



# Back to historical views, reconstructing the sociological imagination: The new tradition of classical and historical studies in the modern Chinese transformation

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## Abstract

Historical perspectives are a means of reconstructing the sociological imagination, as classical sociologists did. There are many historical dimensions in Karl Marx's social studies: dialectical analysis of the present as history; reconstructed narratives of historical events; and finally, evolution of family, ownership, state, and social formations. Likewise, in order to understand the reality of Chinese society, we need to examine the transformation of modern Chinese social thought and its contexts. By reinterpreting the Theory of the Three Epochs from the classic *Spring and Autumn Annals*, Kang Youwei proposed that the establishment of the Idea of Cosmic Unity as the universal value for world history and the building of the Confucian religion for the cultivation of mores had resulted in the successful transformation of Chinese society from the Era of War to the Era of Peace. In contrast, Zhang Taiyan upheld the tradition of 'Six Classics

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are all Histories' and furthered the academic change of focus from classics to history, which Wang Guowei and Chen Yinque carried out. Through the method of synthetical deduction in the social sciences, Wang Guowei interpreted classics historically in *Institutional Change in the Yin and Zhou Dynasties*, confirming the original principle of the Zhou regime and etiquette on the basis of the patriarchal clan system and its emphasis on law, mores, and institutions. On the other hand, Chen Yinque thoroughly investigated the Middle Period of Chinese history from the perspectives of concurrence and inter-attestation and outlined a historical landscape of interfusion between Hu and Han nationalities, the mixing of various religions, the migrations of diverse groups, and the integration of different cultures and mores. In short, there are two waves of intellectual change in the Chinese modern transformation, which together have established the new discipline of Classical and Historical Studies as well as the subsequent institutional and spiritual sources of social and political construction.

### **Keywords**

Chinese classics, history, Kang Youwei, Wang Guowei, Chen Yinque

### **Introduction: From Marx's view of history**

No one would deny the fact that sociology is a newly emerged subject. Nevertheless, a newly emerged subject would by no means follow suit, or imitate other subjects, or make a living by chewing others' dinner leftovers. The emergence of sociology did not lie in the need to start a new domain that would highlight the explanatory power of the logos 'societas' or 'social,' but in a thorough reorganization of past forms of knowledge to combine views and experiences, reality and history, institution and mores, the foundation of national systems and ethnic integration, and social sciences and humanities, which today are intentionally isolated; construct a general subject based on life experiences as well as a spiritual tradition; and open up a possible future for world history. Unfortunately, in the past 30–40 years, sociology has gradually lost the aspirations and the insights that it once possessed and has fallen into an indifferent state that has abandoned both feelings and soul, as remarked by Weber.<sup>1</sup>

Although sociology today has done plenty of work in sub-sociology, as stated by Gouldner (1967), it has hardly surveyed the panorama of life altogether through the complex texture of experiential phenomena. Some sociologists may demand that the whole world act in accordance with their own abstract standpoints, values, or beliefs, turning themselves into tyrants with extreme opinions; some sociologists may play with and even take over the life experiences of people through sophisticated program calculations, making them puppets of mathematical technology; some sociologists may be busy allocating resources through markets and institutions in a great many research projects and enjoy the pleasure of managing people

and spending money. When this kind of learning becomes an international trend, people will be unlikely to hold it in high esteem. In this case, no matter what kinds of standards and norms are established, the research itself has been degraded into a connection between capital and employment, or between subordinates and superiors, and genuine academic learning will have come to an end.

However, at the moment of its emergence, sociology has shown courage in extricating itself from degradation. Sociology comes along with the drastic transformation of a society. Its experience, cognition, and judgment on modern crises come from deep feeling and analytical ability in many aspects. It strives, from the perspectives of structure, mechanism, and behavior, to recognize the whole through observation of the part, and to present the constitutional logic of total experience and world history that has been formed by collisions and interactions between different regions and civilizations at comprehensive levels, such as experience, history, and opinion. As sociology from its commencement has been observing the experiences and history of the whole world, it thus has a general grasp of intellectual, institutional, and social history in various civilizations; in the meantime, it endeavors to enter into the complete experiential world of real life, which renders it strongly problem conscious and socially aware. These factors have made sociology a brand-new science. Through a literature review, one can find that the historical and theoretical works of almost all classical sociologists have such distinctive characteristics.

‘From concrete to abstraction, then from abstraction up to concrete’ implies a basic method of the new sciences, as summarized by Marx (1979: 38), who intended to plant the basis of his concept in the world of concrete and complete experience, and to lift it up to new experiences and new life and thus achieve the ‘second voyage’ of ‘from abstraction up to concrete.’ Marx’s critiques of the philosophy of poverty are that those ideologists immersed in the conceptual world had neither the intention nor the ability to empathize with real live people in their society. They resemble Mr Chatterley in DH Lawrence’s novel (2006), who is an incapable human being wearing the cruel disguise of supervising his employees. Marx (1972, 2002) found the overall structure and operating mechanism of the capitalist production mode and man’s value in materialized production (general value or abstract labor) and its religious form (commodity or currency fetishism), which is a case of obtaining a general explanation from concrete experiential phenomena. The common things in people’s daily lives hold the biggest secrets in the world. The commodity in *Capital* is just the essence of human nature in materialized labor, and the relationship in commodity production also reflects the social relations of human beings and the relationship between Christianity and the state entering into civil society in traditional Western issues.

Marx’s theory is representative of classical sociology. The ascension of the scientific method ‘from abstraction up to concrete’ to concrete experience demonstrates that any real-life experience would not become a complete experience merely because of its actuality. The real-life experience is a component of history and also a key connector through which history could stretch to the future (Cunow, 2006). However, history as we refer to it here is not only a kind of historical

sequence in linear time, but it also has multiple historical dimensions. History constitutes the realistic social experience through different methods.

First, the beginning of *Capital* stated that ‘the development of social economic formation is a process of natural history’ (Marx, 1972: 12). What is natural history? This term implies that all categories of history have specific conditions as well as general purposes. Marx presented his conception of natural history as a Hegelian inherently dialectical movement, that is, a syllogism conception of history based on the logic of the capitalist production mode (Cohen, 1978: 7–29). It evolves to material production through reproduction of the human species, then develops to production of the freedom of man, with a general historical aim (Marx, 1972: 12, 2000: 90). Such a conception of history has a basic philosophical perspective and basic law of history, which regards the origin of the human species (the logic of kinship), the alienation of labor (the logic of capital and the civil society), and human emancipation (the logic of free alliance) as a dialectic historical evolvement of the ‘thesis–antithesis–synthesis’ triad. Endeavors that imply comprehensive historical theory can be found in general historical works since the end of the Qing Dynasty in China, which tried to present the unified pattern of Chinese civilization and its exterior integration so as to anticipate its future in the historical dimension.<sup>2</sup>

Second, the other dimension of Marx’s historical research method bears the characteristics of structural history. He proposed the concept of prehistory of the present in ‘primitive accumulation,’ illustrating that the history of the primitive accumulation of capital is a restructuring process of the whole social structure and social relations and provides necessary structural conditions for the new social form. In other words, the production mode of capitalism is not self-consistent in the beginning; it needs to be fulfilled with the help of some specified historical opportunities. Therefore, the aim of studying the prehistory of the present is to find out the specific precondition of historical transitions; for example, ‘the enclosure movement,’ the ‘peasant revolution,’ and empires’ ‘colonizing activities’ are all key historical elements with such structural functions. However, as soon as the capitalist production mode was formed, primitive accumulation began to keep to the logic of history of the present; as soon as the formal employment relationship was fixed, capital could realize continuous self-replication and started internal recycling within the capitalist production mode (Althusser and Balibar, 2001: 295–310). Of the two different logics of structural history, prehistory of the present signifies innovation and generation, emphasizing the function of bringing about abrupt changes of historical nodes in social transitions; history of the present appears to be a ‘self-reproduction’ system, in which people have much less in the way of social choices under the circumstance of structural solidification (Marx, 1972: 12).<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, Marx’s classical models of historical concreteness are presented in a series of works represented by *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

The tradition of all past generations weighs like an alp upon the brain of the living... Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of whole cloth; he

does not make it out of conditions he chose himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand. (Marx, 1961: 121)

This book depicted a series of events of French society, starting with the chaos of the 1848 revolution and ending with the restoration of Louis Bonaparte to the throne in 1851. It did not keep to the general view of the philosophy of history from beginning to end, but rather, in investigating the events, tried to present the complicated contingency in history through historical annals, and liberated those details that were not influenced by historical rules. It showed that, in the experiential world, contingency of plots serves as a primary expression of historical truth; history is not an explanation of reality that is imposed by views; rather, it is a reality composed of an intertexture of past things. This book was not a diachronic depiction based on a sequence of historical events; it was a presentation of this specific period of history, which showed that the essence of history was not a deductive process of stories. This piece of Marx's writing on history applied a sophisticated technique of writing by composing all historical plots and reorganizing the materials according to the theoretical logic of the events, thus endowing the seemingly constant changing stories with a structure of more explanatory power and integrating the contingency and inevitability of history together.<sup>4</sup> The historical narration 'from concrete to abstraction' has set up a progression from concreteness of storytelling to concreteness of explanation, with a tint of phenomenological reduction, hence making the structured stories approach nearer to historical truth.

