

Historical Writings in 20th Century China: Methodological Innovation and Ideological Influence

Q. Edward Wang (Rowan University, U.S.A.)

Historical awareness in China is almost as old as its civilization. But no time was this awareness more urgently needed than in the 20th century when Chinese historians, buoyed by nationalist impulses in the face of the global expansion of Western capitalism, searched for new ways in writing history. They had a two-fold purpose: embarking on the project of nation-building and embracing the new knowledge that came with the Western intrusion in Asia. The purpose was brand new, which led the historians to seek a “Historiographical Revolution” (Shixue geming), coined by Liang Qichao (1873-1929) in his enthusiastic call for a “new history,” but the understanding that history is a resource of wisdom and help at the time of crisis goes to the heart of Chinese cultural tradition. Many believed that Confucius (551-479, B.C.), the most important cultural figure in China, composed a history text when he saw the decline of ancient rituals at the time of change of his day. Later in the 11th century, Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072), a Confucian scholar and historian of the Song Dynasty, decided to compose a new history for the preceding Tang Dynasty, addressing some key issues in the perceived “breakdown” of Confucian legacy caused by the dynastic and cultural transition (Bol 1993).

At the turn of the 20th century, what Chinese historians faced was yet another critical time in China’s long history that required them to rethink their past as a result of the sudden expansion of their world. The gunshots fired from the English battleships cruising in the Yang-tse River around Nanjing in the mid-19th century awakened the complacent empire once and forever. A few military defeats afterwards proved to the people, particularly the cultural elite who were accustomed to shouldering the responsibility for the rest, that some sort of reform was inevitable.

By the end of the 19th century when the limited, military-oriented reform offered no immediate help for the ill-fated empire, some radical intellectuals, such as Kang Youwei (1858-1927) and Liang Qichao, sought more thorough changes in China’s political and cultural tradition. Their pursuit of political reform, caught in a court struggle between the reigning young emperor and the powerful Empress Dowager Ci Xi (1835-1908), only lasted over a hundred days. But their search for cultural changes proved to be long lasting. Both Kang and Liang, before and after their so-called “Hundred’s Reform” of 1898, wrote extensively *inter alia* on the possibility and necessity of historiographical change, modeling on the ideas of modern Western historians via translation. After the failure of the short-lived political reform they, especially Liang Qichao, devoted more time to the nation-building project. During his exile in Japan, Liang edited and published a newspaper called the “New Citizen’s Journal” (Xinmin congbao), promoting the idea of “new citizen” (xinmin) based on the liberal ideas of Jeremy Bentham and John S. Mill (Huang 1972). As liberalism helped Liang to imagine the parameters of a Chinese constitutional monarchy it was Darwinism, especially Spencerian social Darwinism, that justified his effort to import ideas from the West into China. In Liang’s belief, the Darwinian idea of the survival of the fittest explained how and why China needed a reform at the time; she must catch up with the change of the

world to make herself “rich and strong” (fuqiang) again. To that end, he proposed to write a new history, namely national history, to replace the traditional dynastic historical writing. In his *New Historiography*, which was initially a series of essays he contributed to the “New Citizen’s Journal” in 1902, Liang told us from the very beginning what kind of history he was looking for at the time:

Of the subjects studied in Western countries today, history is the only one which has existed in China for a long time. History is the foundation of scholarship. It is also a mirror of people's nature and the origin of patriotism. The rise of nationalism in Europe and the growth of modern European countries are owing in a great part to the study of history. But how can one explain the fact that, despite this long tradition of historical study in China, the Chinese people are so disunited and China's social condition is so bad (1980:3)?

Liang’s intent to rewrite the history for the Chinese nation derived from his belief in the idea of progress as espoused in modern Western historiography. In his *New Historiography* Liang stated that historical writing ought not only to describe the evolution (jinhua) of human history but also to discover “common laws and common examples” (gongli, gongli) in it. Whether or not history was written for that purpose differentiated the new historian from the traditional, or the “old historian” (jiu shijia). In his opinion, the problems of traditional historiography were shown in its content as well as in its intent; the former was preoccupied with the events associated with the monarch and his relatives and ministers, failing to present the story of the entire nation; and the latter was its lack of interest in generalizing historical evolution, resulting in repetition and triteness (Liang 1980:4-15).

1. Scientific Approaches to National History

Liang’s emphasis on historical interpretation, especially his attempt to view historical movement from the evolutionist perspective, represented the initial effort made by Chinese historians to change traditional historiography. Having adopted the evolutionary outlook and departed from the norm of dynastic history in which historical periodization simply followed the life of a dynasty, Liang and his cohorts began to attempt a new form of historical writing, presenting a new periodization that modeled on the Western tripartite division: ancient, medieval and modern, in generalizing Chinese history. Liang Qichao’s friend Xia Zengyou (1863-1921), for example, published a textbook on Chinese history, bearing the title of *Ancient Chinese History*, combining the histories of several dynasties before the 10th century that had often been treated separately in the past. Their interest in periodizing Chinese history was also inspired by the exemplary works of Japanese historians on Chinese history, especially Naka Michiyo (1851-1908) whose periodization of Chinese history was adopted and rendered into Chinese by Liu Yizheng (1879-1956) in 1902.

Even before Liang Qichao and others sought inspirations from the West and Japan for introducing new changes to Chinese historiography, Kang Youwei had tried to present similar evolutionary ideas from the Chinese tradition. Of the intellectuals of his

generation, Kang was among the earliest who had been exposed to Western cultural influence, including the idea of progress in history. As a learned Confucian scholar, however, Kang believed that the very idea of historical evolution had been anticipated by Confucius in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chunqiu) two thousand years ago. The Three-age theory (sanshi shuo), first suggested in the Gongyang commentary of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and was elaborated by later scholars such as Dong Zhongshu (179-104, B.C.) and He Xiu (129-182) from the Han Dynasty onward, demonstrated, Kang argued, that Confucius had already noticed the evolutionary tendency in historical movement, namely from the age of chaos (jhluan shi) to the age of rising peace (shengping shi) and, lastly, to the age of great peace (taiping shi). Using that theory as its basis Kang worked out his own evolutionary theory that applied both to the past and future development of Chinese and world history. It is characterized by his dialectic presentation of the cyclical as well as the progressive movement in history (Chang 1987, ch. 2).

The interest of Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and others in historical interpretation at the turn of the century shows that after Chinese historians became aware of the Western experience in historiography, they were first attracted to its theories of history, or the philosophy of history. By the 1910s, however, when their knowledge of Western culture in general, and Western historiography in particular, was expanded and when Chinese nationalism reached another high tide in the May Fourth Movement of 1919, Chinese intellectuals, particularly those who had received formal education in the West and returned to teach in China, developed a new interest in historical methodology. Hu Shi (1891-1962), a Columbia University doctoral student who returned from the U.S. to China in 1917, for example, recommended approaching Darwinism from a methodological perspective.

