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Part IV. Thirty Years of Research in American History in China

American history research is a relatively young discipline in China. Although in practice Chinese studies of American history began rather early, in the first half of the twentieth century, at that time most publications in American history were edited or translated works. After 1949, Chinese academic historians began to place greater importance on studying foreign historians, and a number of compilations on American history were published. Since 1978, with the implementation of the reform and opening-up policies in Mainland China, the study of American history, like other disciplines, has experienced unprecedented development. In the last thirty years, research in American history has become a field for serious academic study, as it has gradually escaped from the dominance of political ideology, and publications in this field have gone beyond translations and compilations.

I. Trends and Achievements

The turning point for American history research in China occurred between 1978 and 1979, when two major events provided new opportunities to develop research in American history. Firstly, with the implementation of the reform and opening up policy, China became ever more tolerant politically and witnessed a liberation movement in political and academic thinking. Taking advantage of this favorable development, research in American history entered a new era of rapid development. Secondly, the establishment of diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United States in 1979 brought an end to years of hostility and isolation. As a result, Chinese writing on American history was reoriented, from exposing, criticizing, and attacking the United States to a genuine academic and intellectual search. These two developments also made research in American history a practical necessity. When economic development, political reform, and social progress became top priorities in China, the historical experience and lessons of the rapid economic development of the United States won the interest of Chinese intellectuals. Moreover, more frequent bilateral interactions necessitated mutual understanding. Accurate knowledge of the reality of America could greatly assist China in making the best policy decisions when dealing with the United States.

International academic exchanges have exerted a subtle but profound influence on research in American history in China. Since 1979, countless American scholars have visited China. Lectures by such prominent American historians as Philip S. Foner, Herbert C. Gutman, Michael G. Kammen, Oscar Handlin, Eric Foner, and Akira Iriye, were very well received by their Chinese counterparts. In addition, quite a number of American historians have taught in Chinese universities as Fulbright scholars, helping to train Chinese professionals. Meanwhile, increasing numbers of Chinese scholars have had opportunities to visit the United States to study, familiarize themselves with American society and the American academic world, and collect materials needed in their research. Likewise, many young Chinese students who have enrolled in American universities have returned to China after their graduation to teach, publish works in Chinese, and attend academic conferences, leaving their mark on the study and teaching of

American history in China. Since 1987, China has also hosted seven international conferences specifically on American history. The translation and introduction of American publications on American history has never ceased. Although most of these translated works deal only with general topics and are relatively outdated, they still represent major progress by comparison with previous times, when only works by “progressive” Soviet and American scholars were translated.

Another major and pivotal achievement of research in American history is the improvement of postgraduate training in China. Since 1978, postgraduate programs in Chinese universities have made great steps forward. A number of universities offer master’s programs in American history, and Nankai University, Northeast Normal University, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences pioneered Ph.D. degrees in American history. Since the mid-1990s, growing numbers of universities have established Ph.D. programs. At present, about ten universities in China can enroll Ph.D. students in American history. China has also established a high-quality team of professors. Professor Yang Shengmao of Nankai University, who was one of the first scholars to supervise postgraduates in American history in China, established systematic training for postgraduates, stressing the need to strike a balance between “extensity” and “intensity” and advocating “critical thinking” and “making foreign things serve China” when dealing with the outside academic world. He was also a pioneer in adopting the “seminar” teaching method in graduate programs.¹ Another prominent figure in the teaching of American history is Professor Ding Zemin of Northeast Normal University, who has supervised thirteen doctoral and eighteen master’s students and accumulated a rich experience in “teaching students how to fish” (that is, focusing on teaching students how to study rather than what to study).² Most of those researchers currently active in American history received their master’s or Ph.D. degrees later than the 1980s.

In the last thirty years, a number of research institutes and academic groups specializing in American history have been established, pushing forward the development of American history research in China. Before 1978, only Wuhan University and Nankai University had American history research institutes, but since that time, more than ten universities and colleges have established similar institutes or American studies centers, to which professional staff and funding have then been allocated and directed.³ This meant that sizable research and teaching teams in American history, which remain substantial today, were created. Simultaneously, the American History Research Association of China and the Chinese Association for American Studies were also established. In addition to undertaking such routine tasks as organizing academic symposia and exchanging academic information, the American History Research Association of China has supervised the compilation of a general American history, the largest of its kind in China so far. With financial support from the Ford Foundation’s publication subsidy program, the Chinese Association for American Studies helped to produce dozens of monographs in American history.

¹ Yang Shengmao, “Relations between Extensity and Intensity and Others” (《博与约的关系及其他》) (originally published in *World History*, No. 4, 1986), in Yang Shengmao, *Tanjing Ji* (《探径集》), Zhonghua Book Company, 2002, p. 270; Yang Shengmao, “Reading, Thinking, Dialoguing and Innovating: Thoughts on the Training of Graduate Students” (《读书、思索、对话和创新》) (originally published in *Journal of Tianjin Higher Education Research*, No. 1, 1987), in Yang Shengmao, *Tanjing Ji* (《探径集》), pp. 289-294.

² Gao Song, “A Review of Professor Ding Zemin’s Academic Achievements and Historiographical Thinking” (《丁则民教授学术成就和史学思想评述》), in Liang Maoxin, ed., *Exploring America: Collected Works in Memory of Prof. Ding Zemin* (《探究美国——纪念丁则民先生论文集》), Northeast Normal University Press, 2002, pp. 407-408.

