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Traditions, Temporality and Narrative in Chinese Historiography

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Chinese historiography serves as an exemplar of endogenous evolution profoundly influenced by Western interactions

La historiografía China, ejemplo de una evolución endógena impactada por Occidente

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Abstract

Chinese historiography developed on the margins of Western historiography. As a result of its own civilization, it was built on different assumptions and methodologies. The impact of the West on China in the 19th century could not fail to influence it. Given the technical superiority of the West, Chinese intellectuals tried to adapt their way of doing history to that of foreigners. In this article, starting from the doubts about this process that Chinese scholars show today, we intend to review the evolution of Chinese historiography from the first attempts at reform to the changes introduced by Marxism and its adaptation to the China of the Reform and Opening.

Keywords

Chinese historiography. Chinese history. Chinese historians.

Introduction: debates on chinese historiography

China has developed as a civilization isolated from Western concepts. This led it not only to have its own vision of history and of the concept itself of how history should be "written." The obviousness is emphasized, since there is no better example of this than seeing how its traditional historiography not only does not coincide with the Western one in periodization and *tempo,* but sometimes does not even coincide with the concept of history itself. There is no better example of this than the contrast between our linear vision of history, which requires the existence of a "zero" year, and the circular, or rather spiral, vision of Chinese history marked by the concepts of *dynastic cycle, everything under heaven, and the golden age* (Ramírez-Ruiz, 2016, pp. 141-168).

Since the 21st century, China's historical research has entered a new stage, which could be characterized by inheriting and examining the historical research of the last century (Liang's New Historiography). Qichao in 1902 was regarded as the beginning of modern Chinese historiography) and marking the beginning of its future direction and trend. Of course, this stage connecting the past and the future itself was part of the history of China's historical development, full of multiple transmissivities and indeterminacies involving new advancement and open innovation. Therefore, in 2003, a series of essays was published in the journal *Historical Research (Lìshǐ yánjiū)*, one of the leading journals in Chinese academic circle, titled *"China's Historical Research in the New Century: A Challenge and a Rethinking".*

In these essays, historians discussed the process of transformation of modern Chinese historiography. Shang Chuan argued that there was no absolute dividing line between traditional and modern historiography, as any historical research or narrative method could be seen as a new source of historical studies. It became mainstream, becoming traditional historiography. It also established three high points in the development of Chinese historical research in the 20th century:, Liang's New Historiography Qichao, the beginning of modern Chinese historiography; the introduction of historical theories of Marxism; and the new development at present.

A categorization that was based on Western historical ideas. However, in terms of historical methodology, the new historiography had never completely changed and for most historians, the new Western historical methods were only a complement to traditional historical research (Shang, 2003).

For his part, Xie Weiyang He argued that research in some general and important fields had not reached a convincing and complete conclusion until Guo's contribution. Moruo with his work *"The Historical Methods of Marxism"* and *"The New Evidence of Ancient History"*

after the 1970s. He insisted that to achieve the breakthrough of ancient Chinese history research in the 21st century, a deep introspection into historical materials and early Chinese documentary texts was needed. Xie proposed that the solutions were, first, to strengthen the knowledge of ancient Chinese philology, second, to improve the standard of explanation performance, and third, to adapt to the requirements of interdisciplinary research (Xie, 2003).

Scholars in Hong Kong and Taiwan have also made great achievements in the past fifty years (WANG, 2002). This was due to the *New Asia College* in Hong Kong, founded by Qianmu in 1949. Through the *New Asia College,* they inherited the research methods of ancient Chinese civilization from the mainland, the historical tradition of taxology, and the ideas of cultural nationalism. Compared with historical research in the mainland and Taiwan, historical exploration in Hong Kong has developed in a more relaxed political environment and with academic freedom (Guo, 2018).

In the last century, historical researchers in China have always emphasized the relationship between historical subject consciousness and historical idealism. The historian was a product of history, and his subject consciousness had social significance, which determined his level of research, regardless of his personal significance (Yu, 2003).

But all these discussions mean nothing to the West. That is why, with this article, we intend to review the construction of "modern" Chinese historiography and how its endogenous development was radically modified by the impact that the West, as a civilization, had on China.

Chinese traditional historiography and its characteristics

The limitations of traditional Chinese historiography were related to its theory of government and social forms, as well as to China's position in the world (understood from Chinese paradigms). China saw itself as the only civilized nation in the world, so it had no external standard of comparison, consequently its historiography always developed in isolation.

This created a historiography or a way of writing and understanding history conditioned by three sociopolitical factors that were different from those of the West. Firstly, the Confucian tradition was based on the existence of a legendary "Golden Age" in which all successive dynasties (states or regimes) were, by definition, inferior, and there was no concept of progress or development. The absence of rival civilizations or nations gave China a sense of historical continuity, which would create that "circular" or "spiral" vision of Chinese history, so different from that of the West, which is linear. European history evolves through ages that advance in

time over a previous past that has already been overcome. Chinese history moves in circles, evolving from "good government" (of a dynasty or regime) to bad government; when this is reduced to a minimum, a change of dynasty or regime occurs, and the same previous cycle begins again. This limited the search for causality in historical events (Beasley; Pulleyblank, 1961, p. 168).

Secondly, because imperially appointed *scholar-officials* had a monopoly on political authority, there was an indifference among historians toward institutions and social groups that did not share in that sole source of prestige and power. This gave rise to a "cause-effect" scheme that magnified the role of bureaucracy to the exclusion of all other factors. Finally, the moral formation of bureaucracy led to an undue emphasis on the moral causes of historical events (Yuwen, 2012, pp. 94-100).

These conditions led to the creation of an eminently bureaucratic historiography with three characteristics and objects of study strongly conditioned by its sources. Firstly, traditional Chinese historiography is characterized by its determination to keep complete and accurate records of events, in the history of institutions and their statistics and in the description of the functioning of the political organs of the State. Secondly, excessive importance was given to biography, given the "need" to do justice to the career of the "officials-rulers," their studies, achievements and sacrifices for the community. And, thirdly, Chinese historiography was also characterized by a more economic-statistical bias than that of Western history. For, Chinese society was deeply agrarian, in a fertile territory, but with a more unstable nature than that of Europe. This instability was decisive for the State's economic plans since imperial and provincial income was linked to the prosperity of the landowners and the control of water (Ramírez-Ruiz, 2016, pp. 145-146).

