

Articles 【研究論著】

**Tradition and Identity:
Theoretical Reflections and the
European Example**
傳統與認同：理論省思與歐洲範例

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Abstract

The paper describes tradition as a specific mode of making sense of the past in order to orient people in the present, thus opening a future perspective for their lives. Different levels of this traditional mode of making sense of the past are distinguished and characterised. The next step in the argument is addressed to the issue of identity. A general explanation of identity is followed by the specific role of tradition in identity building. Against the mainstream of today's academic discourse identity is not exclusively understood as a construction by the people looking back at the past. Rather, it is emphasised, that this construction itself is conditioned by the results of the past effective in the conditions under which present-day-life historical thinking takes place. Finally, the issue of European identity as discussed in the process of European Unification is presented as an example of a general tendency to overcome ethnocentric elements in identity building today.

摘要

本文主要論點有三。首先本文將傳統視為是將過去意義化，並指示現今人們方向的特殊模式。在此模式之下，傳統乃能為人們開啟未來生活的視野。而將過去意義化的層次不同，也會形成各自相異的特殊性質。其次，本文論證有關認同的議題。一般認為傳統的作用，會影響認同的建構。雖然今日學術界主流的意見以為，認同形成於人們對過去的回顧，但這並非是唯一的解釋。至少應再強調，在建構認同的過程中，過去必須在當代生活的歷史思考下，才會形成作用。最後，本文將討論歐洲的認同議題在歐洲統合的過程中，普遍意向於超越民族中心主義的因素，將成為今日討論認同建構問題的一個範例。

Im Übrigen mag das Wesentliche einer Tradition, ihre letzte
Rechtfertigung darin bestehen, in dem Moment, wo kein Ausweg, keine
Zuflucht mehr erkennbar sind, Trost zu spenden, ein Stückchen Traum,
einen kurzen Augenblick der Illusion herbeizuzaubern.

—Saul Friedländer¹

What is Tradition?

Tradition is an issue of historical culture. Most, if not all groups, countries, nations and even whole civilizations have their special traditions and they are eager to cultivate them. Tradition is visible in monuments, in street names, in museums, in textbooks, in public speeches and in many other forms of public presentation. The common objective is to confirm a commitment to something, which happened in the past and has a normative meaning for the future. Most nations celebrate the dates of their foundations; and most of the celebrations evoke the obligation of a people of today to those norms and values, which because reality in a newly founded political system. ‘Independence’ and ‘Freedom’ are widespread examples of these values. By commemorating their incorporation into their life-form, people render them present and effective as tradition.

Thus tradition is a mode of the past being present in the lives of a people. It is a specific interrelationship between past, present and future: All three time dimensions are knit together into the conviction that there is one continuous temporal extension of an obligatory form of life in all its changes, which leads into a highly recommended future perspective.²

¹ (Besides, the essence of tradition, its ultimate legitimation may consist in its ability to give some words of comfort, to evoke a small piece of a dream, a short flicker of illusion at the very moment, when there is no way, no refuge anywhere.) Saul Friedländer, *Wenn die Erinnerung kommt* (Stuttgart, 1979), p. 74f.

² This meets the usual definition of historical consciousness: It is an interpretation of the past for the sake of understanding the present and expecting the future. The discourse on historical consciousness may be represented by the following literature: Ursula A.J. Becher, Katja Fausser and Jörn Rüsen, “Geschichtsbewußtsein,” in Martin Greiffenhagen & Sylvia Greiffenhagen (eds), *Handwörterbuch zur politischen Kultur der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 2nd ed, Wiesbaden (Westdeutscher Verlag, 2002), pp. 169-176; Carlos Kölbl & Jürgen Straub, “Historical Consciousness in Youth, Theoretical and exemplary empirical analyses,” in *Forum Qualitative Social Research: Theories, Methods, Applications*, vol. 2, no. 3 (September 2001); Carlos Kölbl,

With this concept of time, tradition is an anthropologically fundamental and universal way of giving historical orientation to practical life. It represents one of the main types of historical sense generation, which can be found in all times and in all countries.³ To elucidate this, it is useful to understand history in its extended meaning.⁴ On the level of cultural universals in human life, history is a representation of the past grounded in memory, which is used to render present-day life conditions plausible and understandable thus allowing a valid future perspective on human activity and suffering. History mediates and synthesizes the three time dimensions into one comprehensive concept of change, which orients a people in the temporal course of their lives.

History as this synthesis of time can be performed by the human mind in various ways. However, it follows certain fundamental rules of making sense of the experience of time; and these rules can be typologically identified and expli-

Geschichtsbewußtsein im Jugendalter: Grundzüge einer Entwicklungspsychologie historischer Sinnbildung (Bielefeld: Transcript 2004); Jörn Rüsen ed., *Geschichtsbewußtsein: Psychologische Grundlagen, Entwicklungskonzepte, empirische Befunde* (Beiträge zur Geschichtskultur, Bd. 21) (Köln: Böhlau, 2001); Magne Angvik & Bodo von Borries (eds), *Youth and History: A Comparative European Survey on Historical Consciousness and Political Attitudes among Adolescents*. 2 Bde. (Hamburg: Körber-Stiftung, 1997); Jörn Rüsen, "Was ist Geschichtsbewußtsein? Theoretische Überlegungen und heuristische Hinweise," in idem *Historische Orientierung: Über die Arbeit des Geschichtsbewußtseins, sich in der Zeit zurechtzufinden* (Köln: Böhlau, 1994), pp.3-24; Achim Mittag, "Historical consciousness in China: Some notes on six thesis' on Chinese Historiography and Historical thought," in Paul van der Velde & Alex McKay (eds), *New Developments in Asian Studies: An Introduction* (London: Kegan Paul, 1998), p. 47; Johann W.N. Tempelhoff (ed.), *Historical Consciousness and the Future of Our Past* (Vanderbijlpark: Clio, 2003), pp. 41-53; Bodo von Borries, Hans-Jürgen Pandel, and Jörn Rüsen (eds), *Geschichtsbewußtsein empirisch* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1991); Bodo von Borries & Jörn Rüsen (eds), *Geschichtsbewußtsein im Interkulturellen Vergleich: Zwei Empirische Pilotstudien* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1994); Karl-Ernst Jeismann, *Geschichte als Horizont der Gegenwart: Über den Zusammenhang von Vergangenheitsdeutung* (Gegenwartsverständnis und Zukunftsperspektive: Paderborn, 1985). In the memory-discourse of the humanities for decades the aspect of future orientation has been very often neglected.

