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Obsah | Contents

Editorial – Alterity, Enmification, Orientalism and Other Issues	177
1. Studie a eseje Studies and Essays	
PETR ANDREAS – Není stále jasné, co jsou to protisocialistické síly. Resovětizace KSČ a jejího diskurzu o nepříteli v období československé krize <i>It is still not clear what the anti-socialist forces are. Re-Sovietization of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and its discourse on the enemy during the Czechoslovak crisis</i>	183
DAVOR PAVIČIČ – A Story Told Twice: Beda Dudík Accompanying Francis Joseph to the Opening of the Suez Canal (1869) <i>Dvakrát vyprávěný příběh: Beda Dudík doprovází Františka Josefa na otevření Suezského průplavu (1869)</i>	225
TOMÁŠ MALÝ – Rituály středověku a raného novověku v recentní české a polské historiografii <i>Medieval and Early Modern Rituals in Recent Czech and Polish Historiography</i>	245
JAN HORSKÝ – Discussing the ‘Grandmother Hypothesis’ <i>Diskuse o „hypotéze babiček“</i>	281
2. Diskuse a rozepře Discussions and Disputes	
STANISLAV KOKOŠKA – Jak to bylo s tábory pro takzvané darebáky, povaleče a cikány aneb odpověď na kritiku Pavla Balouna a Jaromíra Mrňky <i>The History of the Camps for so-called Scoundrels, Layabouts, and Gypsies, or a reaction to the critique by Pavel Baloun and Jaromír Mrňka</i>	311
ZHANG ZUOCHENG – West vis-à-vis East. Tradition, Question and Practice in Chinese Historiography <i>Západ versus Východ. Tradice, výzkumné otázky a praxe čínské historiografie</i>	333

3. Recenze a reflexe | Reviews and Reflections

GABRIELA DUDEKOVÁ KOVÁČOVÁ – <i>Človek vo vojne. Stratégie prežitia a sociálne dôsledky prvej svetovej vojny na Slovensku</i> (Jiří Hutečka)	351
VOJTĚCH KESSLER, JOSEF ŠRÁMEK (edd.) – <i>Tváře války: Velká válka 1914–1918 očima českých účastníků</i> (Martin Jemelka)	357
LENKA J. BUDILOVÁ – <i>Od krvaví msty k postsocialismu. Vývoj antropologického zájmu o Balkán</i> (Jan Horský)	361
ZBYNĚK ZEMAN, RAINER KARLSCH – <i>Na uranu záležití. Středoevropský uran v mezinárodní politice 1900–1960</i> (Matěj Bílý)	370
JANA NDIAYE BERÁNKOVÁ, MICHAEL HAUSER, NICK NESBITT (edd.) – <i>Revolutions for the Future: May '68 and the Prague Spring</i> (Luboš Studený)	376
Editorial Note	385
Upozornění redakce	388

WEST VIS-À-VIS EAST

TRADITION, QUESTION AND PRACTICE

IN CHINESE HISTORIOGRAPHY¹

Zhang Zuocheng

According to XiJinping's speech at the Symposium on the Work of Philosophy and Social Sciences on May 17th,² Chinese historiography has been establishing a disciplinary system, academic system, and discourse system with Chinese characteristics since 2016. Disciplinary system construction refers to strengthening the construction of emerging disciplines (e.g., digital history, maritime history etc.) and interdisciplinary disciplines (e.g., environmental history, urban history etc.), as well as strengthening the support of unpopular disciplines with the value of Chinese cultural heritage such as the Oracle research which started with Wang Yirong (1845–1900), Liu E (1857–1909), Luo Zhenyu (1866–1940) and Wang Guowei (1877–1927). Academic system construction includes but is not limited to the construction of Marxist academic research, continuing the development of Marxism in contemporary China and in the 21st century. Discourse system construction means primarily refining the representative concepts and theories which explain Chinese practice and have influence in the international academia. Contemporary Chinese historians know that these three systems are influenced by the West but they should be distinguished from it.

Keywords: the West, the East, China, tradition, historiography, history writing practice, Chinese historiography

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1 This article is a part of Chinese National Social Science Fund Project 20BSS004.

2 XI JINPING, *The Speech at the Symposium on the Work of Philosophy and Social Sciences*, The People's Daily, May 19, 2016.

