart personal concerns. This paper attempts to approach these texts at a rhetorical level. By reading 'between the lines', I attempt to explicate the interconnections and disjuncture between historical events that Chen's works investigated and contemporary events that they hinted at, as well as their relations with this historian's hidden concerns at the time.

Given his choice of research subjects and historical period, Chen Yuan's works in this period repeatedly used terms such as '[bureaucratic] service or retreat' (*chuchu* 出處); 'remnant loyalist' (*yimin* 遺民); 'treacherous ministers' (*erchen* 貳臣); 'recluse' (*yinyi* 隱逸); 'orthodox and unorthodox' (*zhengrun* 正閏); 'supporting political orthodoxy' (*feng zhengshuo* 奉正朔); and 'distinction between Chinese and barbarians' (*hua yi zhi bian* 華夷之辨). Such terminol-

5 Liu Naihe 劉乃和, 'Shuwu erjin hao liyun' 書屋而今號勵耘 (The studio is now called cultivation), in Chen Zhichao 陳智超 (ed.), *Liyun shuwu wenxue ji: shixue jia Chen Yuan de zhixue* 勵耘書屋問學記：史學家陳垣的治學 (The Record of Study in the Studio of Cultivation: The Historian Chen Yuan's Research Life) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2006), 189.

6 Reply from Chen Yuan to Chen Yue, 6 December 1931, in *Chen Yuan laiwang shuxinji*, 946–947.

ogy was mostly derived from literati writings during earlier dynastic transitions, especially when China faced foreign conquest. Their authors' circumstances therefore formed diachronic correspondence with those of intellectuals living under occupation in different periods. These archaic terms, moreover, were undoubtedly selected as counterparts of modern terms. *Hua yi zhi bian*, for instance, obviously corresponds to *minzu yishi* 民族意識 (national consciousness). However, these obsolete terms were not necessarily applicable to the context of Japanese-occupied Beiping in the 1930s and 1940s. The distinction between 'remnant loyalists' and 'treacherous ministers', for instance, was premised upon imperial rule (which no longer existed). Modern intellectuals could only pledge loyalty or commit treason to the nation-state. Under Japanese occupation, the 'remnant loyalist' was no longer a narrowly defined political identity, but a generic role serving as a common discursive resource and behavioural pattern. The theory of 'political orthodoxy' also did not necessarily mean unquestioned support for the Nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-shek, but rather referred to the legitimacy of an ethnic Chinese polity. Furthermore, in his historical works written under the occupation, Chen Yuan hoped to use the ancient 'distinction between Chinese and barbarians' to instigate Chinese national consciousness. But in the context of the Sino-Japanese War, this traditional pair of distinctions clearly could not be simply equated with the modern national consciousness. The so-called 'barbarians' in history had long become part of the 'Chinese nation', the unity of which was particularly underlined by intellectuals in the War of Resistance. The 'distinction between Chinese and barbarians', in Chen's usage, was therefore a code word referring to the antagonism between China and Japan. In short, it was a rhetorical device and not strictly speaking historiographical terminology.

What I mean here by 'rhetoric' roughly corresponds to what Chen calls 'historiographical methodology' (*shifa* 史法). The most canonical traditional Chinese historiographical method is the moralistic 'historiographical judgement' (*bifa* 筆法), as exemplified by the canonical *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋). This approach involves the historian gesturing towards an ethical position through subtle choices of diction. According to Chen Yuan, a broader category than 'historiographical judgement' is 'historiographical conventions' (*shufa* 書法), which includes all that concerns conventions and styles, the construction of meanings and texts, as well as the selection of historical sources.<sup>7</sup> Broader still is 'historiographical methodology', which includes all the fields

7 Chen Yuan, 'Tongjian Hu zhu biao wei' 通鑑胡注表微 (Illumination of the subtle in Hu Sanxing's *Commentaries of the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government*), Part 1, *Furen xue zhi* 輔仁學志 (Fu Ren Monograph) 13, 1/2 (1945): 132.

in which he excelled, such as calendrical systems, systems of taboo names (*bihui* 避諱), collocation, textual criticism and even commentaries, emotional remarks and moral admonitions. 'Historiographical methodology' is necessary to complement 'historical events'. Hence, what Chen calls 'historiographical methodology' broadly refers to historians' means of expression, which include non-narrative components such as appropriate commentaries and expressive notes. The majority of Chen's works in fact consist of seemingly tedious textual criticism. Chen Yuan's dedication to the style of academic writing manifests in details such as the design of research subject and organisation, the abridging of quotations, the balance of styles between main texts and quotations, considering function words, and the placing of exclamatory diction. In this sense, Chen might be considered as a stylist among historians.

The unique character of Chen Yuan's works during the occupation lies in the fact that they imply, or sometimes even demonstrate, the ways in which a particular book should be read. The most compelling example is the *Illumination of the Subtle in Hu Sanxing's Commentaries of the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* (*Tongjian Hu zhu biao wei* 通鑒胡註表微, hereafter the *Illumination of the Subtle*).<sup>8</sup> The significance of the *Illumination of the Subtle* is by no means limited to this book alone. It sheds light on the methods that might be used to interpret Chen's other works written during the occupation. It might be said that Chen's works from this period all contain the mechanism of 'illuminating the subtle'—that is, the historian, moved by the circumstances of the present, cites historical events to reveal his position on contemporary affairs. Looking at these commentaries today, it is easy to notice that readers of Chen's works during the occupation—the majority of whom had received solid training in history, many being Chen's own students—all abided by methods prescribed in the *Illumination of the Subtle*, consciously or unconsciously. This explains the subtle expressions that Chen wove 'between the lines', and elucidates Chen's ethical dilemma during the occupation. We might call this method of reading itself 'illuminating the subtle'.<sup>9</sup>

8 *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒, published in 1084, was the first major history of China in chronicle form compiled by Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086). Chen's work is a study of Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (1230–1287), a Song scholar living during the Song–Yuan transition, who embeds his opposition to the Mongol regime in seemingly innocuous commentaries of the *Zizhi tongjian*.

9 In Liu Naihe's 'Chongdu *Tongjian Hu zhu biao wei* zhaji' 重讀〈通鑒胡註表微〉札記 (Re-reading the *Illumination of the Subtle* in Hu Sanxing's *Commentaries of the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government*) (1983), he recalls that, while Chen Yuan was still alive, some of Chen's students were discussing the necessity of writing an 'illumination of the subtle of the *Illumination of the Subtle*'. Chen simply nodded and smiled upon hearing this suggestion; Liu

My interpretation of Chen Yuan's work cannot entirely resist this temptation of seeking the subtle either. Yet rather than following Chen's instruction to read the *Illumination of the Subtle* by means of 'illuminating the subtle', we would be better served by taking the 'illumination of the subtle' as a rhetorical strategy—that is, as a historiographical method. The correct parsing of the internal structure and mechanism of this particular method—for example, the tension between evidence and argument, or the implied relations between history and contemporary affairs—relies on some kind of tacit understanding between historians and their readers. To decode rather than to replicate or transplant this mechanism in Chen's works, readers need to be cognisant of their own position as well as that of the historian so as to avoid anachronistic interpretations. Maintaining a distance during one's reading helps one to understand how this rhetorical device functions and to reveal the internal gaps within this mechanism of expression.

