

CHINA'S HISTORICAL RESEARCH SINCE THE NEW CENTURY³¹⁶

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RESUMEN

Desde el inicio del Proceso de Reforma y Apertura en China, se han producido grandes cambios y en la economía. Estos cambios también han afectado a la investigación histórica. Este artículo se centrará en los nuevos cambios de la investigación histórica de China desde el inicio del siglo XXI. En el este artículo se hace analizar las diferentes corrientes de pensamiento en los estudios históricos en China en la nueva era y los vínculos inherentes entre ellos, y resalta la pluralidad historiográfica que se vive hoy en día en China. Donde el materialismo histórico está en declive el artículo analiza sus desventajas teóricas y apuesta por la necesidad de que el materialismo histórico marxista se convierta en un materia sistemática y basada en la práctica. A continuación, se realiza una exploración analítica de los contenidos básicos de la nueva perspectiva histórica marxista. Finalmente el documento aborda los diferentes enfoques de la historia y su relación con la naturaleza de los estudios históricos

ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of reform and opening in China, there have been major changes in the economy. These changes have also affected historical research. This article will focus on the new changes of historical research in China since the beginning of the century. In this article it is analyzed the different currents of thought in historical studies in China in the new era and the inherent links between them, and highlights the historiographical plurality that exists today in China. Now, the historical materialism in China is in decline. This article analyzes its theoretical disadvantages and it supports by the need for the Marxist historical materialism becomes a systematic and practice-based material. Then an analytical examination of the basic contents of the new Marxist historical perspective is done. Finally, the paper discusses the different approaches of history and its relation to the nature of historical studies.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Historiografía china; Historia de China; Liang Qichao; Marxismo*

KEYWORDS: *Chinese Historiography; China history; Liang Qichao; Marxisms*

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Since 21th century, China's historical research had entered a new stage, which could be characterized to inherit and examine the historical researches of the past century(Liang Qichao's *New Historiography* in 1902 was regarded as the beginning of Chinese modern historiography), and usher its direction and tendency in the future. Of course, this stage which connect the past and the future itself was a part of the history of China's historical development, full of multiple transitivities and indeterminacies which implied the new breakthrough and open innovation.

1.- INHERITING THE HISTORICAL HERITAGE OF TWENTIETH CENTURY

When standing at the outset of new century, the primary task of Chinese historians was sorting out the historical heritage of 20th century. In 2003, a series of essays, were published in the journal of *Historical Research*, a top respected journal in Chinese historical circle, whose name was China's historical research in the new century-challenging and rethinking.

Historians discussed the transformation process of modern Chinese historiography from the traditional. Shang Chuan argued there was no absolute dividing line between traditional historiography and modern historiography, and they were relative: any historical research or narrative method could be seen as a new historiography when it was created; when it occupies the mainstream status, it would become the traditional historiography. The difference between the western modern historiography and Chinese traditional historiography was an interdisciplinary research field, transcending the stage of a single historical demonstration and narrative. He analyzed three climaxes of historical research development in the 20th century: Liang

Qichao's *New Historiography*, the beginning of Chinese modern historiography; the introduction of Marxism history theories; and the new development nowadays. Three new historical climaxes all were based on western historical ideas, though their targets against the traditional historiography were changing. However, as to the historical methodology, new historiography had never wholly changed the pattern of positivism historiography, and for the most historians, the western new historical methods was only the complement of traditional history research.³¹⁷

Based on a review of the studies of Chinese ancient history in the 20th century, Xie Weiyang argued that the researches on some overall and significant fields have not been gotten a convincing precisely completed conclusion. For example, in the past century, many famous Chinese historians focused on whether the Xia Dynasty have been existed or not, one of the core problems of Chinese ancient history, from the mode of twice evidences of Wang Guowei, to Guo Moruo's contribution with the Marxism historical methods, and to the new testimony of the ancient history after 1970s. He insisted the key way to make the breakthrough of Chinese ancient history research in the new century was, that historians need profoundly introspect the basic concepts of historical materials, the documentary texts in early ancient Chinese which were continually discovered. In other words, the only way to break the traditional ideas of historical materials in early Chinese ancient history, was to rebuild a overall concept system of historical materials by analyzing and examining the new excavated documents. Xie proposed the solutions were, firstly to reinforce the knowledge of Chinese ancient philology, as for the limitation of the knowledge of traditional historical identification, secondly to improve the standard of the working of explanation, thirdly to adapt to the requirement of inter-

³¹⁷ Shang Chuan, Historical Traditions and Late Ming Studies, *Historical Research*, Beijing, 2003.

disciplinary research. Historians should emphasize not only the working of descriptive-ness, but also the standard of the working of explanation, in order to set up a system of conception and relative terms, including concrete subjects and their meanings. He also fully agreed to the integration of history and archaeology.³¹⁸