The theme of 'West vis-à-vis East' appeared in Chinese historiography in the 1840s. The responses of Chinese historiography to this theme initiated its own development. Since the 1840s, 'spread of the Western learning to the East' became a controversial topic in early modern Chinese history. This controversy lies in the different attitudes towards the West, that is, whether the key to China's development at that time was to 'learn from the West' or 'stick to its own traditions'. Since then, the development of Chinese historiography has been affected by the two opposing attitudes in this debate. This paper argues that, as far as Chinese historiography since 1840 is concerned, these two aspects are not completely opposed, but interdependent. The tradition of ancient Chinese historiography before 1840 has a positive influence on historiography as such. Relying on this tradition, Chinese historiography responds to the change in the objects of historical research and the West becomes a subject of history writing. In the following periods, it confronts various questions. It faces different questions in the following periods. In order to answer them, Chinese historians have carried out continuous history writing and theoretical exploration. In my opinion, it is still in the early stage of fulfilling the above-mentioned challenge. Combined with the history of historiography, Chinese historiography shows its character in the process of dialogue with the West. This character can be understood through the concepts of continuity and wholeness. The manifestation of continuity means that starting with *Shang Shu* in the 10th century BC, Chinese nation has continuously recorded its 5000 years of history in the written form.³ So far, more than 300,000 written archival documents have been preserved from ancient China. The wholeness means that these historical records mainly reflect the idea of 'the Chinese nation as One'. The Chinese nation adheres to the historical concept of a multi-ethnic country consisting of 56 nations, of which the Han nation is a major part.⁴ More than 200,000 instances of the aforementioned number of historical records concern the Han nation while the other 55 nations are represented in the remaining 100,000 instances.⁵ Overall, these historical records preserve the historical memory of the Chinese nation as a whole. In order to reduce misunderstandings and enhance mutual understanding between China and the

3 QU LINDONG, *The Characteristics of the Continuous Development of Chinese Historiography and its Far-reaching Historical Significance*, Hebei Academic Journal 4/2020.

4 QU INDONG, *The Theoretical Legacy of Chinese Historiography: Inheritance from the Past to the Present and the Future*, Beijing 2013.

5 LI HONGYAN, *Looking Back at the Work of Collation of Chinese Ancient Books on the 100th Anniversary of the Communist Party of China*, Chinese Literature and History 7/ 2021.

West, it is still necessary to deeply study the history of Chinese historiography and the West in the context of the exchanges between China and the West.

In this article, I want to offer a Chinese perspective on the global asymmetries and inequalities in research as raised in the article by Pavel Himl.

According to Kenneth Pomeranz, the paths of development of the West and the East diverged between 1750 and 1800. This is called the Great Divergence. As a consequence of the Great Divergence, the gap between the West and the East is widening with the East lagging behind the West. One of Kenneth Pomeranz's valuable points is that he does not deny the advantages of the East while analysing that the East has been falling behind the West since the Great Divergence. For example, 'Britain, where industrialization in fact began, seems to have been no better-off than its rough counterpart in China—the Lower Yangzi Delta—in timber supply, soil depletion, and other crucial ecological measures.'⁶ From the perspective of contemporary Chinese academia, the period from 1840 to the present represents a great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the process of Chinese nation's development from backwardness to rise. The relationship between the West and the East passes through this historical process. Therefore, the thesis of 'West vis-à-vis East' is the logical starting point for my argument. I refer by 'the West' to the civilizational formation, which is also called the Occident. The East means China in different historical periods, including the ancient China before 1840, the Qing Dynasty after 1840, the Republic of China since 1911, and the People's Republic of China since 1949.

From the establishment of Xia Dynasty in about 2070 B.C. to the Qing Dynasty in the Opium War of 1840, China saw a total of 23 ruling dynasties. Each dynasty consciously recorded its own history. This has shaped the historiographic tradition which continues to record important historical events. The Opium War of 1840 was an important historical event, which, according to contemporary Chinese academia's view, changed Chinese society from a feudal society to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal one.

