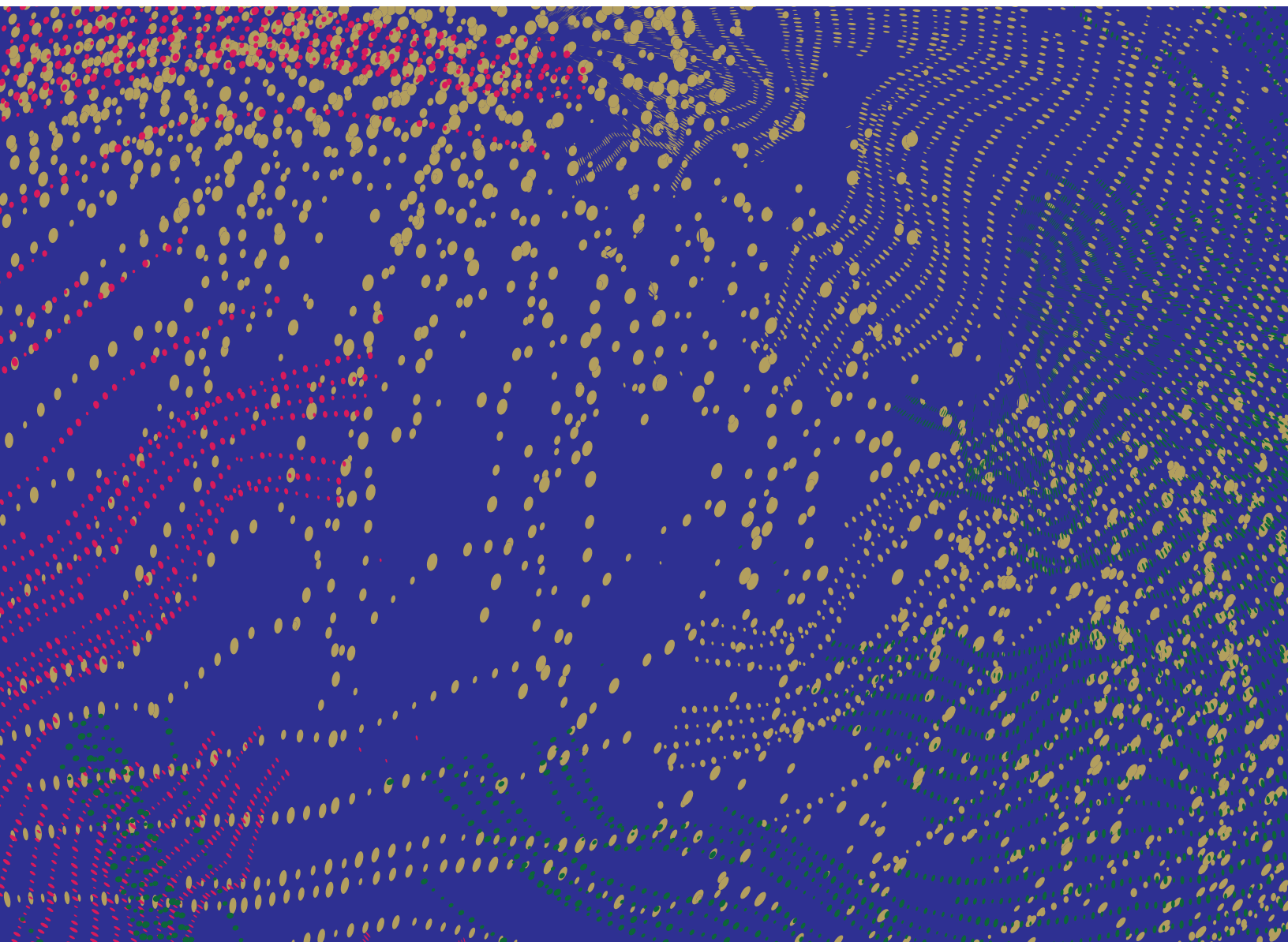


The World Humanities Report

World History in China Today

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World History in China Today

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After the establishment of New China in 1949, the study of world history in the country developed from scratch but has grown since then, so that today Chinese scholars exchange ideas and engage in scholarly debates with peers in the field around the world.¹ In 2011, according to the *Subject Catalogue of Degree Conferment and Talent Cultivation* released by the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council and the Ministry of Education, world history officially became a first-level discipline with five secondary disciplines: world history and historical theory; ancient and medieval world history; modern world history; history of world regions and nations; and specialized history and holistic history. This restructuring reflects its phased development and the achievements of contemporary Chinese world history in terms of research, training, and academic exchange.

The study of world history in China emerged with China's understanding of the world. That understanding can be traced back as far as Xuanzang's journey to the West in the seventh century² and Zheng He's seven expeditions to the "Western Oceans" in the fifteenth century,³ or as recently as the nineteenth century when Lin Zexu, Wei Yuan, and Xu Jiyu compiled a series of books on

¹ This report is based on many excellent review essays on the development of Chinese world history studies. See Ma Keyao, "70 nian dili qianxing de Zhongguo shijieshi xueke" [70 years of building on the field of world history in China], *Lishi yanjiu*, no. 4 (2019): 18; Xu Lan, "Xin Zhongguo 70 nian shijieshi xueke de huigu yu zhanwang" [Review and prospects of the discipline of world history in New China in the past 70 years], *Guangming ribao*, August 26, 2019, 14; He Ping, "70 nian de Zhongguo shijieshi yanjiu huigu—yanjiu fanshi ji qi zhuanji" [Review of 70 years of Chinese world history studies—research paradigms and their transfer], *Liaocheng daxue xuebao*, no. 1 (2020): 21.

² Xuanzang, *Datang Xiyuji* [Buddhist records of the Western world], trans. and annot. Dong Zhiqiao (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2011).