Following the teaching of John Dewey (1859-1952), his mentor at Columbia, Hu attempted to inject a new, methodological direction into evolving modern Chinese historical writing. Hu was not interested in theoretical issues, or any “isms,” but in finding concrete methods to solve real problems. In writing his doctoral dissertation, Hu noticed the similarity between Chinese and Western cultural traditions in developing logical method. To him the essence of philosophical study was nothing but a study of method: “That philosophy is conditioned by its method,” Hu declared at the beginning of his dissertation, “and that the development of philosophy is dependent upon the development of the logical method, are facts which find abundant illustrations in the history of philosophy both of the West and of the East” (Hu 1963: 1). Held to this belief, he returned to teach at Beijing University, China’s oldest and the first modern university.

Hu Shi’s advocacy of a scientific method that emphasized empirical verification of a proposed hypothesis had a significant impact on historical study. In teaching a course and writing a book on the history of Chinese philosophy, Hu declared that the primary task of a philosophy student was not to analyze the great ideas of a philosopher but to examine critically his works for authenticity; one should never try to engage in any serious philosophical discussions of a text before confirming its authorship and genuineness. The same rule should also be applied to the study of other subjects. In campaigning for this scientific attitude, he encouraged a sense of skepticism among his students toward extant texts, whose validity had been only suspected by a very few

scholars in the past. Since China in its long past had accumulated a great number of written texts, Hu Shi's request of his students amounted to a call for examining the entire Chinese literary tradition. In his own words, Hu believed it was time for the Chinese to "reorganize the national past and recreate [its] civilization" (zhengli guogu, zaizao wenming). As a versatile figure in modern Chinese history, Hu pursued a variety of interests; he was a poet, a philosopher, an educator, a political commentator, a diplomat. But most of all, he was a historian who applied "the genetic method" to explaining how things (right or wrong, true or false, etc.) became the way they were, which was seen in his studies of history, philosophy, and literature. He summarized his method in two sentences: "a boldness in setting up hypotheses and a minuteness in seeking evidence" (dadan de jiashe, xiaoxin de qiuzheng) (1986c: 180-185). In the late 1910s what Hu Shi set for his students and colleagues was a bold hypothesis that the Chinese literary tradition was not reliable; it contained many forgeries demanding identification and unmasking. While different from Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei in approach, Hu Shi, too, hoped to build a modern nation for China through historical study. He intended, by examining the literary remains of the past, to recreate, "invent" a new, scientific tradition for modern China (Hobsbawm 1983).¹

Hu Shi's empirical approach to historiography, therefore, led to a transition in the development of scientific history in modern China; from Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao's emphasis on historical interpretation to a methodological interest in source criticism. While not so apparent and abrupt as in modern China, this kind of transition also occurred in the course of modern Western historiography. If the interest of Enlightenment thinkers, such as Voltaire's, in the philosophy of history represented the initial effort made by European historians to imitate the work of scientists in explaining nature, it gradually faded out in the 19th century, with Hegel as a notable exception, when historians like Niebuhr and Ranke pursued the rigor of scientific history through methodological improvement, especially through the critical use of primary sources. In generalizing the development of modern Western historiography, Leonard Krieger therefore offered such an observation:

In one sense it [scientific history] refers to the development of distinctive critical methods, learned in the historical seminars of Germany, propagated in graduate seminars of American universities, and appropriate to the rise of history as a separate profession administering an independent discipline. In the second sense it refers to the use of hypotheses drawn from the natural sciences as fundamental laws of reality applicable *inter alia* to history (1965: 255)

For the scientific history in the first sense, Ranke was considered as a great example; whereas in the second sense, interestingly, Krieger cited Darwin, a prominent figure in Western historiography revered also by many Chinese scholars. Of course, what was shown as a sequential transition in modern Chinese scientific history appeared more like a parallel development in 19th century Western history. But even for most Western

¹ In my forthcoming book, *Inventing China through History: The May Fourth Approach to Historiography* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press), I have discussed in a more detail the significance of the historiographical changes for Chinese nationalism.

historians, it was quite obvious that the emphasis on source criticism, or *quellenkritik* in Rankean historiography, definitely had a longer appeal that lasted well into the 20th century (Iggers 1997).

2. Bridging the East with the West

From the late 1910s to the late 1930s scientific history in China was characterized by the work on collecting and criticizing historical sources; or, to borrow Yu Ying-shih's term, it was the period when the "historical source school" (*shiliao xuepai*) gained an upper hand over the "historical explanation school" (*shiguan xuepai*); the latter referred to both Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao at the turn of the century and the Marxists from the 1930s onward (1982: 2). Hu Shi's skeptical attitude toward the validity of extant written works appeared very influential among his students, especially Gu Jiegang (1893-1980) and Fu Sinian (1896-1950), two of China's most famous historians in the 20th century. Born into traditional literati families, both Gu and Fu were well versed in Chinese classical learning; hence they were not so impressed by Hu's knowledge in that regard. They were however very much intrigued by his new approach, his "genetic method," and his skepticism. After graduation from Beijing University, Fu went to Europe to gain first-hand experience in Western science whereas Gu worked for Hu as his research assistant.

In the 1920s when Hu Shi led the so-called "national studies" project in order to "reorganize the national past," Gu Jiegang became his most loyal follower. In working with Hu Shi, Gu extended Hu's skepticism into the study of Chinese historiography, in which he found that many well-known history texts were either interpolated or forged by later people through the years. By sharing his research finding with his mentor in a new journal, he and Hu, along with Qian Xuantong (1887-1939), another member on the Beijing University faculty, launched the "Ancient History Discussion" (*gushi bian*), in which they posited the hypothesis that what had hitherto been known as China's high antiquity was a result of literary fabrication. China's history before the Qin unification of 221 B.C., or the "golden ages" according to convention, was based, Gu argued with Hu and Qian's support, on unreliable documents that appeared in a much later age and required scientific scrutiny. If the history turned out to be a fabrication, then China's proudly long civilization would be shortened from over five thousand years to a little over two thousand years.

Gu's finding caused a stir in the Chinese intellectual community; his thesis was not acceptable by many for both academic and political reasons. Politically his argument hurt the pride of the Chinese people about their history, the pride to which many Chinese would very much like to hold given their country's weakness in modern times. Academically Gu's approach was more speculative than substantive; he based his theory on discovering a few suspicious texts whose authenticity was indeed very questionable, if not false. It was legitimate for him to point out that there were forgeries in the Chinese written tradition. But he went overboard to postulate that the entire pre-Qin history was a fake just because a few names mentioned in some texts lacked more convincing substantiation. In his research Gu presented strong evidence against some forged texts he had found. But he could not find enough sources to prove that certain ancient kings such as Yu was nothing but a god-like figures in totem worship.