China was a self-contained, orderly and harmonious world that felt it had an intrinsic superiority and occupied the Centre of the World. But this idyllic vision was destroyed by Western interference in the mid-nineteenth century. The Celestial Empire was forcibly ousted from the position it believed it held. Consequently, its society and its vision of history completely collapsed in the century between the First Opium War (1839) and the Proclamation of the People's Republic of China (1949) (Ramírez-Ruiz, 2018, p. 129).

The arrival of "Western culture" meant the immediate erosion of traditional society. But at the same time, it meant the beginning of the modernization and adaptation of the nation. The newly acquired Darwinist concepts considered historical science one of the basic tools for the reform of society "so the history of modern Chinese historiography is largely linked to the history of modern Chinese nationalism" (Ramírez-Ruiz, 2016, p. 187).

Qing reformers and the crisis of the Sinocentric world

The limitations of traditional Chinese historiography had not gone unnoticed by scholar-officials. Zhu Xi (1130-1200), the founder of Neo-Confucianism, himself doubted the classics, but when Neo-Confucianism became the official orthodoxy, his skepticism was ignored (Xiao; Li, 2008, pp. 539-546). A change in the "intellectual climate" was needed for criticism or doubts about the classics to move from punctual to methodological and systematic. This change was brought about by the fall of the Ming dynasty and the subsequent *Manchu conquest*. The nationalist reaction turned into a deep reflection on why the dynasty had collapsed.

The Qing reformers

In classical studies there was an attempt to set aside the exegesis that had accumulated around them, to return to the originals, and to restore the texts as far as possible. At first faith in the classics placed clear limits on criticism. But by the middle of the Qing dynasty many of these classical texts had been proven false (Beasley; Pulleyblank, 1961, pp. 190-191). Bibliographical compilations and epigraphic compilations served to initiate the philological analysis of ancient texts to determine the exact dating of the classics. Thus, Yan Ruoqu demonstrated that the *Book of Documents,* one of the *Four Basic Books* of Confucianism, could not be as old as claimed. Wan Sita (1633-1638) showed that the *Zhou li* (*History of the Zhou*) could not have been written at the beginning of the Zhou Dynasty but rather at the end and Cui Shu demonstrated that the texts that spoke of the mythical founders were much later than the period of which they spoke.

The leading exponent of this period was Wang Ming sheng (1722-98), who used in his works not only conventional materials and private histories, but also epigraphy, local gazettes, novels, family archives, and Buddhist and Taoist texts. Another of the key authors of that period was Wang Mingsheng (1722-98) Qian Daxin, whose most influential work was *"Research on the Discrepancies in the Twenty-Two Histories"* which was completed in 1782. Despite his critical stance, he was a typical academic, while his contemporary Gu Yanwu was a methodological reformer who used philology to uncover the falsehoods of the classical texts. Dai Zhen (1724-1777) was the universal sage of that time, standing out as an astronomer, mathematician, philosopher and geographer. Other great contemporary geniuses were Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801) who was the first to write a history book, abandoning the schematic classification by dynasties. Finally, the work Gujin Tushu Jicheng (1725) directed by Chen Menglei and later by Jiang Tingxi stood out for being the first Chinese encyclopedia composed of 10,000 chapters.

The desire for reform even reached the imperial figure. Thus, during the period of the Kangxi Emperor (1662 - 1722), a dictionary of ancient characters was drawn up and the Qianlong Emperor (1711-1779) tried to surpass the previous enlightened emperors as a poet and calligrapher, while promoting an exhaustive inventory of Chinese literature. From this reform emerged works on the frontier of historiography such as Wu Jingzi's *Unofficial History of the Confucian Sages.* And ultimately a literary environment that helped erode faith in the classics, with authors such as Li Ruzen : *The Union of the Mirror with Flower* and other authors such as Li Yü or Yüan Mei who stood out for their eccentric life and their works, light, traditional and full of social criticism. Yüan Mei drafted short stories in the learned language, such as *Things Confucius Did Not Speak of,* and achieved a certain fame thanks to her tales of spirits, wonders, and love.

To summarize what Qing historiography transmitted to its revolutionary successors, we have: first, the example of a patriotic group faced with a situation of identity crisis due to the Manchu invasion, very similar to that at the end of the 19th century with the loss of Chinese sovereignty at the hands of the West; second, a critical analysis of the contradictions and omissions in classical history, which also led to the discovery of falsifications and the establishment of a correct chronology; and third, a considerable expansion of its sources with the inclusion of auxiliary materials, outside the official records of the state, such as epigraphy or traditional tales (Beasley; Pulleyblank, 1961, pp. 191-195).

The "substance versus function" debate

This opened a debate about the very essence of China and its "values." These doubts were heightened by the continuous defeats that China suffered against the industrialized West. After the defeat in the *Opium War (1839-1842),* a fierce debate broke out among the enlightened-official elite about how to respond to the obvious superiority of the West. In 1842, Wei Yuan (1794-1856) concluded that the West had defeated China because of its superior military technology. He outlined a plan for maritime defense that included *"building ships, making weapons, and learning the superior techniques of the barbarians."* In the following decades, leaders of the *"Westernization"* or *"Self-Strengthening" Movement,* such as Li Hongzhang, went further, calling not only for the purchase and eventual manufacture of Western weapons, but also for the establishment of translation offices and institutions where students could study Western languages and mathematics in addition to the Chinese classics. In 1862, to supply the newly created Zongli Yamen with foreign language experts (1861) the Tongwen Guan (School of Combined Learning) was established. Its students obtained a rank equivalent to that of graduates

of the imperial examination (Ramírez-Ruiz, 2018, pp. 73-74). In 1874, Li Hongzhang managed to have "Western Learning Offices" opened in the coastal provinces. This work was completed by sending Chinese students to the West (He et ali, 2008, pp. 439-451).