The scholars from Hong Kong and Taiwan also outlined their achievements of history studies field in the past fifty years.³¹⁹ The New Asia College in Hong Kong, founded by Qianmu in 1949, marked the epoch-making transformation of the growing of Hong Kong's Chinese historical research from nothing. In 1960s, Hong Kong's historians inherited the research methods of Chinese ancient civilization from mainland in 1930s, the historical tradition of Chinese textology and semantics, and local ideas of cultural nationalism, which became the basis of Hong Kong history research development. Compared with the history research in mainland and Taiwan, the best features of Hong Kong's history research were loose political environment and free academic atmosphere.³²⁰

In the last century, history researchers in China always emphasized on the relationship between the historical subject consciousness and historical idealism, and neglect of the subject consciousness of the subject in epistemology of history and its creativity. Without the reinforce of the subject consciousness of the subject in epistemology of history, it was hardly carrying out the progress of

historical ideas, the development of historical thoughts, and the innovation of historical theories. Historian was the product of the history, and his subject consciousness had social significance, which determined his research level, regardless of his personal significance. How to strengthen the subject consciousness? One way was to master and apply comprehensively, systematically the basic principles of Marxism, and the other was full of strong innovative desire of new theories. The purpose of theoretical creation was not studying the history out of object context, but the history by the historians' cognition more closely related to the feature of history. All of these should be studied on the basis of right theory premises and real textual evidences.³²¹

Besides the theory inheritance, Chinese historians also retrospected the important academic communities and famous scholars in history field in the 20th century. Among various organizations of scholars, local and national, Chinese History Association is the most important until today, which had been restructured three times in the first half of the 20th century. At the first time, two Chinese History Associations were separately set up in Beijing and Nanjing in 1920s. The association in Beijing was set up on January 13th 1929, Zhu Xizu as the chairman. At the same time, the other association also was set up by history professor in Centre University in Nanjing, current capital, and published *the Journal of History Studies*. This situation of chaos was caused by the striving for the culture center between these two cities, with the political center moving from Beijing to Nanjing. The second Chinese History Association was established on March 24th 1943, Gu Jiegang as the chairman, in the period of Anti-Japanese War. Soon after, the civil war broke out, political unrest and economic collapse, and historians were too busy surviving to

³¹⁸ Xie Weiyang, Some Important Issues of Chinese Ancient History Research in 21th Century, *Historical Research*, Beijing, 2003.

³¹⁹ Guo Shaotang, The Cultural Impact and Transcendence: Contemporary History Research in Hong Kong, *Historical Research*, Beijing, 2003; Wang Qingjia, *History Research in Taiwan since Fifty Years: Lineage, Methods, and Tendency*, Maitian Publishing Company, Taipei: 2002.

³²⁰ Guo Shaotang, The Cultural Impact and Transcendence: Contemporary History Research in Hong Kong.

³²¹ Yu Pei, Historical Cognition: the Creativity of Subject and its Consciousness, *Historical Research*, Beijing, 2003.

carry out their academic activities. The third Chinese History Association was founded in Beijing on July 28th 1951. Guo Moruo proposed the new task of historians since the establishment of People's Republic of China: from historical idealism to historical materialism; from personal research to collective research; from for personal fame to for the people; from emphasis on ancient history studies to modern history studies; from the history of the Han nationality to the history of micro ethnic groups; from the history in Europe and America to the history of Asia and other regions. In 1954, the first council of Chinese history Association was selected, Guo Moruo as the chairman, Wu Yuzhang, the revolutionary of the Revolution of 1911, and Fan Wenlan as the vice chairmans.³²²

Wang Xuedian divided the historians of P. R. C. into two academic groups: scholars skilled in history materials and scholars skilled in historical materialism ideas. He argued that, the history can not be displayed by itself, and should be narrated by historians. The activities of the two academic groups reflected the change of Chinese history research in recent fifty years. Their difference was the following four points. Firstly, for the relationship between the historiography and the age, historians skilled in historical materialism ideas advocated history research close to politics, breaking with the connection between academics and age, history and reality; historians skilled in history materials insisted the idea of finding the truth for the truth. Secondly, about the historical theory and historical materials, the former emphasized the priority of theory, and even claimed that historical materials meant nothing without the guidance of theory; the latter were full of enthusiasm about the evidence, and even insisted that they did not write a word without materials. Thirdly, on the relation of macro and

micro, the former devote themselves to social change, epoch-making incidents and the replacements of social patterns; the latter thought the knowledge of a ancient word had its value as same as the discovery of a star in astronomy, and they always fascinate the history details. Fourthly, the former emphasized on the historiography; the latter emphasized on textology. From 1920s to 1930s, the historians skilled in history materials was in a major position. After 1949, the historians skilled in historical materialism ideas dominated Chinese history research. There was also the third academic group, which looked ideas as same as materials.³²³

Some historians challenged Wang's argument. They thought the historians marked the academic group of historical ideas was unfair, and not real, who did not neglect the importance of historical materials. In fact, in Wang's article, the historians skilled in historical materials referred to non-Marxist historians in 1950s, and they had no an unified point of view.³²⁴

2. - HISTORICAL RESEARCH FOCUSED ON SOCIAL HISTORY

Entering the new century, the studies on social history and culture history are hot spots of history research. On the one side, these two research fields have a solid foundations for the development in the last century. On the other side, China is experiencing a great social reform and reorganization, such studies full of all kinds of desires for the nation and the people.