This helps to explain why the *Illumination of the Subtle* includes a section on historical methodology that is more than half of the work's entire length and apparently has little to do with its thesis. A novice cannot possibly pick up the profound messages wrapped in subtle language in a historian's work. The section on methodology in fact provides a guideline for the reader: its aim is to cultivate, train and prepare the reader for the *Illumination of the Subtle*. Reading Chen's works during the period of occupation required not only a common sense of history but also training in the history of religion and other particular fields. More importantly, one needed to acquire a method of reading and develop a spontaneous approach to the text in order to trigger the mechanism of illumination in Chen's works. Of course, the 'illumination of the subtle' in Chen's works refers only to scattered snippets. If we are to assume that something governed those snippets, this would be the historian and his time.

## 2 'The Three Books on Religion' as Political History

Chen Yuan spent many years studying the history of religion. His earliest work, *Four Studies on Ancient Religion* (*Gu jiao sikao* 古教四攷, 1917–1922), investigates foreign religions that spread to China; a later work, *The Sinicisation of the Peoples from Western Regions During the Yuan Dynasty* (*Yuan Xiyuren Huahua kao* 元西域人華化攷, 1923), altered the academic atmosphere of its day. In the

---

Naihe, *Liyun chengxue lu* 勵耘承學錄 (Succeeding the Research Tradition of the Studio of Cultivation) (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1992), 346.

words of Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969), there had never been a rounded history of religion until Chen Yuan's work.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Chen's scholarship on religion had clear-cut boundaries: he only studied the history of religions, focusing on the interactions between religion, politics and society, and did not address issues of theology. History always outweighed religion in Chen's scholarship.

From 1939 to 1941, Chen Yuan wrote what would become known as the 'Three Books on Religion' (*Zongjiao sanshu* 宗教三書), including *Buddhism in Yunnan and Guizhou Towards the End of the Ming Dynasty* (*Ming ji Dian Qian fojiao kao* 明季滇黔佛教攷, 1940); *Disputes among Buddhists at the Beginning of the Qing Dynasty* (*Qing chu seng zheng ji* 清初僧諍記, 1941); and *New Daoist Branches in the Northern Provinces at the Beginning of the Southern Song Dynasty* (*Nan Song chu Hebei xin Daojiao kao* 南宋初河北新道教攷, 1941). From the 'Four Studies' to the 'Three Books', the change in the topics of study indicated a shift in Chen's concerns in his enquiries. The 'Four Studies on Ancient Religions' and *The Sinicisation of the Peoples from Western Regions During the Yuan Dynasty* address the history of communication between China and the West, whereas the 'Three Books on Religion', written during the period of the Japanese occupation, turn to imperial history, especially political history during dynastic transitions. When Chen Yinke prefaced *Buddhism in Yunnan and Guizhou Towards the End of the Ming Dynasty* (hereafter *Buddhism*), he pointed out the approach to read this book: 'Although religion and politics are not the same, they cannot be disconnected. Although *Buddhism* is a history of religion, it might as well be read as political history.'<sup>11</sup>

Taking the 'Three Books on Religion' as political history, the reader cannot only learn about political changes during dynastic transitions as well as political choices made by historical figures, but can also understand the political atmosphere during the period of the occupation and the historian's ethical situation. From the subject matter of the 'Three Books on Religion', especially the specific times and spaces that are featured, it is not difficult to detect a change of key in academia during the Second Sino-Japanese War, as well as this historian's implied correspondence with the scholarly climate in the southwest (that is, the area beyond Japanese control). Chen Yuan once confessed that *Buddhism* did not focus on Buddhism, but rather on:

10 Chen Yinke, 'Preface', in Chen Yuan, *Mingji Dian Qian fojiao kao* 明季滇黔佛教攷 (*Buddhism in Yunnan and Guizhou Towards the End of the Ming Dynasty*) (Beiping: Fu Jen Catholic University Press, 1940), 5.

11 Chen Yinke, 'Preface', 5.



the relationship between Buddhist and literati loyalists and that between Buddhism and developments in the region and in the culture. If the work only concerns Buddhism from a Buddhist perspective, then those who have no interest in the religion do not need to read it. All those who are interested in history should read the work precisely because it does not focus on Buddhism per se.<sup>12</sup>

We can therefore see that *Buddhism* is not purely a history of religion; its targeted readership is neither devout Buddhists nor historians of religion, but ordinary readers interested in the dynastic transition from Ming to Qing.

Why was Chen Yuan, who had no connection with either Yunnan or Guizhou, suddenly concerned with the turn of events in China's southwest towards the Late Ming period during the period of Japanese occupation? In fact, scholars of history and literature sojourning in the southwest were projecting themselves on to Ming loyalists too. Before the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, scholarly discussions about Chinese borderlands, such as those of the Yugong Study Society (Yugong xuehui 禹貢學會) chaired by Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980), paid more attention to China's northwest rather than the southwest: their scholarly inquiries often involved political and economic policies and, by comparison, neglected studies of geography, language, ethnicity and similar disciplines that lacked immediate practicality. After the war broke out, however, and as the political centre of China moved to the southwest, Yunnan and Guizhou were no longer considered borderlands but the vicinity of the new wartime capital of Chongqing. As a result, the study of the southwest turned into a nationwide scholarly project overnight. Chen Yuan, living thousands of miles away in the occupied area, participated in this discussion of the southwest from the perspective of religion, a field within which he moved with ease. Yet Chen's preoccupation was different from that of the scholars who had moved to the southwest to escape the occupation and who thus had an intimate relation to the southwest region itself.

In *Buddhism*, what is juxtaposed with Yunnan and Guizhou is not the southeast, where various Buddhist schools had flourished, but the Central Plain (*Zhongyuan* 中原), which had been seized by the Manchus towards the end of the Ming Dynasty. Buddhism's growing importance in Yunnan and Guizhou at that time was more contingent with the Manchu conquest of the Central Plain, though religious influence from the southeast also played a role. As Chen Yinke clearly points out in the preface, Chinese cultural elites gathered in the

12 Letter from Chen Yuan to Chen Lesu, 3 May 1940, *Chen Yuan laiwang shuxinji*, 113.

southwestern borderlands in the late Ming because ‘Yunnan and Guizhou were in fact in the vicinity of the political centre’, and claimed ‘the mantle of Chinese cultural legitimacy’. What *Buddhism* intends to address is precisely the two southwestern provinces which similarly served as the wartime centres of Chinese culture in the 1930s and 1940s. Therefore, *Buddhism* can be taken as Chen’s patriotic gesture towards the community of Chinese scholars who had moved to the southwest to escape the Japanese.

After he completed *Buddhism*, Chen Yuan penned several letters to his eldest son, Chen Lesu, urging him to request a preface from Chen Yinke, who was then in Hong Kong. While the manuscript had already been sent to the publisher, Chen Yuan was willing to wait for a few more days, because, to him, nobody other than Chen Yinke was qualified to preface his book.<sup>13</sup> The invitation was not only made as a consideration of Chen Yinke’s scholarly accomplishment, but was also due to the two men’s respective situations: their geographical separation symbolised the political separation between the Japanese-occupied north and the Nationalist-controlled southwest, as well as the persisting interconnection of ethical and cultural traditions despite this separation. In the subsequent preface to *Buddhism*, Chen Yinke reflected on his vicissitudes after having left Beiping—there had been ‘infinite changes in the world’ in the previous three years. Adapting the idea of a Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) poem, Chen remarked:

the master has been teaching and writing as the northeast is being reduced to dust; I have been scraping a living between the earth and sky in the southwest. We are parted, one in the north and the other in the south; yet fortunately, neither of us has developed new doctrines that would betray the Buddha.<sup>14</sup>

Putting the ‘northeast’ and the ‘southwest’ side by side, the two men’s resolute safeguarding of the ‘old doctrines’ transmitted from the culturally rich Yangtze Delta region was the message that Chen Yuan hoped to impart to the scholarly community through Chen Yinke. Indeed, no one besides Chen Yinke could have appropriately written the preface.