³ Three ancient books published in fifteenth century recorded the expeditions: Mahuan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan* [The overall survey of the ocean's shores], trans. and annot. Feng chengjun (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1935); Feixin, *Hsing-ch'a Sheng-lan* [The overall survey of the Star Raft], trans. and annot. Feng chengjun (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1938); Gongzhen, *Xiyang Fanguo Zhi* [The annals of foreign nations in the Western Ocean], trans. and annot. Xiangda (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2000).

world history after the Opium Wars—when they “opened their eyes to the world.”⁴ At the end of the Qing dynasty and the beginning of the Republican period, when China faced a crisis of “national extinction,” people attempted to study the experiences of Western countries and the differences between Chinese and Western cultures to save the nation and try to survive. These efforts in the early twentieth century began the study of world history in China. During the Republican period, scholars who had studied abroad—such as Chen Hengzhe, He Bingsong, Chen Hansheng, Lei Haizong, Liu Chonghong, Qi Sihe, among others—devoted themselves after their return to translating well-known works and compiling teaching materials on “Western history” or “foreign history,” which promoted the study of world history in China at that time.⁵ However, the study of world history at that time was mainly geared toward self-reflection, that is, the reexamination of China by learning about the rest of the world and the identification of cautionary experiences in order to reform China. These scholars’ studies of world history contained imported, introductory knowledge, which did not amount to systematic disciplinary study. They also focused on developed countries and regions such as North America and Europe. Even so, these early generations laid an important foundation for the later development of the discipline of world history in China.

In the 1950s the status of world history as a discipline rose steadily and developed in the direction of increasing disciplinarity. As a result of learning from the Soviet experience, world history in China was renamed “Western history,” then “foreign history,” and finally “world history” and was divided into four periods: ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary. At that time, the

⁴ Books in this area include *Haiguo tu zhi* [Map of sea countries] (Wei Yuan, 1843), *Yinghuan zhilüe* [Guide to the world] (Xu Jiyu, 1849), *E'bide bianzheng ji* [The chronicle of the political reforms of Peter the Great of Russia] (Kang Youwei, 1898), and *Xin Yingguo juren Kelinwei'er zhuan* [The biography of the New British giant Cromwell] (Liang Qichao, 1903), which can be regarded as the beginning of the discipline of world history in China. See Xu Lan, “Xin Zhongguo 70 nian shijieshi xueke de huigu yu zhanwang,” 14.

⁵ Relevant works of this period include *Ouzhou wenyi fuxing shi* [History of the European Renaissance] (Jiang Baili, 1921), *Xiyang shi* [History of the West] (Chen Hengzhe, 1924), *Xiyang shi xueshi* [Historiography of Western history] (He Bingsong, 1929), and *Xiyang wenhua shi gangyao* [Outline of the history of Western culture] (Lei Haizong, 1930). Liu Chonghong did not published monographs but taught many courses on Western history; *Qi Sihe Zhongshiji wanqi de xiou* [Western Europe in the late Medieval Age] (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1962). Among them, Chen Hengzhe’s *History of the West* was a high school textbook in Republican China, which dealt with Western history from remote antiquity to the twentieth century in an in-depth and but accessible manner. According to Hu Shi, the book is a work with creative ambitions and the first of its kind to be carefully written by Chinese scholars of Western history for Chinese readers.

institutional development of research on world history in China was focused on establishing the Institute of World History, organizing world history associations and societies, publishing journals and magazines, editing and translating research materials, and cultivating researchers.

In 1955 Northeast Normal University (formerly known as Northeastern University) in Changchun accepted two Soviet historians as faculty (arranged by the Ministry of Education), set up two advanced courses, and recruited young teachers from all over China to participate as students. This advanced studies course trained a large number of skilled instructors and researchers for the field of world history. By the 1960s, Peking University, Nankai University, and Wuhan University had established majors in world history, opened courses, invited Soviet scholars to teach in China, and, at the same time, strengthened foreign language training. In 1959 the Institute of History at the Chinese Academy of Sciences created a specialized unit called the World History Research Group, which was later renamed the Department of World History. And in 1964 the Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the Chinese Academy of Sciences established the Institute of World History. At the same time, area studies institutes emerged in China such as the Institute of Latin American Studies, the Institute of Soviet Studies, the Institute of Asian and African Studies, the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Peking University, the Institute of Middle Eastern Studies at Northwest University, and the Institute of Southwest Asian Studies at Yunnan University.

In terms of research areas, the study of world history in New China gradually broke away from the Western history orientation of the Republican period, and world history became not Western history but the history of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other regions. At the same time, the discipline made great achievements in period-specific fields of history, regional history, history of nations, thematic history, and historical theory and methodology. This research and teaching trained a generation of young scholars and laid the foundation for world history studies in China.⁶

In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Chinese world history studies were heavily influenced by the Soviet Union in terms of theoretical orientation. Scholars

⁶ Xu Lan, “Xin Zhongguo 70 ninan shijieshi xueke de huigu yu zhanwang,” 14. Related works of this period include, among others, Wu Yuqin, *Gudai de Xila he Luoma* [Ancient Greece and Rome] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1957); Ding Zemin, *Meiguo pailua shi* [History of Chinese exclusion in the United States] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1952); Jiang Mengyin, *Di'erci yapian zhanzheng* [The Second Opium War] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1965).

used Soviet world history studies as a template for research, and colleges and universities used Soviet teaching materials, such as the *Shijie tongshi* [General history of the world] edited by the Soviet Academy of Sciences and published by Sanlian Bookstore in 1959, almost exclusively for the teaching of world history. In 1962 another volume, edited by Zhou Yiliang and Wu Yuqin, became the first general world history after the founding of New China and a symbol of the institutionalization of world history studies. Also based on the Soviet interpretation of the Marxist materialist view of history, this *Shijie tongshi* divided historical stages according to five modes of production: primitive society, slave society, feudal society, capitalist society, and socialist society, arranging the history of nations, ethnicities, and regions of the world according to this scheme. The textbook not only reflected the Chinese scholars' level of knowledge and research at that time, but also their sincere efforts to teach and research under the framework of the Marxist materialist view of history and to establish a Chinese system of Marxist world history. However, from 1966 to 1976, the development of world history studies suffered repeated setbacks due to political turmoil. During the Cultural Revolution, modern world history was reduced to the history of class struggle and revolution, while the developments in culture, civilizational encounters, and science and technology were completely ignored. The study of history became, in short, a tool for endorsing political struggles. Political turmoil, however, did not interrupt the development of world history studies in China, as the difficult explorations of this period accrued strength for the dynamic growth of world history studies that followed in the era of reform and opening up.