³ Cf. my theory of four types of historical narration: Jörn Rüsen, *History: Narration - Interpretation - Orientation* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004). Id., "Historical Narration: Foundation, Types, Reason," in *History and Theory*, Beiheft 26 (The Representation of Historical Events, 1987), pp.87-97; id., "The Development of Narrative Competence in Historical Learning - An Ontogenetical Hypothesis Concerning Moral Consciousness," in *History and Memory*, vol.1 no.2 (1989), pp.35-60.

⁴ Cf. Jörn Rüsen, "History: Overview," in Neil J. Smelser & Paul B. Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001), pp. 6857-6864.

cated. Tradition is bound to such a rule. Its leading idea of temporal change is the continuity of an obligatory system of norms and values, which are incorporated into the specific life form of a people who feel committed to it. Its historical sense criterion is the continuation of an obligatory life form across the change of time. Tradition is an idea of an immutable essence in the changing conditions and circumstances of life. One could even speak of eternity instead of continuation.

I can give you a simple example, taken from the everyday-life experience of advertisement. Mitsubishi praises its motorcar by referring to the tradition of Japanese handicraft perfection in making Samurai swords. “The Spirit of Perfection” runs through the time till the last types of Mitsubishi cars.⁵

The continuing life form is empirical and normative at the same time. It is specific for a single nation or group and its life form, and that means that it substantially differs from the life forms of others. It plays an important role in cultural life, mainly as the basis of undisputable consent. It constitutes a feeling of sharing undoubted set of rules and attitudes in daily and in official life.

Since this feeling is very important for the stability of human life forms the people concerned invest a lot of effort to confirm their common traditions. Therefore tradition is always an issue of cultural activities, of communicative strategies, of keeping it alive and in power. Most of these strategies are performed in a special way—explicitly different from the normal daily life. Traditions have been cultivated in this way, reflecting the obligatory order of this life, in a specific non-daily way of communication. This cultivation is performed in public holidays, festivities, ceremonies, rituals and similar modes of cultural communication.

But one should not overlook that tradition is even more. It is more deeply rooted in the lives of the people than in their cultural celebrations. It is highly manifest in the self evident human behaviour, which is simply valid without any reflection and confirmation. The past is present in habits and customs, even before it becomes an issue of historical culture and cultivation. It is there in the givenness of life-conditions and circumstances, which are kept up by normal

⁵ Advertising from Pan Am Clipper, March 1984.

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life. Language is one such powerful mode of the traditional presence of the past before it becomes reflected as history. In the form of self-evident life forms the past has already been effective in the present, since this self-evidence is the result of historical development. Its timeless character hides this internal historicity.

In order to thematize and analyze tradition in its concrete, diverse and manifold manifestations in historical culture it is useful to distinguish four levels of its appearance and effectiveness.

(1) The most fundamental level is that of *unconscious dispositions and determinations* of everyday life. Here tradition is manifest and effective in the form of self-evidence. For a long time, many forms of gender behaviour have belonged to this level. To give another example: There are very specific traditions of laughter and mourning effective in human behaviour. Some people can laugh about something, which is not funny for others and vice versa. This kind of tradition is transported through the chain of generations by a silent discourse of example and imitation in everyday life.

(2) On the level of *everyday life communication* self-evident traditions are put into discussion. They become applied to new or unusual situations. They may explicitly be addressed in order to explain one's own behaviour or more often to criticize the behaviour of others as disgusting, barbarous or, on the contrary, as paradigmatic. "John is a good father" expresses and confirms a traditional concept of fatherhood, without any reflective legitimation.

(3) *Reflective legitimation* is true for another level, where the normative life form is explicated as such. It becomes a matter of reflection, criticism, legitimation, comparison, and even of change. Although the people think that tradition is something unchangeable and solid, nevertheless, it undergoes developments and alterations. This change can take place in an unnoticed way on the level of unconscious self-evidence. Then change is very slow. Communicating traditions is a higher speed medium of change. Here tradition picks up stronger temporal dynamics.

The most prominent example I can present is my own country, Germany. Since the end of Nazi-dictatorship many traditions which the Germans thought to be typical and specific to them have been put under radical doubt. Ever since, the dominant way the Germans treat their traditions engenders are controversial debates. Examples are the debate about the German 'Sonderweg' (special way) into modernity,⁶ and the historians' debate about the role of Nazi-time in German historical culture.⁷ One result of these debates is the fact that Germans now

⁶ Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, 2 Bde (München: C.H. Beck, 2000); Helga Grebing, *Der "deutsche Sonderweg" in Europa 1806-1945* (Stuttgart, 1986); Jürgen Elsässer, *Der deutsche Sonderweg: Historische Last und Politische Herausforderung* (Kreuzlingen: Diederichs, 2003); Karl Dietrich Bracher (ed.), *Deutscher Sonderweg: Mythos oder Realität?* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1982).