It can be stated that the living history in Marx's social theory is presented in a variety of forms: on the one hand, it not only involves a stipulation of general history, but also possesses the logic of the generation and running of social structure; on the other hand, it not only involves a complicated deduction in presenting concrete historical events, but also contains the historical evolution presented in *Anthropology Notes* or *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* by Engels. These historical research studies present an intertexture of multiple dimensions, constituting a multi-perspective view of real experiences. Only by doing this can so-called empirical research acquire real resources for thinking and sociology obtain its source of existence.

As a matter of fact, Marxist historical views only serve as one instance of this. At the turn of the century, over 100 years ago, all those epoch-making classical sociologists did their sociological research from historical perspectives. Durkheim's *Professional Ethics and Civil Morals* and *The Evolution of Educational Thought* were regarded as groundbreaking books in social history (Emirbayer, 1997). The former book challenged the fixed judgment on the family and political systems of Greece and Rome in Western classics and set up basic subjects for the structure of social traditions in Western civilization from the perspective of the evolution history of the corporation; furthermore, it revealed the construction process of contract rights, property rights, and democratic regimes under the status of public sentiment through historical investigation from the classical period to the Middle Ages to modern times (Durkheim, 2001). The latter book systematically studied

how human education was realized through the 'testing of belief with rationality' mode, and how social order was shaped by establishing professional corporations and ceremonial activities such as those conducted at 'universities' (Durkheim, 2003: 100, 123–138). It can be stated that without human beings' remolding of activities and the unity of social organizations, and without human beings' attachment, sense of belonging to social life, and sense of awe over the existence of holy gods, society would lose its ethical foundation.

Weber's research was apparently incorporated within more historical perspectives. Substantially, all the work done by Weber can be regarded as a comprehensive study of history, not only because it involved the histories of religion, economy, the legal system, politics, and organization, and the religious studies of each civilization in the world, but also because he defined this research method and described its intrinsic value as 'historical individualism.' Therefore, Weber (1999: 48) believed that the real task of the social sciences was 'only the cognition that serves to the cultural significance of specified historical connection . . . was the purpose of concept formation and concept criticism'; in fact, certain classical sociologists, such as Pareto, Tönnies, Simmel, and Lukacs, each proposed his unique historical view, comments, and method of historical studies, thus forming different discussions on the origins and transitions of modern society. The historian Bloch (1992: 38) stated that 'understanding modern times by studying ancient times' and 'understanding ancient times by studying modern times' show that history and sociology share the same origins and development, and 'there is only one subject that studies the dead history as well as the living reality.'

History is sociology of the past; sociology is history of present times.

### *The first tide of modern intellectual transformation in China: The revolution of Chinese classics launched by Kang Youwei*

The purpose of quoting the historical orientation in this article is by no means to measure, test, judge, or even forge Chinese history and reality with existing Western theories; on the contrary, it aims to realize the significance of history through sociological observation, analysis, experience, and explanations of reality. The inspiration of classic sociology made us realize that the structure and transitions of modern Western society have different traditions, structural conditions, and senses of real-life experiences. The evolutionary trend of history is by no means purely unified. The modernity we see today is one of the possibilities that was derived from modernity; furthermore, different civilizations and communities make their adjustments, transformations, and reconstructions between tradition and modernity. The essence of history lies not only in its abundant possibilities, but also in its different ways of presenting the possibilities, thus rendering us able to grasp the abundance of real-life experiences, as well as multiple possibilities for creation and options in the future.

Therefore, history means that we should, from time to time, return to the tradition and reality that constitute our own experiences, that history should be a kind of open self-recognition. To inspect the structure of experiences, we should go back

to the starting point of our modern life. The modern transformation of China lasted for only 200 years and was an arduous and tedious journey, with many periods of upheaval and revolution. It appears that it was the mighty invasion of Western powers and the stimulation of tools and materials, institutions, and thoughts introduced by invasion that brought about this transformation. Thereafter, China seems to have been choosing and wavering between resistance and assimilation. In essence, the transformation had internal origins, which offered new opportunities for the regeneration of Chinese society.

Chinese history has lasted for thousands of years, and therefore the external factors of civilization have been not uncommon. As early as the turn of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, Zhou people traveled from the West and established the foundations of patriarchy and feudal order, which served as models for later generations (Fu, 2012; Wang, 2001a); then the Qin people launched battles from the West, unified the six states, and founded a unified system of centralization based on a system of prefectures and counties, which lasted for over 2000 years. At the end of the Han Dynasty, Buddhism was introduced into China from land to the west, after the Wei and Jin dynasties, and also in the course of its ups and downs in later dynasties; it developed into Mahayana Buddhism and its subordinate sects, which enabled the continuation and revitalization of Buddhism in China. There are similar examples afterwards. Wang (2007: 12) believed that,

... the imagination, journey and recognition from east to west has been in existence without interruption. The ideological 'Chinese view on the west' that emerged in the 20th century was the result of 'Western' stimulation in modern times as well as old thoughts of China,

which presents a historical pattern of West–East interaction. Therefore, in the face of stimulation from the West, China never experienced stress responses in the biological sense; rather, China engaged in the work of transplanting, transformation, and renovation. However, the precondition of transplanting external civilizational factors into local land is the restructuring and creation of local traditions.

This new chapter of transformation in modern China was opened by Kang Youwei. In addition, the first chapter in this 'groundbreaking' leap forward was the revolution of Chinese classics. Regardless of the comments of later generations, the starting point, as initiated by Kang Youwei and his contemporaries, still constitutes our modern destiny, and as we cannot get rid of it, so we should face up to it. Kang Youwei's reinterpretation of the three epochs of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* had many tints of the dialectical philosophy of history. He stated in Dong Zhongshu's *Study of Spring-Autumn* that 'since the pseudograph Zuo Zhuan ruined the Biography of Gongyang, the Spring and Autumn Annals declined, and the principles of Confucius also declined' (Kang, 1990: 29). In *Study of the Reforms of Confucius*, Kang stated that:

Spring and Autumn Annals recorded the events from King Wens' reign to the reigns of King Yao and King Shun. King Wen brought about the Era of Removing Disorders, and

during King Yao's and King Shun's reigns, there was an Era of Peace. Confucius' thought on reforms was the dominant idea, while the Biography of Gongyang implied the sublime words. (Kang, 1992: 335)

Kang's intention in establishing the *Biography of Gongyang* as the correct version was to re-mould the meaning of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and reiterate the assertions of 'New text Confucianism,' that is, Confucius' institutional reforms based on some historical pretext.<sup>5</sup> The theory of Three Eras embodies the principle of historical evolution:

The distant hearsay epoch was full of disorder and turbulence, but the hearsay epoch was well governed and the present epoch is peaceful. In the Era of War, culture and education were not made clear. In the Era of Good Governance, culture and education were gradually introduced, resulting in what is called the well-off society; the Era of Peace is called a great community, which has fully developed culture and education. . . . This is the foremost idea of the Spring and Autumn Annals. (Kang, 1990: 29)

Kang (1981a) intended to quote the historical pretexts and establish his theory of Three Epochs on that of historical evolution, postulating an 'Era of War,' an 'Era of Good Governance,' and an 'Era of Peace,' which is similar to the natural historical view based on general history, aiming to cast off the status of China 'managing the society by sticking to the governing rules of the Era of War' in the past 2000 years. In other words, ever since the forged classics concealed the great ideas and sublime words, China has been in a turbulent state that 'upholds high and low relationships between the monarch and his subjects in successive dynasties, and the robbers of the people furtively manipulated this technique and fooled the people' (Kang, 1981a: 469). Thus, Kang Youwei made an explicit judgment that the modern period is an Era of War and that the only way to end this epoch is to re-establish the 'sage king' image of Confucius and allow him to replace the monarch. In this way, the will of Destiny would be followed, the way of Destiny would be preserved, and the main idea of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* in historical evolution would be implemented, providing a path for the modern history of China towards general history rather than monarchy governance (Xiao, 2007).