With the 1978 commencement of reform and opening up, Chinese world history studies developed rapidly under the influence of general international trends. The focus of research shifted from the history of political revolution and class struggle to social, economic, intellectual, and cultural history. The importation of a large quantity of foreign scholarship at this time allowed Chinese scholars of world history to incorporate the cutting-edge achievements of the international academic community, to directly engage with the theories and methodologies of Western historiography, and to assimilate them appropriately. The research achievements in world history after reform and opening up fall into two major areas. The first continued reflections on Soviet historiography, reevaluated the Asian mode of production, and revisited the Marxist theory of social formations. Its questions include whether slave society really existed, precisely when the five modes of production were established, and

consideration of monist versus multilinear paths of development. Scholars also began to reevaluate revolutions in Britain, the United States, and France and to criticize the overemphasis on class struggle in the Soviet textbooks of the past. The second area of research achievement was in the study of modernization theory and process and was a high point in the study of world history. It greatly promoted knowledge and recognition of world history in Chinese academic circles. Modernization theory suited the realities of practical concerns of China's rapid development.⁷ Scholars engaged in modernization studies regarded modernization as a process of global transformation, comprehensively studying the process of transition from traditional agricultural society to modern industrial society. Modernization became the key theme of a new discipline of modern world history.

Many works, whether large-scale works on general history or specialized studies on the history of specific nations, reinterpreted world history from new perspectives. Take for example the six-volume *Shijie shi* [World history] published in 1994. Commissioned by the Ministry of Education and edited by Wu Yuqin and Qi Shirong, the world history scholarship of *Shijie shi* broke away from the Soviet model of compiling a general history of the world. Rather, guided by the Marxist materialist view of history, it explored the linkages between the horizontal and vertical developments of world history to reconstruct the macrosystem of world history, presenting human progress through the narration of major historical events, personalities, and phenomena in China and abroad. At the same time, works written from the perspective of civilizational history, the history of international relations, and the paradigm of modernization also appeared.⁸ Many of these works have become classics. As major works of general history brought about a new climate, studies of national, period-specific, and thematic histories also blossomed. The world history research

⁷ Representative works include Luo Rongqu, *Xiandaihua xinlun* [A new theory of modernization] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1993); Jin Guantao, ed., *Zouxiang weilai congshu* [Toward the future series] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1984); Qian Chengdan and Chen Yixin, *Zouxiang xiandai guojia zhilu* [The road to a modern nation] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1987).

⁸ Related works include Ma Keyao, ed., *Shijie wenmin shi* [History of world civilizations], 2 vols. (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004); Wang Shengzu, ed., *Guoji guanxi shi* [History of international relations], 12 vols. (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2015); a general history that combines topical and sequential approaches: Wu Yin, ed., *Shijie lishi* [History of the world], 38 vols. (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 2013); as well as a work on the sub-categories of modernization: Qian Chengdan, ed., *Shijie xiandaihua licheng* [History of world modernizations], 10 vols. (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2012).

community published general histories of historical periods such as *Shijie shanggu shigang* [Outline of the world in early antiquity], *Shijie gudai shi* [Ancient world history], *Shijie zhongshiji shi* [Medieval world history], *Shijie jindai shi* [Early modern world history], *Shijie xiandai shi* [Modern world history], *Shijie dangdai shi* [Contemporary world history], and *Zhanhou shijie shi* [Post-war world history]. But they also published works in fields where Western scholars had long been leaders such as classics, Egyptology, Assyriology, Hittite studies, Byzantine studies, medieval history, World War I, World War II, and Cold War history.⁹

Further indication of the growing depth and specialization of Chinese world history studies after reform and opening up was the establishment of research associations and societies and professional journals. In 1979 the Chinese Society for the Study of Ancient World History and the Chinese Research Association of Modern World History were founded. In the same year, the American History Research Association of China and the Chinese Society of French Historical Studies were also established. The following year saw the founding of the China British History Association, the Chinese Research Society of German History, and the China Society of Japanese History. In 1984 the China Association of Early Modern World History was established. By 1989 the number of world history societies and associations in the Chinese academy had reached fifteen, with thousands of members. Local provinces and cities such as Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Hubei also established world history societies. In 1992 the China Association of Early Modern World History and the China Association of Contemporary World History merged to form the China Association of Modern World History. In 1977 the Institute of World History, formerly under the Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, was renamed the Institute of World History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and the following year it launched *Shijie lishi* [World history], a professional academic journal in the field of Chinese world history research.

After the turn of the twenty-first century, Chinese world history studies have shown a new wave of energy and vitality. In terms of research regions, the field has shifted from a focus on the West to transregional, transnational,

⁹ Related works include Huang Yang, *Gudai Xila tudi zhidu yanjiu* [A study of the land system of ancient Greece] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1996); *Di'erci shijie dazhan shi* [History of the Second World War], ed. Academy of Military Science, 5 vols. (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1995–99); Liu Minghan, ed., *Ouzhou wenyi fuxing shi* [History of the European Renaissance], 12 vol. (Beijing: Remin chubanshe, 2006–10).

and global studies, with increased attention to smaller countries or microregions. In terms of research angles, Chinese world history scholars have shifted from traditional world history to new world history research, including reconstructing general world history, developing specialized historical subfields, conducting interdisciplinary research, and applying global and bottom-up perspectives to research. In terms of scholar cultivation and international exchange, the younger ranks of Chinese world history research are maturing, and academic ties and collaboration between China and the international academic community are growing tighter.