13 Letter from Chen Yuan to Chen Lesu, 27 June 1940, *Chen Yuan laiwang shuxinji*, 1116.

14 In reference to Du Fu, ‘Yonghuai guji’ 詠懷古跡 (Singing my feelings on traces of the past) no. 1: ‘Split apart from the northeast at the edge of dust of war, drifting along in the southwest between earth and heaven’, in Stephen Owen, trans., *The Poetry of Du Fu* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 360–361.

There is a chapter entitled 'Disputes among Buddhist schools' in *Buddhism*. In this chapter, Chen claims that the continuation of this inquiry resulted in the *Disputes among Buddhists at the Beginning of the Qing Dynasty* (hereafter *Disputes*), as '[the earlier work] is limited to Yunnan and Guizhou, and therefore does not touch on the provinces in the southeast'.<sup>15</sup> Yet his major motive of writing a sequel on the arguments among different Buddhist schools was not the fact that *Buddhism* does not examine the southeastern provinces. The south-east as a geographical category does not matter, and the title of *Disputes* did not emphasise any geographic area. After the war, Chen clarified that the first chapter, which focused on disputes among Buddhist schools, flamboyant as it was, in fact served to camouflage later chapters, in which lay the true spirit of the book.<sup>16</sup> Taking into consideration the order Chen took in the writing of this book, we find that he first drafted the later chapters—that is, Chapter II, entitled 'The disputes of the Tiantong Sect' 天童派之諍, and Chapter III, entitled 'The disputes between the old and the new powers' 新舊勢力之諍. The opening 'camouflage' chapter, entitled 'The disputes between the Linji School and the Caodong School' 臨濟與曹洞宗之諍, was actually written later.<sup>17</sup> The disputes between Linji and Caodong, though dazzling, are relatively 'pure' scholastic disputes within the greater Buddhist tradition, whereas the two other chapters involve different political inclinations. Specifically, they discuss the struggles between the so-called School of the New Dynasty (the Manchu Qing) and the School of the Old Regime (the conquered Ming). Herein lies the key to the entire book.

While reviewing the Japanese translation of the *Disputes*, Shibata Atsushi questioned Chen's emphasis on the power struggles between the schools and his omission of debates on religious tenets, since the book is titled as disputes among Buddhists.<sup>18</sup> However, Chen had already explained in the epilogue that the main text of the work was devoted to the discussion of power struggles between the schools. Buddhist disputes in the early Qing also include those on

15 Chen Yuan, 'Foreword', in 'Qingchu seng zheng ji' (Disputes among Buddhists at the beginning of the Qing Dynasty), *Furen xuezhì* (Fu Ren Monograph) 9, 2 (1940): 1.

16 Letter from Chen Yuan to Fang Hao, 23 February 1940, *Chen Yuan laiwan shuxinji*, 330.

17 Chen Yuan, 'Qing chu seng zhengji gao' 清初僧諍稿 (The manuscript of *Disputes among Buddhists at the Beginning of the Qing Dynasty*), in *Chen Yuan xiansheng yimo* 陳垣先生遺墨 (Manuscripts of Chen Yuan) (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 2006), 183.

18 Shibata Atsushi 柴田篤, 'Ping Chen Yuan zhu, Yekou Shanjing yi Qing chu seng zheng ji' 評陳垣著、野口善敬譯注的〈清初僧諍記〉：中國佛教的迷茫與知識分子 (On Noguchi Yoshitaka's translation of *Disputes among Buddhists at the Beginning of the Qing Dynasty* by Chen Yuan), in *Lishi wenxian yanjiu* 歷史文獻研究 2 (Research on Historical Documents 2) (Beijing: Yanshan chubanshe, 1991), 390.

religious tenets, of course; there were also disputes between loyalist monks and loyalist laity, as well as disputes on moral principles within the circles of loyalist laity itself. Chen excludes all these issues in the main text of the book, and only touches on them in the epilogue. Clearly, this was a matter of conscious choice.

The second chapter on the disputes of the Tiantong Sect (a branch of the Linji School) involves the relations of three groups of people: (1) the conflict between Miyun 密雲 (1566–1642) and his disciple Hanyue 漢月 (1573–1635) in the late Ming; (2) the early Qing struggle between Muchen Daomin 木陳道忞 (1596–1674), another disciple of Miyun, and Jiqi Chu 繼起儲 (1605–1672) of Hanyue's clique; and (3) the confrontation between 'turncoats' and 'loyalists' within literati society, as represented by Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664)<sup>19</sup> and Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695).<sup>20</sup> This confrontation followed disputes among Buddhist monks in the wake of the dynastic transition. 'Tiantong' in the chapter title refers to Miyun. The dispute was triggered as Muchen Daomin invited Qian Qianyi to write a pagoda inscription for Miyun. Shortly afterwards, Huang Zongxi wrote the pagoda inscription for Hanyue upon Jiqi Chu's invitation. The dispute as Chen Yuan presents it includes two factions: that of Muchen Daomin and Qian Qianyi, and that of Jiqi Chu and Huang Zongxi. However, in this chapter Chen does not mention the doctrinal debates over the tenets of the Linji School between Miyun and Hanyue. While quoting Huang Zongxi's 'Pagoda Inscription of Hanyue' at length, he dispenses with the parts related to doctrinal disagreements.<sup>21</sup> The omitted passages mainly summarise their respective theological positions and their challenges of Linji tenets—that is, *Chan* Buddhism's hallmark 'encounter dialogues'. Intentionally avoiding doctrinal disputes, Chen's approach to religion could even be said to be inherently secular.

The main plot in the *Disputes* is the struggle between the School of the Old Regime and the School of the New Dynasty. According to the overall narrative design, Huang Zongxi's pagoda inscription for Hanyue was intended to refute the negative evaluation of this *Chan* master in Qian Qianyi's pagoda inscription for Miyun. As a result, the argument over Linji doctrines between Hanyue and

19 For a biographical overview of Qian Qianyi, see Arthur W. Hummel (ed.), *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period, 1644–1912* (Folkestone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2010), 148–150.

20 For a biographical overview of Huang Zongxi, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 351–354.

21 Huang Zongxi, 'Suzhou sanfeng Hanyue chanshi taming' 蘇州三峰漢月藏禪師塔銘 (Inscription on the spirit pagoda of the Chan Master Hanyue Zang in Sanfeng, Suzhou), in *Huang Zongxi quanji* 黃宗羲全集 10 (The Complete Works of Huang Zongxi 10) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2005), 527–532.