It can be stated that Kang's revolutionary view of Chinese classics has established some basic principles for modernity from the view of history, as follows. (1) The way of evolution: from the perspective of evolutionism, Kang established the common axiom for historical evolution, that is, that the so-called 'doctrine of Confucius took virtue as its root and followed a righteous principle; in terms of law, he upheld justice, in terms of system, he advocated literary grace; its essence clarified the names and duties, and its application kept pace with the times' (Kang, 1981a, 468; Lou, 1992). (2) The way of revolution: Kang established the 'transformation method' of Confucianism by virtue of the principle of Confucius substituting King Wen, that is, the political reform scheme of replacing an autocratic

monarchy with a constitutional monarchy, which provided an ideological basis for his Reform Campaign,

... so a man of complete virtue is able to take advantage of his time and observe nature, in order to bring out the standard and proper tendency. Everything above and below is irregular; only making adjustments can help adapt to the changes. (Kang, 1987: 192)

(3) The people-oriented way:

People are the basis of the monarch. It is unjust to drive people to death. This view reverses people and hates thinking lightly of people's dying. The foundation of the state lies in the people, and since there should not be no one to govern the state, the monarchy was established. Thus, 'people being more important than the monarch' should be the foremost idea of Confucius and the origin of the elucidation of the Spring and Autumn Annals. (Kang, 1981a: 468)

(4) The way of industry and commerce: in his *Mencius' Sublime Words*, Kang stated,

Confucius esteemed literary grace rather than parsimony. . . . In the Era of War there were only a few people who were fully engaged in tillage; in the Era of Good Governance many people were able to get involved in industry and commerce. However, the doctrine of equality was implemented in agriculture and industry, as well as in commerce. (Kang, 1987: 19)

However, although Kang did not explicate the *Theory of Three Epochs* in an abstract way, he made a profound analysis of the dialectic process of the theory. For instance, in *Commentary to the Analects of Confucius*, he remarked,

One epoch can be divided into three eras, three into nine, and nine into eighty-one, into thousands and infinite epochs. . . . the Era of War contains the Era of Good Governance and Era of Peace; the Era of Peace contains the Eras of War and Good Governance. (Kang, 1984: 28; Wang, 2010)

In *Commentary to Doctrine of the Mean*, he stated, 'The doctrines of Confucius included the theory of Three Unifications and Three Epochs, with different unifications and different epochs, so the way may be different' (Kang, 1987: 192). However, there are two important issues in the philosophy of history that need explicit explanations. First, what is the ideal of Cosmic Unity as the common goal of history? Second, what constitutes the key element in the transformations among the three epochs? *Truth of Public Law* and the *Book of Great Harmony* (Kang, 1998) answered the first question. The two books proposed the shocking Utopian idea of 'going deep into the sufferings of the world' so as to 'eliminate the boundaries' of states, ranks, races, families and divisions of labor, achieve the Cosmic

Unity of 'loving all creatures,' and enter a state of 'Elysium.' The two books together set up an abstract ideal that lasted for over 100 years for Chinese of later generations. We can find the most basic spirit of Confucian thought in subsequent ideologies in China, such as anarchism and communism.

Nevertheless, the current transformation from an Era of War to an Era of Good Governance has many problems. In this respect, the integration of Western civilization and religion has also become an important factor. Kang Youwei believed that the civil rights revolution in European and American countries signified the 'first signs of Cosmos Unity,' but since there were national boundaries, battles broke out frequently and led to horrible disasters (Zhu, 1998: 17). However, 'the constitutional monarchy' was really the fundamental path to the Era of Good Governance. The foremost basis for the reform of Kang Youwei was the reform of political systems. The goal of political system reform was to revitalize civil rights, which is also the notion that 'the nation treats people as its foundation, so the business of people should come first,' as emphasized in *Comments on the Bureaucratic Institution* (Kang, 1981b: 607). To achieve the goal of enlightening people's minds and encouraging their spirits, it was necessary to establish social entities through local self-government and the organization of society; as he put it, 'the way to organization of society lies in public opinion. By abandoning private views and listening to public views, constitutionalism will be established' (Kang, 1981b: 607).

However, another important aspect of Kang Youwei's thought has received less attention in previous studies. Kang Youwei clearly realized that institutional construction alone could not accomplish the entire transition from an Era of War to an Era of Good Governance; to emancipate people from an Era of War, public feelings must be consoled. Kang's advocacy of Confucianism has received much criticism; however, his idea is still worth studying today. He believed that if Western societies had not experienced the enlightenment of Christianity in the Middle Ages, they would not have accomplished the transformation from monarchical power to civil rights in the modern sense. Therefore, a key factor in the transition from an Era of War to an Era of Good Governance lies in establishing an era of Sinicized religion, which can only be brought into Cosmic Unity in an Era of Peace by Confucianism. The *Study of the Reforms of Confucius* explicitly proposed that Confucius was the hierarch of Confucianism:

If one law and religion bring much happiness and no suffering to people, they are the acme of excellence; if the law and religion bring much happiness and little suffering, they are not perfectly good; if they bring much suffering and little happiness, then they are not good. (Kang, 1998: 53)

Kang intended to construct a kingdom of religion for refuge and enlightenment based on the thoughts of Confucius, to console the people who were not enlightened and let them believe in Cosmic Unity in the Era of Peace and realize the ultimate value of the general history as the foundation of Chinese civilization.

In this sense, the Era of Good Governance constitutes the key point in the Theory of the Three Epochs:

Government orders only regulate what is external, but the instructive and transforming power may go into what is internal. The flourishing and decline of states in the world is decided by the prosperity of religion. If the religion is prosperous, then the customs and people's morality are perfectly good, and the monarch can enjoy a well-governed society. If the religion is not prosperous, then the customs and people's morality are ruined, and the state is ruined. (Kang, 1988a: 287)

According to Kang, the literal sense of an Era of Good Governance denoted that it was a religionized historical stage. Only in the religionized stage can all people in a state transcend the history of autocratic monarchy so as to realize the ultimate request of value.

Therefore, in Kang's view, the modern world that was created by Western people under Christianity and that stimulated the creativity of Chinese in transforming their civilization was not purely the ultimate destination of public sentiment. *Kangzi and Articles* pointed out the differences between religions:

In establishing a state and governing the people, the religion that embraces the relation between monarch and subjects, father and son, husband and wife, and among brothers; the professions of scholars, farmers, handicraftsmen and businessmen; the customs of paying reverence to spiritual beings and sorcery, the teaching of poems, histories, ceremonies and music, and the foods including vegetables, fruits, fish and meat, is Confucianism... The religion that forbids eating meat and marrying a wife, lets the disciples worship the hierarch, cuts off the four professions, refuses the four subjects, and abolishes belief in spirits and human sentiments is Buddhism. Other miscellaneous religions, such as Protestantism and Mohammedanism were all derived from the two religions... but of the two religions, which is right? Which is wrong? Which prevails over the other? The ethics and customs of Confucianism comply with the Heavenly principle and are at the starting stage in prosperity; the abolishing of ethics and desires in Buddhism made it the acme of human civilizations. (Kang, 1988b: 13)

The goal of general history that Kang pointed out is a presentation of the dialectical relationship between the 'benevolence' and 'propriety' of Confucianism. Although the basis of 'propriety' involves hierarchical differences, 'benevolence' has the developing tendency for the benevolent order as universal sentiment, and the harmony between man and nature in the congenital hierarchical order will be gradually eliminated, and replaced by the transcendental 'all in one' spirit (Gan, 2011).

The previous discussion is not a monograph about Kang's thoughts; instead, it intends to demonstrate that the starting point of modern China was unfolded through a grand view of history about the continuation and transformation of civilization. Kang's theories, such as the extreme idea of the revolution of

Chinese classics, the theory of historical revolution, the proposition of transforming social traditions in a custom revolution, and the Utopian idea that advocated eliminating hierarchical systems have all become the key elements in the later historical transitions and social transformation of China. It seems that his theories are close to the liberal theory that was introduced from the West, and these theories have been affecting our destiny covertly and overtly from time to time. His abstract propositions of equal rights and political ideas have been serving as keynotes in the rhythm of modern China. Kang's followers, although highly influential, could not go beyond his impact.<sup>6</sup> No matter what differences existed between himself and Kang in terms of political views, the view of history in the 'New Historiography' that Liang advocated (1989b: 9–10) did not extend beyond the vision of his tutor. The assertions 'the trace of evolution should only be found in a crowd' and 'human evolution is the evolution of humans as a group, rather than of individuals' still emphasized the rule of evolution. Liang did make a powerful attempt in his harsh criticisms of 'Traditional Historiography,' but this was done out of personal sentiment.

In contrast, in 'coping with the fleeting social transition,' Yan Fu (1986: 1347) advocated 'sociology' and proposed that

The reason for human beings entering into social life from individual living lies in their demand for safety and other benefits...after achieving the sense of safety and other benefits, the rule of evolution may let those who can live social lives survive, and those who cannot live in groups perish; let those who are good at living in groups survive, and let those who are not good at living in groups perish. Why are certain species good at living in groups? They have a good command of sensing ability.