All the same, the “Ancient History Discussion” has exerted a great impact on shaping the historical profession in modern China. In the last few decades, both Chinese and Western scholars have produced a number of works on Gu Jiegang and his leadership role in the discussion (Schneider 1971, Liu 1986, Wang, F. 1987, Peng 1991, Chen 1993, Richter 1993). Many researchers have noticed the significance of the debate in Chinese intellectual history, particularly in Chinese historiography. Peng Minghui, for example, finds that “both sides in the debate used the same sources and adopted the same approach; methodologically they followed the same rules of game” (Peng 1991: 71). His finding has echoed Hu Shi’s observation about the discussion in the 1920s. While the participants did not agree with one another, Hu wrote, “they all searched for the same way out, that is to look for evidence. There has been no clear winner in the debate; we have only seen the difference between adequate and inadequate researches, which decides what we should believe and what we should not believe” (Hu 1962:190). Needless to say, the research Hu meant here, or the “rules of game” in Peng’s words, is source criticism. The discussion helped set it as the standard for historical research in modern Chinese historiography. To some extent, therefore, the significance of the “Ancient History Discussion” is comparable to Ranke’s famous technical appendix, “In Criticism of Modern Historians” to his *Histories of the Romanic and Germanic Peoples*, in which Ranke criticized Machiavelli and Guiccardini for their lack of critical spirit toward historical sources.

Thus viewed, Hu Shi and Gu Jiegang’s suspicion and criticism of the Chinese historiographical tradition helped the growth of historical profession in modern China. In his observation of the evolution of historical profession in the U.S., Peter Novick points out that “The development and standardization of technique was, of course, the whole point of professional training.” Its purpose was not, he quotes J. Franklin Jameson, “to evoke originality, to kindle the fires of genius ... but to regularize, to criticize, to restrain vagaries, to set a standard of workmanship and compel men to conform to it” (1988: 52). Like in the U.S. and Europe, source criticism also became the standard practice in research for Chinese historians, thanks to the influence and exemplary work of Hu Shi and Gu Jiegang of the “historical source school.”

Indeed, the emergence of Chinese historical profession was largely due to the influence of the Western historiographical experience. Hu Shi and the like who had the similar training in Western education played an important role in disseminating the influence. He Bingsong (1890-1946), for example, who had an M.A. from Princeton University and was Hu Shi’s colleague at Beijing University, was well known at the time for his translation of many works in American historiography, particularly James H. Robinson’s seminal *The New History*, which was adopted by He as the textbook for his course on “Historical Methods.” Like Hu Shi, He believed that source criticism should be the first and foremost requirement in scientific history. In an introduction to his translation of Robinson’s *The New History*, he elaborated on the “genetic method,” coined by Hu Shi, as an important scientific approach to historical research. “In order to make history a science,” He wrote, “one has first to adopt the historical approach. That is to say, one should study history not only for knowing what it is but also to explain where it came from” (1980: 51). To that end, one should describe and document the historical process with meticulously conducted research on source criticism.

The Western influence notwithstanding, the source criticism advocated by the “historical source school” was also traceable in the Chinese historiographical tradition. In its long history of historical writing, historians in China had already developed sophisticated skills and techniques in textual criticism. It was almost taken for granted in China that historians should have both the sensitivity and capability for discovering any forged documents and conducting sufficient textual examination before rendering sources into an account. A salient example in this regard was Sima Guang (1019-1086), a great historian of the Song Dynasty who wrote the multi-volume political history, *A Comprehensive Mirror of Aid for Government* (Zizhi tongjian). In preparing his writing of this *magnum opus*, Sima followed a rigorous procedure in source criticism. Aided by a few capable assistants who were good historians in their own right, he collected massive sources and conducted meticulous criticism on them. Then Sima redrafted his manuscript several times in order not only to improve his prose but also to further check the validity of the sources (Pulleyblank 1965, Hsu 1983). By the late imperial period, exegetical research on ancient texts had come to be an essential branch of historical study, especially among the so-called “evidential scholars” (kaozhijia) in the early Qing Dynasty whose careers were basically built upon criticizing and verifying texts in history, literature, as well as in the Classics (Elman 1984, Wang, Q.E. 1992).

The achievement of Qing evidential scholars in source criticism was at such a high level that when Hu Shi spoke about the similar development in methodology in both Eastern and Western philosophy, he basically referred to the exegetical methods perfected by these Chinese scholars. In Hu’s opinion, their methods were *de facto* scientific, for in doing their research, these scholars followed the scientific procedure that goes from positing a hypothesis and collecting data, to examining and criticizing the data for verifying the hypothesis. Although Hu was very enthusiastic about Dewey’s pragmatic interpretation of modern science, it was in his article on Qing evidential scholarship that he coined his famous slogan, “a boldness in presenting the hypothesis and a minuteness in looking for the evidence” and interpreted the essence of the scientific method for the Chinese readers (1986c: 180-185). If Qing evidential scholarship helped Hu Shi to identify a scientific trace in traditional Chinese culture, it also benefited Gu Jiegang in launching his project on cleansing the forgeries from the Chinese written tradition and rejecting the history of China’s high antiquity (Wang, F. 1987).

The “historical source school,” therefore, was benefited from both traditions in Chinese and Western historiography. As proclaimed in Hu Shi’s writings, the school aimed to advocate the equivalence of the two traditions in order to bind them together. Reflecting on their endeavor, Hu wrote that,

It was a movement of reason versus tradition, freedom versus authority, and glorification of life and human values versus their suppression. And lastly, strange enough, this new movement was led by men who knew their cultural heritage and tried to study it with the new methodology of modern historical criticism and research (1934: 44).

Comparing the technique and skill of source criticism of both Chinese and Western historians became an effective means for the school to advocate scientific history. In the

1920s and the 1930s, there appeared many studies on historical methodology; all were aimed at teaching history students a new, scientific approach to historical research that was based on the principles developed in Western/Rankean historiography but illustrated with traditional, hence familiar, examples found in Chinese historiography.

Of these methodological studies, Liang Qichao's *Methods for the Study of Chinese History* (Zhongguo lishi yanjiufa) was the most influential. After its publication in the early 1920s, it was regarded as an important guide to modern historical study for quite a few decades. Of course, Liang's name as a well-known political reformer and essayist and his elegant writing style contributing to his success. However, what was more important was that in writing the book, Liang presented both Western theories and Chinese antecedents on source criticism, hence offering a well-balanced account of historical methodology. He appeared very much at ease cruising back and forth between two cultures and made a persuasive argument: there had been a rich tradition of historical criticism in Chinese historiography that was both compatible and comparable with the tradition in modern Western historical writing (1980: 43-180).