The debates within this elite intensified as it became clear that the mere adoption of Western technology was not enough to resist the West. Discussions began about how to technologically revolutionize China without affecting traditional values and culture. Thus, some Confucian scholars such as Feng Guifen maintained that it was necessary to take what was useful (yong) for economic and industrial development without losing the essence (ti) of Chinese culture. Others, such as Yan Fu, argued that this was impossible, that Western technology could not be borrowed without also taking Western science and the democratic system of government that fostered science. Thus, the controversy between "substance and function" was born (Schell, 1989).

The ineffectiveness of the measures taken by the *"self-strengthening" leaders* to deal with foreigners began to lead many scholars to believe that the traditional system itself was hampering both China's modernization and its ability to repel aggressors. Yan Fu increasingly asserted himself in this *"substance versus function" debate,* denouncing the Westernizers' slogan, *"Let Chinese knowledge be the substance and Western knowledge the function,"* as a futile effort, since substance and function were inseparable from each other. He concluded that to make China *"rich and strong,"* Western knowledge, both its substance and its function, must be employed.

The polemics over the issue of *substance versus function* between Chinese and Western knowledge were about which of the two paths China should follow: whether to stick to traditional imperial institutions or learn from the West for political reform. On the eve of the *Reform Movement,* this controversy reached its climax, diversifying into a host of intellectual polemics: between *Chinese and Western knowledge,* between *old and new knowledge,* between the *modern school system and the traditional imperial examination*. So much so that it constituted the center of gravity in China's modern intellectual history. The self-strengthening leaders laid the emphasis for China's *self-strengthening* only on Western science and technology, while the reformers of 1898 regarded learning Western political and social theories as basic. And so, the debate between "substance and function" was derived into a debate between *"traditional authoritarianism"* versus *"civil rights and equality"* (Shen, 2009, pp. 308-324).

The Birth of New Chinese History

After 1895, with China's disastrous defeat by Japan and the aggravation of the division of China into spheres of influence by foreign powers, conservative reform programs

such as "self-strengthening" were completely discredited and urgent calls for more radical reform were made. This was the time when the reform program was designed by Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong.

Kang Youwei

The initial leading role was played by Kang Youwei, who in 1895 obtained the signatures of 1,300 candidates for the imperial examination in Beijing to support a petition to the young Emperor Guangxu requesting reforms to save China. It was known, among other names, as the *"Petition of Provincial Graduates of 1895."* In the same year, Kang organized the *"Society for Self-Strengthening" in Beijing,* which as an organization for political propaganda and agitation contributed to the ideological mobilization of the Reform Movement. Three years later he was called to the Court by this emperor to implement these reforms. It was known as the "Hundred Days' Reform" or "Kang's Reform Movement" (Palacios; Ramírez, 2011, pp. 185-186).

Kang Youwei (1858-1927) came from a family of landowners and was educated in the traditional way in the ancient classics, but he soon met Western-style educators and, as a result, modified his thinking in an attempt to modernize the Chinese tradition. He founded a school in Canton for the training of opponents of imperial officials, where he taught his theories. These advocated the reform of Confucianism to use it as an instrument of the change that China needed.

Thanks to his journal, *Rejuvenecimiento Nacional* the first translations from Western languages were made and his influence spread throughout Canton and Shanghai and to elite intellectual groups in the interior provinces. It can be said that it was with Kang Youwei that the in-depth study of Western thought and society began in the 1890s.

Kang Youwei also published a newspaper, *The Chronicle of China and the World.* While in Shanghai, he began his activity by founding the newspaper *Self-Strengthening News.* While still teaching in Guangdong, he wrote his major works: *Forgeries in the Confucian Classics* and *Confucius as Reformer (1897)* (He et al., 2008, pp. 461-462). The appearance of these two books surprised the intellectual world. In them, Kang Youwei, opposed the orthodox view of Confucius as a conservative transmitter of the wisdom of the "Golden Age." In fact, he claimed that Confucius had invented much of what he said about the *Golden Age* to support his own revolutionary ideas about society and government. According to Kang Youwei, Confucius's texts do not refer to the past, but to the future of humanity.

His theories were a mixture of Chinese and Western elements. He was the introducer into the Chinese tradition of Western ideas such as the concept of "evolution" as well as an entire system of anti-autocratic political theory, the call for civil liberties and a government under the rule of law.

But these were reformist, not revolutionary, ideas of Kang's. From the very beginning, the *Reform Movement* had a dual character: on the one hand, it emancipated the minds and demanded progress, and on the other hand, it feared and opposed the masses in revolution. The reformists feared the people more than the reactionaries; and as a result, when social contradictions became more acute, Kang Youwei's thought became increasingly closer to that of the reactionaries. With the failure of the *Reform Movement* in 1898, the progressive elements in Kang Youwei's thought began to fade away, and he became a mere traditional monarchist reformer, as reflected in the two works of his later years, *Lectures on the Heavens and The Book of Great Unity.*

The historical moment did not favour Kang; his conclusions were rejected by conservatives and only temporarily accepted by radicals. But his arguments were sound; his book, *"Confucius as Reformer"* can be called, without much exaggeration, "the *starting point of modern Chinese historiography"* (Xiao; Li, 2008, pp. 812-822).

Liang Qichao

Liang Qichao was Kang Yuwei's closest and most prestigious disciple. Thad to flee to Japan y during his exile and through his travels, he acquired an unparalleled knowledge of Western history, culture and science in the China of his time which made him one of the most influential figures in Chinese academia and journalism in the first twenty years of the twentieth century (He et al., 2008, pp. 471-476).