The encounters between the West and the East in this period were intensified by the Opium War, which provided the main source of dynamics to the Chinese history of the time. On the one hand, Chinese historians at the time inherited the historiographic tradition before 1840. This tradition consisted of continuously writing the history of important historical events, seeking historical truth, and explaining the usefulness of historical narratives. Chinese historians paid

6 KENNETH POMERANZ, *The Great Divergence: China Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton 2000, p. 12.

attention to the Opium War. The primary method of truth-seeking in Chinese historiography was to follow the chronicle style and based on the historical sources comprehensively describe political, economic, cultural, geographical, and other aspects of the situation. This tradition became the basis for the development of Chinese historiography since 1840 and a prerequisite for answering the questions which Chinese historiography faced during that period. The questions are as follows: What is the history of these western countries from the historical perspective? How do Chinese historians evaluate their history? On the other hand, due to the influence of the Opium War and subsequent events, the West has become the subject of research for Chinese historians, and the thesis of 'West vis-à-vis East' has been reflected in Chinese historiography ever since.

This essay explores the questions arising from the encounters between the West and the East, with particular reference to the issues in Chinese historiography. It is based on the following premise: the West and the East constitute a fundamental dichotomy in post-1840 Chinese historiography. Based on this dichotomy, Chinese historiography asked the following questions: How did the Qing Dynasty approach its relationship with the West in practical terms? Did it reject the West? Or did it learn from the West? In terms of historical theory, western theories have had their impact on China but Chinese historians also strive to explore theories which answer their own historiographic research questions. This article attempts to draw conclusions from the following assumption: after 1840, faced with the Opium War, Chinese historians took the initiative to include the West in their own historical research, and in the process of studying the West and comparing the West with China, they expressed a consciousness of world history. More importantly, through this kind of historical research, China has learned about the differences and strengths of the West, and began to independently and continuously recognize and learn from the West. But this kind of understanding and learning from the West has always been focused on China. The question asked by Chinese historians at the time was whether the Qing Dynasty could learn from the West in order to maintain its own feudal system. Combining Chinese history and history of historiography after 1840, we know that the answer to this question is 'yes'.

Since then, Western military technology, political systems, and ideological culture have gradually become the content study and practice for Chinese politicians, as well as the content of research for Chinese historians. This experience has changed and influenced China's historiographic culture after 1840. This change lies in the fact that the West has become an important object of research in Chinese historiography while this influence lies in the aspects of historical evaluation and historical discourse system. The influence of historical evaluation

is contemporary, that is, whether Qing Dynasty can follow the western development path. The influence of historical discourse is long-term, that is, whether Chinese history can be fully explained in accordance with the Western discourse system. The more contemporary it is, the more urgently Chinese historians are aware of this question. These questions show the reflection and subjectivity of Chinese historians in studying the West.

In terms of the relationship between Western historiography and Czech historiography, Pavel Himl's article 'Where Does the West End? On Writing History, Catching Up, and Self-Awareness' addresses imbalance and inequality. On the one hand, Western theories, methodologies and discourses influence and even dominate Czech historiography, on the other hand, Czech historians strive to adapt to Western research trends and developments. The relationship between the two is similar to Immanuel Wallerstein's core-periphery structure. The West is the core, the Czech Republic stands for the periphery. This is a persistent question of debate among both Western and Eastern scholars.

To some extent, Pavel Himl's statement applies to China as well. Since 1978, history of Western modernisation has been introduced into China, and Chinese scholars such as Luo Rongqu (1927–1996) have conducted related critical research.⁷ Similarly to the Czech Republic, the voices of Chinese scholars are rarely heard and acknowledged by Western academics. But I believe that Pavel Himl implies an unexplained position: he points out the circumstances and problems caused by the attachment of Czech historiography to the West but he does not elaborate on how to face and solve the outlined problems. In this paper, I will tackle these questions in the context of Chinese historiography. These questions are reflected in changes related to historical research, changes in historical methodology, and changes in historical epistemology. Similar to the Czech Republic, China represents the 'Other' in the Western geography of knowledge – the 'East' in Western geographical terms. I will attempt to demonstrate that China as the East is not completely passive in relation to the West. From the Chinese perspective, China is perceived as the core of historical writing, the West is the 'Other' which is constantly being recognised and constructed.

