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Top Ten Developments in the Studies of Chinese Humanities in 2015

1 The Center of Global Academic Culture Shifts Eastward, and the International Congress of Historical Sciences is Held in Asia

In the past thirty years, the influence of Chinese culture has been growing alongside China's strength as a country. One clear sign of this is China's increasingly normalized role as "the host of the East" in high-profile international scholarship and cultural affairs. In 2008, Beijing successfully hosted the 29th Summer Olympics. In 2015, the 22nd International Congress of Historical Sciences opened in Jinan, marking the first time this event, often hailed as "the history Olympics," was held in Asia. Additionally, the 24th World Congress of Philosophy is scheduled to be held in Beijing in 2018. These are signs that the center of global academic culture may be in the process of shifting eastward.

The 22nd International Congress of Historical Sciences, held August 23-29, 2015, was run jointly by the Association of Chinese Historians [Zhongguo shixue hui 中國史學會] and Shandong University and attended by more than 2,600 well-known representatives and organizations from 88 countries and districts. One of the most important developments at the congress was to "showcase the results of historians breaking away from Eurocentric and Western-centric research frameworks." Fourteen scholars gathered in the first session, which addressed the theme "China from Global Perspectives," to discuss the mutual connections and influences between China and the world as well as China's importance in globalization. Other sessions that were also well-received covered the themes "Historicizing Emotions," on the recent "emotional turn" in historical research, and "Digital Turn in History," which addressed the impact of historical research conducted during the current information age. China's president, Xi Jinping, sent a special congratulatory note to the congress emphasizing that "history is humanity's greatest teacher" and "historical research is the foundation of all the social sciences." The congress and President Xi's note put a spotlight on historical research.

2 **Differentiation in Confucian Studies: Upholding the “Song School” or a Return to the “Han School”?**

In Confucian studies, the Han school favors the Five Classics whereas the Song school reveres the Four Books. In recent years, these two schools have made a comeback. The Song school forms the foundation of what in recent decades has been called neo-Confucianism. With the Four Books as its canon, it is concerned primarily with human temperament and relationships and deals with ontological constructs. Its modern adherents include such great thinkers as the late Feng Youlan and Mou Zongsan. Scholars in the Han school, by contrast, are concerned mainly with politics and institutions; they imagine a system of government for a society undergoing many changes. Therefore, they favor the Five Classics, which pay closer attention to political systems. Supporters of the Han school perceive their position as a return to Confucianism’s origins. This trend of “returning to the Han school” is best represented by the recent emergence of such ideas as institutional Confucianism and political Confucianism.

Following the 1911 Revolution, the study of the classics became divorced from politics and its academic presence was mainly in historiography. It was considered dated, and the inherent value of its canon dismissed, a situation that left many scholars adrift. In 2015, Liu Mengxi reiterated Ma Yifu’s view that “the classics should be one of the Six Arts” in order to revive academic interest in the Six Classics. The works of many other scholars, such as Zhu Hanmin, Gan Chunsong, and Chen Bisheng, also include a call for the revival of study of the classics, resulting in a renewed clash between proponents of the Song and Han schools of Confucian thought. It remains to be seen whether study of the classics has the power to influence modern politics or to become a meaningful part of modern life.

3 **The Belt and Road Initiatives Invite a Global Response, and Research on Sino-Foreign Cultural Exchange Deepens**

In 2013, the Chinese government proposed a strategic initiative to establish a “Silk Road Economic Belt” and “Twenty-First-Century Maritime Silk Road.” The effects of this initiative, which stimulated and advanced research on the history of Sino-Western cultural exchange, could be felt immediately in the humanities. In 2015, research in the fields of history, archeology, linguistics, and literature offered new forecasts for relations between Eastern and Western cultures and civilizations.

The Silk Road, which dates back to ancient China, is a major transportation hub connecting Asia, East Africa, and Europe. It is also known as “the Canal of

Human Civilization” and “the Womb of Global Culture.” Starting with scholars such as Cen Zhongmian, Feng Chengjun, Zhang Xinglang, Huang Wenbi, Tang Yongtong, and Xiang Da, Chinese academic research on the Silk Road has grown in recent centuries. Achievements in the field in 2015 include the works and lectures of Ge Jianxiong, *The Silk Road and Cultural Interaction between East and West* [*Sichouzhilu yu dongxi wenhua jiaoliu* 絲綢之路與東西文化交流] by Rong Xinjiang, *The Silk Road* [*Sichouzhilu* 絲綢之路] by Liu Yingsheng, Yang Juping’s research on the Silk Road and ancient Greek civilization, and Hou Yangfang’s Silk Road map restoration project.