Among the research achievements of reconstructing general world history, representative works include the newly revised *Shijie shi* [World history], edited by Wu Yuqin and Qi Shirong, and *Shijie lishi* [World history], compiled and edited by Wu Yin et al. In 2006 Wu Yuqin and Qi Shirong's *Shijie shi* was revised into four volumes on the basis of the six-volume edition in 1994. This new edition incorporates more recent scholarly contributions, including recent developments in Canada and Australia, and supplements studies of intellectual history, social life, and the culture of science and technology. It focuses on revealing the impact of religious evolution, examining the strengthening of horizontal connections in the modern world and its impact on various civilizations and peoples, exploring the different processes of modernization around the world and their complex effects, as well as deepening understanding of issues such as the evolution of international relations in the twentieth century, the historical experience of socialist construction in the Soviet Union, and national democratic movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.¹⁰ In 2010 over one hundred Chinese world history scholars collaborated to complete the eight-volume *Shijie lishi* [World history], organized by Wu Yin. This is the first large-scale work of general world history in China that combines thematic studies with chronological narratives, consisting of volumes on theory and methodology, economic development, political systems, ethnic groups and religions, war and peace, international relations, intellectual culture, and China and the world.¹¹ In addition, works on the history of world civilizations were

¹⁰ Dong Xinjie, "Lun xinshidai Zhongguo shijie shixue huayu tixi de goujian" [On the construction of the discursive system of Chinese world historiography in the new era], *Shixue jikan*, no. 2 (2020): 57.

¹¹ The set includes *Zhongguo shijieshi yanjiu de chansheng he fazhan* [The emergence and development of world history studies in China] (Yu Pei, vol. 1), *Ren? Ziran? Lishi* [Man? Nature? History] (Chen Qineng, vol. 2), *Shijieshi yanjiu de shijiao he moshi* [Perspectives and models of world history studies] (Jiang Peng, vol. 3), *Zhongguo zhengzhi zhidu* [Political systems in

also published in this period, such as *Renlei wenming de yanjin* [The evolution of human civilizations], edited by Qi Shirong; *Shijie wenming shi* [History of world civilizations], edited by Li Shi'an and Meng Guanglin; and *Shijie wenming shi* [History of world civilization], edited by Ma Keyao. Among them, Ma Keyao's work is divided into three volumes, which deal with agricultural civilization, the rise of industrial civilization, and the global expansion of industrial civilization, respectively.¹² These new editions of general world history and history of civilizations reflect not only the latest research by Chinese world history scholars on periodization, processes of development, and the nature of important historical events, but also Chinese scholars' unique understanding of human history and their systematic knowledge of the major theoretical and practical issues arising from the development of contemporary society.

In the more traditional field of national histories, Chinese world history scholars have collaborated on and published relatively comprehensive works. National histories have always been an area of concentration for Chinese world history scholars, especially in the study of the United States, Britain, France, Germany, the Soviet Union/Russia, and Japan. In recent years, scholars have continued to publish general histories of these countries,¹³ but they have also explored their domestic affairs, diplomacy, military, society, religion, and culture in different periods of development. In addition, the general histories of Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, Turkey, India, Israel, Iran, Egypt, and other countries have also been published.¹⁴ Driven by the evolution

the Middle Ages] (Hou Jianxin, vol. 10), *Xifang guojia zhengzhi zhidu* [Political systems in Western nations] (Wu Yin, vol. 11), *Zhimin kuozhang yu nanbei guanxi* [Colonial expansion and North-South relations] (Gao Dai, vol. 25), etc. (Nanchang: Jiangxi Renmin Publisher, 2010).

¹² Chen Qineng, "Xinshiji yilai Zhongguo de shijieshi yanjiu de jinzhan" [Progress in world history studies in China since the new century], in *Zhongguo lishixue 40 nian (1978–2018)*, ed. Zhang Haipeng (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2018), 101.

¹³ For example, Wu Tingqiu, ed., *Riben shi* [History of Japan] (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1994); Liu Xuyi and Yang Shengmao, eds., *Meiguo tongshi* [General history of the United States], 6 vols. (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2002); Qian Chengdan, ed., *Yingguo tongshi* [General history of England], 6 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2007); Qian Chengdan, ed., *Faguo tongshi jianbian* [Compendium of general history of France] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991); Qian Chengdan and Zhang Zhilian, eds., *Faguo tongshi* [General history of France] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009); Zheng Yifan, ed., *Sulian shi* [History of the Soviet Union], 9 vols. (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2013); Ding Jianhong, *Deguo tongshi* [General history of Germany] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2002); and Xing Laishun and Wu Youfa, eds., *Deguo tongshi* [General history of Germany], 6 vols. (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2019).

¹⁴ Related works include Liu Wenpeng, *Gudai Aiji shi* [History of ancient Egypt] (Beijing:

of the discipline and the Belt and Road Initiative, world history has shifted from the study of larger countries to the study of both large and small countries. Since 2018, the National Social Science Fund has been setting up special research projects on cold and “extinct” studies and national histories. The regional and national studies institutes subsequently established by Peking University and Tsinghua University are also a reflection of this trend.

Currently, there are differences in the extent of research on different national histories within the Chinese world history field. The largest number of research articles center on American, British, and Japanese history, but smaller countries or relatively marginal regions that have previously received less attention are also gradually coming to life. According to data from 2019, most of the research contributions in Chinese world history continue to be concentrated in the fields of American, British, and Japanese history, with 164, 130, and 120 papers on related topics, respectively; the number of papers dealing with the history of France, Germany, and Russia are 36, 28, and 53, respectively. Nevertheless, compared to the data from 2018 and 2017, the absolute dominance of American and British history has weakened, with research targeting Southern and Northern Europe trending upward. In 2019 the number of papers on the history of Southern and Northern Europe rose to 20 and 3, respectively, from 10 and 1 in 2018.¹⁵ In addition, with China’s increasing interest in its neighboring countries, studies countries around China, such as Myanmar, Thailand, India, and the five Central Asian countries, are also increasing.

In addition to deepening the study of national histories, the study of Chinese world history has also taken a distinctly global turn since 2000. In 2001 China joined the World Trade Organization, accelerating its integration into the world economy in all aspects. As a result, the research paradigms of “globalization narratives,” “global history,” and “transnational history” were gradually introduced into China, which had a great impact on world history studies.¹⁶ The

Shangwu yinshuguan, 2000); Chen Zhiqiang, *Baizhanting shi* [Byzantine history] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2003); Liu Zuxi, *Bolan tongshi* [General history of Poland] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2006); Lin Tai, *Yindu tongshi* [General history of India] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2012); Li Jiezhuan, *Jianada tongshi* [General history of Canada] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2014).