In writing the *Methods for the Study of Chinese History*, noticeably, Liang modified his original interest in historical theory as well as his position toward the Chinese historiographical tradition. He had now been won over by Hu Shi and developed a similar interest in making source criticism the foundation of scientific history. As a result, he gave up his original interest in finding the principle of evolution, or the idea of progress, in history. In his *New Historiography*, for instance, he had emphasized that the purpose of historical study was to discover and describe the process of evolution in historical movement. But in the *Methods for the Study of Chinese History*, the word "evolution" disappeared; Liang simply said that historians should describe and analyze historical continuity in their research (1980: 45-46). What is more apparent was that Liang changed his iconoclastic view of the Chinese tradition in historical writing. He was no longer so critical of the fact that traditional historians wrote many biographies of emperors, their ministers and relatives. Instead, he praised the tradition of establishing the historiographical office at the royal court and considered it a resource for historians to collect and criticize source materials and write more reliable historical accounts.

3. Reconstructing China's Past

Modern Chinese historians showed a tremendous interest in textual criticism. They also realized, such as Liang Qichao in his *Methods for the Study of Chinese History*, that source criticism in historical study must include both literary and material sources. This realization became more and more apparent to them as they attempted seriously to reconstruct history on a scientific basis. In the "Ancient History Discussion," there were suggestions that the only solution for both sides in the debate to settle their dispute was to find the archaeological evidence (Li 1962). When Hu Shi declared that there had not been a definite winner in the debate, he somewhat reached the same conclusion. Although he himself did not have the necessary knowledge in using archaeological material for historical research, Hu must have sensed its importance when he called readers' attention to the difference between "adequate and inadequate researches" (1962: 190).

What Hu Shi and Gu Jiegang failed to do was to emulate the career of Fu Sinian, the most visible figure in the “historical source school.” Having left China in 1919 to study in both England and Germany, Fu was absent in the “Ancient History Discussion.” Although he, as Gu’s friend and Hu’s protégé, followed the discussion quite closely, he had not yet been ready to commit himself to the study of history. During his sojourn in Europe, Fu enthusiastically pursued knowledge in science; he first majored in psychology at the University of London and later decided to audit courses freely after transferring to Berlin University. While his study seemed aimless, since it had not resulted in an advanced degree, Fu pursued relentlessly his ambition to discover the essence of modern science. To that end, he read and bought a number of works while abroad, whose subjects ranged from geology and physics to linguistics and logic. It was perhaps in his month-long trip back home at the end of 1926 that Fu gradually made up his mind to become a scientist of ancient history.

To use this strange term is to help us see what was in Fu’s mind when he began his academic career. Out of his strong belief in positivism, Fu was very much convinced that for a true scientist, there is no meaning in what he does except for how he does his research. In other words, there is only one scientific method that can be applied to different disciplines. While his own interest was ancient history, he did not think he was a historian in a traditional sense, who gave narrative descriptions to historical events. Rather, he was determined to become a scientist who would turn the study of history into a scientific research. No sooner had he been hired as a professor of history and literature at Sun Yat-sen University than he established the Institute of History and Philology in 1927. Sharing Hu Shi and Gu Jiegang’s enthusiasm for source criticism and inspired by the model of Rankean historiography, Fu believed that philological study could help historians to verify the authenticity of sources and therefore place historical study on a scientific basis. The name of the Institute is however deceptive; Fu’s real interest actually went beyond allying history with philology. In the Institute Fu set up three programs: history, philology and archaeology, all directed by Western educated scholars. What he intended was, through this interdisciplinary approach, to demystify once and for all the myth of China’s high antiquity that had become so mysterious due to the “Ancient History Discussion,” hence setting an example for scientific research in history.

In 1928 the Institute of History and Philology joined the newly established Academia Sinica and was moved to Beijing, which allowed Fu to have better access to research funding from the nationalist government under Chiang Kai-shek, who had just defeated a few powerful warlords and made China, at least in appearance, a unified country. Having secured quickly the funding and approval from the government, Fu in the same year sent an archaeological team from the Institute to Anyang, a ruin of the Shang capital, to conduct a series of excavations that would last for almost a decade. As an ancient culture whose existence had hitherto had proofs in few writings, Shang naturally became the focus of attention for anyone interested in China’s early civilization, let alone the ones, like Fu, who had followed the “Ancient History Discussion.” Moreover, at the turn of the century there had been some discoveries of a number of inscribed oracle-bones by Western sinologists such as Paul Pelliot of France as well as Chinese scholars like Luo Zhengyu (1866-1940) and Wang Guowei (1877-1927), which further whetted curiosity for the place.

The inscriptions on these oracle-bones were soon deciphered by people like Luo and Wang and were credited as the proto-type of the Chinese written language. But skepticism for their authenticity remained. Initially, therefore, the team sent by the Institute wanted to look for more of those bones and ensure their authenticity. After some excavation, the team did have some gains whereby they were able to dispute the disbelief in them. But the real success, as summarized by Li Ji (1896-1979), a Harvard-educated anthropologist who was later put in charge of the excavation by Fu Sinian, lay in the fact that through the digging, the Institute found many more artifacts other than the inscribed oracle-bones which helped demonstrate the high level of civilization in Shang culture (Li 1977).

They achieved this not simply by relying on a few more inscribed oracle-bones, but also through a detailed investigation of the ruin as a whole, including examining its architectural structure, testing its soil in different layers as well as researching all kinds of artifacts (skulls, skeletons, pottery and so on). The type of research they were conducting, as analyzed by Wang Fan-shen, was entirely new, pointing to a new direction in modern Chinese historiography, for the interest in the inscribed oracle-bones remained under the influence of traditional historiography wherein written sources were considered essential for historical writing (Wang, F. 1997). In Fu Sinian's opinion, which was best shown in his *Introduction to the Work of the Institute of History and Philology* (1952), a scientific historian would not confine himself to written sources; he would rather broaden his search beyond written sources to other material artifacts. He even claimed that "we are not book-readers. We go all the way to Heaven above and Yellow Spring [hell] below, using our hands and feet, to look for things" (1952: 180). To him the key to modern historical research was to expand the category of historical sources to include all useful ones, especially the relics unearthed by archaeological digging. "History equals historical sources," Fu declared loudly, which quickly became one of the most memorable slogans of the "historical source school" (Xu 1986, 1:209-233).

Having proved the level of civilization in the Shang, Fu succeeded in clearing up the clouds of skepticism over China's antiquity in the "Ancient History Discussion." While Gu Jiegang was reluctant to admit to his premature claim of Shang culture as a culture of the Stone Age, Hu Shi quickly changed his position. In his correspondence with Gu in 1929, Hu said that "Now my thinking has changed. I do not doubt antiquity any longer. I believe the authenticity of ancient Chinese history," leaving Gu surprised (Liu 1986: 262). The excavation also caught the attention of Western sinologists. Paul Pelliot, who had done some initial archaeological work on the site, praised the finding as "the most spectacular discovery made in the field of Asiatic Studies in recent years" (1964: 272). For Fu Sinian, this initial success was a great encouragement, which prompted him to launch a series of archaeological projects in the 1930s that were aimed not only at investigating some known ancient remains, but also at examining the origin, scope, and level of development of ancient Chinese civilization as a whole. In a word, he wanted to reconstruct Chinese history on the basis of scientific research.