⁷ Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, S. W. Nicholsen ed. and trans (Cambridge: Mass, 1989); Peter Baldwin (ed.), *Reworking the Past: History, the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate* (Boston, 1990); José Brunner, "Pride and Memory: Nationalism, Narcissism and the Historians Debates in Germany and Israel," in *History and Memory* 9 (1989/90), pp. 246-290; Dominick La Capra, "Revisiting the Historians' Debate: Mourning and Genocide," in Ne'Eman Arad Gulie (ed.), *Passing into History: Nazism and the Holocaust beyond Memory, in honour of Saul Friedländer on his 65th Birthday*, *History and Memory* 9 (Fall 1997), pp. 80-112; Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Wulf Kansteiner, "Between Politics and Memory: The Historikerstreit and the West German Historical Culture of the 1980s," in Richard J. Golsan (ed.), *Fascism's Return: Scandal, Revision and Ideology since 1980* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 86-129.

deeply feel committed to the tradition of Western political culture, against which they originally developed their national identity.

(4) A final level is reached when tradition is performed as a generally accepted content of official celebration. Here it is a well-established and powerful element of historical culture. We could call it an *explicit self-evidence of an obligatory past*. In the academic discourse on memory it is called ‘cultural memory’ (Kulturelles Gedächtnis).⁸ Goethe e.g. has played an eminent role on this level of tradition in Germany for a long time—in the Second Empire, the Weimar Republic, even in the Nazi-period and up to recent times. The same was true for Confucius in China for centuries till the end of the Empire, and even today one can again observe his rehabilitation as a symbol of Chinese cultural tradition and identity in mainland China. A teaching example is a huge statue of Confucius besides the new library of Shanghai. For historians one of the most convincing sources of this explicit self-evidence are text books for historical instruction in schools and the political speeches on national holidays. On this level of tradition the visit of Japanese Prime Ministers to the Veterans’ Shrine where the military leaders of the World War II are buried is an event of Japanese tradition. This may shock Japan’s former enemies, but it is rewarded by domestic political support.

All four levels are interwoven with each other. They can only be artificially separated from each other but, nevertheless, such separation is a useful conceptual means for understanding concrete cases.

There is a permanent movement of events, symbols, celebrations and other representations of the past across all these levels. Powerful symbols of traditions like Confucius may lose their power—think of the fourth of may movement—they may be disputed and criticized, and thus their significance for tradition may fade away. Other events of the past which were forgotten can subsequently get a high significance, like King Asoka in India.

In this respect tradition is anything but solid and unchangeable, although its mode of representing the past pretends exactly this solidity and duration.

⁸ Cf. Jan Assmann, *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und Politische Identität in Frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C.H. Beck, 1992); idem, Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” in *New German Critique*, No 65 (1995), pp. 125-133; Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (München: C.H. Beck 1999).



Statue of Confucius besides the library of Shanghai (Photo, J. Rüsen, April 2004)

What is Identity?

Identity is the answer to the question, “who am I?” This answer can be given by a person, a group, a nation, a whole civilization. In fact identity is a cultural essential for every social unit in human life. It is a feeling and conviction of belonging, of togetherness, and at the same time this belonging is a distinction from others (In the case of a single person this ‘belonging’ means a relationship to oneself and a distinction from every other person).

Belonging to a people means to have something in common with them which others do not have. It does not mean that those who share a common identity are equal or uniform in every respect. Identity does not necessarily mean uniformity. Instead of uniformity one should speak of communality and difference from others. It is a kind of an internalized cohesion or coherence in social relationships. It is a matter of subjectivity. It decides about similarity and difference in perceiving others—on a personal as well as on a social level. Identity is not at all simply given like the colour of the hair. Identity is always an achievement of the human mind in establishing one’s subjectivity in relation to others.

Without a minimum of coherence in the human relationship to oneself and to others life is impossible; since, practical human life needs an internalized social relationship, an awareness of oneself in distinction and relation to others.

Identity is a matter of culture. Culture is the entire achievement of the human mind in interpreting and understanding the given world including oneself as living in this world and being a part of it. Identity is a cultural achievement of human self-relatedness. It keeps people together in their manifold relations to other people and to the world.⁹ It makes them a 'self', or an oriented subject; and by doing so, it enables the person or the people to pursue their own objectives. If I do not know who I am I will lose the ability to pursue my life. Then I can no longer organize my life according to my interests and objectives, and I will lose myself, which is a kind of a cultural death. This is true for peoples as well. If they are robbed of a coherent relationship to themselves, which is grounded in a value system and which lets them follow the objectives of their lives, they will lose their ability to act along the line of their togetherness by sharing their basic convictions. They are paralysed, robbed of the forms of life, which lie in strong self-confidence. There are numerous examples in history of people under foreign domination deprived of their original culture.

Identity is a matter of personal and social coherence and togetherness in the manifold relationship to the circumstances and conditions of life. It has been grounded in experiences and convictions, on belief systems and interpretations of the real world. It is developed by a double process of internalizing experiences and externalizing intentions. Hence, it expresses and confirms itself by symbols, images and languages on all levels of perception and a hidden unconsciousness' awareness to a highly elaborated code of subjectivity.

Temporal change is a fundamental challenge to the mental procedures of identity-formation. It runs against the fundamental interest of human beings in their own stability and their social togetherness.¹⁰ Therefore the mental processes of identity-formation are always concerned with time. They try to give

⁹I mainly follow Erik Erikson's argumentation (Erik H. Erikson, *Identität und Lebenszyklus*, 3 Aufsätze (Frankfurt am Main, 1973). Cf. Jürgen Straub, "Identitätstheorie im Übergang? Über Identitätsforschung, den Begriff der Identität und die zunehmende Beachtung des Nicht-Identitätischen in subjekt-theoretischen Diskursen," in *Sozialwissenschaftliche Literaturrundschau* 23 (1991), pp. 49-71.