The basic issue underlying Liang Qichao's thinking was the conflict between his emotional loyalty to Chinese tradition and his acceptance of the need for reforms based on European examples. Liang Qichao's thinking and tenets evolved throughout his life. He began with the belief that the Chinese classics, if purified and properly understood, would offer a revelation that would not only contain desirable Western values but would elevate them to a more universal level. But as he became more familiar with the West, he evolved to the conclusion that the classics were actually irrelevant to China's contemporary problems. This led him to replace his reverential loyalty to Chinese culture with loyalty to the nation. That is,

his traditional culturalism evolved into something similar to modern nationalism. This implied that China could do without its cultural tradition if necessary for its future survival.

In parallel, his idea of *"Great Harmony"* of progress derived from Kang Youwei's interpretation of Confucius gave way to a social Darwinism where the History of Humanity was reduced to a war of all against all, and the conception of the West was divided into separate nations, unequal in power and creativity (Yingjie, 2004, pp. 72-91). Thus, China ceased to be an exception.

At the same time, he attempted to explain how European progress is due to individual genius, to the concrete people who create those societies, rather than to regional, racial or social characteristics. Finally, he argued that what should be admired in the West – democracy, government under law, technology and scientific creativity – is extremely modern in origin, but at the same time incomplete.

From these perspectives, Chinese history can be viewed from a less humiliating point of view. Liang concluded that classical Chinese society was classless, which made it superior to pre-modern European society, but at the same time this meant that Chinese society had fewer incentives to develop.

After the trauma of China's betrayal at the Versailles Conference, Liang would evolve again, rejecting Western culture as materialistic and returning to the belief in the superiority of Chinese society and culture thanks to its non-materialistic purpose. Therefore, despite its comparative weakness, Chinese tradition had to be emphasized as a basis for national pride and to revive national sentiment.

Liang's greatest productivity and influence, and the period during which he focused most intensely on his academic studies. With the advantages of his extensive studies of world history, he continued to investigate Chinese intellectual history, free at the end of the constant attempts at comparison of values. During this period he published his *"Methodology for the Study of Chinese History"* or "*New Historiography*" (1902) with which he definitively destroyed the traditional way of doing history in China, demonstrating the limitations of dynastic history, of the material composed of annals-biography (*chi- chuan*) and of the collection of data carried out by official committees rather than by individuals. In addition, in this work he argued that history was potentially a positive science and called upon to an empirical attitude, but despite this he could not completely shake off the idea that history should not be at the service of nationalism. (Yuwen, 2012, pp. 4-173).

"Methodology for the Study of Chinese History" or "*New Historiography*" is widely considered to be the work that founded the "new history" of China. From this point on, Chinese historians began to write in a standard way to that of the rest of the world.

Tan Citong

The most important philosopher was Tan Citong (1865-1898), who was born in Liuyang (Hunan) in the family of a provincial governor and received a traditionalist education. The Sino-Japanese War of 1894 was also a great shock for him, after which he abandoned his faith in cultural tradition and transformed it into a craving for Westernization. He joined Kang Youwei, taking an active part in the *Reform Movement.* It was during this period that he wrote his main philosophical work, *Treatise on Benevolence.*

The *Treatise on Benevolence* attacked feudal autocracy and the teachings of traditional *"ethical codes."* In this work, Tan presented a series of harsh criticisms of the imperial system with the aim of *"breaking the traditional traps."* He condemned all monarchs for being *"great thieves"* and all intellectuals for being *"hypocrites."* He also advanced his own theory of the origin of the state, declaring that it was inspired, in the Chinese way, by the theory of the *"Social Contract"* between monarch and subjects, as opposed to the imperial theory of the *"Rights of Heaven."* Through his analysis of the *"five traditional ethical categories"* he was postulating the existence of *"Civil Rights"* as opposed to the feudal idea of personal dependence. Hence, conservatives considered him a heretic who dedicated himself to professing a doctrine of *"no patriarch, no sovereign."* What he proposed, in fact, was the destruction of feudal ties in Chinese society to move towards a *laissez-faire bourgeois society.*

His attack on "feudal" ethical codes and imperial autocracy was one of the preludes to the Democratic Revolution of 1911. The sacrifice of his life with the tragedy of his premature and self-imposed death was nothing more than a historical testimony to the failure of the reformist movement (He et al., 2008, p. 475).

Yan Fu

Yan Fu, both generationally and in his ideas, belongs to this group of young reformists, yet he did not join the political activities of the *Reform Movement* of 1898, although ideologically he made a very notable contribution. Yan Fu (1853-1921), a native of Fuzhou in Fujian, was the only one among the students sent abroad to become an important figure in the

intellectual vanguard. In the 1870s Yan was sent to Britain to pursue naval studies. During his stay in Britain, he witnessed the prosperity of the Victorian period. Yan Fu summed up the superiority of modern Western states in two points: *"In the world of knowledge, they discard falsehood and advocate truth, and in political society, they renounce self-respect in pursuit of the public good."* The first refers to natural science, the second to the political institutions of the West. It could be rightly said that these ideas of Yan Fu marked the first mention of "science" and "democracy" in Chinese history. In contrast to other members of his generation, Yan had a better understanding of the West.

Japanese War, Yan Fu drafted some famous political articles that caused a furor across the country, such as *"On the Urgency of Present Transformation"; "On the Causes of Becoming Powerful"; "A Definitive Exposition on the Salvation of the Nation"* and *"The Refutation of Han Yu".* In them, he fiercely attacked feudal ideology and the traditional imperial examination system, pointing out that they were *"impractical"* and *"useless".*

In 1896, that is, two years after the Sino-Japanese War and two years before the *Reform of 1898,* Yan Fu translated the first part of Huxley's *"Evolution and Ethics"* under the Chinese title *"Evolution".* Historically, the impact of the original work in the West is not as strong as that of its translated version in China. By presenting the theory of evolution, Yan showed the Chinese public that the struggle for existence, natural selection and the survival of the *"fittest"* were the fundamental laws governing the world. This meant for China that unless it could conform to natural laws, striving to become strong to survive in the world, it would be doomed. For Chinese intellectuals, such a theory of evolution was something completely new and unheard of. The publication of his book was like a bomb on the Chinese consciousness and the ideological repercussions it brought were unparalleled in Chinese history. There had never been such a disruptive idea for *classical China:* the world was in constant progress, and if China wanted to survive, it would have to make constant reforms.