¹⁵ Chai Ying and Zhu Wenxu, “2019 nian Zhongguo shijieshi yanjiu gaiguan—jiyu benniandu Renda fuyin baokan ziliao *Shijie shi* yu quannian suoyin” [An overview of Chinese world history studies in 2019—based on this year’s People’s University of China reproduction of newspaper materials *World History* with an annual index], *Shanghai shifan daxue xuebao* (*zhexue shihui kexue ban*), no. 4 (2020): 133.

¹⁶ He Ping, “70 nian de Zhongguo shijieshi yanjiu huigu—yanjiu fanshi ji qi zhuan yi,” 21.

changing realities of the world have prompted Chinese world history researchers to pay attention to new trends and to change their perspectives and ways of looking at the world. As a result, while the study of national histories was on the rise, many scholars proposed to go beyond the nation-state focus to study transnational, transregional, and global histories.¹⁷ Accordingly, Chinese world history scholars have begun to identify the differences between global history and previous world history studies,¹⁸ to contemplate how global history can guide Chinese scholars out of the West-centric research paradigm, and to build a global historical narrative with Chinese characteristics.¹⁹ In 2004 Capital Normal University in Beijing established the first global history center in China.²⁰ Since 2005, a team there, led by Liu Xincheng, has designed and undertaken a major project of the Ministry of Education to study the interaction and symbiosis of world civilizations. They have edited and compiled a series of books, organized academic conferences, regularly and systematically gave presentations about the status of global history research in China at events overseas, and created a journal called *Quanqiushi pinglun* [Global history review].²¹ Since 2010, other universities in China have also set up corresponding research centers to study the history of cross-regional interaction, including the Cross-

¹⁷ Works in this area include Yu Pei, ed., *Quanqiuhua yu quanqiushi* [Globalization and global history] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2007); Xia Jiguo and Jerry H. Bentley, eds., *Quanqiushi duben* [Readings in global history] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2010); papers include Liu Xincheng, “Quanqiu shiguan yu jindai zaoqi shijieshi bianzuan,” *Shijie lishi*, no. 1 (2006): 39–46, 160; Xia Jiguo, “Quanqiushi yanjiu: Hudong, bijiao, jiangou” [Global history studies: Interaction, comparison, and construction], *Shixue lilun yanjiu*, no. 3 (2016): 118–25; Liu Wenming, “Lishixue ‘quanqiu zhuanxiang’ yingxiang xia de ‘Xin diguo shi’” [New imperial history under the influence of the “Global Turn” in historiography], *Shixue lilun yanjiu*, no. 3 (2020): 4–10.

¹⁸ See Liang Zhanjun, “‘Quanqiushi’ yu ‘shijieshi’ yitong chuyi” [The similarities and differences between “global history” and “world history”], *Shoudu shifan daxue xuebao* (*Shehui kexue ban*), no. 3 (2006): 1–5.

¹⁹ See Ma Keyao, “Kunjing yu fansi: ‘Ouzhou zhongxin hua’ de pochū yu shijieshi de chuānglǐ” [Dilemma and reflection: The dismantling of “Eurocentrism” and the creation of world history], *Lishi yanjiu*, no. 3, (2006): 3–22; Peng Xiaoyu, “Xifang lishi wudu de dongfang Beijing: Falü geming, zongjiao gaige yu xiudao shenghuo” [The Eastern context of Western historical misinterpretation: Legal revolution, religious reform, and monastic life], *Lishi yanjiu*, no. 1 (2006): 124–35, 192; Yu Jinyao, “‘Ziben zhuyi’ yu 16 shiji yilai de shijie lishi” [“Capitalism” and world history since the 16th century], *Xuehai*, no. 3 (2007): 92–94; Zhang Xupeng, “Quanqiushi yu minzu xushi: Zhongguo tese de quanqiu shi heyi heneng” [Global history and national narratives: How a global history with Chinese characteristics is possible], *Lishi yanjiu*, no. 1 (2020): 155–73, 223.

²⁰ The official website of the Global History Center of Capital Normal University is <https://ghc.cnu.edu.cn/>.

²¹ He Ping, “70 nian de Zhongguo shijieshi yanjiu huigu—yanjiu fanshi ji qi zhuan yi,” 21.

Regional Civilization Research Center at East China Normal University in 2014 and the Institute for Global History at Beijing Foreign Studies University in 2016.²² In 2016 Shandong University established the Institute for Global and Transnational History.²³

Furthermore, Chinese world history studies in the twenty-first century has opened up many specialized fields of historical research. In addition to deepening the traditional fields of political history, economic history, military history, diplomatic history, history of international relations, revolutionary history, and colonial history, scholars have extended their reach to labor history, peasant history, social history, religious history, legal history, cultural history, education history, art history, urban history, rural history, history of everyday life, overseas Chinese history, and indigenous history, forming a new tradition of looking at history from “up, down, left, and right.”²⁴ Recently, some pioneering fields such as environmental history, women’s history, population history, gender history, family history, history of disease, medical and social history, disaster history, energy history, intellectual history, book history, history of mentalities, conceptual history, history of memory, history of emotion, digital historiography, and new imperial history have all crossed paths with world history studies.²⁵

²² The official website for the Institute for Global History at Beijing Foreign Studies University is <https://global.bfsu.edu.cn/en>.

²³ Yang Hua and Chen Zugen, “Kuayue, guanlian, hudong—Quanqiushi zai guonei de chuanbo ji yingxiang” [Crossing, connecting, and interacting—the diffusion and impact of global history in China], *Qinghua daxue xuebao (Zhexue shihui kexue ban)*, no. 4 (2020): 37.

