

## Fellows



**Sinkwan Cheng**  
IFK\_Senior Fellow

Duration of fellowship  
01. March 2021 bis 30. June 2021

## Sinkwan Cheng

### PROJECT TITLE

Translation, Concepts of “Right,” and the Opium Wars: Beyond Postcolonial Historiography and a New World History

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Sinkwan Cheng's project demonstrates how Chinese translations of "right" in Western law, politics, and philosophy—translations linked to the Opium Wars—could shed new light on "right" in world history. Existing scholarship on the two key Chinese translations of "right"—*li* (moral reason) and *quanli* (power and profit)—has stopped short of calling them "mistranslations." Cheng, by contrast, uses these translations to draw out the "subjective turn of right" around the time of the Spanish Conquest, when the meaning of "right" changed increasingly from "rectitude" to "entitlement." *Li* resembles the early meaning of "right," whereas *quanli* captures the new semantics of "right" as *facultas/potestas* (power) and *dominium* (property). Using *li* allows us to tap into an earlier Western meaning of "right," which has been increasingly repressed since the advent of European capitalism and imperialism. Moreover, the "mistranslations" stand as the truth of the Subject's message being returned from the Other in inverted form (Lacan). Sinkwan Cheng uses the Chinese "mistranslations" to capture certain truths about the Master which he cannot access on his own.

## CV

Sinkwan Cheng has been awarded 13 (inter)national fellowships and grants, including a European Institute for Advanced Study Senior Fellowship, a Rockefeller Fellowship, a DAAD Fellowship, and two additional IAS Fellowships in Poland and the UK. Together with Samuel Moyn, David Armitage, and Michael Freeden, she serves on the International Editorial Board of *Global Intellectual History* and has reviewed fellowship applications for the European Institutes for Advanced Study and the French Institutes for Advanced Study. She has held faculty seminars and lectures in the US, the UK, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Poland, China, South Korea, Macau, and Hong Kong.

## Publications

"Conceptual History, the Will to Power, and a New Politics of Translation," in: *Global Intellectual History*, published online 2019, print forthcoming in the special issue *Interdisciplinarity and Methodological Pluralism: The Practice of Intellectual History and Conceptual History*; "Aristotle, Confucius, and a New 'Right' to Connect China to the West: What Concepts of 'Self' and 'Right' We Might Have without the Christian Notion of Original Sin?," in: Ingolf U. Dalferth (ed.), *Self or No-Self? The Debate about Selflessness and the Sense of Self*, Tübingen 2017; (ed.), *Law, Justice, and Power: Between Reason and Will*, Stanford 2004.