Yan's contribution did not stop there. Through his translation of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, he introduced the classical theory of *laissez-faire*, i.e. the rules of modern economics, to China; through his translation of Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws,* he introduced the theory of separation of powers; through his translation of J.S. Mill's *System of Logic,* he brought to China the empirical induction of modern science. All these represented modern Western ideology in some of its most significant aspects.

A little later, a considerable part of the ideological weapons of the democratic revolutionaries were derived from the works of Yan Fu and Liang Qichao, among which the most important were the *theory of evolution* and the *theory of natural rights.*

Although Yan's works and translations opened an inspiring new world of ideas outside of traditional Confucian teachings, the more the revolutionary atmosphere grew (indeed, partly inspired by him directly or indirectly), the more Yan Fu became afraid and hostile to the revolution. When Yan translated J. S. Mill's *On Liberty,* he deliberately changed the title of the book to *On the Boundary Between the Community and the Individual* to avoid the term "liberty." In his later works he changed the Chinese term liberty to a synonym to show that his idea of liberty differed from that expected by democratic revolutionaries. He often emphasized that social progress could only be achieved step by step, but *"never by overstepping gradations."*

After the Revolution of 1911, Yan Fu surrendered to the traditionalism he had fought against in his youth. It was therefore no accident that when Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) planned to assume the emperor's throne, Yan Fu became one of the six members of the *Society for Peace Planning, an organization manipulated by Yuan in preparation for his ascension to the throne. In this sense, Yan functioned as Kang* Youwei did in the restoration of the dethroned Qing emperor Puyi in 1916. Yan's thinking and activities in his later years, like Kang's, were eventually scorned by his contemporaries (Ramírez-Ruiz, 2018, pp.104-106).

Modern Chinese history changed so rapidly and so drastically that the representative ideologists of each generation rarely had enough time to work out their own theoretical systems. They only felt and reflected the pulse of the times for a moment, and then, after a brief appearance, were quickly swept away by more advanced generations. This feature was most noticeably manifested in the representatives of the *Reform Movement* of 1898. Its failure meant the end of reformism in China. Modern Chinese history entered its next stage: revolution.

The revaluation of chinese popular culture: Gu Jiegang, Hu Shih and Wang Guowei

The reform of Chinese historiography continued with the following generation with figures such as Gu Jiegang, Hu Shih and Wang Guowei.

The emergence of modern Chinese nationalism and the study of other cultures brought interest in Chinese popular culture, its form of theatre, folk songs, folk tales and traditional novels. Societies for its study were formed and three independent scholars began to work on its history. Wang Guowei published his first studies of the history of tChinese literature; Hu Shih returned from America in 1917 and published in 1918 his influential preface to the new edition of *Dream of the Red Chamber,* in which he justified the writing of the history of popular literature and outlined a new method for approaching it. Similar studies were conducted by Gu Jiegang.

These studies were not only intrinsically interesting, but represented a new, and initially devastating, attack on the classical texts. Jiegang was born into a family of scholars, received a classical education, but was later sent to a Western-style school and given the rudiments of the scientific method. Jiegang entered Universidad de Pekín and became a keen theatergoer. His interest in the theatre quickly moved on to the methodical accumulation of material on its history and the comparison of different versions performed by various troupes. His interest extended to the history of family tales and to folk music. Oral transmission was common to all these forms of popular art. By the early 19th century the iconoclastic scholar Cui Shu in his *"Acta de investigación sobre creencias"* had given his opinion that the supposed records of the early kings seemed to have been built up in successive layers. In Japan, Naito Torajiro developed the idea that most of the classics came from oral tradition. Jiegang arrived at similar conclusions independently by accumulating material around the traditional novel or drama that fit the stories told by officials of the emperors Yao, Shun, Yü and their legendary predecessors. Evaluating the hypotheses based on this analogy became his life's work. Until 1917 he worked in isolation, but in that year Hu Shih, after his return from America, began teaching at la Universidad de Pekínon the history of literature and philosophy. He met Gu Jiegang, with whom they agreed on their ideas about historiography. Together with their disciples, they created a working group whose essays and correspondence about classical texts and techniques of criticism were published from 1926 onwards in periodical series under the title "Discussions on Ancient History" (Hon, 1996, pp. 315–339).

The group, of which Hu Shih is considered the leader, became a new factor in the development of the *Chinese intellectuals*. As a reaction against the weight of the polemical struggle of the *West against the East (read China) that had consumed* Liang's time and efforts Qichao and his generation, Hu Shih proclaimed his freedom from any ideological or moral affiliation and declared his intention to address a pragmatic approach to China's problems and the study of the past. Shih brought Dewey's philosophy to China (followed by Dewey himself and Bertrand Russell). In his academic works he called for the maturation of the scientific method under the precept of: "boldness in hypotheses, caution in testing." Hu Shih is credited with establishing rationality and impartiality in historical studies in China (Xiao; Li, 2008, pp. 880-885).

The historical works of this school were weakened, however, by the surprising archaeological discoveries that occurred in China at the beginning of the 20th century.

Strengthening the Conservators: Wang Guowei and archaeology

The most important of these archaeological finds occurred in Hunan in 1888. It consisted of hundreds of thousands of turtle shells with inscriptions. In 1929 he *Instituto de*

Historia y Filosofía de la Academia Sínica sent the first expedition to the site. Archaeologists Li Ji and Dong Zuobin made important advances in the study of the bones in the following years, demonstrating that they were divinatory bones and proving that the Shang-Yin dynasties were not legendary, but that they existed and also confirmed the chronology that Sima Qian's tradition gave for them.

Wang Guowei showed that the information that could be deduced from them confirmed many of the claims in the ancient texts that had been rejected as completely false and that the list of Yin kings given by them Bambo Books was, generally, adequate.