¹⁰Cf. Klaus E. Müller, *Das magische Universum der Identität: Elementarformen sozialen Verhaltens, Ein ethnologischer Grundriß* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987).

time a shape within which identity can survive, continue, or develop. In a complex interrelationship of remembering the past and of projecting the future the human self acquires its shape by making sense of the past in respect to the need for its continuation.

Historical identity is a highly elaborated form of this so to speak 'temporal body' of the human self. The most radical challenge of identity is the fact that the human self is limited and condemned to die. Therefore in all cultures the people try to overcome these limits by giving awareness of themselves a temporal perspective which transgresses birth into the past and death into the future. This is done by putting one's own self into a temporal development of a much larger nature. In respect to social togetherness this transgression of the limits of birth and death and the overcoming of the threat of temporal change is realized by referring to the chain of generations. It is this chain which gives the human self the self-esteem of overcoming the natural limits of human life. It gives it a glimmer of eternity.

The cultural strategy which brings about this temporal body of the human self is the telling of a story. The stories which present people's identity in a temporally enlarged extension are called *master narratives*. In many societies there is more than one master narrative. We have to deal with but competing master narratives, and we should more precisely speak of a master discourse on historical identity.¹¹

Telling stories, which represent a people's historical identity shares its fragility with human identity, its permanently being threatened and challenged by the temporal change in the conditions of life. Therefore the telling master narratives or pursuing the founding discourses on historical identity are an essential part of cultural life constituting what we call historical culture. Historical culture is an essential part of social survival, of the struggle for getting an acceptable place in society or for legitimating domination. All forms of communication by which the people understand their world and themselves enable them to live their lives in connection with and distinguished from others.

¹¹ Jan-Holger Kirsch, *Nationaler Mythos oder historische Trauer? Der Streit um ein zentrales 'Holocaust-Mahnmal' für die Berliner Republik, Beiträge zur Geschichtskultur*, Bd. 25 (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), pp. 22sq.

The Interrelationship between Tradition and Identity

Tradition is the most fundamental form by which identity is shaped. People were born into an established cultural life, which determines what they are. They have internalized these preconditions into the mental bodies of their own—their selfness—as the mediating field between their personal interests and objectives on the one hand and the social demands and obligations on the other. There is no identity without such a traditional basis. Tradition presents identity as self-evident, as a permanent figure in the changing world of human interrelations with others. This permanence and stability of oneself by tradition is an issue of all the levels on which tradition plays a role in human life.

(a) On the *fundamental level of unconscious self-evidence* the human self gets its first shape of self-awareness and self-esteem, and the first convictions of togetherness with and of being different from others.

(b) These basic shapes come into a *communicative movement* of the second level of everyday life, when the people have to *interpret the experience of themselves*, the way they are addressed by others and how to address the others with their own self-concept.

(c) On the third level of *explicit thematizing tradition* identity becomes an issue of more or less systematic reflection. Here the most dynamic force of communication is the question ‘Who am I?’ or ‘Who are we?’ These questions cannot be avoided since from time to time human life is confronted by a situation, where the stability of established concepts of identity are radically challenged, attacked, endangered. So, one of the dominant questions of the Germans after the defeat of 1945 was the radical question: Who are we now? The public discourse tried to answer this question. One answer was committed to the task of presenting cultural traditions of Germany, which seemed to have been untouched by the experiences of Nazi-dictatorship and World-War II which included a complete defeat and a deeply disturbed awareness of one’s own national identity. So the question was raised: Which tradition was still valid vis-à-vis the misuse and the failure of German self-esteem during the Nazi-time? Friedrich Meinecke, one of the most important and respected historians at that time answered this question by referring to Goethe as a paradigm of Germanness, which could stand against the threatening experiences of the recent past.¹²

¹²Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe. Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen*, 2. Aufl.

(d) On the fourth level of establishing *obligatory models and paradigms of historical identity* tradition is a matter of permanent cultivation, evocation and legitimation. Origins of still valid life-forms are celebrated. Anniversaries confirm this stability and continuity of achieved and commonly shared systems of values and models of self-understanding and historical representation.

Master narratives and basic discourses on historical identity are pursued across these four levels. They become adjusted to new situations characterized by new experiences and expectations. Here traditional identity is a matter of change. It has to change in order to keep up the image of stability, the continuity of obligation in changing circumstances. The historical culture of traditional identity is characterized by a tension between change and stability, of developing an image of unchangeable firmness of established forms and contents of historical identity by changing it, by adapting it to new situations. On the other hand, no change can be interpreted along the line of stable identity without referring to something beyond temporal change in the essence of one's own identity.

This is a special problem in modern forms of life, since modernity is basically opposed to the idea of an unchangeable validity of life forms. It stresses change as a condition for continuity. The category of progress, which is typical for modern historical thinking, in its logic contradicts the way historical identity is shaped by tradition. But, nevertheless, the conviction that essentials of one's own identity do not change and are stable is a powerful element in modern historical culture. Thus tradition gets its specific modern forms, i.e. an internal temporal dynamics in the presentation of stability and continuity.¹³ I can give you a remarkable Chinese example regarding fitting Dr. Sun Yat-Sen into the tradition of Chinese culture. This tradition is symbolized by copper vessels which signify its origin and continuity. Opposite of the entrance of the Sun Yat-Sen museum in Cui Heng the visitors see a huge copper vessels onto which Dr. Sun's testament is engraved. Thus he has become the future which is imbedded in the origin of China. The founding figure of post-imperial China is so to speak re-projected into the tradition of imperial China. He does not stand for the rupture in Chinese history between Empire and Republic but for the continuity of its essentials.

(Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1946); Friedrich Meinecke, *The German catastrophe: reflections and recollections*, translated by Sidney B. Fay (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945).

¹³ Cf. Aleida Assmann, *Zeit und Tradition: Kulturelle Strategien der Dauer, Beiträge zur Geschichtskultur*, Bd. 15 (Köln: Böhlau 1999).