³ For detailed information on research institutes of American history and American studies, see Yang Shengmao and Du Yaoguang, “Forty Years of American History Research in China, 1949-1989” (《中国美国史研究四十年 (1949-1989)》), in Yang Shengmao, *Tanjing Ji* (《探径集》), p. 106.

At present, most American history researchers are members of the American History Research Association of China, a non-governmental academic association founded by the first generation of Chinese historians of the United States, born in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Most of these scholars were educated in the United States, graduated before 1949, and had become well established by 1978. Even after 1978, when most of them had entered their senior years, these first-generation scholars still published several new works of research, setting Chinese research and teaching in American history on the right track despite poor conditions, and trained a new generation of researchers.⁴ The second-generation researchers were born in the 1930s and 1940s, and most graduated from Chinese universities before 1966. By 1978, this generation of researchers, then in their prime, had become the backbone of research and teaching in American history. At present the third generation, born in the 1950s and 1960s and supervised as graduate students by the first and second generations, are at the most productive stage of their academic lives. A new generation of researchers, mostly born after the 1970s, is now making its own headway. Strictly speaking, these four generations of researchers have had different experiences in terms of age and educational background but overlap academically. In May 2008, researchers from all four generations took part in the Twelfth Annual Conference of American History Research Association of China, held in Wuhan. The torch of American history research has been handed down from generation to generation, and a promising future lies ahead of it.

Thanks to the efforts of these generations of researchers, a substantial number of research works have been published in the last thirty years. Between 1979 and 1988, more than 820 articles in American history were published, and more than 1500 appeared from 1989 to 2000.⁵ Although authoritative statistics on exactly how many articles have been published since 2001 are not yet available, they are estimated to number more than 1000. As for books on American history (not including translations), seventeen were published between 1978 and 1988, eighty in the twelve years from 1989 to 2000,⁶ and a further seventy to eighty since 2001.⁷ In terms of the sheer number of publications, there have been significant achievements since 1978.

The quality rather than the quantity of research provides more important evidence of the progress made over the last thirty years. Professor Huang Annian, special editor of *The Journal of*

⁴ Liu Xuyi, "Preface", in *American History Series since the 1930s* (《20世纪30年代以来美国史论丛》), p. 1; Yang Shengmao, *Tanjing Ji* (《探径集》), p. 1.

⁵ For statistics on articles published from 1979 to 1989, see Yang Yusheng and Hu Yukun, eds., *Comprehensive Catalogue of Chinese Articles on American Studies (1979-1989)* (《中国美国学论文综目(1979-1989)》) (Liaoning University Press, 1990); for statistics on articles published from 1989 to 2000, see Li Jianming, "American History Research in China since 1989" (《1989年以来中国的美国史研究》); and Wang Xiaode "American Diplomatic History Research in China since 1989" (《1989年以来中国的美国外交史研究》) (in Hu Guocheng, ed., *Look into the United States: American Studies in China in Recent Years* (《透视美国：近年来中国的美国研究》), Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2002). According to a search conducted in the China Academic Journal website, 600 articles on American history appeared between 2001 and 2005.

⁶ Li Jianming, "American History Research in China since 1989" (《1989年以来中国的美国史研究》), in Hu Guocheng, ed., *Look into the United States: American Studies in China in Recent Years* (《透视美国：近年来中国的美国研究》), p. 8; Wang Xiaode, "American Diplomatic History Research in China since 1989" (《1989年以来中国的美国外交史研究》), in Hu Guocheng, ed., *Look into the United States: American Studies in China in Recent Years* (《透视美国：近年来中国的美国研究》), p. 95.

⁷ According to Huang Annian, "American History Research Achievements in China from 1990 and 1995 and International Comparisons" (《1990-1995年中国美国史研究的成果及其国际比较》) (*World History*, No. 3, 1997), 170 books on American history were published in Mainland China from 1979 to 1989, on average seventeen books annually. The comparable figures for the period from 1990 to 1995 were 144 in total, averaging twenty-four a year. The difference between the figures provided by Prof. Huang and those cited here may reflect differences in selection criteria. Here, "works on American history" refers solely to books and articles by Chinese scholars on American history, excluding all other books and articles related to the United States.

American History, who has for many years observed, counted, and assessed publications on American history in China, argued that of articles on American studies published in Mainland China in 1998, “an overwhelming majority deal with quite general topics and the number of high-quality articles is limited,” so that he did not have “many good articles to choose from” when recommending “high-quality articles” to *The Journal of American History*.⁸ This conclusion broadly holds true as a generalization covering all thirty years of American history research in China. Using those articles on President Abraham Lincoln’s attitudes toward slavery as an example, of the thirty articles on this topic published in various academic journals since 1978, most are based on materials from the same Chinese and English books and therefore repeat the same general arguments, with little evidence of progress over these thirty years.

In the last thirty years, the scope of research in American history has expanded widely. The subjects of research have been greatly diversified and updated and the research produced is much improved in quality, with some attaining a high academic level. In the 1980s, research in American history focused on political history, diplomatic history, labor history, and western history. Since the 1990s, increasing importance has been placed on economic history, urban history, modernization, legal history, cultural history, religious history, environmental history, and similar subjects. The development of urban history is very typical. In the last thirty years, research in urban history has grown rapidly from scratch and become a well-developed field of research. Environmental history is a new field, while further progress is expected in economic history, legal history, and religious history.⁹ Meanwhile, new developments have taken hold in research on such traditional subjects as political history and diplomatic history, incorporating insights drawn from political culture, ideology, and research in foreign policy and cultural diplomacy. Research in labor history, by contrast, has been on the wane since the 1990s, and no influential works of research in this area have appeared for many years.