Of almost equal interest to historians was the vast repository of archives in Beijing, which, thanks to the chaos of the years following the fall of Yuan, Shikai was able to gain access (to what would later be known as *The First Historical Archives of China). Young people from* Peking University began their study in a scientific and modern way. Meanwhile, in various parts of China, discoveries of ancient texts of similar historiographical impact were taking place, for example: in 1930 Sven Hedin returned from the Great Wall with 10,000 wooden strips with writings from the Han dynasty (published in 1943); in 1894, in a bookstore manuscripts, wooden strips and Buddhist texts from Dunhuang in the far northwest of Gansu were found, published thirty years later by Aurel Stein.

As we have seen, these findings confirmed some of the early texts of Chinese classicism that had been labeled legendary. This reinforced the positions of conservative historians. Chief among these were Wang Luo Zhenyu Guowei and his disciple.

Wang Guowei, whom we have already discussed above, began his career receiving a Western education in Japan, translating 19th-century Western philosophers and publishing on psychology and jurisprudence. Like Liang Qichao found the synthesis between Western ideas and his loyalty to Chinese tradition impossible and under the influence of his conservative friends like Zhang Luo Zhenyu, he denounced Western materialism and turned to the classics studied in the style of the Qing period. Having distinguished himself as a pioneer in the study of the history of Chinese theatre, he evolved towards the study of ancient history until he became the most brilliant expert in this field in the twentieth century (Fung, 2010, pp. 86-87).

By 1920, Chinese historiography had been completely transformed by Liang Qichao's comparison of China and foreign countries, Wang Guowei's modernized methods for studying the classics, and Hu Shih's empirical way of writing history. In addition, the new universities became active research centers, and translations of foreign works provided constant methodological enrichment.

All this resulted in a definitive change from formal writing in classical language, understandable only by a minority, to colloquial writing based on street language. This also promoted democracy, especially after the "May 4th Movement". Universities gained a lot of influence through the National Union of Students. Nationalism took off. And Soviet fame grew.

The "four great historians of modern china or modern times"

Yan Gengwang (1916-1996), a historian who spent his career at the Institute of History and Linguistics of the Academia Sinica, the Department of History, the Institute of Chinese Culture and the New Asia Institute of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. A visiting scholar at Harvard University and visiting professor at Yale University, he was Qian Mu's most prominent disciple, defining the concept of the "Four modern historians" of China, including among them Chen Yuan, Chen Yinke, Lu Simian and Qian Mu as the "Four modern historians" of modern China or modern times.

Chen Yuan (1880–1971) came from a family of opium dealers, began his studies in the imperial civil service, but after failing the provincial examination he began teaching and founded the magazine *Shishi Huabao* (Pictorial News) in Canton in 1905. It was a magazine related to Tongmenghui, so it was censored and closed. In 1907 he began his medical studies, while continuing his revolutionary activities, founding the newspaper "Aurora Diary". After the triumph of the 1911 revolution he held various government posts, becoming in the 1920s deputy director of the "Ministry of Education of the Republic" of China" and director of the "Library of Pekín" and the library of the Palace Museum. From 1917 he devoted himself to historical research, focusing on research into religious history, the Yuan dynasty and the study of ancient texts. Among his works are research on Christianity (called arkanus), with works such as *Research on the Arkag nu s in the Yuan Dynasty.* He subsequently published several books on the spread of Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism and Islam in China. His specialization on the Mongol Dynasty reached the point of compiling the [legal] Code of the *Yuan Dynasty.*

Chen Yuan was a professor at Peking University, Beijing Normal University Pekín, and Fu Jen Catholic University. He became the rector of Beijing Normal University Pekín. After the victory of the Anti-Japanese War, he was elected an academician of the Academia Sinica in 1948. With the establishment of the People's Republic of China, he was elected a representative to the People's Congress in Pekín 1951 and was also assessed as "a national treasure of our country" by Mao Zedong. During the Cultural Revolution, he was forced to write

a letter of repentance and mail it to Beijing Normal University Pekín. He was then placed under house arrest until his death in June 1971.

Chen Yinke (1890-1969) was a historian, linguist, orientalist, politician and writer, member of the Academia Sinica, considered one of the most original and creative historians of 20th century China. Professor Chen Yinke was born into an *hakka family* in Hunan. He belonged to an enlightened family. His father was Chen Sanli, a famous poet and one of the "Four Gentlemen" of the Hundred Days' Reform. From a very young age he was trained in the Chinese classics. In 1902 he was sent to Japan to study at the Kobun Institute, where he met Lu Xun. In 1905, sick, he returned to China and studied at Fudan University (Shanghai). In 1910 he obtained a scholarship to study at the Humboldt University of Berlin and later at the University of Zurich and the Institute of Political Studies in Paris. He was forced to return in 1914, but at the end of the Great War in 1918 he resumed his studies abroad at Harvard University, studying Sanskrit and Pali. In 1921 he returned to Berlin to study oriental languages. In 1925, he returned to China and became one of the four mentors of the Institute of Chinese Studies at Qingyuan University, the other three being: Wang Guowei, Liang Qichao and Zhao Yuanren. In 1929, he became director of the first group of the Institute of History and Linguistics of the Academia Sinica. At the same time, he was an adjunct of Peking University. He also became a member of the Academia Sinica, director of the Institute of History and Philology and a member of the Board of the National Palace Museum.

After the outbreak of World War II, he retired to the National Associated University of Southwest (Yunnan) and began a teaching career at various universities in the region. He remained in southern China throughout his time, despite having been invited to Oxford University. Unable to come to the United Kingdom, he stayed on to teach at the University of Hong Kong. In 1960, he was appointed deputy director of the Central Research Institute of Literature and History of the People's Republic of China. He was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution and died in October 1969.

Chen Yinke became proficient in more than 20 languages. He created the academic method of using poetry to demonstrate history and using history to interpret poetry. His main representative works include "A Brief Essay on the Origin of Institutions of the Sui and Tang Dynasties", "Essay on the Political History of the Tang Dynasty" and "Essay on the Political History of the Yuan Dynasty" and "An Alternative Biography of Liu Rushi".