Construction and Constructedness

To analyze problems of traditional identity-formation it is useful to pick up the rather crude and abstract distinction between traditional and modern forms of tradition and to develop a perspective of development from tradition to modernity. On the level of this very simple ideal typological distinction it is rather easy to characterize the difference. In archaic and ancient times the logic of traditional sense generation in interpreting temporal change is dominant. The main interest of historical culture is stability and unchangeability of the obligatory life form.¹⁴ People believed that this life form has an objective character. It is a part of the world itself, even of the universe and its cosmological order, which they have to take as it is and to confirm as it is. Every attempt to change it is seen as a danger and therefore will be suppressed.

Anthropology tells us to call these societies 'cold'. That means their main interest lies in keeping up the stability of their life forms thus presenting tradition as the obligatory origin of their world to which they are committed. There are indeed objective elements of social life, which play an essential role in traditional identity all over the world: namely the natural relationship of relatives. To be the son of one's mother is beyond any change. It is a clear given fact and always plays a role in one's identity.

On the other side of the ideal typological scale tradition is a matter of subjectivity, of intentions, personal commitment to a value system. The best Western example for this subjective concept of traditional identity is Ernest Renan's definition of a nation: "Une plebiscite de tous les jours" (an everyday plebiscite).¹⁵ In this concept of nationality there is no objective given condition for togetherness, but only a subjective will of belonging to others, constituted by a shared value system. It only has a subjective validity. Societies with such a code of identity favouring change and subjectivity are called 'hot' societies.

¹⁴ Klaus E. Müller has described this cultural pattern of a timeless world order as dominant in primordial societies: Klaus Müller, "Sein ohne Zeit," in Rüsen, Jörn (ed.), *Zeit deuten. Perspektiven - Epochen - Paradigmen* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2003), pp. 82-110.

¹⁵ Renan Ernest, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* with an introduction by Joep Leerssen (University of Amsterdam press, 1994), 2nd impression, 1995.



Sun Yat-Sen museum in Cui Heng, entrance (Photo J. Riisen, June 2002)

Following this archetypical distinction one can very easily outline an idea of an entire development of traditional identity. It is the transformation process from an objective to a subjective definition of tradition and traditional belonging and difference. Such a perspective has some empirical validity. One can characterize modern national identity along the line of such a development. And it is possible to place different manifestations of traditional identity on a scale with the two ends of objectivity and subjectivity. But one should never overlook that we use the typological distinction of an 'ideal'-type, i.e. it follows logical oppositions which are not the case in the so-called real life. Every tradition has, of course, objective and subjective elements. The difference and the changes are a matter of mixture and of synthesizing them.

Today the academic discourse at least in the West has agreed upon a completely subjective character of historical identity, which is true for tradition as well. The dominant category is 'construction' or even 'invention'.¹⁶ This raises

¹⁶Some examples: Francois Hartog, "The invention of history: The pre-history of a concept from Homer to Herodotus," in *History and Theory* 39 (2000), pp. 384-395; Eric Hobsbawn & Terrence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 2nd Ed. 1984; Bogumil Jewsiewicki, "Cheri Samba and the Postcolonial Reinvention of Modernity," in

the idea that tradition is a subject-matter of deliberate activities. Indeed we will find evidence in the politics of the past that on all three levels of the consciousness of tradition there have always been attempts and strategies of manipulation, of getting influence and of changing traditions along the interests of different groups in their struggle for cognition.¹⁷

But it is a mistake to think that objective concepts and elements of tradition can be completely dissolved into subjective ones, and it is a mistake as well to presuppose that there have been thoroughly objective concepts of identity thus giving tradition a quasi-natural status. This mistake is always the case when identity is based on elements in human life which are understood as being natural. Racism and sexism are the most prominent examples for this pseudo-objectivism in identity formation, thus rooting the obligatory concept of one's own life form in a naturalized tradition.

If one looks at the ontogeny of every human being, one can easily see that identity is always a mixture of objective and subjective elements. Every human individual is born into a life form which for him and her is an objectively given condition of what he or she is or will become. I am born as a German, and for

Callaloo 16,4 (1993), pp. 772-795; Gender Billie Melman, "History and Memory: The Invention of Women's Past in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries," in *History & Memory*, vol. 5, no. 1 (spring/summer 1993), pp. 5-41; Jan Assmann, "The mosaic distinction: Israel, Egypt and the invention of paganism," in *Representations* 56 (Fall 1996), pp. 48-68; Stephan Bann, *The Inventions of History: Essays on the Representation of the Past* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990) —Two critical voices: Peter Lamarque, "Narrative and Invention: The limits of fictionality," in Christopher Nash (ed.), *Narrative in Culture: The uses of story-telling in the Sciences, Philosophy and Literature* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 131-153; David Carr, "Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity," in *History and Theory* 25 (1986), pp. 117-131.

¹⁷ For German and other examples cf. Christoph Kleßmann, Hans Misselwitz and Günter Wiechert (eds), *Deutsche Vergangenheiten - Eine gemeinsame Herausforderung: Der schwierige Umgang mit der doppelten Nachkriegsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1999); Petra Bock & Edgar Wolfrum (eds), *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit: Geschichtsbilder, Erinnerung und Vergangenheitspolitik im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen, 1999); Frank Helzel, *Ein König, ein Reichsführer und der Wilde Osten, Heinrich der I (919-936) in der Nationalen Selbstwahrnehmung der Deutschen* (Bielefeld: Transscript 2004); Jan-Holger Kirsch, "Wir haben aus der Geschichte gelernt," *Der 8. Mai als politischer Gedenktag in Deutschland*, Beiträge zur Geschichtskultur, Bd. 16 (Köln: Böhlau, 1999); Edgar Wolfrum, *Geschichte als Waffe: Vom Kaiserreich bis zur Wiedervereinigung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Rupprecht, 2001); Edgar Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung 1948-1990* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999).

me and my identity this is something beyond my deliberate will. It is a simple objective fact. This is the case with gender identity and a lot of other dimensions of identity as well. But at the same time, those who are conditioned by these objective elements of their identity, have subjectively come to terms with them. They have to interpret them, to internalize them, and internalization depends upon agreement and acceptance.

