



A YEAR AT WIKO  
YONGLE ZHANG

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Yongle Zhang is a Chinese constitutional historian and political theorist. Born in Southeast China in 1981, he received his Bachelor in Law in 2002 from the Law School of Peking University and then went to study in the Department of Political Science at the University of California, Los Angeles. He wrote his dissertation on “Counterfactual Reasoning and Writing in Graeco-Roman Historiography”. In 2008, he returned to China to teach at the Peking University Law School. He has published numerous articles and reviews on Chinese constitutional and administrative law, Graeco-Roman historiography, and modern Chinese constitutional history and intellectual history. His first book *The Remaking of An Old Country: 1911–1917* (2011) brings theories of comparative empires and state-building into the study of modern Chinese constitutional history and discusses the disintegration and re-integration of this huge country. The book explores the ambiguous political compromise between revolutionary republicans, the Qing court, and the Northern Ocean Clique in 1911/12 and its further development in the early republican era and sheds light on the vulnerability of the republic. – Address: Peking University Law School, Room 321, Chen Ming Building, 100871 Beijing, China. E-mail: pkujuris@126.com

Thanks to the Fellowship that Wiko provided, I came to Europe for the first time. During my ten-month stay in Berlin, I made substantial progress on my own research project and greatly widened my intellectual horizon.

I was supposed to work on constitutional history since the late 19th century. Since this project is too big for the relatively short period of stay, it was feasible for me to make breakthroughs only on a few specific themes. Due to the lack of primary sources in

Europe, I was initially expecting some progress only in theoretical perspectives and methodology. However, in an unintended way, I found a new primary source for my historical study. The famous Chinese constitutional monarchist scholar Kang Youwei was in Europe for quite a few years in the early 20th century, and Germany is the country he spent the most time in. Although I had already read some of Kang Youwei's travelogues and comments on Europe before I came to Berlin, it is hard to reconstruct his world vision without some personal experience in Europe.

Now Wiko opened such a window. During my stay in Europe, I not only read German history, especially the events and persons that Kang Youwei mentioned, but also followed Kang Youwei's footsteps and visited a series of European cities, comparing what he saw in the early 20th century with the later path of European history. A combination of reading, sightseeing, and thinking deepens my understanding of Kang Youwei's theory of constitutional monarchy. Now I can clearly see how he appropriates and adapts European ideas to serve his practical needs. The strength and weakness of his constitutional vision also became much more explicit. With this new experience, I improved my narrative on constitutional monarchists in the late Qing Era and achieved a thicker description of their sources of knowledge about Europe. It was on the basis of this progress that I prepared my colloquium on the vicissitudes of constitutional monarchists in the late Qing and early republican periods.

A series of questions raised during my Tuesday Colloquium also pushed me to refine the theoretical perspective of my first book *The Remaking of An Old Country: 1911–1917*, namely, that the constitutional monarchism prevailing in the late Qing era was closely related to state-building. While China's state-building took place much earlier than Europe's, the classical form of Confucian-legalist state proved to be inadequate in the face of European invasion. Therefore, late Qing China tried to imitate more recent European models of state-building, and Prussia stood out as the most impressive exemplar. Even if some constitutional monarchists used Britain as a model in their rhetoric, their concern is still state-building – a consciousness that Britain lacked at that time.

As a part of my research project, I also began to work on the evolution of the notion of sovereignty that lay behind the change in constitutional texts. Taking European theories of sovereignty as my reference point, I distilled a theoretical framework from Chinese history: in the monarchical era, the mandate of heaven – the emperor – the people; since the 1920s, the truth of history (progress) – the vanguard party – the people. The two “triangles” set the basic framework to understand the notion of sovereignty in the Chinese

context. While the notion of popular sovereignty prevails in the second triangle, its substance is much more complicated than that of its European counterparts. Based upon this research, I delivered a speech in the Department of Philosophy at the Freie Universität Berlin in June and sparked heated discussion.

Meanwhile, I continued to work on the relationship between historical narrative and constitutional law, which I began to investigate in 2012. I discussed how political actors attempted to construct narratives of continuity in the face of political rupture. More specifically, the 1912 ROC provisional constitution was abolished twice, during 1914–16, and in 1917, but was correspondingly restored twice. This is a unique phenomenon in world history. It is interesting to track different theories and narratives that attempt to legitimate the renewal of the constitutional order. I presented my findings in the Wiko Working Group “comparing comparison” in February and later at the University of Exeter in UK.

Besides the major project, I also made progress on a parallel research project, Counter-Factual Reasoning and Writing in Graeco-Roman Historiography, which is the topic of my dissertation. In May, I participated in a workshop organized by Françoise Lavocat and presented a chapter of my dissertation. Notwithstanding the distance between early modern French literature and my dissertation, I benefitted substantially from the methodological discussion on counterfactuality. In June, when my dissertation advisor Carlo Ginzburg visited Wiko, I had the opportunity to discuss with him how to solve the problems left in my dissertation and how to develop it into a book. For such a project in the tradition of micro-history, this dialogue with Carlo Ginzburg was extremely necessary and productive.

Among other things, I also initiated a small discussion on the comparison between the Russian Revolution and the Chinese Revolution. The key texts are Perry Anderson’s *Two Revolutions* and a few responses that it sparked. A few Fellows attended the discussion. The discussion is not only a survey of the path of and key factors in the two revolutions, but also a reflection on the methodology of comparison.

During this period of stay, I continued to have my voice in the Chinese intellectual world. My collaborators in China and I founded a new intellectual journal, *Consilium*, to intervene in the political and intellectual debates in China. The first issue came out in November, 2014 and I acted as its executive chief editor. In later months, we continued to work on the second issue.

Undoubtedly, the living conditions that Wiko provides are wonderful. Fellows can concentrate on their own research and take inspiration for new intellectual possibilities through mutual interaction. But I do believe the program could be further improved by increasing the regional-cultural diversity of the Fellows. So far, the third world is still underrepresented at Wiko, disproportional to the changing intellectual landscape of the world. I'm sure Wiko has realized this problem and will try to address it in the future.

Although I haven't published any academic papers during this year, I'm sure many of my future works will be related to my stay at Wiko, a wonderful place designed to make more wonderful things happen.