

To Be or To Become a Chinese, That Is a Question

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Abstract

China is its history. In its long history of changes, we can see a more stable “methodological China” compared to the often-changing Chinese values and beliefs. It means China exists in its flexible ways of thinking and doing rather than in any unchangeable fundamentalist faiths. “Methodological China” refers to “exemplars,” “political systems,” “history-based civilization,” “unchanged samples,” as well as the “episteme of Chinese mind.”

1. The Undefinable Chinese

This is a little bit of a discursive topic. The first problem is that neither a general mind nor an image of the true Chinese with typical “*Chinese-ness*” has been agreed upon with any certainty. The stereotyped images of the supposed Chinese mind, such as the supposedly eternal collectivism, despotism, conservatism and nationalism, or fabricated characters such as the evil Fu Manchu or the Mandarin, or the arrogant emperor Qianlong, are mainly based upon the misperceptions, partly due to ignorance of the long duration of Chinese history and its mainstream of traditions, if not deliberately hostile distortions of that history. For instance, the supposed despotism and conservatism were no more than the symptoms of the declining Chinese empire in the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911). As for collectivism and nationalism, they have been imported from Europe at turn of the twentieth century. Nationalism is an imitation of the European concept of nation-state, while collectivism

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