4 Narrating History: Source Criticism’s Challenge to Traditional Historical Research

In classical scholarship, major breakthroughs have almost always been connected to the discovery of new source materials. In recent years, paradigmatic shifts in methods and approaches to source materials have accompanied the continued emergence of new materials, such as bamboo strips, stele inscriptions, and documents. For instance, *e-kaoju* [electronic textual criticism and research], a form of historical research that uses digital and internet technologies to broadly aggregate and analyze related source materials, has steadily gained ground. *Er chong zou: Hong xue yu Qing shi de duihua* [二重奏: 紅學與清史的對話], by Professor Huang Yinong, exemplifies the success of this approach. The more groundbreaking and influential methodological development of the year, however, was source criticism.

Source criticism, also known as the study of historical archives, is a research paradigm and methodological approach to source materials used mainly in the study of official history. This paradigm can be traced back to debates on antiquity, historical origins studies, and postmodern historiographical methods. A method centered on analyzing the authorial intent of the historian, it mainly examines the question of how historical source materials take on their existing forms and what historical narratives they give rise to. It is currently employed mostly by scholars of Sino-Japanese history from the Qin to Han periods and scholars of the Northern and Southern Dynasties period.

5 Crisis and Revival: Chinese Philosophy Gains International Importance as an Academic Field

In recent years, Chinese philosophy, in a narrow sense, has existed in a state of both crisis and revival. In 2006, the well-known philosophy blog Leiter Report

Blog posted an entry on “Crisis in the Cultivation of Philosophy PhDs in China.” In 2008, the newsletter of the American Philosophical Association offered a similarly grim analysis of China’s situation. In the second half of the twentieth century, as leading Chinese philosophy scholars from Stanford University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Michigan retired, Chinese philosophy began to recede at American universities with the most prominent philosophical research departments. This period constitutes an interruption in the advancement of Chinese philosophical studies internationally.

At the same time, the specificity and nuance of Chinese philosophy have begun to regain attention among international scholars. Many scholars trained in both Chinese and Western philosophy are working to raise the quality of Chinese philosophical research. During the 2015 conference of the International Institute of Philosophy, held in Beijing September 16-19, an unprecedented special session on Chinese philosophy was convened. Flyers for the 24th World Congress of Philosophy, scheduled to be held in Beijing in 2018, announce that the official theme of the conference will be “Learning to Be Human,” a topic that is deeply connected to Confucian thought. The intellectual directions spurred, on the one hand, by the decline of quality overseas research in the field and the unprecedented international attention granted the field, on the other, might indicate that Chinese philosophy, as an academic field, is about to undergo some significant changes in the near future.

6 Holding on to the Enlightenment: Commemorating the Hundredth Anniversary of the First Issue of *New Youth* [*Xin Qingnian* 新青年]

In Shanghai, on September 15, 1915, Chen Duxiu founded *Youth Magazine* [*Qingnian zazhi* 青年雜誌], a publication that was renamed *New Youth* on September 1, 1916, beginning with the first issue of its second volume. The magazine has since gained a reputation for having established an ideological foundation for the May Fourth movement, critiquing China’s feudal past, transmitting Marxist ideology, supporting the New Culture and New Literature movements, and promoting individual liberation. However, in the current climate, in which traditional culture, particularly Confucianism, is enjoying a revival, the “enlightened” status of anti-traditional movements such as the May Fourth and the New Culture movements has been undergoing reexamination and questioning.

Academic conferences were held in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Anhui, and Henan and other cities in the fall of 2015 to mark the hundredth

anniversary of *New Youth* by examining and discussing the impact of the magazine and the New Culture movement on modern Chinese history, literature, thought, and culture. These conferences offered an opportunity for both a positive examination and critique of the New Culture movement, effectively establishing a counterdiscourse to the revival of Confucian studies. How does one evaluate the historical trajectory of “enlightenment” and twentieth-century anti-traditionalism? What position and function should be assigned to traditional culture in the future development of national and academic culture? From the fragmented opinions at present, one can see that the realm of intellectual inquiry has entered a diverse and contentious period.

7 The Scope of Scholarship Broadens to Include Resistance Literature

Interest in the literature of the War of Japanese Resistance in China and the end of World War II revived in 2015, marking the seventieth anniversary of their conclusion. Resistance literature was a prominent theme at academic conferences held throughout the country, special columns in periodicals, and hundreds of scholarly essays, including those on newly discovered primary materials. Some examples include Zhang Zhongliang’s essay on the context and origins of the March of the Volunteers [Yiyongjun March] and Zhang Yesong’s “The Battleground ‘Landscape’ and the Treble Texts: A Report about Qiu Dongping’s *Lost Book Marching Towards the Enemy’s Rear Area* [*Zhanqu beijing yǔ wenben sanchong xing—dongping yi shu xiang diren de fubei jinjun fajue baogao* 戰區‘背景’與文本三重性—東平佚書〈向敵人的腹背進軍〉發掘報告].” Several books released in 2015 offer new theoretical perspectives on Resistance literature, such as *Posui yu chongjian: 1937-1945 kangzhan shiqi de Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* 破碎與重建: 1937-1945 抗戰時期的中國文學研究], by Gao Yuanbao, which deals with victorious battlefronts and occupied territories, and *Xiaoshuo zhong de Nanjing datusha yu minzu guojia guannian biaoda* [小說中的南京大屠殺與民族國家觀念表達], by Li Yongdong, which discusses the home front and liberated areas.