7 LUO RONGQU, *New Theory of Modernization: The Modernization Process of the World and China*, Beijing 1993. Luo Rongqu discussed the general trend of world modernization and the great social changes since early modern China, and made a special inspection of China's modernization road. On the historical explanation theory of modernization process, he proposed a one-dimensional and multi-line historical development view, and took productivity as the central axis of social development. Besides this book, he also published a *Sequel to New Theory of Modernization, From 'Westernization' to Modernization* and other works.

Chinese historiography was essentially focused on the East until the early modern period when ‘West vis-à-vis East’ became and a major theme. Since then, reflecting on how to understand the West and the relationship between the West and the East has been fundamental. Four important turning points exist between then and now: 1840s, 1930s, 1970s, and 2010s. I have selected these four because they represent important transformational periods in Chinese history. The 1840s marked China’s transformation from a feudal society to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. The 1930s was a period when the Chinese nation faced full-scale Japanese aggression. The 1970s marked the end of a decade of turmoil in China and the implementation of reform and opening-up. The 2010s is a new period during which China continued to promote reform and opening-up. In that time, China implemented the Silk Road Economic Belt and since 2013, the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road initiative. Following this timeline, there are various historiographic reflections which have shaped China’s differing attitudes towards the ‘West vis-à-vis East’ issue in different periods.

The 1840s marked the beginning of early modern Chinese history. In terms of historical stages, Chinese historians generally refer to Chinese history before 1840 as the ancient Chinese history, and Chinese history after 1840 as the early modern Chinese history. This change of era did not break the continuity of Chinese historiography. On the contrary, the tradition of the ancient Chinese historiography was a ‘living past’ in the early modern Chinese historiography. In order to explain the continuity of Chinese historiography, we may use Karl Jaspers’s concept of the Axial Period. The Axial Period is ‘to be found’ in the period around 500 B.C., in the spiritual process which occurred between 800 and 200 B.C., when the most extraordinary events took place. ‘Confucius and Lao-tse were living in China, all the schools of Chinese philosophy came into being... In this age were born the fundamental categories within which we still think today’.⁸ From the Axial period of Jaspers to the 1840s, a continuous tradition of historical writing developed in China. The Ancient Chinese historiography created two traditions of seeking the truth and justifying the authority. The legacy of the ancient historiography has influenced the early modern Chinese historiography. However, in terms of content, the historical writing of ancient China mainly concerns the ‘East’, that is, China and its neighbouring countries.

By the 1840s, China under the rule of Qing dynasty was invaded by the Western countries in the Opium War. In addition to the confrontation on the battlefield, Chinese intellectuals at the time believed that in order to defeat Western

8 KARL JASPERS, *The Origin and Goal of History*, New Haven & London 1953, p. 1–2.

countries it was necessary to write and understand Western history. The ethos at that time was 'Open your eyes to see the world'. Therefore, the 'West' has become a part of Chinese historiography ever since. Chinese intellectuals took the initiative to write the history of the West and of the world. In compiling the history of Western countries, Chinese intellectuals wrote books on the history of England, Sino-England trade history, etc.⁹ In terms of introducing the world knowledge, Chinese intellectuals wrote more than 100 volumes on geography, history, politics, economy, military, science and technology, and culture of countries of the entire world at the time. These texts made China the writer of Western history. The West was encapsulated in Chinese historiography. Since the 1840s, Chinese historians' understanding of Western or world history remained largely at the level of the introduction and description, it lacked in-depth analysis. 'The study of foreign history and geography in early modern China was developed during the Opium War. Naturally, at that time, it was not possible to talk about world history in a sense of a discipline, let alone a theoretical system or method of world history'.¹⁰ This situation changed to a certain extent with the introduction of Marxism in China in the 1920s. Two main sources of Chinese Marxism were the Chinese students studying in Japan at that time and in Russia after the October Revolution. One of the leading figures was Li Dazhao (1889–1927). In the 1930s, the 'West vis-à-vis East' issue changed its manifestation in China. Historiography goes along with time. Japan launched an aggressive war against China in 1931. The Chinese nation fully resisted the Japanese invasion in 1937. The pressing question that Chinese historians faced was whether China could resist the Japanese invasion and preserve its national independence. To resolve this question, Chinese historians employed Marxist theory to heatedly argue about the relationship between the West and China. This can be regarded as the great controversy in Chinese social history during 1930s, with three major themes: the question of the Asian mode of production, the question of slavery and the question of commercial capitalism. To answer these questions, Marx's theory of social formations and historical materialism were employed as the theoretical guidelines. A group of Marxist historians and relevant historical works appeared at the time. Guo Moruo's *Research on Ancient Chinese Society* (1930),