²⁴ For example, in legal history, Cheng Handa and Li Peifeng’s *Yingguo sifa zhidu shi* [History of the English judicial system] (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 2007) provides a comprehensive and systematic account of the history of the English judicial system, as well as the values and operational mechanisms behind the system. In urban and rural history, Liu Jinghua’s *Xi’ou zhongshiji chengshi xinlun* [New theory of medieval cities in Western Europe] (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 2000) reinterprets the dialectical relationship between cities and the countryside in Western Europe and the important influence of population and capital flow into the countryside on the rise of capitalism. In religious history, see Shao Zhengda et al., *Yingguo zongjiao shi* [History of religions in Britain] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2017), which takes the evolution of Christianity as the main content of the history of religions in Britain and comprehensively discusses the various religions that have been produced or are still influential in Britain. In overseas Chinese history, Zhu Jieqin’s *Dongnanya Huaqiao shi* [History of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008) is based on important facts about the social activities of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and is written chronologically, from the Han dynasty to the end of the Second World War and the period of independence and autonomy of Southeast Asian countries.

²⁵ For example, Li Huacheng of Shanxi Normal University sketched the correlation between demographic change and social change in England through the analysis of the difference in mortality rates of the Black Death in England from 1348 to 1350. See Li Hualcheng,

Research in these pioneering fields has enriched the development of the discipline of world history in China and deepened scholarly understanding of world history.

Take environmental history as an example, because of its close connection with China's modernization: Chinese world history scholars began, in the 1980s, to introduce research methods from environmental history, and in the past forty years academic achievements have pushed forward, making environmental history an undisputedly emerging field.²⁶ At present, many universities

“Heisibing qijian de Yingguo shehui chujie (1348–1350)” [The first exposure of English society during the Black Death (1348–1350)], *Zhongguo shehui kexue*, no. 3 (2007): 189–200. Wang Tao, Nanjing University, used digital tools to mine the data in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* [The general German biography] to reveal the construction of “Germans” in the imagination of mainstream German historians and the spread of German historical cities from south to north. See Wang Tao, “Shuzi rewen kuangjia xia Deyizhi renwu zhi de qunxiang miaohui yu leixing fenxi” [Group portrait and typological analysis of the German people in the digital humanities framework], *Lishi yanjiu*, no. 5 (2018): 148–66. Zhang Qianhong of Zhengzhou University reveals how the Israeli government built a bridge between modern national revival and classical historical glory to inspire in the Jewish people a sense of belonging and identity for the new state through history of memory. See Zhang Qianhong, “Lishi jiyi yu dangdai Yiselle guojia renting de goujian” [Historical memory and the construction of contemporary Israeli national identity], *Shijie lishi*, no. 6 (2019): 3–7. Wang Qingjia at Peking University analyzes how the study of the history of emotions takes emotions as the object of study and incorporates emotional factors into historical research. See Wang Qingjia, “Tuozhan lishixue de xinlingyu” [Expanding the new frontier of historiography: The rise of the history of emotion and its three features], *Beijing daxue xuebao (Zhexue shehui kexue ban)*, no. 4 (2019): 95–97. Fu Xinqiu traces the “encounter” between the study of British imperial history and gender history, arguing that the perspective of gender history has enriched and expanded the study of imperial history. See Fu Xinqiu, “Xingbie shijiao xia de Yingdiguo shi yanjiu” [The study of British imperial history from the perspective of gender], *Shixue lilun yanjiu*, no. 4 (2020): 138–44.

²⁶ Related works include Mei Xueqin, *Huanjing shixue yu huanjing wenti* [Environmental historiography and environmental issues] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2004); Xu Zairong, *Quanqiu huanjing wenti yu guoji huiying* [Global environmental issues and international responses] (Beijing: Zhongguo huanjing kexue chubanshe, 2007); Mei Xueqin, *Huanjing shi yanjiu xulun* [Narrative of environmental history studies] (Beijing: Zhongguo huanjing kexue chubanshe, 2007); Jia Jun, *Yingguo dili xue jia Yi'en Ximengsi de huanjing shi yanjiu* [Environmental history of the British geographer Ian Simmons] (Beijing: Zhongguo huanjing kexue chubanshe, 2011); Mao Da, *Hai you xia'an: Meiguo feiqiwu Haiyang chuzhi guodong yanjiu* [The sea has a cliff: A study of US Waste Marine Disposal Activities (1870–1930)] (Beijing: Zhongguo huanjing kexue chubanshe, 2011); Bao Mao Hong, *Huanjing shixue de qiyan he fazhan* [The origins and developments of environmental historiography] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2012); Fu Chengshuang, *Ziran de bianjiang: Beimei xibu kaifa zhongren yu huanjing bianxian* [Natural borders: Changes in people and the environment in the development of the North American West] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012); Shen Hou, *The City Natural: Garden and Forest Magazine and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013); Gao Guorong, *Meiguo huanjing shixue*

in China, such as Tsinghua University, Peking University, Renmin University of China, Beijing Normal University, Capital Normal University, Nankai University, Fudan University, Sun Yat-sen University, Yunnan University, Liaoning University, and research institutes, such as the Institute of World History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, have experts in world environmental history, who systematically carry out teaching and research, talent cultivation, and international exchange in environmental history. Authoritative and core journals such as *Lishi yanjiu* [Historical studies], *Shijie lishi* [World history], *Shixue lilun yanjiu* [Studies in historical theory], *Shixue yuekan* [Monthly journal of history], and *Xueshu yanjiu* [Academic research] regularly publish papers on topics in environmental history, and conferences on environmental history of different scales and levels have been held on regular basis.

In parallel with the booming development of world history studies in China, the interest of scholars in Western historical theory and methodology has deepened and the breadth of research has gradually expanded. The history and theory of Western historiography have thus become an important area of disciplinary construction in world history, represented by the 2011 publication of *Xifang shixue tongshi* [General history of Western historiography],²⁷ and the works of well-known Western scholars such as Benedetto Croce, R. G. Collingwood, Georg Iggers, and Hayden White have been translated and

yanjiu [Studies in American environmental historiography] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2014); Liu Xiangyang, *Qingjie kongqi de boyi: Huanjing zhengzhishi shijiao xia 20 shiji Meiguo kongqi wuran zhili* [Contest over clean air: 20th-century air pollution governance in the US under the perspective of environmental political history] (Beijing: Zhongguo huanjing kexue chubanshe, 2014); Teng Haijian, *Meiguo huanjing zhengce yu huanbao lifa yanjiu: Yi huanjing zhengzhi shi wei shijiao* [American environmental policy and environmental protection legislation: Environmental political history as a perspective] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2018); Mao Lixia, *Cong geli bingren dao zhili huanjing: 19 shiji Yingguo huoluan fangzhi yanjiu* [From isolating patients to governing the environment: A study of cholera prevention and control in 19th-century Britain] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2018); Xiao Xiaodan, *Ouzhou chengshi huanjing shixue yanjiu* [Study of European urban environmental historiography] (Beijing: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2018).