4. The Rise of Marxist Historiography

The “historical source school,” therefore, attained a predominant position in the academic circle of historians in Republican China in the 1930s. They however also had critics and competitors. In the course of change in 20th century Chinese historiography, we can generally see three schools that were developed in parallel with one another; each had a distinct academic interest as well as a clear position in politics. In contrast to the “historical source school,” there was the “historical explanation school,” a name which, in the 1930s, referred mainly to the Marxist group. In addition, there was yet another school whose composition was quite mixed, including not only the cultural conservatives who basically resisted any cultural change from the West but also a group of scholars who had a similar educational background in the West, such as Hu Shi and Fu Sinian of the “historical source school.” This school was gathered around the journal *Scholarly Critique* (Xueheng), based at the Southeastern University in Nanjing. What differentiated their approach from that of the other two schools was its disdain of science worship and its advocacy of humanism seen in both Chinese and Western cultural traditions. Consequently, it showed little interest in making efforts to change the Chinese cultural tradition, as championed by the leaders of the May Fourth Movement (Rosen 1969, Shen 1984).

In the 1930s, however, it was the Marxists who posed a strong challenge to the influence of the “historical source school.” Buoyed by their revolutionary enthusiasm, the Marxists were interested in applying the Marxist theory of social development to the interpretation of Chinese history. But their efforts were also greatly hindered by the fact that the course of Chinese history bore little resemblance to that of European history on which Marx’s historical materialism was based. As a result, the Marxian interpretation of Chinese history, offered by Chinese Marxists, varied tremendously. It spawned many debates and discussions. These debates culminated in the so-called “Social History Controversy” between 1931 and 1933 (Dirlik, 1978, Leutner 1982), which was as eye-catching as the “Ancient History Discussion” for historians in modern China. In fact, in terms of social influence, the “social history controversy” was more direct, for it pointed to the heart of the Chinese cause of national salvation, which suddenly became very urgent to most Chinese due to Japan’s invasion and occupation in Manchuria. Although the participants discussed seemingly academic questions in historiography, they all intended to address the real challenge in history: how to rid China quickly of its weakness and problems and return it to the glory and power it had enjoyed in the not so distant past. The Marxists of course only offered one solution which did not have its appeal to all, but it sounded simple and sympathetic, finding more receptive ears among the young Chinese.

If the Marxists and the *Scholarly Critique* group only played the role of competitors for influence in the historical circle of the early 1930s, they gained on their competition after 1937 as Japan launched a full-scale war against China. As the Marxists spread their influence onto college campuses through organization and propaganda, attracting many radical students who associated Marxism with nationalism, the *Scholarly Critique* group developed a popular cultural agenda that called for a more selective cultural exchange with the West in constructing modern Chinese culture. As a result, both schools expanded and attracted members of the “historical source school.” Since there had not been definite boundaries among the three, this kind of turnover was only

understandable, given the seriousness of the circumstances. In fact, it had already taken place before 1937. For example, having experienced the Japanese bombing of the Commercial Press in Shanghai, where he worked as a chief editor in 1932, He Bingsong drafted and co-signed (with nine others) the “Declaration of the Construction of a China-based Modern Culture” in 1935, causing a great argument between him and Hu Shi. The two debated whether, in the face of the foreign invasion, there was still the need for China to remain open for foreign cultural influences. While Hu maintained his cosmopolitanism, He became more cautious and conservative.

All in all, the climate of time was changed; it was no longer possible for scholars to remain in their ivory tower, devoting their time to detailed research on verifying some ancient texts or examining the dates or figures of ancient times. This also affected the most celebrated scholars of the “historical source school.” Fu Sinian, for example, had to discontinue his archaeological projects in 1937 because of the Japanese invasion in northern China. Asking his peers the poignant question, “how can a scholar help save the country?” he himself initiated the writing project on Manchurian history in order to refute Japan’s claim on the land. He also made frequent contributions to the *Independent Review* (Duli pinglun), a journal edited by his mentor Hu Shi and others, to offer his thoughts and advice for the nationalist government. Even Hu Shi, who had vowed not to take part in government, also changed his stance during the war. Besides publishing the *Independent Review*, which was his vehicle for voicing opinion on national defense, at the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941 he accepted the appointment to become China’s ambassador to the U.S. By taking government positions, Hu and his friends were no longer able to maintain their commitment to liberalism, nor their “independent” position. The war definitely made them closer to the incumbent government, or Chiang Kai-shek’s dictatorial style of leadership.

Consequently, the history of modern Chinese historiography in World War II entered a new course, which was characterized by the decline of interest in source-oriented research and a growing desire for a more direct answer to the question facing Chinese historians at the time: How could history offer any guidance in their search for a strong country at the present and in the future? The Marxist approach seemed more appealing, for its emphasis on periodizing the evolution of Chinese history provided the more relevant answers to questions like where the Chinese came from, where they were now and where they should and would go from here. To be sure, not everyone, even among the Marxists, agreed upon the periodization, much less the nature, of Chinese society in the 1930s and the 1940s, and the necessity of making a revolution. But they all felt like taking some action to help save their country. While Hu Shi and Fu Sinian took some actions on their own behalf, they often advised young college students, who were already charged by strong nationalist sentiment, not to make demonstrations but to concentrate on their studies. In contrast to their active leadership in the May Fourth Movement in which Fu himself had been a flamboyant student leader, they appeared more and more conservative in comparison with their students, but particularly with the Marxists. It was not surprising that they lost their original appeal to and influence among the young Chinese from the late 1930s onward. Even among the non-Marxist historians, their popularity also fell. The most popular work in history during World War II, for instance, was Qian Mu (1895-1990)’s *Outline of Chinese History* (Zhongguo shigang),

whose author had little training and interest in scientific history but a strong conviction in the vitality of the Chinese cultural tradition, a conviction desperately needed at wartime.

In regard to the change in modern Chinese historiography, therefore, World War II, or to be more precise, Japan's invasion of China during the 1930s, played a pivotal role. It caused Chinese historians to give up and/or switch their original interest in research and prompted them to embark on new projects. More importantly, it paved the way for the Marxist historians to exert their influence in the historical circle. In his observation of the origin of Marxist historiography in China, Dirlik, by quoting the work of Feng Youlan (1895-1990), a historian of philosophy who had no strong tie with either the Marxist or the non-Marxist group, states that from the mid-1930s onward, the question that intrigued Chinese historians was neither to believe or disbelieve antiquity but how to explain history for its movement (1978: 264-266). That is to say, the "historical explanation school" in Marxian dress had come to be the predominant influence among historians.