Miyun is turned into a confrontation between Qian Qianyi and Huang Zongxi: that is, between 'turncoats' and 'loyalists' in literati society. Considering the development of Buddhism as a religion, the argument of the Tiantong Sect, spanning from the late Ming to the early Qing, can without a doubt be traced to doctrinal disagreements between Miyun and Hanyue. Yet Chen's unconcealed disdain for Qian Qianyi and Muchen Daomin (especially the latter) drove him to defend the moral high ground of Hanyue's clique, represented by Jiqi Chu and Huang Zongxi. He obscured the historical background of Miyun and Hanyue's religious debate lest the religious tenets lead the reader astray. The *Disputes*, especially the latter two chapters that embodied the author's intention, can be taken as Chen Yuan's criticism of Muchen Daomin. He cast Muchen Daomin as the Qian Qianyi of the Buddhist *sangha*. Constructing binaries between 'loyalists' and 'turncoats' and the School of the Old Regime and the School of the New Dynasty glossed over the complexity of the Buddhist arguments during the dynastic transition.

However, the traces of revisions to Chen's manuscript indicate that the struggle mentioned above was not the initial narrative that Chen had designed. Instead, he picked up the unstated rivalry between the two Preceptors of the State, Muchen Daomin and Yulin Xiu 玉林琇 (1614–1675), belonging respectively to the School of the New Dynasty and the School of the Quasi-New Dynasty.<sup>22</sup> This episode ended up as the contents of the last chapter. Neither the School of the Old Regime nor the School of the Quasi-New Dynasty appeared strong enough as the opponent of Muchen Daomin. Both Jiqi Chu and Yulin Xiu managed to achieve only a weak voice. Sometimes they became entirely silent, leaving Muchen Daomin to carry on his soliloquy by himself. As the leading figure of the School of the New Dynasty, Muchen Daomin's flamboyant personality and his bellicose speech style earned him criticism from many monks.<sup>23</sup> Yet only a person who was so disposed to dispute could support the making of the *Disputes*.

Although the *Disputes* takes events as its narrative unit, there is still a detectable timeline hidden in the book.<sup>24</sup> The most important turning point

22 The original title of this work was *Qing chu liang guoshi zhi andou* 清初兩國師之暗鬥 (The unstated rivalry between the two preceptors of the state in the beginning of the Qing Dynasty), see *Chen Yuan xiansheng yimo*, 182.

23 Huang Zongxi, 'Shanweng chanshi wenji xu' 山翁禪師文集序 (Preface to the anthology of the Chan Master Shanweng), in *Huang Tingjian quanji* 10, 58.

24 See 'Ming Qing jian seng zheng nianbiao' 明清間僧諍年表 (A chronology of the Buddhist disputes between Ming and Qing), in Chen Yuan, *Qing chu seng zheng ji* (Disputes among Buddhists at the Beginning of the Qing Dynasty) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 10–12.

in this timeline is 1659, when Muchen Daomin went to the capital in accordance with the decree of an imperial edict. The use of chronological order gives an apparently objective view to history. It justifies temporal relations forged by historians, and enables them to conceptualise events and people with temporal prepositions like 'before' and 'after'. Chen Yuan's Muchen Daomin is one such oversimplified character produced by the narrative of the imperial audience. Before going to the capital, he was already labelled as the 'Qian Qianyi among monks'. Then the monk Jianyue's evaluation of Muchen Daomin follows: 'In his heart as well as on his face, we perceive only the title "The Great Monk, Preceptor of the State"'. In Chen Yuan's view, Jianyue took Muchen Daomin as 'little more than faeces'.<sup>25</sup> This unexpected wording in this ostensibly rigorous work of history is indicative of Chen Yuan's strong emotion. Chen filtered Muchen Daomin's correspondence with the loyalists and cut out his religious and literary writings that manifested his grief for the fallen dynasty after the battle of Beijing in 1644.<sup>26</sup> What is left is a Muchen Daomin marred by the imperial audience—a stereotypical image of a 'turncoat'.

In the afterword of the second edition published after the founding of the People's Republic of China, Chen Yuan makes a special note to explain that the *Disputes* was a product of intense emotions: '[it is] not specifically concerned with Muchen Daomin and his fellow monks'. The highly symbolic significance of the imperial audience alludes to contemporary events:

In 1941, as the Japanese army was occupying Beiping and Tianjin, the traitors were exhilarated. Some of them gathered in groups and embarked on a trip across the sea to pay respects to the Emperor of Japan. Regarding the experience as an honour upon their return, they boasted about it to their countrymen and neighbours.<sup>27</sup>

Chen's student Liu Naihe 劉乃和 believes that Chen was referring here to June 1941, when Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 (1883–1944) led a delegation from his Reorganised National Government to visit the Emperor of Japan.<sup>28</sup> However, the

25 Chapter 3 of Chen Yuan, *Qing chu seng zheng ji*, 53.

26 Qian Qianyi, 'Shanweng chanshi wenji xu' (Preface to the anthology of the Chan Master Shanweng), in Qian Zeng and Qian Zhonglian (eds) *Muzhai youxue ji* 牧齋有學集 2 (The Anthology of Qian Qianyi, vol. 2) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996), 876.

27 Chen Yuan, 'Qing chu seng zheng ji houji' (Postscript to *Disputes among Buddhists at the Beginning of the Qing Dynasty*), in *Qing chu seng zheng ji*, 94.

28 Liu Naihe, 'Kangzhan shixue' 抗戰史學 (Resistance historiography), in *Chen Yuan pingzhuan* 陳垣評傳 (A Critical Biography of Chen Yuan) (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue

*Disputes* were completed at the beginning of 1941, which means that the time does not exactly fit. Muchen's travel to the capital probably does not allude to a journey by any particular person, then, but Chen's treatment of it definitely incorporated his own contempt for 'turncoats' and 'traitors'.

*Buddhism* is concerned with the southwest, where the cultural and political mandate was preserved; the *Disputes* constructs a southeast Chinese society that either confronted or collaborated with an alien regime. The last instalment of the 'Three Books on Religion', *New Daoist Sects in the Northern Provinces at the Beginning of the Southern Song Dynasty*, returned to the occupied Central Plain. Sources such as stele inscriptions and epitaphs were accumulated in the *Survey of Daoist Epigraphy*, which Chen had edited some thirty years earlier. Yet its scope is not limited to either the Southern Song or the provinces to the north of the Yellow River. The epilogue of the reprinted edition provides the reason that this book covers this specific region and period:

In the wake of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, many areas to the north of the [Yellow] river fell by turns. This author also suffered many prosecutions. Reflecting on the Song–Jin and Song–Yuan dynastic transitions, he thought those so-called Daoists were all loyalists who refused to serve the alien regimes, and we should not ignore them because they belonged to Daoism.<sup>29</sup>

The so-called New Daoist Sects refer to the School of Complete Perfection (Quanzhen jiao 全真教), the School of the Great Dao (Dadao jiao 大道教) and the School of Supreme Unity (Taiyi jiao 太一教), which emerged in north China after the Song regime was pushed south in 1127. After the Jingkang Incident 靖康之亂 (1125–1127), north China first fell into the hands of the Jurchens and then, in 1234, to the Mongols. All three branches were under the rule of either the Jurchens or the Mongols. So why does Chen Yuan date the events to the beginning of the Southern Song? On the mismatch between dynastic rule and the area under its geographical control, Chen Yuan explains in the foreword: 'the founders of all three sects were born during the Northern Song and established their respective branches, refusing to serve the Jurchen Jin Dynasty. I

---

chubanshe, 2002), 347. This biographical work also includes a *nianpu* (chronology) of Chen's life.