In recent years, Chinese historians began to focus on social relief in history. Wang Rigen discussed the system of social relief in Hunan

³²² Sangbing, Chinese History Association in the First Half of 20th Century, *Historical Research*, Beijing, 2004.

³²³ Wang Xuedian, Chinese History Research in Recent Fifty Years, *Historical Research*, Beijing, 2004.

³²⁴ Liu Zonghan, Some Opinions to the Article of Chinese History Research in Recent Fifty Years, *Historical Research*, Beijing, 2004.

province in Qing Dynasty. Chinese traditional charities were the coalitions under the advocacy and funding by the local governments, and its response of local elites and the public. The custom of infanticide was popular in Hunan province in Qing Dynasty. This caused the stings of local gentries and intellectuals' conscience. As the undertaker of social responsibilities, local officers and elites also had been beset. The strong social responsibility was the social psychological motivation of the establishment of the foundling hospitals. Frequent disasters resulted in the pauperization, and the relief for the poor and the disabled became the urgent task of local government. At the same time, local elites zealously responded to the call of government, and took an active part in disaster relief donation activities. Furthermore, the aged clan leaders also dedicated themselves to social assistance. By all kinds of political rewarding measures, the government encouraged local powers involved in the activities of charity and relief, and administrated by local social mobilization. From the perspective of social mechanism, the popular charities, many parenting institutions by local gentry, was the products of value orientation of the traditional morality, instead of solving the anxiety of their properties themselves or the social mismatches for the reason of the properties. The local gentries were aware of the responsibility for defending and promoting the social welfare of their hometown, and elevated their fames and reputations by the charity, in order to accumulate the intangible symbol capital, which could help them attain the status of local elites, by strengthening their importance of local affairs, and expanding their regional influences.³²⁵

The system of porridge factories was common local institution of social relief in the lower Yangtze region in the period of Qing

Dynasty and Republic China. In the early Qing times, local elites in Jiading, Zhejiang province, seldom took part in the management of administration. They always regained their public responsibility for their local rural communities, by various philanthropic activities. In the 18th century, there was incapability to set up the system of porridge factories in many rural towns, in other words, the porridge factories which had to depend on the supports of county government and market, was always for the temporary relief. However, the system of porridge factories began to become a regular social institution after 1795, the last year of the reign of Qianlong emperor. At the same time, the number of porridge factories also became more and more static. Henceforth, the directors of the porridge factories not only carried out the social relief, but also full local administration. This situation reflected the facts of the weakening process of administrative efficiency in late Qing period, and the transfer process of the controlling power of local society, from the government to the local elites themselves. The scope of the porridge factory system maybe overlapped with the market system, partly or wholly, because the place of the porridge factory often gradually develop a new market town, or even a new market town needed identify its local legitimacy by setting up a porridge factory. At this time, the porridge factory always became a community unit whose core was a market town, and its function was not only in the disaster activity, but a real local administrative division by joining the activities of regular local administrative affairs.³²⁶

Characterized by the integrated discipline of social history and culture history, many took them as all-inclusive. It seemed that, if from social perspective, everything in history could

³²⁵ Wang Rigen, the Cooperation between Local Officers and Civilian in the Social Relief Institution in Hunan Province in Qing Dynasty, *Qing History Research*, Beijing, 2004.

³²⁶ Wutao, The Transformation of the Tradition of the Porridge Factory in Baoshan County in Qing Dynasty and Republic China, from Social Relief to County Autonomy, *Qing History Research*, Beijing, vol.2, 2004.

be categorized into social history, including political, economics and even culture. Especially for the fields hardly categorized by other topic history, just as daily lives, customs, lower class, and so on, they could be fit into social history. scholars named social history as generalized, narrow, macro, micro, grassroots, and secret, all kinds of societies. On the other hand, it seemed that everything in history, if from cultural perspective, could be categorized into culture history, both material culture and spiritual culture, even including watermelon culture, scorpion culture, and so on. Some scholars named culture history as generalized culture, narrow culture, macro culture, subculture, secular culture, and so on. Hence, it seemed that the subjectivities of social history and culture history were lost, which became the all-encompassing research fields, or complementary points which could be superposed or replaced by other historical studies.