After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, needless to say, Marxist historiography progressed remarkably. In fact, it was the only school that was allowed to flourish in mainland China. On the other side of the Taiwan Strait, however, it was the "historical source school" that became the orthodox influence among the historians on the island, where the defeated nationalist government settled down. While Hu Shi did not go to Taiwan right after Chiang Kai-shek's retreat and Gu Jiegang chose to remain in the mainland, Fu Sinian did, along with his Institute of History and Philology, and was immediately appointed the president of Taiwan University. Despite his premature death in 1950, Fu left, through his leadership at both the institute and the university, a long-lasting legacy that is still quite appreciable today. The Institute of History and Philology, for instance, remains a major attraction to the most promising and ambitious young historians in Taiwan, whereas Taiwan University continued to select its best graduates for ensuring the supply. This situation reminds us of a similar cooperation between the Institute and Beijing University in the earlier decades. But in Taiwan it has evolved almost into a system.² As a result, Fu's emphasis on source-oriented research retains its appeal, which has been a primary and persistent interest in history for the contributors to the *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology* in the last several decades.

Despite its ecumenical claim, Marxist historiography in mainland China has been a diverse tradition ever since the 1950s when it first secured its leadership position. After founding the People's Republic, the Chinese government established the Chinese Academy of Science, which was later split into two; the newer addition is called the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The academy sets up three institutes in history to cover the research on ancient history, modern history and world history. In addition to the academy, many universities scatters around the country that, along with the academy's provincial and municipal branches, house the rest of the history faculty. In comparison, while the academy boasts its direct linkage with and stable resources from the government the universities, particularly those well-known ones, also enjoy their prestige

² With only a few exceptions, the majority of the research staff on the Institute of History and Philology were graduates of Taiwan University. Many of them also received advanced degrees from prestigious universities in the U.S.

because of a relatively longer history and tradition. As a result, these two systems are equally attractive to young students who aspire to enter the historical profession.

No matter where they are, however, Chinese historians have the same assigned goal: to apply Marxism to the interpretation of Chinese and world history in order to make history useful for the new regime. In the early days of the People's Republic, it was particularly important for them to come up with a persuasive explanation for the Chinese Revolution led by the Communists, namely to justify its legitimacy not only according to the immediate context such as its just victory over the corruption-ridden nationalist government, but also in the long evolution of Chinese history that was, supposedly, correspondent to the Marxist theory of social development. To that end, historians needed to present a coherent periodization theory for China's past, on the basis of which they could identify correctly the current social stage of development and corroborate the government's claim concerning the nature of the Communist Revolution. While there was but one goal, results of periodization research were very diverse, especially in the study of ancient Chinese history, or the period before the 19th century.

The periodization question had long been a central issue in Chinese Marxist historiography ever since its incipient years of the late 1920s and the early 1930s. In the famous "social history controversy," for example, many theories had been presented and exchanged by the participants which did not result in a consensus at the end. During the 1950s and the 1960s, Chinese historians resumed the discussion and, given its importance to both the growth of Marxist historiography and the legitimacy of the Communist government, participated in it with a considerable vigor. Moreover, the discussion on the periodization of Chinese history also spread to other areas, causing more debates on related questions, such as the formation of the Chinese nation, the sprouts of capitalism in the late imperial period, the role of peasant rebellions and the Asiatic mode of production. These discussions represented the so-called "five golden flowers" in the garden of historical research between the 1950s and the 1960s. To help them grow, Chinese historians exhausted almost all their energy and time. Unfortunately, good intention did not necessarily result in good outcomes. In some cases, participants were persecuted for their "deviant" views during and after the discussions, which, even if not fatal, cost them their career and status in the profession and society.

What concerned the historians in these discussions were details which now seem minor. They all agreed upon one thing: like the histories of other parts of the world, Chinese history went through the social stages first outlined by Marx in his *Preface to A Critique of Political Economics* and later defined arbitrarily by Stalin in the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*. That is, they all believed that there were successive stages of development in Chinese history known to be primitive, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and so on. However, they held different opinions in regard to when these social transitions actually occurred at particular times. The main problem lay in that while there seemed to be different characteristics of the historical phases that divided China's past, these appeared never quite so clear-cut as compared to Marx's periodization of European history. The distinction between slavery and feudalism in China seemed particularly problematic, for the former was obviously shadowed by the latter that was not only prolonged but somehow overdeveloped as well.

Consequently, many attempts were made to identify slavery in China in order to fit the course of Chinese history into the Marxian framework. Among these, two theories, offered respectively by Guo Moruo and Fan Wenlan, gradually gained the upper-hand over the rest. But their “victory” was due more to their high status in the historical circle than to the efficacy of their interpretations per se. Having joined the Communist Party prior to its taking over of power in the country, both Guo and Fan were considered revolutionary veterans among their peers. After 1949 as Guo assumed the presidency of the Academy of Science, Fan headed the institute of modern history at the academy and, in the meantime, he had written a popular general history of China which was sanctioned by party leader Mao Zedong. In presenting their theses on the supposed “transition” from slavery to feudalism, Guo and Fan disagreed with each other about its timing for a few centuries. But what is more interesting was the methodological difference in their research. As an expert in the study of inscribed oracle-bones, Guo tried to use both material and written sources in forming his theory; whereas Fan appeared more traditional, relying mainly on written texts in making his argument. This difference bears some resemblance to the different approaches Fu Sinian and Gu Jiegang had adopted in their earlier research of China’s antiquity. Although Marxist historians studied history with an entirely different agenda, they also utilized and benefited from the methodological development that had taken place in modern Chinese historiography.

The divergent views shown in the discussion on periodizing Chinese history is illustrative in seeing the difficulty Chinese Marxists have encountered in studying history. They have struggled to fit Chinese history to the Marxian framework but often to no avail, hence resulting in heated debates that often, even more unfortunately, led to harsh political accusations. The only way out of their plight is, quite obviously, to give up the endeavor at seeking a universal application of the Marxist view in history. Indeed, in almost every discussion there were people who had suggested, rather courageously, that as the course of Chinese history was so deviant from the “standard” route of historical evolution according to Marxism, it would probably be better for Chinese historians to propose alternative interpretations. But their suggestions could only cause them to receive harsh criticisms from their colleagues. In discussing the formation of the Chinese nation, for instance, Fan Wenlan argued that national characteristics had been seen in ancient China so that the Chinese might have formed their nation earlier than their European counterparts of the 17th century. Despite his seniority, however, Fan was criticized not only by his colleagues at the research institute where he was the director but also by other fellow historians nationwide (Wang, Q.E. 1999).

A critical issue therefore arose in the Chinese application of Marxism in historiography, which was known to be the relationship between “history” (shi) and “theory” (lun). In making efforts to adopt the Marxist theory into their study of Chinese history, historians noticed that they were troubled in constancy by the inherent tension in Marxist historiography, namely the tension between what was supposed to happen and what did happen in history. The two often were in direct conflict with each other, leaving historians with little choice for reaching a compromise but opting for the one at the cost of the other. To a great extent, all the major discussions that took place at the time were testimonies to that insolvable tension; as one group of historians were more prone to theory, the other group insisted on being consistent (faithful?) with historical facts.