29 Chen Yuan, 'Chongyin houji' 重印後記 (Postscript to the second edition) (1957), in *Nan Song chu Hebei xin Daojiao kao* (New Daoist Branches in the Northern Provinces at the Beginning of the Southern Song Dynasty) (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1958), 154.

associate them with Song to follow their will.’<sup>30</sup> In other words, Chen takes the founders of the three sects as Song loyalists rather than as Jurchen or Mongol subjects. The sects are associated with the Southern Song according to their founders’ political position, rather than the areas where they developed.

Daoism flourished because of the need for state ritual sacrifice. The new Daoist sects, rising as a result of the new dynasty’s ritual and fiscal needs, are nevertheless viewed by Chen as a ‘shelter for loyalists’.<sup>31</sup> Chen argues that the three Daoist sects thrived after the collapse of the Northern Song, and loyalists gathering together in defence attested to the possibility of popular recuperation. Detaching the religion from the new regime, Chen idealises the origin and social functions of these new Daoist sects. In his view, the importance of the three sects under Jurchen or Mongol rule was not only the transmission of Daoist tradition but also the ability of these sects to cultivate social cohesion in the face of alien conquest and ensure the continuity of scholarly traditions. Therefore, Chen Yuan compares the new Daoist sects to Confucian schools, and the three founders are deemed ‘northern scholars’ as great as Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682),<sup>32</sup> Huang Zongxi and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692)<sup>33</sup> during the Ming–Qing transition. As Chen argues: ‘since the Confucians could not bring people together, they turned to the Daoists’.<sup>34</sup>

The role of ‘using the Chinese to transform the foreign’ that Chen assigns to these Daoist sects during a time of dynastic transition is similar to the political shelter that was provided by the Catholic university he presided over (Fu Jen) during the Japanese occupation. Serving at a Catholic university in the occupied area could, to a degree, alleviate the pressure of public opinion, but it also meant that one had to live by higher moral standards. As the president of Fu Jen Catholic University, Chen Yuan had to find historical support for his special position in education and culture in north China. He did this by arguing that:

There were Chinese serving foreign regimes in the past. Polite society would still accept them if they did not harm their own country and managed to transform the foreigners with Chinese ways. Moreover, serving a foreign state is not the same as serving the enemy state. One who serves

30 Chen Yuan, ‘Xumu’ 敘目 (Preface), in *Nan Song chu Hebei xin Daojiao kao* (New Daoist Branches in the Northern Provinces at the Beginning of the Southern Song Dynasty) (Beiping: Fu Jen Catholic University Press, 1941), 3.

31 Chen Yuan, *Nan Song chu Hebei xin Daojiao kao*, 20.

32 For an English introduction to Gu Yanwu, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 421–426.

33 For an English introduction to Wang Fuzhi, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 817–819.

34 Chen Yuan, *Nan Song chu Hebei xin Daojiao kao*, 3.



in a foreign state is just an alien minister; yet one who serves the enemy state is a capitulator.<sup>35</sup>

If the theme of the *Disputes* is to condemn the 'capitulators' (*xianglu* 降虜, that is, 'collaborators'), the intention of the *New Daoist Sects* is to explain what it is to be an 'alien minister' (*keqing* 客卿). Having become an 'alien minister' while living in his own country, Chen viewed the 'foreign state' that he served—the Catholic university—as a shelter for 'loyalists' (that is, patriots) as well. One of his friends in the south, upon reading the foreword, realised that Chen was alluding to his own situation with this period of history, and thus took this book as a lyrical rather than historical work: 'Grievous with pent-up feelings, it is related to the ways of the world and the proclivities of people.'<sup>36</sup>

After the end of the Japanese occupation, Chen looked back on the 'Three Books on Religion' written during wartime and remarked, '[they are] all works advocating a resilient nationalist spirit in the guise of research on the history of religion. Today they just seem like a somniloquy.'<sup>37</sup> The three books all take the history of religion as their theme. Regardless of whether they are about Buddhism or Daoism, or China's southwest or north, and regardless of the period of transition focused on in each book, Chen's works are allegories of his own feelings and thoughts. Chen viewed the three books as a form of 'sleep talking' because they are the historian's 'jabberings' that lasted through the nightmare of occupation. After the end of the occupation, these 'jabberings' probably seemed like writings from a previous life.

### 3 Seeking Meaning beyond Evidential Scholarship

In order to view Chen's works during the occupation as a whole, it is necessary to consider his wartime and post-war accounts of this period. These accounts cover changes of method in his scholarly work, as well as the overall evaluation of his teaching and writings. Most of these accounts are found in his correspondence with his peers and the younger generation of scholars. Later, commemorative essays, and sometimes even academic articles, regularly cite these

35 Chen Yuan, 'Tongjian Hu zhu biaowei', Part 11, *Furen xuezhì* (Fu Ren Monograph). 14, 1/2 (1946): 70.

36 Letter from Wang Zongyan 汪宗衍 to Chen Yuan, 18 September 1941, *Chen Yuan laiwang shuxinji*, 495.

37 Letter from Chen Yuan to Yang Shuda 楊樹達, 15 March 1946, *Chen Yuan laiwang shuxinji*, 274.

accounts, making them pivotal to the interpretation of Chen's works during the Japanese occupation. Sometimes they are taken as conclusive statements that can replace textual analysis, while sometimes passages in his works are selectively chosen to support Chen's own accounts. The passage cited most often, for example, comes from a letter that Chen sent to Fang Hao on 11 November 1943:

As for history, the trend here has also changed. Previously my focus was on evidential research, and I therefore respected Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728–1804)<sup>38</sup> of Jiading; after the occupation, I gradually turned to a more practical approach, and hold Gu Yanwu of Kunshan in high regard. Recently, I have moved one more step forward to advocate for meaningful historical scholarship. Therefore I taught Gu's *Record of Knowledge Gained Day by Day* (*Rizhi lu* 日知錄) in the past two years, and this year I am teaching Quan Zuwang's 全祖望 (1705–1755)<sup>39</sup> *Collection of the Jieqi Pavilion* (*Jieqi tingji* 鮑埼亭集). I hope my efforts can rectify the human mind and correct academic ethos rather than merely carrying out rigorous evidential research.<sup>40</sup>

From Qian Daxin to Gu Yanwu and then to Quan Zuwang, the change of paradigm that Chen modelled implies a change in his conception of history or, more precisely, an altered understanding of history's social role. Before the occupation, Chen Yuan compared himself to Qian Daxin; his contemporaries did the same. To Chen, Qian was not an empty name, nor a subject of research, but a paragon whom Chen quietly emulated. In the history of Qing scholarship, Qian Daxin belonged to the orthodox school of evidential scholarship. Besides phonology, hermeneutics and classics, Qian also first developed a textual approach to history, which fits Chen's image of a professional historian specialising in philology.

After the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 1937, Chen taught a class called Evidential Methods in Qing Historical Scholarship at Fu Jen Catholic University, using Gu Yanwu's *Record of Knowledge Gained Day by Day* as his textbook. This class was also called Practicum of the Sources of History, and required students to find the origins of historical sources in the materials cited in Gu's book.<sup>41</sup>

38 For a biographical overview of Qian Daxin, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 152–155.

39 For an introduction of Quan Zuwang, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 203–205.

40 Letter from Chen Yuan to Fang Hao, 24 November 1943, *Chen Yuan laiwang shuxinji*, 326.

41 See Chen Zhichao 陳智超 (ed.), *Chen Yuan shiyuan xue zawen* 陳垣史源學雜文 (Chen Yuan's Essays on the Sources of Historical Scholarship) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2007), 121.