9 LIN ZEXU, *SiZhouZhi*, Beijing 2002; WEI YUAN, *HaiGuoTuZhi*, ZhengZhou 1999.

10 YU PEI, *The Compilation of World History in Early Modern China (1840–1949)*, Beijing 2021, pp. 91–92. The quoted content is my English translation based on the Chinese edition. The following quotations represent the original text, if no special instructions are given: 中国近代的外国史地研究，是在鸦片战争时期酝酿发展起来的。……自然，那时还谈不到具有完备学科意义的世界史，更不存在世界史的理论体系和史学方法。

Lv Zhenyu's *Prehistoric Chinese Society Studies* (1934) and other books were published. Marxist theory was the source of categories used in these historical works.

During the 1840s, mutual isolation or even opposition was a typical trend in the relationship between the West and the East in terms of historical writing. At that time, Wei Yuan (1794–1857) put forward the concept of 'Learn from the West to defeat the West' which opposed the East (Qing dynasty) and the West (England), both of which throughout the Opium War, presented a connection in the early modern Chinese historiography. This is because the West and East are the subjects of comparison which aims to reveal the commonalities and differences between them. For instance, Guo Moruo (1892–1978), in his study of Engels's *Family, Private Ownership and The Origin of State*, believes that, like ancient Greece and Rome, ancient China also underwent the developmental phase of slavery society, 'Judging from all present data, there is no doubt that China entered the slave society during the Yin Dynasty'.¹¹ Engels, however, did not mention this in his work. Revealing this commonality is Guo Moruo's original intention in writing his *Research on Ancient Chinese Society*. At the same time, he was also convinced of China's distinctiveness. 'We have sorted out the reality of Chinese society, commented on Chinese culture and thought, and enabled you to understand whether China's national conditions and Chinese traditions are different.'¹² Similarly to Guo Moruo, the aforementioned Chinese historians also had their own visions of world history when they compared China and the West to find commonalities and differences.

With the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Marxist historiography achieved a dominant position in China, and the reflection of the relationship between the West and the East gained a different academic and political context. On the one hand, Soviet Marxism, especially Stalin's theory of five social forms, was a major influence in China until the 1970s. 'In the 1950s and early 1960s after the establishment of New China, the main focus of Chinese historiography was the introduction and study of Soviet historical theory and its research practice... The study of Soviet historiography was determined by the basic national policy of 'leaning towards one side' in the early days of New

11 GUO MORUO, *Research on Ancient Chinese Society*, Beijing 1982, p. 4. The original text is: 从今天所有的资料材料看来, 殷代进入奴隶社会是不成问题的。

12 GUO MORUO, *Research on Ancient Chinese Society*, pp. 9–10. The original text is: 我们把中国实际的社会清算出来, 把中国的文化, 中国的思想, 加以严密的批判, 让你们看看中国的国情, 中国的传统, 究竟是否两样。

China.¹³ On the other hand, the new regime assumes a historical explanation based on Marxist theories which correspond to China's actual conditions. These two aspects highlight the issue of theoretical autonomy.

In his article, Pavel Himl raises a question 'What autonomy for East-Central European historiography?' and asks what possible forms and routes an emancipated or autonomous history writing could take. And Pavel Himl does not assume one single answer to this question. In the context of Chinese historiography before the 1970s, the answer to Pavel Himl's question is as follows: Chinese historians were guided by Marxism in historical theory, but their answers to one specific historical question differed. Chinese Marxist historians used Marxist theories to explain Chinese history. Specifically, they mainly discussed the starting point, performance, and the final point of slave and feudal society in Chinese history. The relevant Marxist historians of the period included Fan Wenlan (1893–1969), Jian Bozan (1898–1968), Hou Wailu (1903–1987) etc. What they have in common is the aim of re-examination of the ancient Chinese history to reveal the reasons why China did not follow the path of capitalist development, but embarked on the new revolution under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. The purpose of their historical research was to construct a national identity and capture the Chinese development path. But there are following problems: this mode of historical explanation relies on Marxist theory as outlined in the Soviet Union and it lacks any Chinese own theoretical innovation. In these historical writings, the political history and the history of class struggle dominate excessively. This situation improved with the introduction of the current Western historiography and non-Marxist historiography during the 1970s.