²⁷ Zhang Guangzhi, ed., *Xifang shixue tongshi* [General history of Western historiography], 6 vols. (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2011). Related works on the history and theory of Western historiography include He Zhaowu and Chen Qineng, eds., *Dangdai xifang shixue lilun* [Contemporary theory of Western historiography] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexue chubanshe, 2003); Hou Jianxin and Xu Hao, *Dangdai xifang shixue lipai* [Contemporary schools of Western historiography] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2001); and Peng Gang, ed., *Hou xiandai shixue lilun duben* [Readings in postmodern theory of historiography] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2016).

introduced into China.²⁸ In addition, Chinese world history scholars have actively drawn on interdisciplinary research, introducing not only research theories such as metrological history, psychohistory, and oral history, but also research methods from social sciences such as economics, sociology, population studies, and statistics and even applying theories and methods from the natural sciences such as genetics, paleontology, biochemistry, and geology to the study of world history, deepening our knowledge of the historical process of human evolution and migration.

When it comes to cultivating scholars, their number in world history research studies is also growing. After establishing a complete degree system in 1978, China has independently produced a large number of master's and doctoral degrees in history, which has provided a steady flow of fresh thinking to the discipline of world history in China.²⁹ Schools with strong world history instruction and research, such as Peking University, Nanjing University, Nankai University, and Northeast Normal University, have basically inherited the academic tradition and their dominant positions. Schools that were not at the forefront of world history teaching and research in the past, such as East China Normal University and Capital Normal University, have likewise developed rapidly and become the new leaders in world history. At present, twenty-three institutions in China have established separate world history majors, and undergraduates in some of them also receive professional training in both world history and multiple foreign languages, such as Capital Normal University, which opened a world history major in 2001, with students studying in both the School of History and the School of Foreign Languages.³⁰ In 2012 Peking University opened a major in foreign languages and foreign history, which was jointly established by Yuanpei College, the School of Foreign Languages, and the Department of History. In terms of postgraduate training, although China resumed the postgraduate enrollment system after 1978 and formally

²⁸ For example, Benedetto Croce, *The Theory and Practice of Historiography*, trans. Fu Rengan (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1982); R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, trans. He Zhaowu et al. (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1986); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, trans. Chen Xin (Nanjing: Yilin chubanshe, 2004); and Georg Iggers et al., *A Global History of Modern Historiography: From the 18th Century to Contemporary Times*, trans. Yang Yu (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2011).

²⁹ Xiang Xiang, Song Faqing, Wang Jiafeng, and Li Hongtu, "20 shiji Zhongguo de shijieshi yanjiu (shang)" [World history studies in 20th-century China (part 1)], *Xueshu yuekan*, no. 7 (1999): 94.

³⁰ Xu Lan, "Xin Zhongguo 70 ninan shijieshi xueke de huigu yu zhanwang," 14.

implemented the degree system in 1981, there were very few degree institutions capable of awarding postgraduate degrees in world history at that time. After years of development, as of 2019, China has thirty-one first-level doctoral programs in world history, more than eighty first-level master's programs, plus dozens of circulating postdoctoral programs in world history, forming a complete network for the cultivation of world history scholars.

In recent years, the Chinese world history community has been actively and frequently engaged in academic exchanges with foreign countries, connecting with international academics in a comprehensive and multitiered manner. At the individual level, more and more scholars of world history have gone to institutions of higher learning, academic centers, and archives around the world, to pursue doctoral degrees, conduct in-depth research, lecture, or attend academic conferences, constantly enriching themselves while also strengthening their exchanges with their counterparts outside China. At the same time, more and more scholars from various countries and from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan are visiting the mainland to lecture, research, and attend conferences. Chinese scholars have also undertaken collaborative research projects with foreign scholars, such as participating in the compilation of the *Feizhou tongshi* [General history of Africa] under the auspices of UNESCO, and scholars from China, Japan, and Korea have been working together on *Dongya sanguo de jinxindai shi* [Modern history of the three East Asian countries]. At the level of academic institutions, almost every university and research institution has a partner university or research institution for foreign exchange. In addition, there are countless academic conferences held within China or attended by Chinese world history scholars outside of China.

At the level of academic organizations, the research societies of world history have also carried out fruitful exchanges with their foreign counterparts. In May 1987, in close collaboration with Nanjing University and the University of Edinburgh, many experts and scholars in British history from home and abroad gathered at Nanjing University to attend the International Symposium on British History. Since the 1990s, China has held four large-scale international symposia on ancient world history. In 2001 the Institute of World History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences hosted the International Symposium on the History of the Twentieth Century in Nanjing. Since 2004, the Chinese Society for French Historical Studies has held an annual international seminar on French and Chinese history and culture in cooperation with relevant French academic institutions. Since 2009, the China British History

Association and the Royal Historical Society have established a mechanism for regular academic exchanges. In 2011 the Global History Research Center at Capital Normal University hosted the twentieth annual conference of the American World History Association. Some Chinese societies or scholars also participate in relevant international academic organizations, such as the Institut d'Histoire de la Révolution française [Institute of history of the French Revolution] in at Sorbonne and the World War II Studies Association. Especially worth mentioning is that the Association of Chinese Historians has been actively engaged in exchange activities with the International Congress of Historical Sciences. Since 1982, when the Association of Chinese Historians was accepted as a member of the International Congress of Historical Sciences (ICHS), Chinese scholars have organized delegations or attended the in their individual capacity every congress, held every five years, to give keynote speeches, lead panel discussions, or participate in roundtable symposia, making some of China's research contributions known to the international academic community. In 2015 the Twenty-Second Congress of the ICHS was held in Jinan, Shandong Province; it was the first time since its establishment in 1900 that the congress was held in an Asian country, thus further promoting the development of the discipline of world history in China.