For the same class in autumn 1943, however, Chen changed the textbook to Quan Zuwang's *Collection of the Jieqi Pavilion*,<sup>42</sup> because while the most interesting part in tracing a source back to its origin lies in finding out its mistakes, 'there is no book better at imparting its spirit than *Collection of the Jieqi Pavilion*'.<sup>43</sup> Apprehending the spirit of a book is meaningful history. The letter Chen wrote to Fang emphasised the function of the *Jieqi Pavilion* to rectify the human mind and correct the ethos of the intelligentsia. Giving special importance to the essays that reject capitulators and galvanise thoughts for the conquered dynasty, he hoped Quan's book could revitalise the flagging scholarly community in north China.

The 'meaningful history' that Chen advocates refers to the scholarly tradition of the Eastern Zhejiang School, represented by Quan Zuwang. The most systematic exposition of the Eastern Zhejiang School is none other than Zhang Xuecheng's 章學誠 *Comprehensive Review on Literature and History* (*Wenshi tongyi* 文史通義).<sup>44</sup> His definition of an Eastern Zhejiang scholar is 'one who discusses human nature and destiny must study history'. In other words, discussing norms and patterns is a prerequisite, but norms and patterns eventually have to correspond to contemporary events.<sup>45</sup> Chen Yuan's understanding of the Eastern Zhejiang School does not necessarily originate from the *Comprehensive Review on Literature and History*, however. After the May Fourth Movement of 1919, both Liang Qichao and Hu Shi praised Zhang enthusiastically; yet Chen viewed Zhang's learning as provincial, remarking that Zhang had read little and seen little, but was fond of making comments.<sup>46</sup>

Towards the end of the Japanese occupation, Chen Yuan devoted much time and thought to writing the *Illumination of the Subtle in Hu Sanxing's Commentaries of the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government*. The foreword states that 'those who speak of Eastern Zhejiang scholarship often talk about Shenning 深寧 and Dongfa 東發, and leave out Shenzhi 身之'.<sup>47</sup> Shenning and

42 For Chen Yuan's teaching materials, see Chen Zhichao, *Chen Yuan shiyuan xue zawen*, 122–125.

43 Letter from Chen Yuan to Chen Lesu, 1 June 1946, *Chen Yuan laiwang shuxinji*, 1145.

44 For an English introduction of Zhang Xuecheng, see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 38–41.

45 Zhang Xuecheng, 'Zhedong xueshu' 浙東學術 (Eastern Zhejiang School) in *Wenshi tongyi jiaozhu* 文史通義校注 (A Critical Edition of the *Comprehensive Review on Literature and Historiography*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 523.

46 Mou Runsun 牟潤孫, 'Litan shuwu wenxue huiyi' 勵耘書屋問學回憶 (Reminiscences of my days of study in the Studio of Cultivation), *Litan shuwu wenxue ji*, 76.

47 Chen Yuan, 'Tongjian Hu zhu biao wei xiaoyin' 通鑑胡註表微小引 (Preface to the *Illumination of the Subtle in Hu Sanxing's Commentaries of the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government*), *Furen xuezhì* (Fu Ren Monograph) 13, 1/2 (1945): 117.

Dongfa respectively refer to Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (1223–1296) and Huang Zhen 黃震 (1212–1280), active during the Song–Yuan transition, and Shen zhi is the protagonist of the *Illumination of the Subtle*—Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (1230–1302). Using Quan Zuwang to represent Eastern Zhejiang scholarship, Chen's intention was not to delineate a complete scholarly lineage, but to focus on Hu Sanxing, a figure living between the Song and Yuan dynasties who had been virtually forgotten.

It seems Chen Yuan chose to make himself a spokesperson for Hu Sanxing. But looking into the *Illumination of the Subtle*, it might be more appropriate to say that Hu speaks for Chen rather than vice versa. The commentarial sections in particular, wherewith 'the subtleness is illuminated', make the reader wonder if it would be possible to separate the author's voice from the commentator's own expressions. Thanks to the layered guise of historical methods and events, the reader can easily pass over the fictional relationship between the spokesperson and the one for whom he speaks; indeed, their roles can be reversed. If we borrow a term from the rhetoric of classical literature, the *Illumination of the Subtle* is in fact the historian's 'impersonated expression'.

Similar to Hu Sanxing's commentaries of the *Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government*, Chen's *Illumination of the Subtle* is also a commentary or, more precisely, a commentary of a commentary. Unlike the ordinary commentarial format, the *Illumination of the Subtle* reorganises Hu's original commentaries and structures the entries into categories, which make twenty chapters. The first ten chapters address methods, including 'The present dynasty', 'Approaches to writing', 'Collation', 'Explanation', 'Taboo names', 'Textual criticism', 'Arguments for mistakes', 'Commentaries', 'Expressions' and 'Admonitions'.<sup>48</sup> The final ten chapters discuss historical events, including 'Statecraft', 'The integrity of subjects', 'Ethical codes', 'Serving and retiring', 'Borderland events', 'Barbarians and Chinese', 'The will of the people', 'Buddhism and Daoism', 'Life and death' and 'Economy'.<sup>49</sup> The format of the book works as follows:

every chapter has an introduction, which is indented with two character-space; then it cites the *Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* with no indent; then it cites Hu's commentary indented with one character-space; finally there is the illumination of the subtle, which is also indented with two character-spaces.<sup>50</sup>

48 These chapters were published in *Furen xuezhì* 13, 1/2 (1945).

49 These chapters were published in *Furen xuezhì* 13, 1/2 (1945).

50 Letter from Chen Yuan to Chen Lesu, 1 May 1945, *Chen Yuan lai wang shuxinji*, 1132.

The book comprises key passages from the *Comprehensive Mirror*, all of Hu's commentaries and the *Illumination of the Subtle*—Chen's own commentary, which, like the introduction at the beginning of a chapter, is indented with two character-spaces. This formatting is applied not only out of a consideration for visual convenience, but also follows the traditional generic hierarchy of classical commentaries. It also reflects the place in which the historian positions himself.

Chen's position is that of an observer according to the hierarchy reflected in the arrangement of the *Comprehensive Mirror*, Hu's commentary and the *Illumination of the Subtle*. The *Illumination of the Subtle* is not concerned with the *Comprehensive Mirror* but Hu's commentaries, or, more precisely, the personal circumstances of Hu Sanxing during the Song–Yuan transition. Instead of writing a monograph, Chen chose to write a commentary of history—that is, a fragmented genre. The reason is twofold: on the one hand, he was restricted by the subject—a biography or reconstructed history is impossible with the limited sources on Hu Sanxing's life, beliefs, deeds and, in particular, his experience after the founding of the Yuan Dynasty. On the other hand, commentaries in the tradition of classical scholarship, classics or history, philosophy or literature can be used as a form to explain the norms and patterns or to project personal aspirations. It is not until the last century, as systematic scholarship has been emphasised, that fragmented and auxiliary writings such as commentaries have gradually declined.

