

Where Is Home? Expectations vs. The Unexpected

Dong WANG vom Niederrhein (she/her/hers)

Disclaimer: This blog post was first drafted on July 4, 2023, and first revised on August 12, 2023 in West Berlin (Germany) on the 30th anniversary of my coming to the United States. The draft was then further revised on January 13, 2024, before being finalized seven days thereafter at the Lower Rhine of Germany.

“Feeling is deep and still; and the word that floats on the surface.
Is as the tossing buoy, that betrays where the anchor is hidden.
Therefore trust to thy heart, and to what the world calls illusions.”

---Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*, first published in 1847, Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2003, p. 67.

There is something paradoxical about home, in seeking refuge from the troubles of the “world.” When I recently found new forms of peace and consolation in oil and watercolor painting, drawing and kayaking/canoeing, they were automatically added to my list of hobbies like baking, swimming, hiking, cycling, and practicing classical guitar as anchors of the mind. Finding both my own rhythm of living and sense of value and beauty is home to me in Northwest Germany, for that is the only point from where I can chart the world, on-site and/or imagined. By contrast, homecoming in the physical sense, the well-trodden sentimental journey back to roots, is yet another *unnerving* encounter with reality and even less a moral grounding for calmly contemplating the world, at least for me.

Publishing my course book in 2023, *Tse Tsan Tai (1872–1938): An Australian-Cantonese Opinion Maker in British Hong Kong* (Wang, 2023, thereafter), was a different type of homecoming: Tse Tsan Tai and his self-identification invited me into a century-old universe that, for better or worse, revised morals and beliefs that *may* serve as fresh beacons today.

Tse’s life was deeply involved with revolution and the legitimization of old and new political power *partly* embodied by the mixed Chinese and/or “Chinese” diaspora like Tse himself. My book examines his legacy and puts his own testimony and moral judgement into a historical context. Tse was a colonial cosmopolitan who straddled worldviews, nationalisms, scientific endeavors, and religious ideals. My research findings have torn him out of the ideologically driven historical narratives in the Republic of China (ROC, 1912--present in Taiwan) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC, 1949--present) that brushed/brush him off as an oddball. A multifaceted, spirited, and creative individual, Tse defied/defies not only partisan historians, *but also* the asphyxiating expectations of the post-colonial gaze that still prevails today.

Tse’s story allows us to touch base, so that we can get real about ideas that are floating around today: The moral attribute of nations, freedom, ideologies, markets, wars, and rightful political rule. For example, Tse, an express Christian baptized in Australia, dwelled briefly on the Mandate of Heaven (天命, *tianming*) in the Qing Manchu/Chinese dynasty—the first

reign name of imperial Qing China (1644-1911/1912) *before* the Manchu forces took over Peking in 1644 in cooperation with the locals.

Tianming is a term that has entered general knowledge as meaning legitimate rule/governance. Tse believed that the Qing rulers/usurpers, “Manchu”/“non-Chinese,” had been unlawful and unfit since the very beginning, that Nurhachu/Nurhaci (b. 1559-1626), the first Qing emperor, revealed his base character when Nurhaci named his reign as “Chinese” *tianming*—a *self-* and *illegitimate* claim to power in China, according to Tse who led, advocated and participated in toppling the Qing regime in China through military and non-military means. In other words, the rulers/ruling parties, the ruled/the people/s, the land/country, and the ruling states/governments in China were totally *different* things to Tse Tsan Tai.

In the 1910s, when Frank Johnson Goodnow (b. 1859-1939), a jurist from the United States, helped write the Constitution of the Republic of China (1912-present in Taiwan), he predicted that China was about to become a military dictatorship, and his advice to avert this was to bestow “the most important classes, such as the merchants, the literary class and the larger property owners” (Wang, 2023, p. 32) a role in the legislative bodies. Goodnow argued that power sharing or stake-holding self-interest was a precondition for exerting political power. In other words, for Goodnow, taking the American Constitution as a model and aggregating the political will among self-interested individuals who *could* act within formal laws with separation of power, checks and balances, as well as freedom of speech, was the way forward in the Republic of China.

Tse’s approaches differed from Goodnow’s. His ideals were probably best expressed in the slogan *ducit amor patriae* 盡心愛國 (Love of country/land leads me) of his revolutionary headquarters in Pak Tze Lane, Hong Kong (Wang, 2023, p. 112). When Tse observed the behavior of Sun Yat-sen, Yuan Shih-kai, perhaps Chiang Kai-shek, and others, he realized that their political ambition did not meet the complete moral dedication needed. For Tse, the “wholehearted patriotism” was an obvious reference to Mencius’ *chin-hsin* (*jinxin*, 盡心), which associated legitimate governance or moral statehood with the ruler’s total commitment and benevolence as an existential and moral imperative. But Tse’s demand went further than this.

Tse Tsan Tai believed that the Christian *home*, the Garden of Eden, had been in Xinjiang and that the Chinese were close heirs to the Kingdom of God, so China should become a Christian democracy. On the other hand, as an Australian-born who spent the first seventeen years of his life in Australia before moving to British Hong Kong for good, he regarded Sun Yat-sen (b. 1866-1925), Yuan Shikai (b. 1859-1916) as well as other leaders who emerged in his time as lacking the moral *habitus* to lead *his* “homeland” China, the moral compass not just of Confucian benevolence but of creating true democratic institutions.

Dong WANG (she/her/hers, Ph.D., Ph.D.) vom Niederrhein (the Lower Rhine of Germany) is collection editor of Asian Studies at Lived Places Publishing (New York), a member of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, an elected Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, and vice chair of the Association for Asian Studies’ Editorial Board. Her single-authored books in English are: *Tse Tsan Tai (1872–1938): An Australian-Cantonese Opinion Maker in British Hong Kong* (Lived Places Publishing New York, 2023), *The United States and China: A History from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2nd and rev. ed. 2021; 1st ed. in 2013), *Longmen’s Stone Buddhas and Cultural Heritage: When Antiquity Met Modernity in China* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), *Managing God’s Higher Learning: U.S.-China Cultural Encounter and Canton Christian College (Lingnan University), 1888–1952* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), and *China’s Unequal Treaties: Narrating National History* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).