Since the reform and opening-up in the 1970s, the Chinese study of the world history can be seen as a discipline in its own right. The field of study now includes professional researchers and academic journals, such as *World History* (1978), *Historiography Quarterly* (1992) etc. Professional institutions and universities offer master and doctoral degree study programmes in Chinese world history. The study of the world history in China has undergone a transformation through translation and introduction of foreign works and materials towards a (quasi)independent research. In those years, 'What is the system of the modern world history?' represented a burning question in Chinese academia. Specifically,

13 YU PEI, *The Study of World History in Modern China: A Reexamination (1949–2019)*, Beijing 2019, p. 10. The original text is: 在新中国成立后的20世纪50年代和60年代初, 中国史学建设的主要内容是介绍、学习苏联史学理论及其研究实践……学习苏联史学, 这是新中国成立初期, “一边倒”的基本国家政策决定的。

the viewpoints put forward by Chinese scholars include among other the ‘theory of three social forms’, ‘theory of five social forms’, ‘theory of modernization thread’, ‘capitalist holism’, ‘world holism’ and etc.¹⁴ From the current perspective prevalent in Chinese historiography, the solution to this question is to adopt Marxist theories as the leading theory while absorbing reasonable elements from non-Marxist theories, such as modernization theory, to write modern world history. For example, the relative rationality of modernization theory lies in its emphasis on the priority of the progress of economic production methods, and its acceptance of the diversity of modernization paths, including the Chinese-style modernization paths.

In discussing this question, Chinese historians realized the influence of the West-centred style of thinking and strived to transcend it. In my opinion, the West-centred style of thinking mentioned here includes two aspects: the first refers to the works written by Western scholars who are influential in China from a Western perspective, such as Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*, Leopold von Ranke’s *Weltgeschichte*, Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* etc. The second refers to works written by Chinese scholars who unconsciously employed Western perspectives and the historical periodization framework. It can be said that the contemporary Chinese historians are still in the process of breaking away from this influence. They have either formulated new interpretations of Western concepts and theories, or proposed original concepts and theories different from those of the West. The example of the former is Luo Rongqu, and the example of the latter is Wu Yujin (1913–1993) who will be discussed below.

In a parallel to Pavel Himl’s description of the unequal relationship between Western historiography and Czech historiography, we can say that Chinese historiography is in a similar position. That is, Chinese historians are well acquainted with Western categories, methods, scholars, and writings, but they have been unable to propose their own categories and methods which would be accepted and used by Western scholars. In their attempt to transcend the West-centred style of thinking, Chinese historians’ approach is to draw on Western theories and methods and create their own interpretations of them by incorporating Chinese historical experience into these interpretations because Western theories and methods may have ignored or misinterpreted Chinese historical experience.

14 From 1970s to 2010s, the results of discussions on this question in Chinese academia can be found in Chinese journals such as *Historical Research* and *World History*. In 2010, Yu Pei edited the results of this period into a collection of essays. See: *Main Line and System of Modern World History*, YU PEI (ed.), Beijing 2010.

Through the interpretation by Chinese historians, Western theories absorb Chinese historical experience and perspectives and as a result, they are no longer confined to the West.

A representative achievement of Chinese historiography during this period is the six-volume *World History*. One of the editors-in-chief of *World History* is Wu Yujin who developed and used a theory of vertical development and a theory of horizontal development in *World History*. Vertical development means that with the development of productive forces, human society undergoes changes in five social forms which refer to primitive society, slave society, feudal society, capitalist society and communist society. 'They constitute a vertical sequence from low-level to high-level development. This vertical sequence is not a mechanical formula. Not all histories of nations, countries or regions have developed in this sequence without exception. Some did not experience certain stage; some stopped at a certain stage for a long time; even if they belong to the same stage, their development forms often differ from each other. However, historical diversity of different nations, countries or regions and the unity of world history are not mutually contradictory.'¹⁵ Horizontal development implies that from the ancient times to the present, human history goes through a development from closed to open, from isolation to connection. In the process of interpreting this theory, Wu Yujin synthesized Karl Marx's theory of world history and the Western global history which was influential in China in the 1980s and 1990s, mainly Geoffrey Barraclough's concept of global history.