In the introductions as well as the main text, Chen Yuan repeatedly mentions that Hu Sanxing only became known for his knowledge of historical geography after evidential scholarship began to flourish. Yet Hu was not only good at historical geography; his patriotic sentiment was omnipresent in his commentaries of the *Comprehensive Mirror*.<sup>51</sup> In Chen's view, the image of the 'evidential scholar' has obscured Hu's as well as his own breadth of scholarship, let alone the historian's concern with political ethics. In the early Republican period, Chen Yuan was known for his expertise in specialised fields such as the history of religion, calendars, taboo names and collation. This is similar to the stereotype that the 'Qing Confucianists' held against Hu Sanxing as a scholar of historical geography. What the *Illumination of the Subtle* aims to show, however, is that Hu's personal aspirations and scholarly pursuits was not merely evidential scholarship.<sup>52</sup>

51 Chen Yuan, 'Tongjian Hu zhu biaowei xiaoyin', 117.

52 Chen Yuan, 'Tongjian Hu zhu biaowei xiaoyin', 117.

Chen Yuan makes a special point that Hu obtained his *jìnshì* degree the same year as Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1282), Xie Fangde 謝枋得 (1226–1289) and Lu Xiufu 陸秀夫 (1238–1279) all did.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, Hu's devotion to scholarship seems not worth mentioning compared to Wen and Lu's military achievements and eventual martyrdom. Living a life of seclusion after the fall of the Song, Xie Fangde and his literary works were included in the canon of loyalist records and became examples for later generations. Hu, by contrast, was a true recluse who enjoyed no fame. His work was also flattened to the label of evidential scholarship. Choosing Hu as his spokesperson, Chen Yuan—who was already famous prior to the Japanese occupation—intended to show the meaning of devoted scholarship in juxtaposition to military achievement and martyrdom. Situated in the tradition of expressing one's intent through history, the *Illumination of the Subtle* was but one link in Chen's project to construct his self-image.

At the end of the foreword of the *Illumination of the Subtle* published in the *Fu Jen Journal* in December 1945, Chen remarks:

The Commentary of the *Comprehensive Mirror* was completed nine years after the fall of Lin'an [that is, the Southern Song capital] in 1285, which was the year of *yíyou* 乙酉 [in the traditional sixty-year calendrical cycle]. Some 660 years later, the *Illumination of the Subtle* was completed, which also happens to be in the year of *yíyou*. This is just a coincidence.<sup>54</sup>

This foreword is dated July 1945, that is, before the surrender of the Japanese. In addition to this foreword, there are three more lines at the end of the table of contents, which read:

This treatise was written to commemorate my friends who were arrested or captured. How could I expect that these gentlemen had all been released before the manuscript was published! Beiping had been occupied for nine years as well now. It was not until sixty-six years after Hu had passed away that the Chinese territory was recovered. That which I have experienced is slightly better in comparison. Regrettably, I am still in a difficult situation, and cannot exhaust what I wish to say.<sup>55</sup>

53 Chen Yuan, 'Tongjian Hu zhu biaowei xiaoyin', 117.

54 Chen Yuan, 'Tongjian Hu zhu biaowei xiaoyin', 117.

55 Chen Yuan, 'Tongjian Hu zhu biaowei xiaoyin', 118.

The *Illumination of the Subtle* was largely completed in 1945, 660 years after Hu's commentary had been completed (which was the eleventh *yiyou* after 1285). In 1945, Chen Yuan was sixty-six years old, so he called himself (in direct reference to Hu) 'a sixty-six year old man after 660 years'. These coincidences seemingly indicate Chen Yuan's sensitivity—bordering on superstition—towards years and numbers. Yet instead of regarding these as numerical coincidences, we would be better served to take them as coincidences of a subjectively, ethically measured time and their respective experience. Chen used the coincident numbers to imply a sense of anachronistic contemporaneity shared by those who lived during different periods of foreign occupation. Behind this sense of contemporaneity is the idea of cyclical temporality, which causes the reappearance of past catastrophes.

We can find another example of this in the *Illumination of the Subtle*, which is similar to the 'coincidence' between the *Illumination of the Subtle* and Hu's commentary, or Chen Yuan and Hu Sanxing:

When the Southern Song fell, Xie Gaoyu 謝皋羽 [the style name of Xie Ao 謝翱, 1249–1295] composed the 'Lament of the Western Terrace' and the 'Preface to Holly'. Both are full of unintelligible language. In the early Ming, Zhang Mengjian 張孟兼 (1338–1377) glossed the essays. After the fall of the Ming, Huang Zongxi glossed them again and remarked, 'Mengjian and I lived in different times. Mengjian's time is far removed from Gaoyu's, whereas mine is close. Therefore, Gaoyu's writings are easier for me to understand.'<sup>56</sup>

Huang's conception of time might seem incompatible with common sense: Zhang lived in the early Ming Dynasty, while Huang lived during the Ming–Qing transition. Zhang's time is therefore, of course, much closer to Xie's than Huang's. Yet in terms of the circumstances of those periods, Zhang saw the Mongols driven away and the Chinese state restored. His commemoration of Xie Ao is therefore comparable to that of the late Qing revolutionaries towards the late Ming. Huang, however, witnessed a dynastic transition and understood the loyalists' grief while living in a conquered state. To him, Xie's words were like the lament of Ming loyalists. Likewise, Hu's commentary to the *Comprehensive Mirror* was written when he experienced a great national trauma. Therefore, 'only the traumatised can grasp the nuances while reading it, whereas those who have lived in a time of peace may fail to understand what he

<sup>56</sup> Chen Yuan, 'Tongjian Hu zhu biao wei xiaoyin', 160.

means'.<sup>57</sup> The standard method to calculate the lapse of time between the past and present is not based on a linear temporal progression, but a on cyclical, ethical temporality. The authenticity of *Illumination* and Chen's qualification as Hu's spokesperson are established on the basis of an anachronistic contemporaneity between Hu and himself.

In a letter to his family, Chen frankly explained the approach he employed to write the commentaries: to 'find the facts'. According to the historian's understanding, the 'illumination of the subtle' means citing historical analogies to contemporary events.<sup>58</sup> A consciously subjective position is evident in the phrase 'finding the facts'. It is the most candid account of the method of the *Illumination of the Subtle*, which, with a most straightforward confession, brings down the ostensible objectivity in which the discipline of evidential scholarship prides itself. 'Citing the past as precedents for the present' involves seeking to match events, as well as writings, from the past and the present. The historical analogy in the *Illumination of the Subtle* is twofold: Hu's commentary cites the *Comprehensive Mirror* as analogies of the events of Hu's time, and the *Illumination of the Subtle* constitutes another layer by putting side by side Hu's situation during the Song–Yuan transition and Chen's situation under the Japanese occupation. The reason for this approach is a belief in the pragmatism of historical scholarship.

The completion of the *Illumination of the Subtle* spanned the wartime and post-war periods, as Japan had already surrendered before the book was published. Yet the book is still a product of the Japanese occupation if we consider the author's initial motive for the project. After its completion, Chen mused, 'there is no new frontier yet, and the general is already getting old'.<sup>59</sup> He planned to put aside his work and take a break, but no one could have suspected that the *Illumination of the Subtle* would become his last systematic work. This of course relates to the changing circumstances in post-war China. Yet if we examine the work itself, the *Illumination of the Subtle* includes Chen's expertise in fields such as collation, taboo names and evidential scholarship, which show us multiple facets of his scholarship. To some extent, this book is a demonstration of his erudition; hence he calls it 'the monument of my learning' in the afterword of the second edition. Chen Yuan was approaching, if not already broaching, the bottom line he adhered to as a historian. In other words, the ethical duty of historiography almost breaks loose from the constraints of historical events and methods.