Yan's theories offered a supreme position to the 'social' logic in the modern transition of China, especially in his translating modern Western classics and devoting himself to Chinese–Western cultural exchanges; in a way that was similar to the Buddhist texts translation since the Han and Tang Dynasties, Yan transplanted Western concepts and thoughts into the thinking of the Chinese language, and expanded the inclusive and transforming ability of the Chinese vocabulary and grammar. Without this foundation, the modern transformation afterwards would have been out of the question in terms of ideas and language.

### *The second tide of the modern intellectual transformation: The historical transformation of Wang Guowei and Chen Yinke*

The revolution of Chinese classics that Kang launched constituted the first tide of intellectual transformation in modern China. The tide was violent and turbulent. It not only proposed overall innovation, but also astonishingly demonstrated the evolutionary law and the ideal of Cosmic Unity. However, although this intellectual transformation had a destructive momentum for a period, it served as the source of motivation for the radical revolution afterwards because of its strong

abstraction in view. Kang's 'family boundary elimination theory' had a powerful impact on Chinese society. Although the theory of Three Epochs was formed within the domain of Chinese classics, it had no followers in the tradition of this field. Liang Qichao, Yan Fu, and other scholars were all clear about the fact. Since the self-revolution of Chinese classics was on the rise, only a revolutionary historiography and a brand-new sociology could undoubtedly herald in the new historical epoch of China. Although Kang himself became a Royalist, he had sown the seeds of radical thought in the minds of the subsequent revolutionists. As soon as a revolution was initiated from tradition, it would become an uncontrollable passion that would terminate both tradition and history.

Zhang Taiyan made the harshest objection against this trend. Although his revolutionary thought was more radical, he was quite discontented with Kang's abstract historical philosophy that interpreted the notion of the Three Epochs through the Biography of Gongyang's explanation of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Zhang believed that

Confucianism is a religion based on history; those who believe in Confucianism should discard the trick of seeking emolument and express sentiments about the stories of previous monarchs time and again. Before the Spring and Autumn Annals, there were the six writings in line with Confucianism; while after the Spring and Autumn Annals, there were the Records of the Grand Historian. The Book of Han and records of successive dynasties, annals, and biographies, were all historical records of Confucianism. If a theory is restricted to the view of the Biography of Gongyang and advocates the big theory of the Three Epochs and the Three Unifications, treating all history as nonsense, then it is far from Confucianism! (Zhang, 2003: 179)

In revising the *Tao Book*, Zhang Taiyan abandoned Kang's method of interpreting ancient classics by quoting the denotations of modern writing and paid tribute to tradition in studying the Chinese classics. He explicitly pointed out that 'Confucius was an excellent historian in ancient times . . . after Confucius, the only scholar that can be compared with Confucius was Liu Xin in the Han Dynasty' (Zhang, 2000: 51). Briefly speaking, the difference between Kang and Zhang lies in the difference in the direction from Chinese classics to religion or from Chinese classics to historiography.<sup>7</sup> Zhang criticized Kang for his way of judging history only according to the *Biography of Gongyang*, and ignoring thousands of years' inheritance and the evolvement of Chinese history, replacing the dignity and tenderness of specific history with the arbitrary general historical view. Thus, at the turn of the transformation of state and society, it was necessary to find a way of exploring the historical essence of the Chinese classics, transforming the Chinese classics into historiography, with the purpose of strengthening the state, civilizing people, and enhancing the spirit of China with history.

Believing that the six writings were all historical works, Zhang devoted most of his effort to textual research on the classics. The scholars who realized the modern transformation from Chinese classics to historiography and integrated the recent

social science research methods were Wang Guowei and Chen Yinke. They initiated a Chinese history movement that served as the cornerstone of the Chinese civilization spirit among contemporary historians of the time.<sup>8</sup> Wang Guowei's younger brother, Wang Guohua, made the following comments on Wang Guowei (Wang, 1983: Preface):

In studying Chinese classics with historiography, my late brother raised no doubts about ancient ideas imprudently, nor did he stick to convention: he would always explore the truth. So even if the theory, 'the Six Writings are All Historical Works' was initiated by his predecessors, my late brother was the first to prove this theory with historical materials and establish the structure of a new historiography.

Wang (2001b: 875) made similar remarks later:

The indefinite status of studies has lasted a long time! For the studies today, we have disputes on new and old theories, disputes on Chinese and Western theories as well as disputes on useful theories and useless theories. I want to earnestly admonish the reader that there is no such case as new and old theories, Chinese and Western theories, or useful and useless theories. Those who created such words have no learning at all; even if they have learned a lot, they didn't know the right way to learn. It can be seen that, Wang Guowei's study on history didn't rely on any school in ancient or modern times, didn't care about the differences between new and old theories, and was not sensitive to Chinese-Western differences.

Most people believe that the quotation above illustrates only a moderate attitude on the part of scholars; however, after careful consideration, we can see that it has profound implications. In Wang Guowei's view, in studying the historical transition in China at that time as well as the revitalization of civilization after the transition, scholars should not be confined to the discrepancy and opposition between old and new, China and the West, and should return to recognizing Chinese culture itself. The 'body' included the 'changes,' and the 'changes' took place based on the 'body.' This is the basic spirit of Chinese civilization. It was exactly the endeavor that served as a link between past and future that needed strong sentiment and strenuous efforts: on this point, Chen (1992: 502) offered the most profound explanation:

People with lofty ideals, no matter whether in China or abroad, in ancient or modern times, were always laden with grief, even to death. The reason for their grief and death was not merely confined to one period of time or one region. There is rationality that goes beyond time and geography.

The 'body' stands for Chinese classics, while 'changes' stand for history. Wang Guowei integrated Chinese classics and history in his research method, and his most important studies were about some interdependent fields, such as propriety,

culture, institutions, and transportation. His research on institutional history can also be regarded as research on structural history, or even research on spiritual history, with *On the Constitution of Three Dynasties* as the typical representative. At the start of this article, he remarked with a changing view that ‘the most violent status for the revolution of politics and culture in China was at the turn of Shang and Zhou Dynasties’ (Wang, 2001a). This remark contained a great idea. By altering the consistent status of the First Emperor of Qin by other historians, it emphasized that system establishment and ethical moralization during the Zhou Dynasty constituted the basis for the spirit of the 2000-year institution.

Since the reign of the Five Emperors, the capitals that served as the political and cultural centers were all located in the east. Only the Zhou Dynasty rose from the West: The transfer of capital from east to west was initiated in the Zhou Dynasty. (Wang, 2001a: 287)

This fact also demonstrated that the drastic change from the Shang to Zhou Dynasties was the result of adapting to the ‘changes’ and establishing its ‘body.’ It seems that it was the ‘rise or fall of one family or the shift of the capital’<sup>9</sup> (Wang, 2001a: 287); in essence, ‘the purpose of establishing the political system and culture was to ensure the governance for myriad ages’ (Wang, 2001a: 287). Therefore, all the observations on Chinese history by far should be made based on the structure of the spiritual system. Only by conforming to the ‘body’ can we see the ‘changes.’ This is exactly the essence of the dialectical relationship between Chinese classics and historiography.

In this case, what constituted the ‘changes’ and the ‘body’ at the turn of Shang and Zhou Dynasty? By avoiding applying the ‘Chunqiu writing style’ in traditional historiography, Wang Guowei made a step-by-step analysis through deductive reasoning. First, the Zhou people adopted the ‘method of bequeathing to son rather than younger brother’ and altered the descent system of ‘brothers’ succession to the throne’ of the Shang people, deriving the ‘wife–concubine lineage system’ from the ‘heir adopting system,’ while the difference between the sons of the wife and those of concubines would surely result in a patriarchal system and mourning system. Within the clan system, the divisions of ‘big-inherit-law’ and ‘small-inherit-law’ established the order of honoring the honorable<sup>10</sup> and showing affection to kindred. Da Zhuan stated,

Thus, he regulated the services to be rendered to his father and grandfather before him, giving honor to the most honorable. He regulated the places to be given to his sons and grandsons below him, showing affection to his kindred. He regulated (also) the observances for the collateral branches of his cousins, involving all their members in the feasting. He defined their places according to their order of descent, and his every distinction was in harmony with what was proper and right. In this way, the procedure of human duty was made complete. (Wang, 2001a)

Thus, ‘the way for the ruler to assemble and feast all the members’ formed through the clan system has become the root of clan organizations in China. In addition, the

so-called 'mourning system' established other systems based on the exquisite structure of the patriarchal system. A complete ethical and sacrificial system was thus formed.