With strong support from the state, the discipline of contemporary Chinese world history has developed rapidly. From the accessible announcements of key, general, and youth projects in world history of the National Social Science Fund, there were ten sponsored projects in 1994, thirty-two in 2009, and ninety-eight in 2019. Chinese scholars of world history have increasingly kept up with the international academic trends of research, with a large number of Chinese scholars having been accepted as members of professional historical societies and associations in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States. They have also made a series of distinctive research contributions, many of which have been recognized by the international academic community.

To summarize, Chinese world history can be broken down into five distinct periods since 1949. The period of the 1950s through the 1970s was a nascent period that established an early foundation for Chinese world history. Research in this period was inclined toward a universalist human history, drawing on Soviet disciplinary paradigms and teaching systems and with Marxist thought dominant. In the 1980s the concept of culture in the anthropological sense and theories of modernization helped Chinese scholars to reconceptualize the historical process in both China and the world. In the 1990s, under the influence

of postmodernist thought, Chinese scholars reflected on the historical knowledge constructed in the past and tried to free themselves from Eurocentrism. From the 1990s to 2016 newer paths of global history, transnational history, and cross-cultural studies gradually expanded within the writing of world history in China, and scholars increasingly emphasized the concept of networks to understand world history.³¹ After 2016 we are witnessing a turn toward conservatism and anti-globalization even as China is proactively embracing world currents. The outbreak of a trade war between China and the United States only has not affected normal interactions between the two countries but has also worried researchers of world history. In such a context, how do we continue the study of world history? How do we develop a world history or global history with Chinese characteristics? How do we reconceptualize the process of world integration as well as globalization and counter-globalization? As Liu Xincheng points out: “Should we deny the general trend of ‘interaction-integration’ or acknowledge that there will be temporary ‘fluctuations’ and ‘reversals’? If there are ‘fluctuations’ and ‘reversals,’ what are their causes? Are there cycles? All these questions need to be explored in depth, and Chinese scholars should pay particular attention to research in this area based on China’s historical encounters and practical needs.”³²

The disciplinary construction of Chinese world history can be roughly divided into three stages.³³ The first stage was from 1952 to 1978. During this period, the discipline of world history in China was relatively nascent in general. Most research was then based on limited historical materials and secondary sources, which, after being turned over repeatedly and cross-referenced, could yield some original conclusions, but were certainly not in-depth, and more often than not, anecdotal. The instructional materials were heavily influenced by Soviet scholars and lacked independent ideas and interpretations. Moreover, some political movements also wreaked havoc on the development of the discipline, so not much was accomplished. The second stage was from 1978 to 1990. The primary contribution of this period was the construction of a teaching and research system of general world history. Scholars cultivated by China itself after liberation were the stronghold at this time, but their roots in traditional studies were not as deep as those of the older generation of scholars, and

³¹ He Ping, “70 nian de Zhongguo shijieshi yanjiu huigu—yanjiu fanshi ji qi zhuanyi,” 16.

³² Liu Xincheng, “Goujian you Zhongguo tese de quanqishi” [Constructing global history with Chinese characteristics], *Guangming ribao*, September 16, 2019.

³³ Ma Keyao, “70 nian dili qianxing de Zhongguo shijieshi xueke,” 18–22.

they often lacked language proficiency. They had few opportunities to go abroad for exchanges, so they could only press their way forward with difficulty. Their strength, however, was their ability to investigate major academic problems. The third stage is from 1990 to the present. The new era was accompanied by the rise of Chinese scholars in the international arena, and Chinese academics continued to reflect on West-centrism and fashion a world history with Chinese characteristics, and a new trend of reexamining world history emerged, whether in academic research, curriculum teaching, or textbook editing and compilation. Theoretical paradigms gained prominence in world history studies. Scholars became even more determined to apply the “Chinese experience” to the interpretation of world history; Chinese world history studies gained wider range in terms of its research on regions and countries, as well as becoming increasingly optimized internally, and research grew more thematized and integrated. Since 2012, the Ministry of Education has set up 437 country- and region-specific research centers (including the first batch of 42 “cultivation stations” and the second batch of 395 “records stations”) in many universities, which have objectively further expanded the field of research for world history in China.

Although the discipline of world history in China has undergone rapid development since the founding of New China, particularly since the 1990s, and has made remarkable achievements, some problems in current research also deserve our attention. For example, the emphasis on empirical research is not conducive to improving theoretical literacy and research methods; microstudies are overemphasized, while not enough effort has been directed toward macroanalysis; developed countries are also overemphasized, while there is a severe shortage of research on developing countries and regions. As far as the scale of historical research is concerned, the Chinese academy generally suffers from two problems: “broad but not specialized” and “fragmented but not connected.” Some studies are biased toward grand narratives, ignoring the nonlinear and horizontal connections of history, and some studies are too fragmented, unable to connect with the larger historiographical context and problems. While these issues emerge as part of the flourishing moment of the booming field of world history in China, they still deserve our attention.

With regard to transcending West-centrism, a tendency to overcorrect has appeared, breaking through Eurocentrism while falling into the trap of Sino-centrism. It is important to understand that intentionally or unintentionally foregrounding Sinocentrism not only fails to break through Eurocentrism, but

also confirms the logical correctness of Eurocentrism and endorses Eurocentrism or Orientalism.

Real-life problems and objective factors have also overshadowed the study of contemporary world history in China. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not so convenient for Chinese scholars to engage in international travel and academic exchange, which may hinder their research process. In addition, changes in international relations (e.g., Sino-US relations) have also negatively affected world history research in China. In this regard, we still need to confront the situation with objectivity and cool heads.

Despite the above-mentioned problems, China's world history scholarship and disciplinary development are still moving in the right direction and will continue to gain more influence on the international scene. The future of world history research should also continue to bring Chinese history itself into the international arena of global history, creating conditions in which Chinese history and world history can both compete and prosper. This is also one of the directions in which Chinese world history researchers can break through the "Anglo-Saxon circle" in academic research.

Translated from the Chinese

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