Lu Simian (1884-1957), professor and head of the history department at Kwang Hua University, which became East China Normal University (Shanghai) in 1926, always remained at this institution. His disciples included such important historians as Qian Mu and Yang Kuan.

At the age of fifteen he entered the county school. In the second year he began to learn history on his own. Later he became a member of the Doubtful Antiquity School or *Yigupai.* This historiographical current was formed around a group of Chinese scholars and historians who applied a critical approach to Chinese historical sources. Its formation took place around the New Culture Movement in the decades 1910-1920 (De Bary; Theodore, 2001). Most of its criticisms concern the authenticity of pre- la dinastía Qin texts and address questions raised by past dynastic writers. Their debates were collected in the academic movement called *Gushibian* (Debates *on Ancient History)*, which published a journal with the same name (between 1926-1941. Seven issues). The main critics of the Doubtful Antiquity School were the historians: Chen Yinque, Gu Jiegang, Guo Moruo, Hu Shih, Kang Yu Wei, Liang Qichao, Liu Yizheng, Miao Fenglin, Qian Xuantong, Wang Guowei (Peng, 2021).

Lu Simian was a very prolific writer who covered a wide range of topics including nationalities, institutions, various chronological histories and other historical topics. His major representative works include Literature of the *Song Dynasty* (1931), *Introduction to Pre-Qin Scholars* (1933), *History of Chinese Ethnic Minorities* (1934), *History of Pre-Qin* (1941), *History of the Three Kingdoms* (1943), *History of Qin and Han* (1947), *History of the Two Dynasties Jin, Southern and Northern* (1948), *History of Sui, Tang and Five Dynasties* (1959), *History of Chinese Institutions* (1985).

Qian Mu (1895-1990) was a historian and philosopher from the prestigious Qian family in Wuxi. His ancestor was said to be Qian Liu, founder of the Kingdom of Wuyue (907–978). He received little formal education but acquired his knowledge of Chinese history and culture through his family upbringing. He began his teaching career as a primary school teacher in his hometown when he was eighteen. Recommended and invited by the famous historian Gu Jiegang was appointed as a professor at Yenching University in 1930. He continued his teaching career at several other universities such as Yonghua and Peking until 1937.

Following the communist victory, he moved to Hong Kong, thanks to Zhang Qiyun. With the help of the Yale-China Association, he founded, together with Tang Junyi and Zhang Pijie, New Asia College, of which he was president from 1949 to 1965. After that New Asia College became a member of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He later received honorary doctorates from both Yale University and the University of Hong Kong. New Asia College was transformed into the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1963, and Qian Mu continued to serve as Dean. In 1965, he resigned as Dean and went to teach at the University of Malaya (Chou, 2011).

Qian moved to Taiwan in October 1967 after accepting an invitation from Chiang Kai- shek amid pro-Cultural Revolution riots in Hong Kong. In 1968 he was selected as a member of the Academia Sinica.

Qian wrote extensively on Chinese classics, history, and Confucian thought. Unlike many 20th-century Chinese intellectuals influenced by the New Culture Movement, Qian Mu insisted on the importance of traditional values of Chinese culture. Qian Mu's representative works include *"Political Gains and Losses in Chinese Dynasties"*, *"Outline of National History"*, *"An Overview of Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming Dynasties"*, *"Chronology of Pre-Qin Scholars"*, *"Academic History of China in the Past Three Hundred Years"* (Hung-Yuk; Tze-Ki; Chiu-Chun, 2003).

Marxism

Marxism came to China through the pages of the magazine "New Youth" (Xīn *qīngnián*). Where a debate was established between Hu's pragmatism Shih and Marxism, represented by Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu (Xiao; Li, 2008, pp. 924-930). In history, the debate inevitably revolved around the "Classical Age" and the first issue on which they clashed was whether the legendary "well-field" system" or "of equal allocation of agricultural land" had ever existed. Hu Shih and pragmatism will lose. Hu's cosmopolitanism Shih and his promotion of progress "drop by drop" seemed totally unsuited to China's desperate situation. Marxism would dominate Chinese historiography after 1920, but it was not, in the main, at first stifling. After 1927 the party was rural and illiterate and had few relations with intellectual life. Marxists min academic circles focused on studies of economic determinism and its political implications in a country where all major political groups accepted the need for a ambiguous socialist revolution. After 1927 Chiang Kai-shek, through his Shanghai coup against the Communists and the left wing of his party, polarized China politically. There was no proportionate effect on Chinese intellectual life because the entire Chinese intelligentsia was inclined to moderation. Thus, among historians there were wide differences regarding methods that were not related to political attitudes, taking into account even the differences between the communists on the one hand and the apologists of the Confucian and pseudo-fascist cultural movement promoted by Chiang Kai-shek, under the name of "New Life" (Fung, 2010, pp. 113-120).

The period 1930-37 was one of stability. The study of history began to lose its crudeness. In many Chinese universities, faculties of history began to form, and specialized publications began to appear. The obsession with ancient history was left behind and the activity

of historians began to expand into other areas. Attempts began to make a new, modern and schematized periodization of Chinese history. The idea was to replace the classic periodization by dynasties with another comparable to the Western one that described history in a linear manner. The difficulty centered on where to place the end of the "Middle Ages" or Chinese "feudal period" and the beginning of modernity. In practice, the traditional division into dynasties was difficult to abolish and continued to uódominate until its replacement in theory (but not in all practice) by the Marxist scheme favored by the Party.

Historiography in the People's Republic Of China

The lines of what would be considered "orthodox" history in the People's Republic of China were set on June 28, 1951, with the inauguration of the Chinese History Association. Guo Moruo (Sangbing, 2004), its president, proposed that the task of Chinese historians in the new People's Republic should evolve from historical idealism to historical materialism; from personal research to collective research; from personal fame to that of the people (Niu, G., 2016, pp. 91-92); from an emphasis on ancient history studies to modern (and contemporary) history studies; from the history of the *Han ethnic group* to the history of all ethnic groups; from the history of Europe and America to the history of Asia and other regions (Luo, 2009, pp. 484-485).