Given the rapid development of research in American history over the last thirty years, it would be unwise to use the same standards to evaluate works from different periods. It seems more appropriate to divide the thirty years into three decades and then pick out representative works from each decade, in order to demonstrate the achievements of research in American history in China in the last thirty years.

In terms of general historical research, representative works from these three decades are *A Concise General History of America* (《美国通史简编》) (Huang Shaoxiang, People’s Press, 1979); *A New American History* (《美国史新编》) (Yang Shengmao and Lu Jingsheng, Renmin University Press, 1990); and *A General History of America* (《美国通史》) (6 volumes) (Liu Xuyi and Yang Shengmao, eds., People’s Press, 2002).

Among journal articles, typical examples from the first decade include Liu Zuochang, “a Brief Discussion of Thomas Jefferson’s Democratic Thinking” (《略论托马斯·杰弗逊的民主思想》) (*Historical Research*, No. 4, 1980); and Feng Chengbo, “A Question about the Year When the Factory System was Established in America” (《美国工厂制确立年代质疑》) (*Historical Research*, No. 6, 1984). Representative of the second decade are He Shunguo, “A Brief

⁸ Huang Annian, “Reform and Opening-up and the Development of American Studies in China: A Case Study of Articles Published in 1998” (《改革开放与中国美国学的发展——以 1998 年发表的文章为个案分析对象》), in *Academics in China*, No. 2, 2000, p. 226.

⁹ In recent years works on legal history and economic history published by Prof. Han Tie in recent years have greatly lifted the research level in these two fields in China.

Discussion of America's Founding Spirit" (《略论美国的立国精神》) (*Historical Research*, No. 2, 1993); and Man Yunlong, "The Establishment of the Massachusetts Political System" (《马萨诸塞政治体系的确立》) (*Historical Research*, No. 5, 1992). In the most recent decade, several influential articles have been published, notably Yang Shengmao. "George Bancroft's Historiography—An Explanation of 'Selective Assimilation' and 'Study for the Purpose of Application'" (《论乔治·班克拉夫特史学——兼释“鉴别吸收”和“学以致用”》) (*Historical Research*, No. 2, 1999); Cui Pi, "America's Strategy of Economic Containment and Restrictions on the Transfer of Advanced and Innovative Technologies" (《美国经济遏制战略与高新技术转让限制》) (*Historical Research*, No. 1, 2000); and Wang Lixin, "Ideology and America's China Policy: A Reassessment of Dean Acheson and the Recognition of China" (《意识形态与美国对华政策：以艾奇逊和“承认问题”为中心的再研究》) (*Social Sciences in China*, No. 3, 2005).

Between 1978 and 1988 the publication of books was rather limited, but included Liu Zuochang, *The History of American Civil War* (《美国内战史》) (People's Press, 1978); Liu Xuyi, ed., *Contemporary American Presidents and Society* (《当代美国总统与社会》) (Hubei People's Press, 1987); and Zi Zhongyun, *The Origin and Evolution of US Policy toward China, 1945-1950* (《美国对华政策的缘起和发展, 1945-1950》) (Chongqing Publishing House, 1987). Between 1989 and 1998 more academic books appeared, of which the most influential were Shi Yinhong, *American Intervention and the War in Vietnam* (《美国在越南的干涉和战争》) (World Affairs Press, 1993); Liu Zuochang, *A Biography of Thomas Jefferson* (《杰弗逊传》) (Chinese Social Sciences Press, 1990); and Yang Shengmao, ed., *A History of American Foreign Policy* (《美国外交政策史》) (People's Press, 1991). Since 1999, increasing numbers of high quality books have been published to favorable reviews, including Wang Xu, *American Urban History* (《美国城市史》) (Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2000); Wang Xiaode, *American Culture and Diplomacy* (《美国文化与外交》) (World Affairs Press, 2000); Qi Wenying, *A Survey of American History* (《美国史探研》) (Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2001); Tao Wenzhao, *A History of Sino-US Relations* (《中美关系史》) (Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2004); Liang Maoxin, *American Human Resource Training and Employment Policies* (《美国人力培训与就业政策》) (People's Press, 2006); Wang Jinhui, *Southern Slave Owners and the American Civil War* (《南部奴隶主与美国内战》) (People's Press, 2006); and Wang Lixin, *Ideology and American Foreign Policy* (《意识形态与美国外交政策》) (Peking University Press, 2007).

II. The Focus and Orientation of Study

In the first ten years or so of the era of reform and opening up, the focus of research by Chinese scholars in American history derived from their interest in and analysis of existing contemporary realities and conditions in both China and America. This practice of studying history from the starting point of current affairs was then regarded as the standard approach to research in American history. After 1978, researchers initially analyzed problems from the political perspective, defining the academic value of their studies in terms of their political significance. Back then, the most urgent task for research in American history was neither to make breakthroughs in terms of theory, materials, methodology, and opinions, nor to accomplish highly original research (which, given prevailing rather rudimentary research conditions at that

time, was not likely to be the focus of attention), but to transform China's basic attitudes toward American history; effectively, to recognize "the uniqueness of American state" and the brighter sides of American history and to "study history based on historical realities in a comprehensive, dialectical, and realistic way".¹⁰ This situation on the one hand reflected how detrimental the past damage inflicted on academic research by political power and ideology had been, and was on the other hand indicative of the difficulties facing future research in American history.

