

Professor Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik - Biographical Sketch

Siu Lien Ling Wong Visiting Fellow 2017/18, Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Professor Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik obtained her Ph.D. and habilitation from the Faculty of East Asian Studies at the Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany in 1982 and 1989 respectively. She joined the Heidelberg University as Professor for Modern Sinology from 1989 to 2002 and served as the Vice-Rector for International Affairs from 1999 to 2001. Since 2002, she has been the Professor of Sinology at the Department for East Asian Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria, and served as Dean of the Faculty for Philological and Cultural Studies from October 2010 to September 2011, as well as the Vice-Rector for Research and Career Development from October 2011 to September 2015.

Professor Weigelin-Schwiedrzik's main research areas involve history, politics and culture, including history of China and East Asia in the 20th century, politics and economy in China after the Reform and Opening-up, and contemporary Chinese discourse on memory of the Great Famine and the Cultural Revolution.

Since the very beginning of her research activities, Professor Weigelin-Schwiedrzik has been fascinated by historiography in China. Both her dissertation and her postdoctoral thesis deal with the development of Chinese historiography in the 20th century; the former focuses on PCR party historiography, and the latter on a methodological dispute amongst Chinese historians. She is interested in aspects of the inner dynamics of historiography as an academic discipline, as well as its relationship with the process of nation building and the formation of national identity. With the increasing diversification of historiography in the PRC since the late 1970's, she has also turned to the field of memory and recollection, and lately conducted several case studies on the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution addressing the issue of trauma and memory.

Her work in the field of Chinese historiography aims at internationalizing the discussion of Chinese history, and at facilitating the exchange of ideas related to historiography issues inside and outside China. She views her contributions to the understanding of Chinese historiography as an integral part of the ongoing discussions on world and global history. With Arif Dirlik, renowned historian of contemporary China, modernisation and globalization, she shares the conception of historical universality as the sum of its particularities. They believe that a central concern of the science of history should be the development of instruments that allow us to discover these particularities, to comprehend them, and to understand them as a part of the whole. A concrete expression of this conception is the cutting-edge series of comparative research on historiography she edits together with Axel Schneider (University of Göttingen): the Leiden Series in Comparative Historiography, which is an on-going project and counts 11 volumes up till 2017.

Based on years of theoretical explorations into the field of historiography, she edited a book on "Broken Narratives" in 2014, focusing on the change of history and identity since the end of the Cold War both in Europe and East Asia. She and her colleagues tried to show how during 25 years after the end of the Cold War historiography, especially in its non-academic forms, was successful in overcoming a black-and-white binary writing of the history of the last 100 years. In this process, the otherwise neglected aspects of the history of the 20th century came to the readers' attention.

Like the French historian Yves Chevrier, Professor Weigelin-Schwiedrzik conceives history as the center of the discourse about politics and ethics in China. Her research on Chinese historiography is, in this sense, a contribution to the discussion of the political and intellectual situation in the Chinese world. Her recent work highlighted especially the possibility of a public reappraisal of historical events of the Maoist period. This work contributes to the analysis of the relationship between politics, historiography and the debate on communicative and cultural memory as described by the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann.

Apart from her basic research on Chinese historiography, Professor Weigelin-Schwiedrzik has developed a second focus on applied research since the middle of the 1990's. Starting from an investigation on the problems of township and village enterprises in the vicinity of Shanghai, she has engaged with different aspects of rural development, and developed a theoretical approach to explain the relationship between state and rural society. She set up a hypothesis on the distance of state and rural society with reference to Yves Chevrier and other historians. Together with her master and doctoral students, she has tested in several studies the explanatory power of the hypothesis. These studies include not only the socio-economic investigations of the transfer of rural enterprises into private ownership, the public health system in the countryside, and the migration from the countryside to the cities and its impact on the cities, but also encompass the cultural inquiries of the memories of Chinese peasants of the Chinese Revolution and the PRC under the leadership of Mao Zedong. As part of these projects, her team was engaged in translating theoretical knowledge into policy measures by trying to support the implementation of public health policies in the Chinese countryside as well as among minorities in the PRC.

Professor Weigelin-Schwiedrzik is currently writing a book with Professor Wolfgang Schwentker from Osaka University as part of the *Neue Fischer Weltgeschichte* on East Asia in the 19th and the 20th centuries. In this book, the two historians try to go beyond the conventional approach to the topic. Instead of producing the sum of three national histories related to China, Japan and Korea, they are developing a narrative based on the theory of social constructivism of how the three countries built, destroyed, and re-built the region of East Asia by their inter-relatedness as well as their isolation from each other.

Having been the only full professor of sinology in Austria for a long time, Professor Weigelin-Schwiedrzik had to give lectures about many subjects she did not conduct research on. However, she has always taken a personal interest in the areas of research her students engaged in, so much so that she has sometimes included these areas into her personal research agenda, and worked jointly with her students on these fields. Given the fact that of the 800 students she supervised at the University of Vienna, 250 are of Chinese origin but have grown up in Austria, the question of migration readily became a new area of her research. So far, her contribution consists in the supervision of several master- and doctoral theses on the topic of integration of Chinese migrants into Austria and other places under sociological, economic and cultural aspects. At the same time, she supervises several master- and doctoral theses on the topic of Chinese foreign policy and has recently expressed her view on questions of Chinese foreign policy in several publications.

Professor Weigelin-Schwiedrzik considers the way she practices modern research on China to be an academic form of interdisciplinary engagement with China and its development in the 20th century. Her research opens discussion in disciplines such as the social sciences which put their often universalistic but in some regard unexamined theories to the test of China. In addition to that, she believes that it is the responsibility of academics to develop new theorems that are capable not only of explaining the complex development of China in the 20th century, but also of contributing to the further elaboration of the theoretical repertoire of the aforementioned disciplines.