The "Seventeen Years" (1949-1966)

Historiography in the People's Republic of China in the period 1949-1966 before the Cultural Revolution had two orientations: first, it maintained the preceding lines of the pre-revolutionary period, that "New History" which sought new general rules and laws for the history of China but centered the search within the Marxist framework of historiography. And second, within that framework, emphasis was increasingly placed on the "Debate on the Social History of China."

Both lines of research sought to determine whether a capitalist system could have developed in Confucian China. This was a continuation of the previous approaches of the "New Culture" Movement on the debate of why China had not been able to produce science like the West. The conclusions that all these historians reached was that "only socialism could save China" (Zhang, 1998, pp. 3-108).

in this profoundly Marxist environment, the debate on the "two processes" and "three climaxes" took off in Chinese historiography. These concepts were based on Mao's analysis of

the Yan'an years as to what were the basic processes and moments of the road to revolution and modernity in China. According to Mao, the "two processes" included: the *two Opium Wars,* the *Taiping Celestial Rebellion,* the *Sino-Japanese War,* the *Reform of 1898* and the *May 4th Movement.* And the "three climaxes" were the *Taiping Rebellion,* the *Boxer Uprising* and the *1911 Revolution.*

If one reflects on the background of these theories, their application to historiography comes to mean the "indigenization" of the history of China by making endogenous events represented by climaxes the protagonists of historical evolution.

The Party wanted to prioritize internal causes over external ones as the driving force behind the change from a *semi-feudal country* to a *semi-colonial one,* although it always ultimately blamed foreign powers. As a result, these studies produce a paradoxical effect that reinforces the studies of the semi-feudal elements involved within a "semi-colonial" domain (Bai, 2008, pp. 388-725).

History in the times of "Reform and Opening" (1978-today)

The continuities between the 1949-1966 period and the post-1978 period lie in that both are continuations of the "New History" considering that traditional Chinese historicism is not a suitable tool for modern historical study. And the biggest difference between the two periods is that the citation of Marxist classics gradually decreased in post-1978 studies.

Once the process of "Reform and Opening" had begun, Chinese historians turned to the West to reform their theories and tools. In the first part of this period, Western historians/philosophers Croce and Collingwood (Luo, 2009, p. 489) were taken as references. Later, the range of international sources was expanded and there was a tendency towards multidisciplinarity.

The most obvious change in the post-1978 period is the definitive definition of the period from 1840 to 1949 as "modern history" of China. This breaks the old scheme that uses the year 1919 to draw the line between "modern" and "contemporary" history (Niu, D., 2019).

The major changes in current Chinese historiography could be summarized into six. First, at the beginning of "reform and opening up," under the influence of the policy of "focusing on economic development," some scholars began to put forward new arguments about the "key to development" in modern Chinese history. Others suggested that "modernization" should be treated as the basic interpretation model to replace or complete the theory of "revolutionary climaxes."

Secondly, with the implementation of "reform and opening up" in politics, Weber's question about the "rise of capitalism" has become increasingly important in mainland China. What is interesting about this Weberian theory is the relationship he establishes between the rise of capitalism and Protestantism. In China, they try to establish parallels by analyzing the rise of the "Four Little Dragons" by replacing the Protestant component with Confucianism.

Thirdly, at the beginning of the 21st century, once the concept of "revolutionary climaxes" has been replaced by the concept of "modernization", a paradoxical situation has arisen in China of wanting to replace this concept of "modernization" with that of "modernity". The essence of this terminological discussion lies in determining whether the modernization process in China is still underway.

Fourthly, there has been an expansion of the fields of research beyond the "revolutionary climaxes." There has been a beginning to study historical figures and events that were ignored or even banned during the pre-Reform *and Opening Up period.*

Fifthly, the recovery of the tradition has been conducted. In the last forty years, we can once again observe the eagerness of Chinese historiography to recover and update the most useful and positive aspects of its own tradition, following the line of learning from the past to improve the present.

And finally, great prominence has been given to "social history." Where a place is being made for the study of the "rise of the masses." With this they refer to the assumption of historical prominence by pChinese urban society and its new middle class. In a position remarkably like what Ortega called "the Rebellion of the masses." (Niu, G., 2019, pp. 492-501).

Conclusion

Looking at Chinese historiography since the beginning of the 20th century, one can follow Wang Xuedian (Wang, 2004) who divided Chinese historians into two groups since the triumph of Marxism: scholars who are experts in historical materials and in ideas of historical materialism. He held that history cannot be shown by itself and must be narrated by historians. The activities of the two academic groups reflected the change of Chinese history research in the past fifty years. Their differences were the following four points.

Firstly, for the *relationship between historiography and the era,* the historians who were experts in the ideas of historical materialism advocated the research of history close to politics, breaking the connection between the academic and the era, history and reality; historians who were experts in historical materials insisted on the idea of finding the truth for the truth.

Secondly, on *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 for evidence, and even insisted that they did not write a word without sources.

Thirdly, in the *relationship between macro and micro,* the former are concerned with social change, epoch-making incidents and the replacement of social patterns; the latter thought that the knowledge of an ancient word was of equal value to the discovery of a star in astronomy and are always fascinated by the details of history.

Fourth, the first group emphasized historiography; the second textology. From the 1920s to the 1930s, historians who were experts in historical materials occupied an eminent position. After 1949, historians who were experts in the ideas of historical materialism dominated the research of Chinese history. There was also the third group of scholars, who sought ideas as materials.

These theories have been criticized by other Chinese historians, pointing out that non-Marxist analysts of the 1950s did not have a unified point of view (Liu, 2004).

The truth is that Chinese historiography has been strongly influenced by Western methodology and vision, but, as with other concepts such as the Nation, State or Socialism, even today it does not find a suitable fit in a model that is still considered foreign. The process of *Sinification* Western historiographical prototypes is still open.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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