If we can say that the principles of "seeking truth from facts" and "bringing order out of chaos" were put forward in order to reassess American history from the political perspective, the study of the American experience of rapid growth was a much more realistic and pragmatic need, given China's modernization drive. Once the focus of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese government shifted to economic development, China faced the problem of implementing rapid growth, and the reasons and conditions for America's speedy past economic development became the focus of Chinese scholars' attention and thought, leading to the publication of many academic studies.¹¹ From the 1990s onward, the historical experience of American modernization has fallen well within the scope of academic research in China. In August 1993, Weihai City in Shandong Province hosted the first international conference on American history, entitled "The Historical Experience of American Modernization". In their preface to the proceedings of this conference, the editors wrote that "to benefit China's modernization campaign" was "the more far-reaching goal" of this compilation. Understanding the historical experience of American modernization was seen as a tool that could help in tackling thorny problems in China's modernization drive.¹² After this international conference, numerous works on American modernization were published.¹³ After China adopted the strategy of "developing the western part of China", the history of the American west and the comparative study of the development of the west in China and America attracted scholarly interest. In 2000 alone, about forty articles on these subjects were published in newspapers and journals.

Chinese scholars' choice of research topics is inspired by relevant research by American historians, in an effort to fill in the lacunae in research in China. Since China is a late comer in research on American history and has not yet built a solid foundation, there are still quite a number of fields and subjects that Chinese scholars have not touched upon. The so-called "gaps in research" are generally determined by research conditions in China; that is, no matter how much work on a particular topic has appeared in the United States, so long as Chinese scholars have not studied this topic or American scholars' attitudes and value orientations do not suit China, that topic is treated as a "gap" in research.

For most Chinese scholars, the ultimate goal of "realistic considerations" has always been to provide options for or exert influence on governmental decision making. Prof. Huang Annian, for example, when discussing the significance of studying the American social welfare and security system, explicitly argued that the objective is to provide models for China's reform of its

¹⁰ Luo Rongqu, *American History*, pp. 17, 21.

¹¹ For details, see Zhang Youlun, "A Review of A Hundred Years of American History Research" (《美国史研究百年回顾》), *Historical Research*, No. 3, 1997, pp. 157-158.

¹² The Chinese Association for American History Research, ed., *Historical Lessons of American Modernization*, The Eastern Publishing Co., Ltd., 1994, p. 2.

¹³ Hong Chaohui, *The Theme of Social and Economic Changes: A New Discussion of the Process of American Modernization* (《社会经济变迁的主题：美国现代化进程新论》), Hangzhou University Press, 1994; Li Qingyu and Zhou Guiyin, *The Path of American Modernization* (《美国现代化道路》), People's Press, 1994; Zhang Shaohua, *Struggle between Two Roads in the Early Stage of Modernization in America* (《美国早期现代化的两条道路之争》), Peking University Press, 1996.

distribution system and social security system.¹⁴ Dr. Wang Dongxing studied the social transformation of the American South after the Civil War and argued that what is most relevant to the development of Western China is not the history of the American West but the experience of development in the American South.¹⁵ Prof. Chen Yiping studied population issues in contemporary America in order to provide a proper understanding of contemporary American society in the context of the relevant decision making process in China.¹⁶ Moreover, the social interpretation of research in American history may sometimes surpass the expectations even of the authors themselves. Madam Zi Zhongyun, for example, admitted that when she was writing about American public welfare foundations, she “did not expect this work to have much practical significance”; yet when this book was published, it “attracted attention from both academia and the general public”. Accordingly, she wrote a lengthy postscript for the reprint edition, illustrating the genuine significance of studying American foundations to the development of Chinese philanthropy.¹⁷

Pragmatic applications nonetheless sometimes constitute a double-edged sword. On the one hand, these utilitarian factors “give a Chinese characteristic to Chinese research on foreign history and therefore are the preconditions for China’s research in this area to attain international influence”.¹⁸ On the other hand, such realistic considerations may generate negative consequences, in terms of “utilizing history to discuss current affairs”. In consequence, “historical research may divert from its proper academic standards and lack solid substantial research and the arguments put forward may be general or even ridiculous”.¹⁹ Such factors obviously undercut further progress in research.

III. Theoretical Orientation and Research Methodology

After 1949, historiography in China, like most other fields where it was impossible to eliminate value and moral judgments, developed a discourse characterized by the prevailing political ideology.²⁰ Besides the dominating influence of political ideology, the Cold War hostility between China and the United States made it impossible for research in American history to be purely academic, and essentially it became a political activity. Such writing on American history, tainted by political ideology, began after 1949, reached its peak during the later stages of the “Cultural Revolution,” and even now has still not entirely disappeared. For some time after 1978, the most difficult agenda facing research in American history was how to jettison the restrictions imposed by political ideology, to end the practice of treating political discourse as academic discourse, and to construct a new discursive system and method of expression whose

¹⁴ Huang Annian, *Social Security Policies in Contemporary America* (《当代美国的社会保障政策》), China Social Sciences Press, 1998, pp. 2, 508-509. In his conclusion, Prof. Huang gives ten suggestions on how China could learn from “the lessons and experiences of western countries” and establish and perfect its own social security system. For details, see pp. 522-535.

¹⁵ Wang Dongxing, *Institutional Changes and the Rise of the American South* (《制度变迁与美国南部的崛起》), Zhejiang People’s Publishing House, 2002, pp. 271-274.

¹⁶ Chen Yiping, *Demographic Changes and Contemporary American Society* (《人口变迁与当代美国社会》), World Affairs Press, 2006, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷ Zi Zhongyun, *The Destination of Fortune: A Review of Modern American Public Welfare Foundations* (《财富的归宿：美国现代公益基金会述评》), Shanghai People’s Publishing House, pp. 1-3, 321-350.