57 Chen Yuan, 'Tongjian Hu zhu biao wei gao', 248.

58 Letter from Chen Yuan to Chen Lesu, 31 January 1945, *Chen Yuan lai wang shuxinji*, 1131–1132.

59 Letter from Chen Yuan to Chen Lesu, 18 November 1946, *Chen Yuan lai wang shuxinji*, 1149.



Shielded by Fu Jen University, Chen Yuan's defence mechanism against the occupation was to close his door and devote himself to scholarship. However, right after the outbreak of the war, a certain public opinion had already held that there was only 'accommodation' or 'resistance' under occupation; those writers and scholars who hung the sign 'loyalist' outside their closed doors were, in effect, no less than accommodators who had accepted the order of occupation.<sup>60</sup> Denying the legitimacy of cultural production under the occupation and further denying the legitimacy of the 'loyalist' tradition amounted to a denial of the existence of the 'grey zone' between resistance and collaboration. Under pressure to make binary moral choices, intellectuals who remained in the occupied areas appeared to have had no third path to follow. However, as the Holocaust survivor Primo Levi points out, there was a vast territory of ambivalence between good (defined as uncompromising resistance) and evil (defined as unconditional collaboration); there were many 'grey characters' who struggled to survive, having compromised, been ready to compromise or simply not having yet compromised.<sup>61</sup> Neither can the circumstances and moral conundrum that the historian Chen Yuan faced be reduced to simple terms such as 'accommodation' or 'resistance'.

To a certain extent, the twisted spatial and temporal structure that developed under occupation rejuvenated the literati tradition, especially the 'loyalist' tradition that had long lost its institutional foundations. Those intellectuals who stayed on in occupied Beiping faced a historical situation much more complex than a change of dynasties. It therefore became necessary to redefine the 'loyalist' gestures and discourse that they had inherited, and even more so the *identity* of a 'loyalist' per se. The 'loyalist historiography' that Chen Yuan represented in the period of occupation did not equate to history-writing by loyalists. The 'loyalist' in 'loyalist historiography' was not a description of the author's identity, but rather, as in the case of Chen Yuan's works, an ethical duty and an implicit moral standard which penetrated historical facts and even historiographical methodologies. Chen Yuan's three books on Chinese religions and his *Illumination of the Subtle* were all examples of the 'loyalist historiography' entering a 'post-loyalist' stage. While reviving this historiographical tradition, however, Chen also paid the ethical price of objectivity demanded of a historian.

60 Jili 吉力 (the pen name of Zhou Li'an 周黎庵), 'Yimin zhi jinxi' 遺民之今昔 (The past and present of loyalists), *Shenbao* 申報 (Shanghai Newspaper), 31 October 1938.

61 Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*; cited from the Chinese translation, *Bei yanmo he bei zhengjiu de* 被淹沒和被拯救的, trans. Yang Chengguang 楊晨光 (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 2013), 20–22.

## Acknowledgments

An earlier version of this paper was first presented at the workshop 'Cultural and Intellectual Histories of Japanese-occupied China', held at Asia House (London) on 16 September 2019. This workshop was organised through the COTCA Project, and was thus supported by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant no. 682081).

*Translated by Mi Xiuyuan*

## References

- Boorman, Howard, and Janet Krompart (eds). *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 261–264.
- Chen Yuan, *Mingji Dian Qian fojiao kao* (Buddhism in Yunnan and Guizhou Towards the End of the Ming Dynasty) (Beiping: Fu Jen Catholic University Press, 1940).
- Chen Yuan. 'Qingchu seng zheng ji' (Disputes among Buddhists at the beginning of the Qing Dynasty), *Furen xuezhishi* (Fu Ren Monograph) 9, 2 (1940): 1.
- Chen Yuan. *Nan Song chu Hebei xin Daojiao kao* (New Daoist Branches in the Northern Provinces at the Beginning of the Southern Song Dynasty) (Beiping: Fu Jen Catholic University Press, 1941).
- Chen Yuan. 'Chongyin houji' (Postscript to the second edition) (1957), in *Nan Song chu Hebei xin Daojiao kao* (New Daoist Branches in the Northern Provinces at the Beginning of the Southern Song Dynasty) (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1958).
- Chen Yuan. *Qing chu seng zheng ji* (Disputes among Buddhists at the Beginning of the Qing Dynasty) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962).
- Chen Yuan. 'Tongjian Hu zhu biao wei' (Illumination of the subtle in Hu Sanxing's *Commentaries of the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government*), Part 1. *Furen xuezhishi* (Fu Ren Monograph) 13, 1/2 (1945): 132.
- Chen Yuan. 'Tongjian Hu zhu biao wei' (Illumination of the subtle in Hu Sanxing's *Commentaries of the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government*), Part II. *Furen xuezhishi* (Fu Ren Monograph) 14, 1/2 (1946): 70.
- Chen Yuan *laiwang shuxinji* (Collection of Chen Yuan's Correspondence) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2010).
- Chen Zhichao (ed.). *Chen Yuan shiyuan xue zawen* (Chen Yuan's Essays on the Sources of Historical Scholarship) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2007).
- Du Fu, trans. Stephen Owen. *The Poetry of Du Fu* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).
- Huang Zongxi. *Huang Zongxi quanji* (The Complete Works of Huang Zongxi) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2005).

- Hummel, Arthur W. (ed.). *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period, 1644–1912, vols 1 and 2* (Folkestone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2010).
- Jili. 'Yimin zhi jinxì' (The past and present of loyalists). *Shenbao* (Shanghai Newspaper) 31 October 1938.
- Levi, Primo. *I sommersi e i salvati*, trans. Yang Chenguang, *Bei yanmo he bei zhengjiu de* (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 2013).
- Liu Naihe. *Liyun chengxue lu* (Succeeding the Research Tradition of the Studio of Cultivation) (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1992).
- Liu Naihe. *Chen Yuan pingzhuan* (A Critical Biography of Chen Yuan) (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2002).
- Liu Naihe. 'Shuwu erjin hao liyun' (The studio is now called cultivation). In *Liyun shuwu wenxue ji: shixue jia Chen Yuan de zhixue* (The Record of Study in the Studio of Cultivation: The Historian Chen Yuan's Research Life). Edited by Chen Zhichao (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2006).
- Qian Qianyi. *Muzhai youxue ji* (The Anthology of Qian Qianyi). Edited by Qian Zeng and Qian Zhonglian (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996).
- Shibata Atsushi. 'Ping Chen Yuan zhu, Yekou Shanjing yi *Qing chu seng zheng ji*' (On Noguchi Yoshitaka's translation of *Disputes among Buddhists at the Beginning of the Qing Dynasty* by Chen Yuan), in *Lishi wenxian yanjiu* 2 (Research on Historical Documents 2) (Beijing: Yanshan chubanshe, 1991).
- Zhang Xuecheng. 'Zhedong xueshu' (Eastern Zhejiang School). In *Wenshi tongyi jiaozhu* (A Critical Edition of the *Comprehensive Review on Literature and Historiography*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 523.
- Zhou Guoting. 'Beiping lunxian qijian tanxian ji' (Adventures in Occupied Beiping). *Zhengyi bao* (Justice Newspaper) (Kaifeng), 22–23 December 1946.