Consequently, although there was always a sincere plea for the ideal situation wherein history fits the theory (shilun jiehe), there had hardly been such cases. What was usually seen is either “theory leads history” (yi lun dai[ling] shi) or “theory substitutes history” (yi lun dai[ti] shi), but not “theory comes from history” (lun cong shi chu), as noticed by S. Weigelin-Schwiedrzik (1996).

The pair relationship between theory and history sometimes also took another form: class viewpoint versus historicism. In the mid-1960s, as observed by Dirlik, Chinese historians engaged in a nation-wide discussion on how to keep an appropriate balance between adopting the class viewpoint approach and that of historicism; the former referred to the application of Marx’s class struggle theory whereas the latter called for a consideration of the particular time and condition in which a historical event or figure was situated (Dirlik 1977). What was discussed is essential to historical study in modern China. Had there not been such a balance, some historians argued, there would be almost nothing in the past still worth one’s attention in Communist China. This was because most cultural activities in history had only served the rich and powerful, rather than the proletarian class the party wanted them to identify themselves with. The key issue in the discussion, therefore, remains the same: whether historians should dogmatically apply Marxist theory or seek a way in which they could compromise the theory in order to present more history. All the same, while Chinese historians in the 1950s and the 1960s faced tremendous challenges in adapting Marxism, they seemed unintimidated by various approaches to creating Marxist historiography, even if their approaches were different from the orthodox version of Marxism sanctioned by the party, or from the views offered by Soviet historians whose works were then regarded as exemplary models. Acting on nationalist impulses, Chinese Marxists often attempted to find their own way out by offering plausible historical interpretations (Wang, Q.E. 1999).

All this, however, changed in 1966 when the Cultural Revolution started. Interestingly, it was caused in part by a controversy over a historical drama, written by a well-known historian, Wu Han. An outstanding scholar whose research had been recommended before by both Hu Shi and Fu Sinian, Wu chose to become a Communist in the 1940s, disdainful of the corrupt and dictatorial style of the nationalist government. Appointed a deputy mayor of the city of Beijing, he became one of the high-ranked officials in the historical circle after 1949. His writing of the drama, which was about Hai Rui (1514-1587), a model official in the Ming Dynasty, was known to be suggested (ordered ?) by Mao Zedong. While a novice in literary writing, his play, *The Dismissal of Hai Rui* (Hai Rui baguan), was initially well received by both academics and society. Then, however, troubles arose when someone made the connection between Mao’s dismissal of Peng Dehuai, the former defense minister who criticized Mao’s “Great Leap Forward” economic policy, and Hai Rui’s case. A controversy ensued yet ironically Wu, the main figure, was not allowed to defend himself. What was supposed to be an academic debate therefore became a one-sided criticism of the silent other. Seeing no chance of survival, Wu and his wife both committed suicide (Fisher 1993).

This tragic episode, taking place in 1965, forecast what was going to happen to the Chinese people in general and Chinese intellectuals in particular in the Cultural Revolution. During the ten fierce years of the Revolution, what had been seen earlier as exchanges among historians became criticisms, often launched by students and historians

themselves. Not only was academic research forbidden, but scholars also had to “repent,” sometimes by sacrificing their own lives, what they had done earlier by admitting to presupposed faults. At the end of the 1960s, universities and research institutes were closed. As a result, all faculty were sent to the countryside to work either in the farms or communes. Although Mao later decided to reopen universities and readmit students, professors remained subjected to severe political scrutiny. No one was able to conduct serious research, especially in subjects like history. China therefore witnessed a darkest period in its history. Worse still, no historian was allowed to record it!

5. Social History as the Alternative

As the Cultural Revolution finally ended after Mao’s death in 1976, historians began to repair slowly and cautiously the damage done to their field. Given the remaining political pressure which exists, to a much lesser extent, even today, they are never able to exercise academic freedom as freely as do their counterparts in democratic countries. However, their enthusiasm for historical research was also quite apparent, which is due in a great part to their painful experience in the Cultural Revolution. Regarding the Revolution as an aberration in Chinese history, for example, they were eager to offer their wisdom through historical study for explaining its occurrence, similar to the apologies German historians had offered after World War II for the Third Reich.

Beginning in the late 1970s, therefore, there appeared in the historical circle a nationwide discussion on the supposed longevity of feudalism in China. While it bore a clear resemblance to the discussion seen before the Cultural Revolution, trying to fit Chinese history to the Marxian framework of social development, it was also intended for a covert purpose: explaining the origin of the Cultural Revolution in the operation of the Communist party, hence associating the Communist rule with a feudal dynasty. In other words, the discussion on the longevity of Chinese feudalism amounted to a criticism of the Communist party itself, although its main target was on Mao’s Cultural Revolution. Indeed, historians found many traces of feudalism in both the party and Chinese society. It was due to these feudal remains, the discussion concluded, that Mao gained the aura of a god, worshiped by the party and the people, which consequently led him to launch the disastrous Cultural Revolution (Sullivan 1993).

A more important development, in my opinion, that originated from the discussion was a renewed interest in methodological innovations for historical study. Like Hu Shi and Fu Sinian of the earlier generations, young scholars were enthusiastic about trying out new methods in their research, especially the methods developed more recently in scientific studies. This enthusiasm represented the effort made by the historians of a young generation, who just had the exposure to outside influences from the West, to seek an alternative to the jaded Marxist approach. Like the discussion itself, therefore, it became a way in which they could show, indirectly, their distrust in and criticism of the Marxist ideology. In 1980 when the discussion on Chinese feudalism just began to receive more and more attention, Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng, a young couple who were both trained as scientists rather than historians, looked at the question from a new perspective. Inspired by the ideas discussed in new scientific theories, such as systematism and cybernetics, they argued that China experienced a long period of

feudalism because ever since the Qin unification in 221 B.C., the country had gradually evolved into a super-stable system, or an equilibrium, in which all its parts, called sub-systems, were structured so well in communication. Even if one part, say, the political system, was broken down at a particular time it would later repair itself, with the help of others, for maintaining the balance (1984).

While only a tentative hypothesis, Jin and Liu's article, which was later developed into a book, stirred up a great controversy among historians. Many disliked their approach, more because of the authors' lack of training in history than an account of the theory per se, which was not very comprehensible to the critics anyway. Yet there were still many others who welcomed their effort. In comparison with the Marxist approach, Jin and Liu's theory emphasized the importance of looking at different fabrics of society, particularly their associations with one another. It was no longer the economic determinism one used to have associated with Marxism in explaining historical movement. Thus viewed, Jin and Liu, while amateur historians, posed a challenge to Chinese historians for new ideas and theories. In the 1980s, there emerged a popular trend for historians to borrow from the methods of other disciplines in doing research. As a result, Chinese historiography entered a new phase, which was characterized by the historian's interest in interdisciplinary approach.