Sociology was from Europe in 1830s, when many great changes took place in European society, old feudalism displaced by new capitalism. While Chinese social history became the research hot spot in the end of 20th century, and at that time, China also in the period of social transition, reforming and opening. Both had similar history background. Only realizing this history background and the research purpose of social history, we could construct the theoretical framework, particular perspectives and methods of social history research, and consciously contribute to the studies, academically, theoretically, and practically. As for the importance of social history research, and its profound connotations and broad extension, which revealed the developmental rules of Chinese society, more and more researchers devoted themselves to this research field.

3. - TENDENCY OF CHINESE HISTORY RESEARCH OF THE NEW

CENTURY: MULTIDISCIPLINARY INTEGRATION

The integration between history research and other social science marked the significant change of Chinese history studies in the new century. The multiple research methods and explanatory instruments brought unprecedented vitality and vigor for the development of history research. The cooperations between economic history and economics, social history and sociology, local history and anthropology became more closer than ever. However, with more and more multidisciplinary studies deepening, the boundary between history and other disciplines became more fuzzy. How to hold up the subjectivity of history? Historians have to face this problem in the new century. The following is the arguments of the relationship between history and archaeology.

For historians, how to deal with the relationship between history and archaeology, whether make it closer, or return to the history text and set up its own theory system, has to be solved. Two archaeologist, Yu Weichao and Zhang Zhongpei emphasized on factors of culture in the archaeology research, and the relationship between factors of culture and types before 1980s. After 1980s, these two archaeologists broke through traditional patterns, and proposed to make use of modern science technology to study different environments and settlements. Yu Weichao insisted archaeology should collaborate with history and anthropology in more broadly and comprehensive ways. Zhang Zhongpei, however, maintained archaeology should set up its own theory system through returning to archaeological materials. Their disagreements reflected the fact that archaeology was a separate subject or a sub-subject of history. Li Ji's interpretation mode of the archaeological materials, from cultural anthropology perspective had been far reaching, but his views had not been fully recognized by main-

land archaeology. Archaeological digs and unearthed data were always the mainstream of Chinese archaeology in 20th century. Archaeologists in mainland tried to set up a series of culture sequences based on the unearthed objects in the forty years after 1949. At the same time, archaeologists in Taiwan tried to link up archaeology with other subjects, mainly history. Xia Nai proposed that Chinese archaeology had double traditions, history and anthropology, but he still stressed the independence of archaeology itself. In the new century, more and more scholars from cross-straits invariably pay attention to the subject identity of archaeology and its relationship with ethos. They are increasingly aware that archaeology become more and more open, whether its period of time, or its spatial range.³²⁷

Zhu Fenghan discussed the relationship between history and archaeology³²⁸. He argued that, historical research could be interpreted in the broad and the narrow senses: the former studied on the history of human society; the latter mainly relied on documentation. Zhu focused on the complicated relationship between archaeology and narrow sense history. Archaeology was part of history research in Europe, while belonged to anthropology research in America. Chinese scholars seemed to deem modern archaeology beyond history research in research scope, methods, and technological means, which should be attributed to humanities, or board sense history. Recently, Chinese archaeologists, even international arachnological field, discussed the relationship between Chinese archaeology and narrow sense history, which was promoted by Xia Shang Zhou Chronology Project, focused on whether Chinese archaeology

meant science, or the subsidiary of history or not. According to the chronological order, archaeology could be divided into three parts, prehistoric archaeology, protohistoric archaeology, and historical archaeology. From Shang to Ming dynasty, historical archaeology and history together comprised two wings of historical age research. Scholar paid more attention to the relationship between protohistoric archaeology and narrow sense history, especially foreign scholars suspected whether Xia did exist in history. Zhu approved that archaeology could not be separated by history, and could be found an appropriate conjunction between them. The relationship between them could be, that narrow sense history testified by archaeology, and protohistory and historical archaeology based on historical documentation. Chinese protohistory and historical archaeology research seemed not to be shaped to the knowledge beyond abundant historical documentary, in order to chase their 'purity' and independent status. Recently the efforts of close collaboration between history and archaeology in China, will become the most important development of Chinese historical research in the new century.

Furthermore, China had a historiography tradition, which meant the effective and legitimate government officially compiled the history of the closest former regime in the flourishing period. That was the origin of Chinese *Twenty-Four Histories*. In 2002, Chinese government began to carry out the Qing History Project, which will cost one hundred millions Euro and more than ten years. This project now well under way.

³²⁷ Zha Xiaoying, the Controversy of Chinese Archaeology Trend in the end of 20th Century: focused on Yu Weichao and Zhang Zhongpei, Journal of Sichuan University, Chengdu, 2003.

³²⁸ Zhu Fenghan, the Relationship between History and Archaeology, *Historical Research*, Beijing, 2004.