The same is true for the temporal dimension of historical identity whether it is traditional one or moulded by another logic of historical sense-generation. Historical identity is always a synthesis of the experience of the past and the expectation of the future. It is moved by the two constitutive intentions of the human consciousness of time. Husserl has called them *retention* and *protention*.¹⁸ In the language of everyday life we can speak of memory and expectation. *Memory* is related to experiences, and *expectation* is related to objectives, values and norms. We all know that memory changes the past to which it is related according to the interests of the person or people who remember. This is the effect of expectation by its synthesis with memory. On the other hand identity is more than only what people want to be. They have to accommodate this wish and projection with the experience they have of themselves and that is true for individuals as well as groups, nations and whole civilizations.

Thus a narrow interrelatedness of tradition and identity is constituted by a very tensional mixture and synthesis of experience and norms and values, of factual conditions and fictional imaginations. Human life as a cultural process is an achievement of this synthesis brought about by the forces of the human mind which strives to come to terms with the relationship of oneself and the others under changing conditions.

European Identity: A Demand for the Future

In the case of Europe this tension is evident. The European union is an open-ended process with a growing extension of members and a growing demand to bring about a historical consciousness of their togetherness.¹⁹ Therefore

¹⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins*, Martin Heidegger (ed.), 2nd Ed (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1980).

¹⁹ Cf. Sharon Macdonald (ed.), *Approaches to European Historical Consciousness: Reflections and Provocations* (Hamburg: Edition Körber-Stiftung, 2000); Joke van der Leeuw-Roord (ed.), *History for Today and Tomorrow: What does Europe Mean for School History? Eustory Series*,

one can observe a lot of different attempts to create and to thematize European-ness as a dimension of historical identity. Many institutions are eager to contribute to this European-ness. The educational systems and the humanities are highly important in such a contribution. But the public media play an even more important role, not to forget all the other institutions of historical culture like museums, text-books etc.

The case of the ongoing process of European unification is a fascinating example of the possibilities and limitations of creating traditions for the sake of forming new identities.

The starting point for this process is the traditional dominance of national identity in most, if not all, of the European countries. Unifying different European nations does not at all mean replacing the variety and difference of national identities in favour of a single new, a European one. European-ness is something completely different. It is an interrelationship of nationalities, a communication between very different national and regional traditions. European togetherness and commonness integrates this diversity. The slogan of this integration is highly significant: unity by diversity. One can speak of a growing European identity, if essential and decisive elements of this European commonness become a part of the historical identity of the peoples of the unifying Europe.

This historical identity in the making is supranational, but not anti-national. It integrates differences without dissolving them. Integration means that these features and structures of national identity which have a strong exclusive nature have to be changed so that the national traditions include a supranational commonness. This European togetherness must have a strong normative validity if it may grow into the validity of identity-forming commitment to traditions. What happens in this integration process on the level of identity-forming traditions?

First of all the aggressive exclusiveness of traditional national identity has to be overcome and changed into an inclusive nationalism. This is a very important issue of the logic of historical sense-generation and identity-formation.²⁰

Shaping European History, vol. 2 (Hamburg: Körber Stiftung, 2001); Attila Pok, Jörn Rüsen and Jutta Scherrer (eds), *European History: Challenge for a Common Future*, *Eustory Series*, *Shaping European History*, vol. 3 (Hamburg: Edition Körber-Stiftung, 2002).

²⁰ Cf. Jörn Rüsen, 'Cultural Currence,' The Nature of Historical Consciousness in Europe, in Sharon Macdonald (Ed.), *Approaches to European Historical Consciousness: Reflections and Provocations* (Hamburg: Edition Körber-Stiftung, 2000), pp. 75-85 [European historical consciousness: preconditions, visions, interventions, in Johann W. N. Tempelhoff (ed.), *Historical*

Exclusive nationalism is a very powerful example for the widespread and deeply rooted mode of historical sense-generation and identity-formation, which I would like to call ethnocentrism. We can observe the power of this ethnocentric logic of forming historical identity all over the world and in all different times.

Ethnocentrism is characterized by three principles:

(a) A *normative asymmetry*, which ascribes positive values into the image of one's own self and negative ones into the image of the otherness and others. A well known example is the distinction between civilization and barbarism. A more modern version could be the distinction between being more or less developed. It is this asymmetrical interrelationship between the concept of one's own self and the otherness of others which constitutes the 'clash of civilizations' on the level of identity-formation by tradition.

(b) The second characteristic of ethnocentric traditional identity is the idea of a *teleological continuity* from origins reaching in an unbroken chain of events to the present and into a projected future in which the commitment to the normative origins will be a guideline of collective behaviour in keeping up the difference between togetherness and distinguishing oneself from the others. The idea of this teleological continuity is very often related to the idea of a territorial heritage (the land of our forefathers). In all the cases when two or more people claim the same territory or live there together, ethnic cleansing is a potential danger, at least under the conditions of modern nationalism.

(c) The third characteristic of ethnocentrism is its *centralistic perspective* in shaping historical spaces. One's own people live in the centre of the world, and the others are at the margins. A short look at world maps can teach us the evidence of this centralism. Otherness is something in a spatial distance from the centre of the world. And, this spatial difference is loaded with values. Beyond the limits of one's own world where the centre stands for the highest values in one's own life form there is the space for demonic creatures, for deviations, for a threatening otherness.