On the surface, this new phase appeared almost like *dǐjībù*; it was similar to the effort made by the "historical source school," especially Fu Sinian's attempt to turn history into a science, in the 1920s and the 1930s. But it was also different on at least two counts. First, although the advocates of the alliance between history and science in both periods were equally inspired by the example in Western scholarship, they actually had quite different motives. The scholars of the old generation, while receiving a better training in Western science via foreign education, appeared more concerned about advancing Chinese scholarship vis-à-vis Western scholarship, although in so doing, they had first to learn from the West. In other words, they, particularly Fu Sinian, had a strong competitive mind-set that was often hidden beneath their enthusiasm for Western learning. Fu's founding the Institute of History and Philology, for instance, was for the purpose of making China the center of sinological study in the world; Fu disliked the fact that foreign scholars had come to China only for collecting sources, but not for exchanging research ideas (Fu 1952, Wang, F. 1993). By contrast, scholars in the 1980s, having suffered from the academic isolation and the ravage of the Cultural Revolution, showed a boundless zest for Western culture, for the latter provided not only inspirations for scholarly research but also the means with which they could help find an alternative to the overused and outdated Marxism. With this two-fold purpose, young scholars launched the so-called "culture fever" (*wenhua re*) movement in the mid-1980s, in which Western theories and practices in history, among other things, became a major attraction (Wang, J. 1996, Gu, E. 1999).

Second, despite their enthusiasm for new Western ideas and their intended criticism of the legacy of Chinese Marxism, young historians still had to justify their new interest within the Marxist framework. During the 1980s as many attempts were being made to adopt new theories and methods in studying history, a major question still lingered: How to accommodate Marxism in this methodological revolution? As a great number of works were produced at the time, introducing the ideas of Oswald Spengler,

Arnold Toynbee, Benedetto Croce, R.G. Collingwood and Karl Popper, and schools of the Annales, psychohistory, cliometrics and social history in Western historiography, there were also many works that addressed the issue how these ideas and schools were related to Marxism. The usual conclusion was that Marxism had provided inspirations for these new developments, hence remaining a useful, better guide for historical study. By contrast, when Liang Qichao, Hu Shi and Fu Sinian campaigned for scientific history, they had launched a relentless attack on the Chinese tradition.

In sum, when the historians of these two generations, those from the first half of the 20th century and those from the second, searched for changes in historiography, they faced a different challenge due to their cultural heritages. Although the scholars of the older generation had had fewer restraints on their criticism of the Chinese tradition, they actually had a stronger attachment to it, which led them to seek its revival rather than its abandonment under Western cultural influence. In comparison, the younger generation were much more critical of the tradition they inherited in the second half of the century that, in their eyes, was an unsuccessful mixture of Chinese feudalism and a dogmatic Marxist ideology. Having little attachment to the Chinese cultural tradition of which they never possessed a good knowledge, they were much more enthusiastic for changing China after the Western model. The popular TV series, “River Elegy”(Heshang), was the best demonstration of the generation’s mind-set in 1980s China, in which the producers showed an overt envy for Western civilization and an equally overt contempt for the Chinese past (Wang, J. 1996).

This unbounded enthusiasm for Western learning encountered an abrupt turn in the tragic ending of the Tian’anmen Square demonstration in 1989. As the government used harsh means against pro-democracy student demonstrators, it also tightened its control of the intellectuals. However, in retrospect it appears that the damage proved to be temporary and limited. In the 1990s there were indeed fewer translations, or translation-based, series of Western theories than in the 1980s, such as the popular “Toward Future” (Zouxiang weilai) series edited by Jin Guantao (Gu, E. 1999). However, the interest among historians in new ideas and methods remained apparent, which has been more clearly shown in recently completed doctoral dissertations. More importantly, it seems that the attempt at methodological changes in historiography of the 1980s has resulted in the popularity of social history among Chinese historians. Of course, during the 1980s there were already people, like Feng Erkang, who campaigned for the study. But it is in the 1990s that the study of social history really took off, becoming the most popular field in historical study. As a result, there also appeared a strong interest in its related fields, such as urban history, women’s history, and cultural history. During the 1990s, for example, the *Historical Research* (Lishi yanjiu) journal, an authoritative historical publication in the PRC, ran a few forums, discussing the nature, scope, and significance of social history. The articles published in the journal and other professional journals on topics in social history have also increased tremendously. Due to its popularity, *The Chinese Yearbook on Historical Study* (Zhongguo lishixue nianjian) has reviewed its development every year since 1990. Sometimes, the review was divided into a few sections to cover different time periods and/or different areas, each penned by a few authors active in these sub-fields.

The social history trend in 1990s China extended the same interest in Western historiography that began in the 1960s (Iggers 1997). It suggests that Chinese historians have formally and finally ended their isolation from the outside world, due to the extensive exchanges the country has had with the rest of the world since the 1980s. Not only have there been a large number of Chinese students, including those who have pursued advanced degrees in history, studying abroad, there have also been many foreign historians visiting and lecturing in China, among them some well-known historians from the West such as Georges Duby, Jacques Le Goff, François Furet, Albert Soboul, Michel Vovelle, Immanuel Wallerstein, Charles and Louis Tilly, Fritz Stern, Georg Iggers, Lynn Hunt, Bill Bouwsma, Michael Kammen, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Akire Iriye, Philip Foner, Eric Hobsbawm, E.P. Thompson, Jürgen Kuschynsky, Werner Conze (Zhang 1995: 139, footnote 1). Like John Dewey and Bertrand Russell in the beginning of the century, these foreign scholars have helped their Chinese colleagues to open up their research horizons and sharpen their minds.

But in the Chinese context, the rise of social history has a good deal to do with the legacy of the “culture fever” movement of the 1980s and, in an indirect way, the legacy of the “historical source school” in the 1930s. It was the enthusiasm, seen on behalf of the young scholars of the last decade, for new ideas in historical methodology that paved the way for the study of Chinese social history. The primary impetus for social history, observed by an analyst, came from the historians’ interest in interdisciplinary study of history, for social history study provides the best opportunity to experiment with different approaches; historians can use not only the methods of sociology but also the methods of anthropology and ethnography (Yue 1989). Social history study, therefore, was “a point of departure,” claimed Feng Erkang, one of the forerunners in the field, “for the study of history to move in a new direction of fast development,” for it allowed historians to expand their vision of the past and extend their research into many new areas such as family, marriage, festival, entertainment, social activity, and the lives of both the elderly and the young (1987).

Thus viewed, social history has become an important alternative to the orthodox Marxist approach to Chinese historiography; the latter in the past forty years had basically dwelled on the interest in finding a general law in Chinese history. In fact, given its readily perceived popularity, there is ample reason to believe that social history will succeed, by advocating a more versatile and expansive research into the past, in replacing the Marxist focus of the “historical explanation school” on seeking law-like interpretations in China. Of course, this will not mean the return of the “historical source school,” but a higher stage of development in Chinese historiography that is less dogmatic and more sensitive to and reflective of the changes in Chinese history.

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