Resistance literature reached its first peak in the ten years after the Japanese invasion of China (1937-1945). After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Resistance literature became an important part of “Red Memory.” Research on Resistance literature has been influenced by these two main ideological contexts, which accounts for both its flourishing and its limitations. In recent years, the intellectual environment and scope of research in China have become more open and liberal, drawing heavily on ideas ranging

from democracy to colonial theory. Thanks to renewed interest in Resistance literature, the field has made theoretical breakthroughs and progress, marking a turning point.

8 Macro-Oriented Research Makes a Comeback and Global History Trends

In the past twenty years, global history, a major intellectual trend in international academic studies, has been the topic of debate in Chinese history circles, revolving mainly around the issue of historiographical writing practices. As a trend that is in the process of taking shape, global history, with its emphasis on macro perspectives and the “total” scope of history, is undoubtedly seen as a counterweight to the currently dominant method that privileges micro-perspectives and research based on attention to detail and fragments.

At the 22nd International Congress of Historical Sciences, held in Jinan in 2015, the most important of the four topical sessions that convened was “China from Global Perspectives.” As Capital Normal University celebrates the fourth anniversary of the establishment of its Global History Research Center, global history and cross-regional civilization studies programs at Beijing Foreign Studies University, Shanghai Normal University, and Shandong University are also establishing research centers. Recent discussions over New Qing History in China also demonstrate that conversations—some tinged with anxiety—are taking place about the variety of historiographical methods available, including global history. In a world in which even culture and the economy are constantly merging, how does one address the growing trend of integration in relation to the integrity of individual countries and specific cultural subjectivities? How does one incorporate Chinese historical narratives into global history? These are pressing questions that are sure to have long-term implications for the future of Chinese historiography.

9 Yang Yi Restores the Hundred Schools of Thought, Drawing Widespread Academic Attention

China's pre-Qin period included pivotal breakthroughs in Chinese thought. The Hundred Schools of Thought contributed uninhibited creativity and penetrating insights to myriad discussions, creating a cultural tradition that has lasted to the present. To study the pre-Qin classics and the Hundred Schools of Thought is to explore the origins and formative processes of Chinese

civilization; it is to decode the DNA of Chinese national identity. Even so, many flaws, blind spots, and errors endure from two thousand years of research and study.

For many years, Yang Yi has combed through, analyzed, and interpreted not only the pre-Qin classics and Hundred Schools canon but also countless related documents and primary materials to trace their ideological origins. His 2015 work *Genesis of Confucius' Analects* [*Lunyu huanyuan* 論語還原], along with works from his previously published “Genesis of the Hundred Schools” series (which includes *Genesis of Laozi*, *Genesis of Zhuangzi*, and *Genesis of Han Feizi*), all seek to strip present classical studies of their frills and laces. By restoring classical works to their unfettered state as canonical documents and historical evidence, Yang seeks to reveal the original context for understanding the value of the ideas expressed in them. His approach has garnered the widespread attention of scholars and might be the first thorough reconsideration and exegesis of pre-Qin and Hundred School texts since the antiquity debates of the 1920s.

10 **Chen Lai Receives the Confucius Culture Prize and a New Generation of Confucius Scholars Make Their Grand Entrance**

On September 27, 2015, Chen Lai, a professor of philosophy at Tsinghua University and chair of its Academy of Chinese Learning, received the Confucius Culture Prize at the seventh World Confucian Conference. The prize, established by China's Ministry of Culture in 2009, is the most prestigious prize offered in the field of Confucius studies. It is awarded to organizations and individuals that have made extraordinary contributions to Confucius studies as well as the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture worldwide. Previous recipients of the award include Pang Pu and Tang Yijie, among other mainland scholars who were educated around 1949, when the People's Republic of China was established. Chen Lai, by contrast, is part of a generation of Confucius scholars who grew up during the market reform era and are reaching the peak of their careers.

Born into a vastly different context, this newer generation of Confucius scholars diverges quite a bit from older generations in terms of intellectual models, modes of inquiry, and points of interest. Older generations comprised individuals who became familiar with the classical canon in childhood. Although they had a stronger foundation in the classics, their education was nonetheless steeped in Western academic theory. In an era of transition, in which old and new coexisted uneasily, their relationship with the classics

likely veered between doubtful contemplation and renewed endorsement. The older generation was not just one of scholars but also one of philosophers. In contrast, the current generation, which came of age during the market reform era, likely trained in the contemporary academic system, in which one pursues a course of study within specific disciplinary divisions. They approach the classics mostly by examining existing scholarship through the lens of epistemology. Living under China's discursive regime of cultural subjectivity, they tend to be more conservative, often prioritizing continuation of the system over engaging in cultural work. Whether Confucius studies can create the conditions necessary to sustain its relevance in twenty-first-century China will depend largely on the efforts of this generation.