¹⁸ Wang Lixin, “Realistic Concerns, Chinese Characteristics and American History Research” (《现实关怀、中国特色与美国史研究》), *Journal of Historical Sciences*, No. 9, 2003, p. 6.

¹⁹ Li Jianming, “Democratic Test and Tested Democracy” (《民主的考验和考验中的民主》), *Dushu*, No.2, 1999, p. 26.

²⁰ In every political society and cultural system, ideology of one kind or another exists, but it can take different forms, whether political, cultural, official, civil, or social. In this essay, political ideology refers to the type of ideology that is shaped by political power to facilitate the practice of this political power.

precondition would be respect for the American historical discursive context.

The methodology in which all expressions of writing on American history were tainted by political ideology was rooted in several sources: firstly, Marxist theories interpreted in extreme political terms, especially the teachings of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin as purveyed by the Soviets; secondly, speeches by Chinese political leaders and political editorials in newspapers; thirdly, materials and arguments drawn from the works of “progressive American historians”, such as William Foster, Philip Foner, and Herbert Aptheker; and fourthly, Soviet works on American history and world history. Due to the pervasive political power structure, the influence of the first two of these penetrated deeply into the humanities and social sciences, while works by “progressive American historians” functioned largely as sources of materials, historical facts, and arguments. Soviet historiography, however, played the most decisive role in shaping the basic framework of Chinese research in American history. After 1978, China experienced major and profound transformations. The connotations and role of political ideology changed accordingly, and its dominating impact upon academia decreased, while the broader academic atmosphere also took on some new characteristics. Taken together, all these developments duly had a significant impact on the intellectual and theoretical orientation of research in American history, as most researchers began to abandon the dogmatic attitudes dictated by Marxist theories and consciously or unconsciously to free themselves from the dominance of political ideology. The result was that major changes occurred in both the discourse on American history and the methods used to process research materials, which could genuinely be described as representing a “de-ideologizing” process.

Another prominent new feature is theoretical diversity. Since the mid-1980s, the new generation of scholars have made it a conscious practice to employ relevant theories drawn from the social sciences in their research. In one of his books, Prof. Wang Xu admitted that he has drawn lessons from “relevant theories and methods of economics and geography” while adopting “traditional methods of historiography”.²¹ In his doctoral thesis, Prof. Dai Chaowu tried to “conduct multi-disciplinary comprehensive research by adopting theories and methods from sociology, economics, geography and demography.”²² Prof. Wang Lixin applied such theories and concepts as the “image”, the “other”, “national construction,” and “national identity,” taken from anthropology, sociology, and political science to analyze how American elites have understood China at different times and to explain why and how the image that they have of China is significant and affects the construction of American national identity.²³ Mature Chinese theories and research paradigms are still, however, lacking in China, meaning that Chinese scholars largely use as models those advanced by European and American scholars. Prof. Wang Lixin, for example, admitted that the work of Akira Iriye inspired him to adopt a cultural perspective in *Ideology and American Foreign Policies* (《意识形态与美国外交政策》) when studying American diplomatic history.²⁴

In terms of methodology, research in American history has been characterized by one long-term

²¹ Wang Xu, *A Study of Metropolitans on the West Coast of America* (《美国西海岸大城市研究》), Northeast Normal University Press, 1994, p.3.

²² Dai Chaowu, *American Immigration Policies and Asian Immigrants, 1849-1996* (《美国移民政策与亚洲移民 1849-1996》), Chinese Social Sciences Press, 1999, p. 4 of “Preface”.

²³ Wang Lixin, “Against the Background of the Dragon: The Image of China and the Construction of American National Identity” (《在龙的映衬下：对中国的想象与美国国家身份的建构》), *Social Sciences in China*, No. 3, 2008, pp. 156-173.

²⁴ Wang Lixin, *Ideology and American Foreign Policy: A Case Study of America's China Policy in the Twentieth Century* (《意识形态与美国外交政策》), Peking University Press, 2007, pp. 29-30.

deficiency, namely, indifference to historicist consciousness. “Historicist consciousness” means placing historical events and figures in their respective historical time and space and understanding their essential historical significance on the basis of the concrete historical context. For quite some time after 1978, many researchers failed to draw a definite dividing line between works of history and political commentaries on current affairs, but chose “commenting while taking references from history” as a legitimate historiographical approach, usually advancing arguments that paid insufficient attention to the concrete historical time and space of the period they were studying. In the last decade or so, research in American history, as with many other fields of historical research, has returned to the historicist methodology, emphasizing the subjectivity of historiography and reiterating the basic fundamental model of historical research, namely, adherence to empirical study based on firsthand materials, following the basic principle of “argue as the materials speak”, and bearing in mind the concrete specifics of a particular historical time and space when analyzing the past. Chinese scholars no longer indulge in excessive superficial commentary.²⁵

IV. Historical materials and resources

It is a basic requirement of historiography that empirical research should be based on abundant firsthand materials. In terms of research in American history, however, the shortage of primary materials and the long-term tenet of “avoiding competition with foreign scholars in terms of historical materials” followed by Chinese researchers made empirical research virtually impossible. This by no means proved, however, that Chinese researchers were reluctant to base their research on primary sources, but was due, rather, to the fact that, even after reform and opening up policies began, Chinese researchers had only very limited research materials available to them. If they had insisted that all research and writing on American history must be based on primary sources, many researchers might have had no choice but to abandon their research work. Most scholars believed it acceptable to quote extensively from secondary or even third-hand English sources.