The threat of ethnocentrism and its permanent danger lies in the cultural procedures ascribing problematic, disturbing, irritating, suppressed elements to the image of the others. By placing the negative elements of one's own self into the otherness of others, the identity-forming idea of one's own people becomes indivisibly focussed on the otherness of the others.

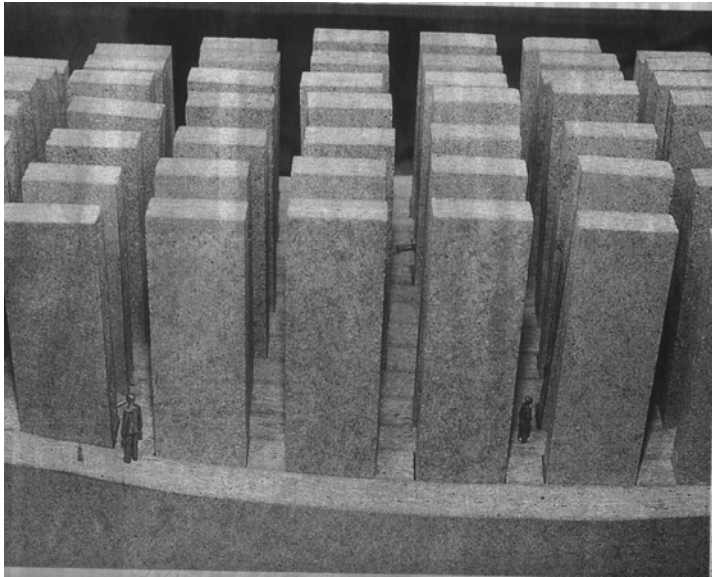
We can easily find the features of this ethnocentrism in all traditional ideas of humankind as an essential element of cultural identity. We are human, the others are either not or less human than we are. This synthesis of ethnocentrism and universalistic elements of cultural tradition is a danger for all those who have not been integrated into the specifics of this universalistic set of identity-forming traditions. This is the case in all monotheistic religions. This has also been the case in the traditional Western concept of civilization with a universalistic approach, as it is constituted by a general and fundamental idea of humankind. Till today this idea of humankind can be loaded with cultural specifics with the consequence of an unequal division of the values of humanness between different civilizations and cultures. Western imperialism is the most important example for the disastrous consequences of using universalistic traditions for the sake of identity-formation.

The European unification process is a remarkable attempt to overcome this ethnocentrism incorporated in the traditional concepts of nationality. European-ness can only become a convincing concept of a transnational identity if it overcomes the disastrous elements in exclusive ethnocentrism, which influenced the European history for a long time and finally led into the two World Wars.

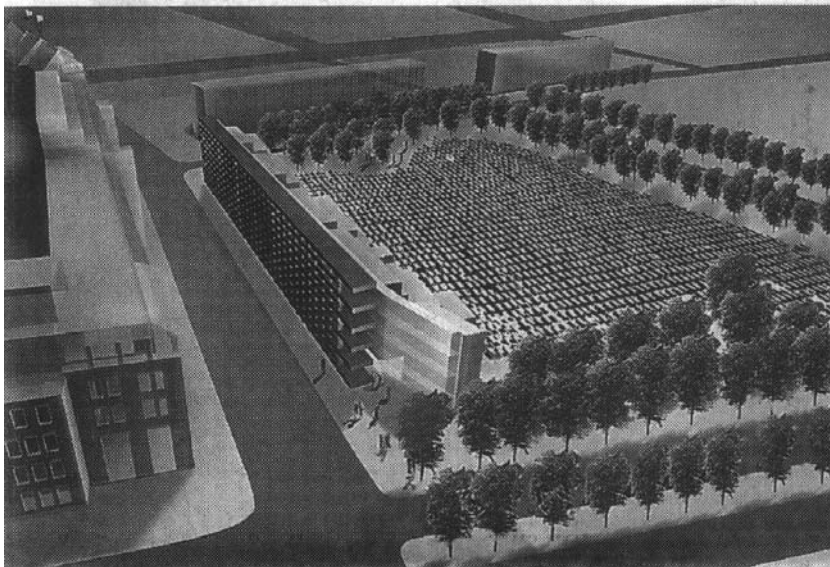
How can this transformation of the logic of ethnocentric identity-formation into a less exclusive and more inclusive one be brought about?

Let me outline this development in respect to the three characteristics of ethnocentrism:

(a) In respect to the asymmetrical evaluation ethnocentrism can only be overcome by *introducing a powerful concept of equality into the cultural discourses on tradition and identity*. Here Europe has indeed a long tradition of elaborating the idea of equality against the power of difference and distinction. It is a long story, not to be told here, how this idea of equality has become a constitutive factor in the political culture of the West. In Europe it is this idea and its incorporation in constitutional law and strategies of social welfare which can break the power of ethnocentric evaluation.



Richard Serra, Peter Eisenmann: First draft of their Holocaust-Monument



*Modified model (third version) of the architect Peter Eisenman.
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung January 11, 1999*

Historical thinking can contribute to this overcoming of ethnocentrism by *integrating negative historical experiences into the self image of historical identity*. This definitely is the case in Europe. The best example for a non-Western

audience is the fact that some years ago the German parliament decided to build a monument commemorating the Holocaust in the centre of the German Capital, a monument to commemorate the millions of Jews murdered by Germans.²¹

We can observe tendencies in the historical culture of other European nations, in which this growing ambivalence in the forming of one's own identity can also be observed. In Sweden a research project about the European dimension of the Holocaust has brought about remarkable results,²² and the neighbours of Germany have realized that there was a lot of collaboration with the Nazi-oppressors enabling them to pursue the Holocaust to a higher degree than would have been possible without the support of non-Germans in the occupied countries. But not only the Holocaust is a challenging historical experience, which cannot be removed from the historical self image of the Germans and their neighbours in the long run, but European imperialism as well. It is becoming a burdensome element in European historical identity thus dissolving the traditional Western feeling of superiority over the non-Western civilizations.