In dealing with the West and the East, Wu Yujin's theory of vertical development and theory of horizontal development represent the most ambitious theoretical project of Chinese historians so far. Dipesh Chakrabarty argued that 'There are at least two everyday symptoms of the subalternity of non-western, third-world histories. Third-world historians feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate. Whether it is an Edward Thompson, a Le Roy Ladurie, a George Duby, a Carlo Ginzberg, a Lawrence Stone, a Robert Darnton, or a Natalie Davis¹⁶ – to

15 WU YUJIN, *General Preface to World History*, in *World History (Volume Five)*, WU YUJIN, QI SHIRONG (edd.), Beijing 1995, p. 9. The original text is: 它们构成一个由低级到高级发展的纵向序列。这个纵向序列并非一个机械的程式，不是所有民族、国家或地区的历史都无一例外地按着这个序列向前发展。有的没有经历某一阶段；有的长期停顿于某一阶段；即使属于同一阶段，其发展形式又往往互有差异。但是不同民族、国家或地区在历史上的多样性，和世界历史的统一性并非互不相容的矛盾。

16 'Le Roy Ladurie' should spell as 'Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie'. 'Carlo Ginzberg' should spell as 'Carlo Ginzburg'. 'Natalie Davis' should spell as 'Natalie Zemon Davis'.

take but a few names at random from our contemporary world—the ‘greats’ and the models of the historian’s enterprise are always at least culturally ‘European.’ ‘They’ produce their work in relative ignorance of non-western histories, and this does not seem to affect the quality of their work.’¹⁷ Pavel Himl quoted this passage to illustrate the situation in Czech historiography. And Dipesh Chakrabarty’s words apply equally to the situation in Chinese historiography. Both Czech and Chinese historians are all aware of this structural asymmetry and strive to overcome this inequality. As mentioned above, although Chinese historians have made some efforts in this regard, the process of overcoming the West-centred style of thinking is still a long-term project.

The process of globalization endowed the ‘West vis-à-vis East’ problem with a new form in the 2010s. Western categories, theories and journal systems occupy the dominant position in the era of globalization. Clearly, not all Western theories are suitable to explain Chinese history, and some of the Western theories misunderstand Chinese history. For example, John Fairbank’s theory has been highly influential in China in recent years. In explaining the reasons for early modern China’s modernization since the 1840s, John Fairbank believes that the Western challenge, or to be more precise, the Western aggression, is the fundamental reason why early modern China embarked on the path of modernization. ‘The Western impact of the 1840s and 1850s was a stunning blow. To the next generation, however, from the 1860s through the 1890s, the West became a model to imitate, the better to strengthen China to deal with the West. Finally, in the twentieth century the West has been an inspiration for China’s three revolutions, Republican, Nationalist, and Communist.’¹⁸ John Fairbank put forward some insightful viewpoints but it is undeniable that to a certain degree, he misunderstands Chinese history. John Fairbank attributed the fundamental reason for China’s modernization to external factors, that is, Western invasion or the so-called ‘challenge’, and denied any internal factors of China’s historical progress. This demonstrates the necessity for Chinese historians to write Chinese history from the Chinese perspective.

Pavel Himl proposed a return to the plurality of methodologies, institutions, and journals to deal with this inequality. In China, Chinese historians strive to maintain their own cultural uniqueness and perspectives in terms of historical

17 DIPESH CHAKRABARTY, *Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?*, Representations 10/1992, No. 37, p. 2.

18 JOHN KING FAIRBANK, *The United States and China*, (4th edition, enlarged), Cambridge 1976, p. 143.

writing in the era of globalization. At this stage, 38 volumes of *World History*¹⁹ were published by Jiangxi People's Publishing House in 2012, which can be said to be the collective research result of contemporary Chinese historians. 'China and the world' is one of the eight main themes of this series. Within the theme of 'China and the world', this series of books includes the following titles: *The Origins and Evolution of World History Study*, *Perspectives and Patterns of World History Study*, *China and the World before the Sixteenth Century*, *China and the World during Ming Qing period*, *China and the World in Early Modern Times*, *The People's Republic of China and the World*, *China and the World during the Reform and Opening-up Period*. In the new era, one of the major tensions is, for example, the tension between the national framing and research organization and the global/international framing and structures. In this tension, the economic factor and economic asymmetries are clearly at play as they disadvantage some scholars from becoming major players in the research field which does not resemble a level ground.