The patriarchal system not only offered an honoring system and a kindred system, but also established a political order. 'The system that supports the wife-concubine lineage system is the infeudation system.' Once the people of Zhou had determined the status of the son of lineal descent, the status of son of heaven was also established. As for other sons of the wife and sons of concubines, the emperor invested them with statuses according to their nobility, virtue, and talent. Although at the beginning of the Zhou Dynasty the same surnames and other surnames took up half of the statuses, respectively, the distinctions between son of heaven and princess, emperor, and subjects were determined. In this way, land and cities were invested step by step and the unified situation was formed for the first time ever. Moreover, the integration of the patriarchal system and feudalism constitutes the foundation of propriety in China. Wang (2001a: 297) remarked,

The people of Zhou established the 'wife-concubine lineage system' based on 'giving honor to the honorable' through 'showing affection to kindred,' then established the temple system based on 'showing affection to kindred' through 'giving honor to the honorable': this was the Zhou people's method of system formation.

What does this mean? According to the people's basic system, the fundamental difference between sons of the wife and those of concubines lies in the system of 'giving honor to the honorable,' but within an organization that unites, all members eat together, 'the cherishing of virtue secures repose; the circle of the king's relatives is a fortified wall' (Cheng, 2012: 278), the head of the family holds sacrificial ceremonies with all members of the family, demonstrating the system of 'showing affection to kindred' and the significance of teaching virtue. Therefore, the essence of the turn of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties was to establish the tradition of 'giving honor to the honorable' among brothers. The establishment of the status of family head shows that 'great families are buttresses' on the one hand and also, on the other hand, that the purpose of establishing the head of the family was to unite all family members. The establishment of a patriarchal system together with mourning and sacrifice was intended to integrate the systems of 'giving honor to the honorable' and 'showing affection to kindred' and realize the hierarchical differences within the family and social unity through family sacrificial ceremonies.

The temple system is a reversed political deduction of the internal logic operating within a patriarchal clan. Since the emperor is the state head and family head and serves as the head of the world, there is no difference in the mourning apparel system for the emperor, and there should be a system for showing affection to kindred in the sacrificial ceremony. However, as should be a premise for feudalism, people below the level of Great Officer should pay respect to the Greater Head of a branch family and, outside the monarchy system, there was the patriarchal system;

the system of giving honor to the honorable would inevitably stipulate differences in the ancestral temple number. As the pattern of the integration of state and family was formed, other systems derived from the wife-concubine lineage system of the Zhou Dynasty were based on the system of giving honor to the honorable and showing affection to kindred. If there is only the system of giving honor to the honorable without showing affection to kindred, then this becomes authoritarianism, while if there is only showing affection to kindred without giving honor to the honorable, then the order would not be formed. In the meantime, the integration of the system of giving honor to the honorable and showing affection to kindred changed the rule of the system into the order of propriety. 'Propriety' not only indicates rule, but also denotes emotional sublimation. The Zhou Dynasty upheld a peaceful rule in which 'there are three hundred important rules and three thousand smaller rules' (Yang, 2007: 284). The so-called 'sentiment-reason' relationships of the Chinese, namely human relations and the rule and teaching of virtue, all originated in the Zhou Dynasty.

Wang (2001a: 300) concluded,

Therefore, since there was a system of adopting a son as one's heir, the position of emperor was determined; since there was an infeudation system, the positions of different kindred became weakened and the emperor had a more honored status; since there was a wife-concubine lineage system, the patriarchal system was established; since there were mourning regulations, the whole state, even the whole world, became one family; since there was a rule that a high noble or great officer did not inherit his rank, men of virtue and talents were recommended; since there was a system of forbidding marriage within the same surname, the separation between males and females was strict.

Wang Guowei's interpretation of tradition was apparently different from traditional historiography in terms of the writing style; in contrast with Kang, Wang distained Kang's purely axiomatic grand narration, in which some conceptions traced their origins to Chinese classics – although we can still find elements influenced by Western philosophy and historiography. In Wang Guowei's three articles, *On Human Nature*, *Interpretation of Reason*, and *The Origin of Fate*, the author applied the 'law of sufficient reason' to sort out the materials through the cause-and-effect relationship analysis method (Chen, 1990: 18–33). Chen's (1992: 501) approach of 'adopting foreign thoughts and existing materials for reference and verification' also referred to this method.

In *On the Constitution of Three Dynasties*, when exploring the origin of Chinese history, Wang Guowei applied the methods of synthesis and deduction. He criticized traditional historiography by saying that 'there is argumentation but no logic, there is literature but no law of writing' (Wang, 1983: 97–98), with the intention of mutual referring and validation between references and implementation, names and reality, and logic and history, and building a basis for exploring the historical essence of Chinese classics and 'studying Chinese classics through historiography.'

Moreover, the aspiration for practicability in this article as well as the articles in *A Textual Study of Earlier Princes and Dukes through Oracle Bones Inscriptions* (Wang, 1983) is also evident. Concerning the decline of the state, the reason for Wang Guowei 'locating the origins of institution establishment in the Zhou Dynasty and the reason Wang found for the ruling of the kingdom by King Cheng and the duke of Zhou with earnest words' (Luo, 2001: 4) is that, first, he firmly believed that the spirit of the Chinese civilization system since the time of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius would not perish but, on the contrary, would continue to generate universal value in world history; second, he expected that this tradition would integrate with external views and methods during the exchanges between China and the Western world and accomplish the regeneration and rejuvenation of Chinese civilization. As Wang stated (2001b: 877),

I think Chinese learning and Western learning will prosper together and decline together. Since a favorable atmosphere is growing in our society, they will promote each other. Furthermore, we should talk about learning in our time, as it is not the case that Western learning fails to prosper while Chinese learning does, nor is it the case that Chinese learning fails to prosper while Western learning does.

However, 'the Chinese learning I mean is not the kind of learning other people refer to, nor is the Western learning I mean the kind of learning that is being taught in the schools' (Wang, 2001b: 877). Nowadays, when people see what he said before, those who understand his meaning would break into laughter.

In terms of the changes in modern social thought, if we say the abstract historical philosophy of Kang 'descended' to Wang Guowei's studies of institutional history, then that of Chen Yinke 'descended' to a greater extent. However, this 'descending' can be described as an 'ascending' process from abstraction to concreteness. Chen (1980: 236) did not cite the classics in studying history; he would rather pick up those scattered historical materials. As he stated: 'The new learning of one era should have its own new materials and new questions, thus adopting new materials to solve problems may constitute the new learning trend of the era.' According to Chen's comments, what he had studied for all his life was a 'learning that doesn't belong to either the past or the present,' which cannot be regarded as new learning. Then what are the differences between his new learning and the common-sense new learning?

The 'learning that doesn't belong to either the past or the present' surely implies that it is neither new nor old; however, its foremost implication is the inheritance of Wang Guowei's view in historical studying that would break away from the disputes between present and ancient studies of the Confucian Classics and direct the conceptual problems to the origins of history and practical experiences (Lu, 1998: 201–202). Next, since historical study requires 'exploring truth and providing examples,' scholars should not merely stick to studying Chinese classics 'by applying one or two suspected pieces of evidence to draw wrong conclusions about extensive materials.' In the Qing Dynasty, 'the scholars all abandoned historiography and pursued the study of Chinese classics,' missing the essence of

historiography.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, scholars should bring the historical materials to light from new perspectives, infuse them with new meanings, and form a system. Through ‘the mutual reflections of literature and history,’ then, ‘false’ and ‘deceptive’ personal writing will be avoided and historical truth will be obtained. Furthermore, in the mutual reflection of literature and history, the new materials adopted largely came from narrations and scholars’ sentimental expressions on manners and folk customs. Thus, historiography requires adherence to texts as well as reflections using official history books; more importantly, it should present the history of folk customs or history of scholars’ thoughts.

Finally and most importantly, the historical studies of Chen Yinke selected the Wei, Jin, Sui, and Tang dynasties. As Wang (2005) remarked, the true meaning of ‘learning that doesn’t belong to either the past or present’ is the ‘learning of medieval times.’ But Wang was only half right. Chen Yinke’s study of the history of medieval times was not his unwillingness to compete with other scholars in ancient history, nor was it his desire to protect his family by keeping away from modern history; the events that allowed him to do so were the occurrences in medieval times themselves, including exchanges of ethnic groups and Hans, the integration of different religions, migrations of nationalities, and cultural integration. Since the end of the Han dynasty, the frailty of the central government and the conquest of the regime by other minorities led to Chinese history facing unprecedented changes. The ‘neither new nor old’ form of medieval times did not establish the organization of family and state based on a patriarchal system as traditional feudalism; it set up a historical logic with minds of scholars and folk customs as the core elements. As Chen (1992: 510–511) stated,

During the Northern and Southern Dynasties, there were three religions, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. During the Tang Dynasty, the activities of the three religions were transformed into a stable system for the state. For example, when there was a national ceremony, the central government would ask the scholars of the three religions to deliver speeches at the palace hall. Thus, since the Jin Dynasty, Chinese ideology could be represented by the three religions of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Although this is a common view, if we check the facts of ancient history, and verify them in terms of the present situation, we find that this view is absolutely correct.