At the same time, some researchers failed to realize the importance of using primary sources and claimed that on the contrary, Chinese scholars were applying advanced theories to American historical research, giving them an advantage over American scholars who were obsessed with raw historical data. Such beliefs prevented Chinese scholars from analyzing and studying primary sources. Some researchers, who sought to conceal their lack of materials by proclaiming their so-called theoretical superiority, screened, re-organized, and reinterpreted historical facts drawn from American scholars by using a set of discourses and concepts that differed from historiography in America, and even termed such practices American historical research with Chinese characteristics. During the 1980s, growing numbers of researchers benefited from financial support of various kinds that gave them opportunities to conduct research in the United States, but the publications of these researchers not demonstrate any major progress in terms of sources, but largely relied on general works rather than primary sources. Such scholarship often cited indiscriminately many outdated or poor quality secondary works. Since the mid-1990s, by contrast, primary sources have become much more accessible in China, yet much research on American history published by Chinese scholars still fails to utilize fully materials available in China, or even basic historical source materials found in the holdings of most libraries. Works on

²⁵ Representative works of this type include Huang Jinhu, *Southern Slave Owners and the American Civil War* (《南部奴隶主与美国内战》), People’s Press, 2006; and Wang Lixin, *Ideology and American Foreign Policy: A Case Study of America’s China Policy in the Twentieth Century* (《意识形态与美国外交政策》), Peking University Press, 2007.

the drafting of the American Constitution, for example, are rarely based on the papers of James Madison or the literature on the promulgation of the Constitution, but largely rely on very general documentary collections and secondary sources, even though for the past decade, basic materials on the American Constitution have been readily available in the National Library of China and the libraries of Peking University, Nankai University, and Nanjing University.

In terms of using primary sources, the pioneers in China have been scholars of American diplomatic history. As early as the 1960s, Prof. Luo Rongqu quoted a substantial number of primary sources in his article on the origins and essence of the Monroe Doctrine.²⁶ In the mid-1980s, Prof. Shi Yinhong's small book, *The Nixon Doctrine* (《尼克松主义》), set a better example, since in its one hundred pages he cited thirteen separate sources of government archives and diplomatic documents, eight memoirs or publications by parties directly involved, and thirteen newspapers and journals.²⁷ At that time, it was still rather rare for Chinese scholars to attach such high importance to and make full use of primary sources. During the 1990s, Chinese works on American diplomatic history increasingly cited the United States Department of State series *Foreign Relations of the United States* and other sources from government archives. In 2000, for example, Prof. Cui Pi published the book *America's Containment Strategy and COCOM, CHINCOM, 1945-1994* (《美国的冷战战略与巴黎统筹委员会、中国委员会(1945-1994)》), which drew upon many declassified American and Japanese diplomatic archives, published diplomatic documents, and other materials from official archives, comparing and differentiating these primary documents, and including as an appendix a list of declassified US National Security Council documents as a convenience to other researchers.²⁸ These works largely utilized published diplomatic documents and microfilms. In terms of the direct use of relevant archival materials, the works of Prof. Hua Qingzhao were most notable. In his book *From Yalta to P'anmunjom* (《从雅尔塔到板门店》), Prof. Hua not only made use of published documentary collections, memoirs, diaries, and articles in newspapers and journals, but also spent one year collecting official documents and personal papers from American and British archives and libraries, such as the Harry S. Truman Library, the National Archives of the United States, the Library of Congress, the National Archives of the United Kingdom, and relevant university libraries.²⁹ Given this positive atmosphere, many Ph.D. dissertations on American diplomatic history published in recent years also represented major progress in terms of the use of primary sources.³⁰

In other sub-fields of research in American history, by contrast, the use of primary sources lagged behind, something that remained a rather common phenomenon throughout the two decades after 1978. This situation did not change until the beginning of the twenty-first century, when it began to improve for the following reasons. Firstly, more channels to access primary

²⁶ Luo Rongqu, "The Origin and Essence of the Monroe Doctrine: The Development of Expansionism in the Early Stage of America" (《门罗主义的起源和实质——美国早期扩张主义思想的发展》), *Historical Research*, No. 6, 1963.

²⁷ Shi Yinhong, *The Nixon Doctrine*, Wuhan University Press, 1984.

²⁸ Cui Pi, *America's Containment Strategy and COCOM, CHINCOM, 1945-1994* (《美国的冷战战略与巴黎统筹委员会、中国委员会(1945-1994)》), Northeast Normal University Press, 2000, reprinted by Zhonghua Book Company, 2005.

²⁹ Hua Qingzhao, *From Yalta to P'anmunjom* (《从雅尔塔到板门店》), Chinese Social Sciences Press, 1992, pp. 249-254.

³⁰ Liu Guozhu, *The New Frontier of American Culture: A Study of the Peace Corps in the Cold War Era* (《美国文化的边疆——冷战时期的和平队研究》), China Social Sciences Press, 2005, pp. 302-309; Luo Xuan, *Between Dreams and Reality: Henry Luce and China* (《在梦想与现实之间——鲁斯与中国》), People's Press, 2005, pp. 430-451; Yang Weidong, *Expansion and Isolation: A Study of John Quincy Adams's Diplomatic Thought* (《扩张与鼓励: 约翰·昆西·亚当斯外交思想研究》), Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2006, pp. 350-361.

materials have become available. A revolutionary development of recent years is the skyrocketing increase in Internet resources. The United States leads the world in developing Internet technologies and digitalized materials, especially in terms of archiving and publicizing historical documents, a development that has made it easier for researchers outside America to benefit from this convenience. In recent years, many prominent Chinese universities and research institutes have purchased various firsthand material databases, such as Early English Books Online (EEBO), the Eighteenth Century Collection Online (ECCO), Early American Imprints, American Historical Newspapers, and the Declassified Documents Reference System (DDRS). Moreover, many free resources, such as the Library of Congress database, Archive.Org, and Liberty Online, have become far more accessible without charge on the Internet. In addition, some universities have established databases on certain specific topics, again accessible free of charge. Many scholars are very much aware of and interested in the improved research facilities that Internet technologies have generated.