In the study of world history in China, both the data and the language used are foreign, which will inevitably affect the (quasi)independent understanding and judgment of Chinese historians. At present, Chinese academia has a clear understanding of this problem, and is responding to it quite effectively. They have divided the past into historical periods according to the actual development in Chinese history, not fully accepting the Western views. For example, from the Western perspective, the Second World War began in 1939. This view was also adopted in China for a certain period of time. Now, Chinese academia largely agrees that the starting point of the Second World War, which China experienced, was in 1931, when Japan launched the Mukden Incident. From that moment, China started the anti-fascist war in the East. This shows that Chinese historical thinking and historical consciousness are (quasi)independent of the Western academia.

The concept of community of human destiny is the latest theoretical summary of the Chinese Reform and Opening-up practice from the 1970s to the 2010s. It also contributes to how Chinese historians understand and write world/global history. The clash of civilizations theory is an important theory of world/global theory which is based on diversity and distinctions between different civilizations. 'In this new world, local politics is the politics of ethnicity; global politics is the politics of civilizations. The rivalry of the superpowers is replaced by the clash of civilizations. In this new world the most pervasive, important, and

19 YE PEI et al, *World History* (38 volumes), Nanchang 2012.

dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural entities. Tribal wars and ethnic conflicts will occur within civilizations.²⁰ It presupposes rationality of conflict, antagonism and even war.

On the other hand, the concept of community of human destiny emphasizes the importance and necessity of equal dialogue and cooperation among different civilizations. It is also the value position and perspective for the compilation of world/global history in China in the new era. From this perspective, the historical view emphasizing antagonism and war is being erased in Chinese historical writing. The history of China and history of the East-West Relations have witnessed countless wars and conflicts. From ancient times to modern times, China also holds many significant historical writings, for instance the 8-volume *Chinese War History* published in 2017.²¹ 'Remember history, cherish peace' is the common feature and aim of these historical writings. The concept of community of human destiny expresses this character and aim in contemporary Chinese historical writings. Three main sources exist for the construction of Chinese historical discourse: Marxist theory, Western humanities and social science theory, and traditional Chinese culture. In addition to Western hermeneutics, Chinese scholars propose the imposed interpretation theory as China's hermeneutics. Of course, this attempt to construct Chinese discourse is still in progress, and its practical utility still needs to be tested.

In conclusion, Chinese historiography cannot be separated from Western historiographic theories and methods, but neither can it follow them completely. The above summary of history of Chinese historiography shows that Chinese historiography has developed its own method of dealing with the West. This method consists in the fact that Chinese historians since the 1840s have continuously written about important events in the course of wars or exchanges between China and the West. However, instead of relying entirely on Western theories, they have explored the theoretical models suitable for interpreting China's and Western history. Therefore, in terms of historical knowledge and historical theories, Chinese historians are gradually exploring knowledge and theories in their own style. This process of exploration is not completed but always in a state of progress. Pavel Himl used the term 'catch up' to describe the relationship between Czech historiography and Western historiography, 'I hope it will

20 SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York 1996, p. 28.

21 WU GUOQING, MU ZHONGYUE, *Chinese War History* (8 volumes), Beijing 2017.

not sound too presumptuous, on the back of the rather critical thoughts I have presented, to suggest that after spending such a long time trying to 'catch up', it is time we were more self-confident.²² If I were to choose a term to describe the relationship between Chinese historiography and Western historiography, I would choose 'dialogue', or 'equal dialogue' to be precise.

22 PAVEL HIML, *Where Does the West End? On Writing History, Catching Up, and Self-Awareness*, *Dějiny – Teorie – Kritika*, 2/2020, p. 297.