In *Testifying Notes on Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi’s Poems*, Chen (2001a: 85) stated,

In a chaotic and changing period in terms of moral standards and social customs, there were scholar officials of virtue and talent as well as those of the contrary character, and both had miserable feelings, as they could not adapt to the changes in moral standards and customs.

Along with the drastic changes in institutions, the moral changes brought on by the changes in social customs were especially important, as they contributed to the structure and mechanisms of history in the future. Hence, Chen Yinke’s method of studying history was similar to the logic of mores proposed by Montesquieu,

that is, an institution always originates from customs, and society is always supported by sentiment. Moreover, Chen's method of evaluating present-day societies with ancient history can reveal his judgment on the transition from the modern to present ages. At the end of *The Relationship between Celestial Master Daoism and Coastal Areas*, he says,

as for the political revolutions of our country, they tended to have a mysterious nature in the booming stage. Even nowadays, it is still a historical convention. People who are fond of learning and thinking may understand what I mean. (Chen, 1992: 189)

To study the customs and conditions of the people and find out the human geographical elements in the forming of religions, ideas, and ways of living, scholars should apply the comprehensive method of historical studies: first, collect related historical materials from a multitude of historical records and form a preliminary draft after making comparisons and selections, then 'verify the reality, explain contradictions and doubts, and provide references and verifications.' It is difficult to restore real history, but historical studies are similar to the studies of real experiences; by merely reviewing and studying materials, without exploring human geography and collecting materials through comparison and reflection, referential evidence and supporting evidence, one cannot grasp the overall experiences associated with a transition of the underlying customs that nurture institutions and public feeling cannot be discovered, and the opportunities for change in historical realities could not be known. Therefore, to understand the changes of the time, it was necessary to understand the historical process of the integration of politics, religion, ethnic groups, and culture with 'understanding empathy' (Wang, 1998). We will give two or three examples below to illustrate this view.

The medieval times are totally different from the Zhou Dynasty, during which an all-pervading logic was set up, the political system was blended with ethnic issues during medieval times, and the integration of ethnic groups and the Hans was interwoven with cultural issues. Chen (2001b: 3) believed that

[The] Sui and Tang Dynasties were the most flourishing period during the medieval ages, with culture, materials and institutions spread to the desert areas to the north, to Cochin to the north, to Japan to the east, and to Central Asia to the west, however, there were few books on the origin and development of that period. This is a regret in Chinese historiography.

Therefore, the studies on the system of medieval times are directly related to the political system of the state and the issues of national integration. In the 'pattern of diversity in unity of the Chinese nation,' Fei Xiaotong traced the institutional and cultural evolution back to medieval times. At the beginning of *The Origins of the Systems in Sui and Tang Dynasties*, Chen Yinke commented that, although the systems in the Sui and Tang Dynasties were extremely extensive and complicated, they have only three origins: the first one comprises the Northern Wei and

Northern Qi Dynasties, which inherited the cultural system of the first half of the Eastern Jin and the Southern Dynasties adopted by the Northern Wei Dynasty, also including ‘the system transferred and preserved in Liangzhou since Wei and Jin Dynasties’, namely the ‘Western Yellow River Branch’; the second one comprises the Liang and Chen Dynasties, ‘the transition and development of cultural systems of the second half of Southern Dynasties that was not influenced by the reformer Wang Su’; the third, the Western Wei and Northern Zhou Dynasties,

... the old system created in Western Wei and Northern Zhou Dynasties different from that of Shandong and south of the lower reaches of the Changjiang River, sometimes representing the folk customs of Six Town Xianbei ethnic group, and sometimes representing the style of the faraway Wei and Western Jin Dynasties.

... they were a mixture resulting from the preservation of Han nationality culture in Guanlong area to adapting the circumstances under the control of Six Town Xianbei ethnic group. Comparatively speaking, the influence of the third origin was ‘actually very slight. (Chen, 2001b: 3–4)

We shall not discuss the textual research of Chen Yinque due to lack of space in this article; however, his view on history as shown above has great significance. First, in the changes in the medieval times, the aristocratic families and geographic relations constituted the key elements in institutional construction. Since the decline of the school system in the Han Dynasty, the doctoral teaching tradition ceased and families began to act as the academic centers, while being restricted to local areas. Su Chuo was specially appreciated by Yuwen Tai, the founder of the Western Wei Dynasty, and Su Wei, son of Su Chuo, was in charge of regulating the five ceremonies as state minister. Su Wei’s learning was handed down from his family. In addition, Niu Hong and Xin Yanzhi, who regulated royal ceremonies for Emperor Wen of the Sui Dynasty, were both scholars from the Helong region. This is because many aristocratic families retreated to the Helong region because of long-term war, making this remote area become a place that preserved traditional culture. The former core district of culture was shifted to a desolate area and finally the Helong region became a cultural relic and the source area for institutional exportation. Second, definite evidence shows that the formation of systems and ceremonies in the Sui Dynasty adopted the system of the Liang and Northern Qi Dynasties. Although at that time the Chinesization of society in the Northern Wei Dynasty was strengthened, the ritual system was not complete, and the regime of the Tuoba family regulated systems and revised ceremonies during their migration to the north in wartime. It shows that the ritual system of Central China was deeply rooted in the regime of northern minorities, in which the scholars had important impacts during migration. Third, the reason for Chen Yinque’s low opinion of Northern Zhou systems was the impure motives in the regime establishing,

In the name of inheriting the systems of Northern Zhou Dynasty, Yuwen Tai decorated the systems of Xianbei, Northern barbarian tribes, by plagiarizing the old articles of six-state conspiracy, it was a poor imitation for use of a short period. Although it could help

Yuwen Tai obtain the hegemony, it was discarded by the following emperors or existed in name only. (Chen, 2001b: 20)

The Northern Zhou Dynasty applied the ritual system in Chinese culture as a disguise and intentionally mixed it with Xianbei culture: 'the Northern Zhou Dynasty followed the old system of Tianxing period of Northern Wei Dynasty, although the system was revised, it did not conform to the formal system of Chinese culture' (Chen, 2001b: 60).

'Yinque always emphasized that the differences between Chinese and the northern ethnic groups in Northern Dynasties lie in culture rather than ethnicity.' The institutional history research here is closer to cultural history and custom history in terms of the research method; discussions on ethnic issues intended to illustrate that with only institutional arrangements and transplanting without custom adaption; in other words, in maintaining the situation of separation between the Han people and northern ethnic groups, a Dynasty could not last for long. Similarly, if the Han people and the northern ethnic groups could not unite as a power group, then there would not be a unified political structure in the medieval times. In *Draft Outline of Tang Political History*, Chen Yinque (2001b) verified the source and changing process of the royal Li family of the Tang Dynasty systematically and pointed out that the founding emperor of the Tang Dynasty was Chinese; later the family intermarried with northern ethnic groups; for example, Li Bing's wife Dugu, Li Yuan's wife Dou, and Li Shimin's wife Zhangsun were all from northern ethnic groups. Chen (2001b: 196) pointed out that, 'if the ancestors of Li family of Tang Dynasty were not an impoverished family in Zhao Prefecture, then they could not be from the Li family. The official books of the Tang Dynasty recorded the origin of the royal family and kept the facts in the past; however, most of them were overstatements and exaggeration.' The purpose of the modification was 'to draw a farfetched conclusion of Li Chong'er's (ancestor of the Li family) journey from north to south, and afterwards from south to north' (Chen, 2001b: 188).

However, changing surname in medieval times was common in the conflict and integration process of Han and northern ethnic groups. 'The lineage changing process was not merely limited to the royal family, most aristocratic families in Northern Dynasties, Sui and Tang were of the same case' (Chen, 2001b: 197). It shows that, since the aristocratic families like Yuwen and Li did not attach great importance to pure lineage, there were great changes in customs in the medieval times.