Researchers have also become much more conscious of historical facts. Most of the younger generation of researchers, who have enjoyed more rigorous training in historiography, attach adequate importance to collecting and using firsthand materials. When writing his book *Southern Slave Owners and American Civil War* (《南部奴隶主与美国内战》), Prof. Wang Jinhua made full use of “Documents on American Southern History” on the website of the University of North Carolina, and “The Log of the Confederate Congress” in relevant Library of Congress databases. The use of primary sources has also improved research on other subjects. Prof. Liang Maoxin’s book *The Age of Metropolitanization* (《都市化时代》) (Northeast Normal University Press, 2002), for example, refers to seventy-two different primary sources, and the bibliography of his *American Human Resource Training and Employment Policies* (《美国人力培训与就业政策》) (People’s Press, 2006) lists over one hundred governmental documents. A second example is Prof. Chen Yiping’s book *Demographic Change and Contemporary American Society* (《人开口变迁与当代美国社会》) (World Affairs Press, 2006), which is based on demographic statistics and analytical reports available on the Internet. Another more typical example is Prof. Han Tie’s *The Ford Foundation and Chinese Studies in America* (《福特基金会与中国的中国学》) (China Social Sciences Press, 2004), which is based entirely on primary sources, including the archives of the Ford Foundation, oral history records, government documents, and various manuscript collections. Prof. Han Tie received systematic academic training in America and this book is based on his Ph.D. dissertation. These examples demonstrate that, given appropriate facilities and determination, Chinese scholars are fully capable of producing innovative works that draw upon concrete and solid primary sources.

These works are still, however, rare and atypical examples of Chinese research on American history. Primary sources can be employed in two ways, either for decorative use or for substantive use. “Decorative use” means that primary materials serve mostly to supplement secondary materials or are employed to illuminate minor issues rather than playing a decisive role in supporting the main argument of a book or thesis. Using primary sources merely to recount historical facts that are already well-known or to prove the findings of earlier researchers also falls into this category. “Substantive use” means that the research question under consideration is derived from firsthand materials, so that by exploring primary sources new conclusions can be drawn. Up to the present, most works on American history have still fallen in the first category. Although decorative use of primary sources materials may be acceptable in the initial stages of research in American history, in the long run such practices will prevent Chinese

researchers from producing innovative work. So will another established practice when Chinese scholars write on American history, namely, that, American history textbooks and even general world history textbooks published in China are cited as sources in what claim to be research-based works.

Another notable development is the changed attitude toward secondary sources. Before the 1990s, authors referred to secondary literature largely for the purpose of quoting source materials without much attention to their broader themes, arguments, and methodologies. Most works lacked any historiographical review of the academic history of a specific research subject, background to which, in the last twenty years, Chinese researchers have begun to attach far greater importance. Increasingly, books, dissertations, and articles now discuss existing research on their subject in the preface or notes, so as to demonstrate and clarify their own research orientation and focus. Prof. Shi Yinhong's *The Nixon Doctrine* (《尼克松主义》), for example, discusses "previous studies of the Nixon Doctrine by American scholars" in its notes.³¹ In the author's preface to *A Biography of Jefferson* (《杰弗逊传》), Prof. Liu Zuochang introduces and comments in detail on the sets of Thomas Jefferson's papers edited by American scholars and earlier biographical works on Jefferson before describing the logic of his own research and the themes and organization of his own study.³² In the preface to *The Twentieth Century American Civil Service System and Bureaucracy* (《二十世纪美国文官制度与官僚政治》), Shi Qinghuan provides a detailed listing of other relevant works and comments on the major ones.³³ Wang Dongxing's *Institutional Change and the Rise of the American South* (《制度变迁与美国南部的崛起》) reviews the development of research on the history of the American South.³⁴ In the preface to Liang Maoxin's *American Human Resource Training and Employment Policies* (《美国人力培训与就业政策》), he discusses relevant key works, pointing out their achievements and limitations and explaining the logic of his own research.³⁵

After only a few decades of development, research in China in American history has already built an efficient infrastructure, though, thanks to the limitations of sources, methodology, theory, and perspectives, innovative Chinese works on American history are still few and far between by comparison with their American counterparts. All these works are nonetheless landmarks in the development in China of research on American history and part of the accumulated Chinese pool of academic work on American history. As this develops greater critical mass, Chinese researchers on American history are undoubtedly destined to produce more original studies.

V. Recent Developments and Prospects

In retrospect, major limitations of research in American history in the last thirty years include a focus on excessively general topics, superficial use of sources, the absence of in-depth research, and an obsession with discussing extremely wide issues in a lengthy time frame and broad context. One American scholar who used to teach in China has made similar observations and criticized these defects from a friendly perspective.³⁶ The development of historiography in both

³¹ Shi Yinhong, *The Nixon Doctrine*, p. 2 and notes.

³² Liu Zuochang, *A Biography of Jefferson* (《杰弗逊传》), pp. 4-11.