On the other hand one should not underestimate the power of a concept of tradition which is immune to this ambivalence and ambiguity. After the reunification, e.g. the German government chose the third of October as the new national holiday. This is the day, when the East German Parliament voted to join the Federal Republic of Germany. A much more significant and historically important day would have been the ninth of November—the day when the wall dividing Germany came down. But this day was too ambivalent since it is the day of the 'Reichskristallnacht' (1938) the first anti-Jewish pogrom organized by the Nazi regime.²³

(b) In respect to the teleological concept of continuity, ethnocentrism can be overcome or at least moderated by *giving contingency and rupture a higher importance* in interpreting a development of one's own people from the very

²¹ Cf. Jan-Holger Kirsch, *Nationaler Mythos oder historische Trauer? Der Streit um ein zentrales 'Holocaust-Mahnmahl' für die Berliner Republik*, *Beiträge zur Geschichtskultur*, vol. 25 (Köln: Böhlau, 2003).

²² Cf. Klas-Göran Karlsson & Ulf Zander (eds), *Echoes of the Holocaust: Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2003); Frank van Vree, "Auschwitz and the Origins of Contemporary Historical Culture: Memories of World War II in a European Perspective," in Attila Pok, Jörn Rüsen and Jutta Scherrer (eds), *European History: Challenge for a Common Future*, *Eustory Serie, Shaping European History*, vol. 3 (Hamburg: Edition Körber-Stiftung, 2002), pp. 202-220.

²³ Elisabeth Domansky, "Kristallnacht," the Holocaust and German Unity: The Meaning of November 9 as an Anniversary in Germany, in *History and Memory* 4, Nr. 1 (1992), pp. 60-94.

beginning to the present day. Contingency means that continuity is only a perception from afterwards and that there were different options for the further development.

On the level of theoretically and methodically reflected historical thinking the concept of teleology has completely been discredited, although it is still valid in many fields of historical thinking and historical culture. *Instead of teleology: Historical Thinking should be guided by the Logic of Reconstruction.* Here the decisive element is not a supposed origin, which includes the essence of identity-forming traditions and preserves itself in all the changes of time till today. Instead, the starting point should be the present day projection and expectation of the future with a sharp reflection of its inbuilt value system. Historical thinking should follow the intention of referring this present-day outreach into the future to the past by reconstructing the temporal change of conditions of possibility, which has brought about this very situation of today and its future perspective. Reconstruction is open for contingency, for rupture as well as for continuity and development. Looking back at the past with the surplus of future expectation brings the past into a perspective of ambivalence. It nurtures future and presents it at the same time in a complex temporal interrelationship, thus supporting the need for integrating negative historical experiences into the historical image of oneself.

(c) In respect to the monocentric perspective preferred by ethnocentrism historical thinking should *stress multi-perspectivity and polycentrism* in the reconstruction of the past. In the case of Europe nothing could be more plausible.

With these strategies of historical culture in the unifying process of Europe the construction of historical identity is used as a chance for developing new non- or meta-ethnocentric features of traditional historical identity. But all these attempts will be in vain if there is no support in historical experience. If European identity has not already been constructed in favour of such attempts, it won't be succeed. There has always been a feeling of togetherness and sameness in the history of Europe—not in a continuous way and not referring to the same subject matter, but, on the contrary, in very different respects with varying evidence and changing dimensions of this Europeanness.

The catastrophe of the two World Wars demonstrates the disastrous consequences of exclusive forms of tradition and traditional identity. It has provoked a new outlook on those elements of historical experience which can be interpreted as essentially European and which is a comprehensive European cultural tradition. What are these elements? They are rational argumentation originating in Greek philosophy, the Roman law system and its consequences in bringing

about rational law, methodical rationality in the sciences, great manifestations of art and its aesthetic autonomy, a strong division between religious and political power, traditions of democracy, Human and Civil Rights, etc.

At the same time there is Europeanness in negative historical experiences as well: exclusive claims for religious universality in Christianity, concepts of cultural superiority, colonialism, imperialism, anti-Semitism, sexism, etc. Rationality in European culture has a dark side, too. The barbaric ideologies of dominating nature and history by rational cognition have brought about disastrous consequences of environmental destruction, mass killing and genocide. They are outcomes of the attempts to become the masters of history and to liberate humankind from all evils.

Nobody can predict the success of the attempts to overcome the deeply rooted ethnocentric tendencies in the cultural practices of traditional identity-formation in Europe. We should not be too optimistic. There is a good deal of anti-Semitism and racism and they are still powerful in Europe. Political movements get support by their slogans of hostility against foreigners, and even the enthusiasm for unifying Europe is not free from exclusive tendencies, for instance in respect to the attempt of Turkey to become a member of the European Union.

We as academics should not overlook that the logic of ethnocentrism has not been sufficiently reflected as a powerful element in the academic work of the professionals themselves. A powerful Spenglerianism is still valid in many attempts of intercultural comparison. Very often cultures or civilizations are defined as semantic wholes, which cohabitate only in an external interrelationship. In this case the idea of humankind does not go across cultural differences. Instead it should bring the different traditions into a vivid communication in which recognition of differences is a common issue.

I think that these ethnocentric suppositions of doing comparative academic work and of thematizing world civilizations and their interrelationship stand against the methodical rationality of our discipline. They principally violate the claims for truth, which are valid for all those who share the attempts of understanding and recognising cultural differences. This however takes place on the basis of universal equality. It is this spirit of reason as I prefer to call it which unifies all academics in the world. By the rules of argumentation they are empowered to realize their different traditions and to give them a voice in intercultural communication at the same time.