Chen Yinque believed that, in terms of politics, from the beginning of Tang to the earlier stage of the reign of Emperor Gaozong, the ministers and subjects were all from 'civil and military officials of Han and northern ethnic groups together,' which was also a massive Guanlong group. During the reign of Empress Wu Zetian, excellent scholars were selected through Civil Palace Examination, then the Guanlong group's monopolization of state affairs was finalized. The founding of the Tang Dynasty by the Li family had one basic structural condition, that is, Yuwen Tai gathered talents in civil and military affairs in Han and northern ethnic groups in the Guanlong region, and afterwards Sui and Tang inherited and

extended the legacy: almost all the royal family members and ministers were from the Guanlong region. A close structure was formed by gathering ministers and subjects from all ethnic groups and taking the Li family as the core. They 'regarded it the key way of ethnic integration of complex nationalities in spiritual and cultural fields' (Chen, 2001b: 198). In terms of value orientation, Tang deliberately understated the status of Shandong people and established a new lineage by pretending the descendants of Li Xiong were of a noble family Longxi, and fabricated the story of Li Chong'er, the fourth generation ancestor, running to Song after Liang was conquered, aiming at establishing Guanzhong as the origin of Chinesization in history and regarding the place where Han and northern ethnic groups integrated as the one of formal lineage. Therefore, at the beginning of the system establishment of Tang, solving ethnic problems was the most fundamental issue. Chen (2001b: 202) stated that, 'the fact that Wu Zetian took the place of Li family and changed Tang Dynasty to Zhou Dynasty was not only a political transformation, but also a social revolution as a matter of fact'; this conclusion was drawn based on this reason. The outburst of the An Lushan Rebellion was due to long-term lack of cultural enlightenment in Hebei military governors; thus, 'the society advocated martial affairs rather than culture and education . . . so in discussing the issues of Tang Dynasty, in order to find the truth, we should pay special attention to ethnic and cultural problems' (Chen, 2001b: 210).

Other than ethnic issues, another important aspect of medieval history was religion. Chen Yinque did not implement a specialized discussion on religion; rather, he was committed to presenting the political relationship between the royal family and aristocratic families, changing of religion and folk customs, and even a complete historical status of the coexistence of Confucianism and Taoism in the inner spirit of scholars. For example, in *The Relationship between Celestial Master Daoism and Coastal Areas*, he remarked on the official scholars in the Eastern and Western Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties: 'although they observed Confucianism in their actions and conformed to nature as advocated by Laozi and Zhuangzi in their opinions,' most aristocratic families took harmful witchcraft as family instructions and spread such beliefs through coastal transportation, and most of the palace revolutions were caused by the conspiracy of such religions. In *Cui Hao and Kou Qianzhi* (Chen, 1992), he did a great deal of textual research and surveyed a major case in the history of Northern Dynasties. Cui Hao, a minister born in an aristocratic family, upheld the ideal of 'regulating human relations and clarifying surnames' and collaborated with Kou Qianzhi, who believed in the Neo-Taoism that 'connects human and spirit with splendid writing' through mutual utilization. They both attached great importance to 'zhongmin' in their theories, which denoted people in the same social class, and finally enraged Xianbei and brought about a tragic event in history. In analyzing the source of this historical change, Chen Yinque arrived at the following conclusion: the tragedy of Cui Hao was that he placed the Confucian ideal of 'recovering the five degrees of rank' in a special social class and ignored the feelings of Han and northern ethnic groups, and intended to 'revitalize the great branches of Confucianism by learning from Sima Xiangru, but ignored the basic boundary between China and minorities' (Chen, 1992: 223); thus, his political design

did not conform to the expectations of the head of Xianbei or the basic conditions of people at that time, so his failure was inevitable.<sup>12</sup>

In this sense, the history studying method of Chen Yinque is somewhat similar to that of Montesquieu and Tocqueville. Hu (1985: 539) evaluated him as a scholar 'most learned, most insightful and best in material application at modern times,' who was good at textual and reference research through the comparison of seemingly irrelevant materials in systems, geography, poems and articles, names and things, customs, and transportation to seek the truth in history (Luo and Ge, 1998). However, he had a clear supporting view among the bulky materials, that is, his view on the essence of medieval times lies in his view of historical changes, and it was essential to find out the inner mechanism in institutional transformation through the changing process of social customs. Among them, the delicate details of key figures and key events, the common sensitivity or spirit in society, as well as specific changes in situations and structural conditions in history, all formed a kind of logic and opportunity for his findings in history. Therefore, the way of recognizing the whole through observation of the part, rigorous textual research, and theoretical explanation all constitute a decisive element in studying the folk customs of medieval times. In addition, it is in relation to the new perspective formed with the development of social sciences in modern times, which is also 'exploring the traces of prosper and decline and seeking the new knowledge in learning' (Chen, 2001c: 97).<sup>13</sup>

### **An unfinished conclusion**

The 'changes' in the history studying the theory of Chen Yinque complements the 'body' of history, as explored in *On the Constitution of Three Dynasties* (Wang, 2001a). This point can also explain the different implications between ancient and medieval times and their historical essence. There have always been new historians since the establishment of the Republic of China, while Wang Guowei and Chen Yinque were the two representatives who reviewed the most materials and have done the most extensive and intensive research. The study method introduced by them was meant to explore the essence of institutions and the changing mechanism of customs, and made abundant presentations on the body and changes in Chinese history. It formed a striking contrast with the universal history theory and political reform thoughts raised by Kang Youwei based on the theory of the Three Epochs. However, for people of modern times, the significance of this comparison lies in the fact that they have initiated two reforms in the modernism of China and laid a foundation for the keynote of studying modern and historical traditions for later scholars. Therefore, our task today is to reflect on the process of this modern transformation and learn from the discoveries and methods of our predecessors.

Kang Youwei's deduction and analysis on the medieval times were based on the 'great idea' and 'sublime words,' 'deduced from the theory of Three Epochs, and made the conclusion that the Cosmos Unity was the supreme stage of the Three Epochs.' Then 'by studying Buddhism, he added Buddhism into his theory of Three Epochs' and, afterwards, he 'also introduced the sense of universal fraternity of Christianity,

and elucidated Darwin's theory of evolution, and the theory of Cosmos Unity was complete.' He 'melted Confucianism and Buddhism, and different thoughts in China and Western society, and established the most imaginative Utopian theory in Chinese ideological history. Although he followed the old word of the Cosmos Unity, he referred to new meanings' (Wang, 2008: 50). In this sense, the 'origin' of history is the 'body' of Chinese classics, and also the objective of social evolution. In addition, another purpose of the revolution of Chinese classics was to carry out the civilizing tradition since the implementation of Confucianism; and by introducing the logic of historical evolution in Western society, he pointed out that, in a time that ceremonies and music were ruined and culture and education were not clear, the modern revolution in China should experience a religious stage in the Era of Peace based on the belief of 'benevolence' of the uncrowned king, and form a transcendental order in the way of heaven, to transform customs and let human sentiments achieve a harmonious status.

The bold proposal of pushing Confucianism in Kang Youwei's later years was actually meant to initiate a revolution within Confucianism. The reason for its generation within Confucianism was that the changes of any political systems should be started from adjusting the belief structure of people, and the changes in customs cannot be brought about through changes in institutions; rather, they should come from the more extensive religious enlightenment. 'The king is the authority that all the world is committed to' – the Cosmos Unity signifies the order that all the world belongs to one unity; thus, the final goal of universal history is not decided by the boundary between nations or families, rather it is intended to achieve the natural right that 'for the king, there is nothing beyond his reign' and 'the boundary between China and minorities' through moralization as said by ancient people (Gan, 2011). Kang Youwei advocated revolutions, but opposed full-scale revolution for fear that people would cut the blood linkage of benevolence and sentiments in civilization, forget the natural evolutionary order of their civilization, and fall into the perpetual circulation of the Era of War at a time of drastic social and political changes.

For this theory, the historical rectification made by scholars such as Wang Guowei and Chen Yinke was directed to this very abstract historical evolutionism. Facing the change that had not taken place in the past 3000 years, the foremost thing was to recover people's reverence, sense of experience, and explanatory power for history. Zhang Taiyan took the lead and advocated transfer between Chinese classics and historiography, which intended to recover the reverence for history by returning to the tradition of Chinese classics. Although *On the Constitution of Three Dynasties* by Wang Guowei seemed like a kind of study on Chinese classics, in terms of compilation style, he explored the origin of the system of Zhou Dynasties through historical deduction. He pointed out that, in the hierarchical feudalism since the implementation of Confucianism, the heir adopting system constituted the logical starting point of all systems, and the series of state and family order generated from the system formed an institutional system for patriarchal clan, land, sacrificial activities, and political regime. The order of honoring honored ones and showing affection to kindred established a structure order for sentimental linkage among all systems, causing the ritual system, culture, and

education to go back to the basis of justice and humanity. He included a complete logic chain in the institutional history and integrated logic and history, showing a new view of history. It rendered civilization history a more steady foundation and well explained the inner spiritual world and academic ideal of Wang Guowei:

The current political situation is the result of economic development of Western society for hundreds of years. I am afraid that my opinion will be proved in the future. If there is some problems that need to be solved for people around the world, then they should only be solved by eastern morality and political system. (Wang, 2000: 447)

The difference between the theory of Wang Guowei and that of the Quintessence School lies in his adherence to the enlightenment of the 'law of sufficient reason' of the Western society and the theory of name and reality. He believed that the structure and principle of the spiritual history of systems can only be explored through comprehensive analysis. In the same way, Chen Yinque maintained, in 'accepting and introducing foreign theories,' the Chinese should 'not forget the status of our own nationality'. However, the 'status of our own nationality' is not an abstract self-identity by conjecture; rather, it should be proved through open historical perspective. In understanding Chinese history and even the chaos in modern China, the scholars should not only relate to the institutional origin of ancient history, but should also fully study the new situation formed through the integration of nationalities and religions in medieval times. In studying a period of drastic changes, scholars should not merely stick to Chinese classics or systems; rather, they should find out the source, process, and linking mechanism of the system and custom changes from vast historical materials, and seek the traces of historical changes and conditions of the people based on customs. The studies on medieval times reveal a kind of new situation, including differences as well as integration between China and the minorities, which serve as the basis of the order of the empire. Among them, the studies on Cui Hao further illustrated that, without understanding the origin of conditions of the people and the real foundation of changes, the behavior of discussing the abstract ideal of Confucian scholars will be discarded by history.