³³ Shi Qinghuan, *The Twentieth Century American Civil Service System and Bureaucracy* (《二十世纪美国文官制度与官僚政治》), Northeast Normal University Press, 2003, pp. 4-12.

³⁴ Wang Dongxing, *Institutional Changes and the Rise of the American South* (《制度变迁与美国南部的崛起》), pp. 15-18.

³⁵ Liang Maoxin, *American Human Resource Training and Employment Policies* (《美国人力培训与就业政策》), People's Press, 2006, pp. 15-24.

³⁶ Allan Kulikoff, "Contributions to be Made to the Study of Early American History" (《中国学者在美国早期史研究中即将作

China and the United States reveals that in order to make progress in a particular field, concrete and in-depth studies must be undertaken on a subject by subject basis. Historiography became specialized in America in the late nineteenth century, when monographic studies began to appear. In China too, when historiography began to modernize, some scholars also advocated “in-depth research of manageable scope”, meaning that the scope of the research subject should be suitable for American historical research in China. Too big a subject inevitably leads to superficial arguments, with no guarantee of academic quality. Too small a research topic is likewise similarly difficult to manage, because of the insufficiency of sources. A more feasible strategy for researchers is to devote themselves to one particular field over the long run while conducting in-depth and detailed research on topics which meet the required research conditions. It is not easy to research a small topic, because this requires a large vision. Only by “doing big research on a small topic” and “seeing big through small” can specialized and high-quality outputs be attained. Once such studies appear in significant numbers, together they will substantially change the overall nature of research on American history.

A good monographic study requires sensitive and unique research questions, since its themes and arguments should be driven by these research questions. Lacking the structural support of a good research question or without theoretical references, such studies will not succeed in putting forward intellectually challenging opinions and will become merely a chronological account of a problem. In terms of research in American history in China, it would even be impractical to seek to unearth new sources and thereby to “restore historical facts”. Given existing research facilities, a more promising practice is to study old topics by asking new research questions and approaching them from new perspectives, in order to interpret them innovatively. To guarantee continuing progress in research on American history, new researchers will require instruction in a well-established postgraduate training system, making it not just critical but also urgent to improve postgraduate training in China. One American scholar familiar with the deficiencies in China’s postgraduate training believes that the “seminar” teaching method, proved effective by European and American experience, is the only way to improve the quality of postgraduate education in China.³⁷ In addition to reforming teaching practices and methods, training in relevant disciplines should also be strengthened so that graduates can broaden their theoretical vision and cultivate their skills in insightful and creative theoretical thinking. In the context of globalization, learning and theorizing has become less nationalistic but more “universal”. Chinese scholars can deploy theoretical tools drawn from overseas to cultivate and strengthen their own academic thinking. Yet, if they rely exclusively on theories developed by foreign scholars, how can Chinese academia develop its own features in terms of its perspectives, methodology, and interpretative framework? In the final analysis, the progress of research in American history in China depends on the overall development of Chinese academia.

At present, the academic community has become increasingly international. Chinese scholars should never build a cart behind closed doors without any knowledge of developments elsewhere in the world, but should follow closely new global developments in historiography and actively participate in international academic dialogues. One has to ask, however, whether participating in international academic dialogues and striving to become part of the international academic community conflict with the “localization” drive? On the surface, tension exists between “internationalization” and “localization”. Yet in reality, these are questions of different levels;

出的贡献》), *Journal of Historical Science*, No. 2, 2008, p. 13.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

that is, “internationalization” is about academic operations while “localization” is closely related to academic quality. “Localization” is inevitable when Chinese scholars do research on the history of foreign countries, which must become part of broad Chinese historiography rather than merely a supplement to the historiography of the country subjected to study. When researching American history, Chinese scholars use American materials, making it impossible for them to escape from American influences when they pose their research questions, frame their arguments, and formulate their opinions. The danger of becoming followers and parrots is pronounced. Without localization, Chinese academia may lose its own academic identity. The key to localization is twofold. On the one hand, Chinese scholars need to explore American history in-depth, yet on the other hand they should rely on the achievements of general Chinese historiography. It is essential for Chinese scholars to follow with interest China’s social and academic development, remain aware of developments in research on Chinese history, and learn from scholars of Chinese history. At the present time, great progress has occurred in Chinese social history, local history, and environmental history. Folk historical sources are attracting increasing attention. The interactions between internal and external factors, grass roots society, and systemic changes have all become important research angles. These developments should also inspire research in American history. Chinese scholars of American history should dig into the historical context of American history and reflect on it with cultural self-awareness. If the Chinese historical community cannot make breakthroughs in terms of its research models, theoretical orientation, research methodologies, and research questions, there will be no place for Chinese historians in the world academic community and Chinese research on foreign histories, including that of the United States, will fail to cultivate its own academic characteristics or exert appropriate academic influence.

To sum up, the thirty years of reform and opening up witnessed the rapid growth and continuous development of research in American history in China. Research on American history has already become a vigorous and thriving discipline, especially in recent years with the emergence of the new generation of researchers, most of whom have only recently finished their postgraduate studies, in the course of which they received systematic academic training, in terms of the selection of topics, literature reviews, the collection and interpretation of historical materials, and the compilation and improvement of their dissertations, especially when researching on and writing their Ph.D. dissertations under the guidance of their supervisors. With a proper understanding of basic research methodologies and academic standards, this new generation of researchers can begin their studies much better equipped than were the older generations of the last twenty or thirty years. Moreover, the new generation enjoys the blessings of an ever more favorable political environment, sustained economic development, and superior research facilities. When the new generation becomes academically mature, Chinese research on American history will enter an age of prosperity.

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