Therefore, the structure of systems should be combined with sentiments in customs. The integration between the 'body' and 'changes' of history is the essence of the historical studies of Wang Guowei and Chen Yinque, who intended to set up the true connections between views and experiences, just like in Montesquieu's study on the spirit of the law. In the meantime, the studies on ancient and medieval times also provide a perspective for the social transition of modern China, that is to say, only by connecting the spiritual source of the civilized system and the realistic changes of historical experiences can scholars provide an effective thinking plan for the future China, just as Chen (1992: 512) wrote in the examination report of *A History of Chinese Philosophy* of Feng Youlan:

Taoism tried to assimilate all the importing thoughts, such as Buddhism and Manicheism, however, it never ignored the status of China. After assimilation, it stuck

to the difference between China and ethnic groups to reject foreign religions. Such kind of attitude in thoughts has existed since the six dynasties. It seems contradictory; actually the two attitudes are complementary. The New Confucianism is a religion that can inherit the legacy and prosper. I believe that, in the future, even if China could import the thoughts of North America and Eastern Europe, they will turn out to be like the consciousness-only philosophy of Xuanzang, which will not take up the highest position and will finally come to an end. The ones that can form a system and make achievements should and on the one hand accept and import foreign theories, on the other hand not forget the status of our own nation. The opposite and complementary attitudes are the true spirit of Taoism and the old way of new Confucianism, they are also the thought contacting history between our nation and other nations in the past two thousand years.

It can be concluded that, within the academic structure of modern China, historical studies have always stuck to their own spiritual disposition and experiences, as well as integrating the perspectives and methods of modern social sciences. The strategic and foresighted views, erudite and informed insights, detail-oriented researching attitude, and social responsibility and concern of preceding scholars have constituted the motives for the development and changes in history. Comparatively speaking, the situation today that academic research has fallen into such a limited circumstance needs serious self-reflection.

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### **Notes**

1. Mills (1959) and Gouldner (1967) had harshly criticized the abstract research tendency represented by American sociology by pointing out that the prevailing of abstract researches deprived sociology of mental quality and self-reflection spirit.
2. As Liang (1989a: 1–2) remarked, ‘Historians of modern times tend to survey the movement progress of all human beings, namely all experiences of nationals and their relationship.’ It marks the commencement of a new conception of history. However, the concept of general history that takes ‘understanding the changes of ancient and modern times’ as the core ideology may have different manifestations, for example, the models of ancient times, mediaeval times, and late antiquity proposed by Xia Zengyou (2003); the cultural history perspective by Liu Yizhi; and institutional history proposed by Lü Simian (2005) are all representatives of establishing comprehensive historiography of China. Liu (1988: 3) made the following remarks that could also well illustrate this ambition: ‘So the essence of our history is implied in the infinite time and space. If we only confine ourselves in East Asia, we are just like a flash in the long process of history. The brilliance of

Chinese history in the world lies in the creation and inheritance of great thoughts by several sages and men of virtue. We should carry forward and forge ahead into the future and select the essence in our history to inform our successors and contribute to the world. This is the responsibility of Chinese historians.'

3. The analyzing method on the prehistory of the present and history of the present has great significance for surveying the realistic problems in the reform of China. In the relationship between market and institution, if the market elements are generative, and there is little change in institutional structures, although the new structural conditions provided by the market will trigger adjustment in institutions, like the project system, the market element will be quickly included in the history of the present of the institution. In logic, the part that has been transformed by copying itself or reproduction would have fewer and fewer choices (Qu, 2012).
4. Praver (1980: 236–248) compared the writing mode of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* as a kind of 'theatre writing,' where Marx (1961) quoted at random the passages of past literature works and fragments of historical memories and applied an inversion technique of narrating plots, aiming at emphasizing the performativity of roles that represent different interest groups and social logic in their behaviors. The true history is like a masquerade, and Louis Bonaparte played a leading actor in the comedy, which presents an inevitable historical trend of restoration of the old system.
5. The origin of Kang Youwei's 'New text Confucianism' and its position in the four-stage development of the Classics study of the Qing Dynasty (Zhou, 1983).
6. Liang (1999: 482) remarked in the *Biography of Sir Nanhai Kang Youwei*, 'His aspirations reach to thousands of years ahead; his profound enthusiasm can pass through seven layers of armors; his courage has no equal in the world. No one in his time could come up to him. If he were living at present, the whole state would envy his abilities. If in the future there is a book named the New Chinese History in the Twentieth Century, I know that the first page of the book may appraise the spiritual cause of him, and regard his studies as the starting point of the motive power of society. Sir Kang Youwei is really the pioneer of Chinese history!'
7. Wang (2008: 212–213) did not approve of the religion evolution tendency of the Confucianism of Kang Youwei. He stated, 'Kang Youwei's theory of uniting heaven by oneness has the stink of pantheism. He worshiped Confucius and imitated Christianity; in the meantime, he regarded himself as the prophet and cherished the ambition of Mohammed. His greatness lies in his breaking away from the ideological restraints of the past thousands of years and believed in the superstition in decline in the Western society. This is why both his studies and his political ambition failed.'
8. Liu (2011: 309) pointed out the nature of Chinese history in *The Essence of the History of China*, and said Wang Guowei made the greatest contribution: 'the sentiment of any state is forged by its history. With different conditions in heaven, earth, people and materials, the evolutionary paths are different... modern times inherit that of Song and Ming, Song and Ming inherit that of Han and Tang, while Han and Tang inherit that of Zhou and Qin. The process from simplicity to complexity or from complexity to simplicity, may have been created by a few sages or philosophers, it is in fact the choice of most people. Sima Qian's method of studying history was to explore the law between man and nature... Humanism in my sense is the same with the one called by Wang Guowei, who refers it to a moral community that integrates all the state.' Also refer to Xia (2003).

9. It here means 'the drastic change from Shang to Zhou Dynasties,' as the Shang and Zhou Dynasties were slave societies, and the whole Dynasty belonged to one family. Thus, it seems that the change from Shang to Zhou Dynasties is regarded as the 'rise or fall of one family or the shift of the capital.'
10. 'Honoring the honorable' means that in this system, people should honor senior people or people with higher social status.
11. Chen (1992: 512) described himself as a scholar 'who is engaged in neither ancient nor modern learning, and restrains his thoughts in the period of the emperors Xianfeng and Tongzhi, with similar opinions to that of Zeng Guofan and Zhang Zhidong.' The comment was naturally related to his family tradition of learning, but in a greater sense, it is a self-identification of his choice in learning. The so-called 'Xianfeng and Tongzhi Period' means that although he accepted the proposition of Zhang Zhidong, 'Chinese Philosophy as Substance and Western Philosophy as Function,' with empathy (Wang, 1992: 27), he intended to make revisions by sticking to the spiritual core of Zeng Guofan. Luo (2008) believed in the critical attitude of Chen Yinque on the New Text Confucianism in the late Qing Dynasty and the ideological trend of suspecting the past. Although he had to take the pragmatic road of 'learning from the current emperor without mentioning things far from the present,' and there were 'painstaking efforts as he had to do so,' he still upheld the view of 'don't forget the status of his state' with tolerant and open perspectives.
12. Chen (2012: 206–214) believed that the failure of Cui Hao in setting up the ideal of aristocratic politics that combines clan and ethics, high-ranking officials, and Confucianism was caused by his misjudgment in the time and pace of the Chinesization process of Xianbei tribes. The purpose of Chinesization at that time was to revere aristocratic families with a cultural background and make an alliance with them. Apparently, the Xianbei tribe had already taken this path; however, they were always afraid of complete assimilation by the Han nationality. Only under the reign of Emperor Xiaowen had the Northern Wei Dynasty entered into a new Chinesization period.
13. The influence of sociology and anthropology on historical studies in the late Qing Dynasties and the Republic of China (Sang, 2005).

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