

The Ideology of Scholarship : China's New Historiography

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*This article is a report on the conference on historiography in Communist China convened by The China Quarterly at Ditchley Park near Oxford, September 6-12, 1964. Many of the papers will appear in forthcoming issues of this Journal and will be published in book form next year. Professor Feuerwerker served as chairman of the conference, Mr. Kahn as its rapporteur.**

IDEOLOGY is, rightly considered, a datum of history. When it becomes *the* datum of history—the end of the scholar's search as well as his means—the rules of the game change and historical inquiry becomes essentially a political exercise. The historian moves from the classroom to the platform, the natural habitat of the ideologue; historiography moves from an effort to discover what actually was (Ranke's hope) to an effort to confirm what in fact should be. The past, that is, serves the present not by illuminating it but by defining it, by justifying it. This is not an unfamiliar phenomenon. Prussian scholarship served Bismarck as Soviet scholarship, after Pokrovsky, served Stalin and as Chinese scholarship today serves Mao. It is in large the scholarship of nationalism. And nationalism, being a jealous mistress, demands the creation of a particularistic history, a private affair, as it were, between the state and the people. This is all very well in the privacy of the sovereign realm, but it is awkward in the vestibule of the new ecumeni. For Marxism too is jealous and demands of her historians universality. To court both cultural uniqueness and universal applicability is a task few historians savour, yet it is one that Chinese writers today are forced to perform.

Their frequent incompatibility and the problems raised by attempting to reconcile nationalist sentiment and Marxist-Leninist theory in the writing of history are demonstrated in the controversy over "historicism" (*li-shih chu-i*) and the "class viewpoint" (*chieh-chi kuan-tien*) which

* This report represents in general form and without specific acknowledgment of individual contributions to the discussions a consensus of views expressed at the conference. The authors alone of course are responsible for the form those views take here.

since mid-1963 has regularly occupied the pages of historical and philosophical journals in the People's Republic of China. In the first decade of Communist China, historical writing was heavily weighted towards the "class viewpoint." That is to say, the problems to which historians addressed themselves tended to be clothed in a vulgar and schematic Marxism which failed, on the evidence of the practitioners themselves, to do justice to the scope and weight of a cultural tradition as magnificent as any that human genius has created. By the late 1950s a reaction was evident against anonymous history—dynasties without "feudal" emperors or bureaucrats, literature minus the landlord-scholar-official literatus, nameless peasant rebellions as the central matter of China's history—which emasculated as a feudal excrescence the two-thousand-year core of traditional Chinese civilisation. The "re-evaluations" which were undertaken of such hitherto malefic persons as Ts'ao Ts'ao, the emperor Han Wu-ti, the Manchu rulers K'ang-hsi and Ch'ien-lung, and most recently of Genghis Khan introduced a leaven of "historicism," or historical relativism, into the treatment of the feudal past. In brief, historians were enjoined that these men and others like them were henceforth to be judged by their "contribution to the people and to the development of the whole nation and to cultural development" rather than by the standards of the "Socialist" society in which the historian wrote.

There is evidence to suggest that this altered emphasis in Chinese historiography after 1958 or 1959 correlates with a patent quickening of Chinese nationalism in the face of increasingly severe differences with the Soviet Union. But however much diluted in practice, the observance of the old religion and the worship of its gods cannot be abandoned without calling into question the foundation of the state and undermining one's defences in the great polemic with Soviet Russia. Hence movement from a "class viewpoint" to "historicism" inevitably gives rise to counter forces. Witness the experience of Professor Liu Chieh of the Department of History at Chungshan University in Canton.

Riding on the wave of historicist criticism of the crude application of the class viewpoint, Liu in several articles written in 1962 and 1963 questioned whether the class struggle was really applicable to ancient Chinese history. "In brief, the theory of class struggle is practical and effective when applied in current politics," he wrote, "but when applied in the interpretation of ancient historical events, is it necessary to use the theory in such a dogmatic manner and so mechanically?"¹ Liu's doubts had been expressed in his contributions to discussions in

¹ Quoted in *Jen-min Jih-pao (People's Daily)*, June 18, 1963. We have not been able to see the original articles by Liu, some of which appeared in the Canton bi-monthly *Hsueh-shu Yen-chiu (Academic Studies)*, No. 1, 1962; Nos. 2, 3, 1963.

philosophical circles devoted to the re-evaluation of Confucius and Confucian thought. Like a few others, notably Fung Yu-lan, who was also to be attacked, Liu had argued that Confucian *jen*, for example, was devoid of class content. He described it as an "abstract ethical concept" which "has been induced from all kinds of concrete happenings in human society from ancient times till the present." The nature of man, regardless of his times and his class, always required him to pursue *jen*.

On the one hand, Liu's position might be likened to that of some earlier predecessors who had sought to identify values in the Chinese tradition which might too, like those of the politically dominant West, be nominated as candidates for universal acceptance. That is, in re-evaluating China's philosophical heritage, Liu was to some degree expressing a nationalist attitude. This was not, however, the way in which his eccentricity was interpreted by Liu's more politically sophisticated colleagues. In numerous articles and at such meetings as that of the Kwangtung Historical Association held on October 5, 1963, he was attacked for "opposing the materialist historical viewpoint of Marxism" for espousing a theory of human nature "basically opposed to the class theory of Marxism," and for taking a "supra-class viewpoint" which was in fact the viewpoint of the capitalist class.² It was Liu's misfortune that in his interpretation and espousal of Confucian *jen* (which one might read as the equivalent of "humanism" or "humanitarianism") he was, intentionally or not, coming close to the very ideological sin of which the Chinese Communist Party was accusing the Soviet "modern revisionists." As Chou Yang, Deputy Director of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CCP, put it in a speech to a conference of the Department of Philosophy and Social Science of the Academy of Sciences on October 26, 1963³:

Completely discarding historical materialism, the modern revisionists substitute the bourgeois theory of human nature for the Marxist-Leninist teachings on class struggle and proletarian dictatorship. . . . They have equated the concept of humanism so-called with that of scientific Communism. . . . They say "Communist ideology is the most humane ideology," they talk of humanism as "the highest embodiment of Communism," and they assert that "humanism in the broad sense of the word merges with Communism," and that "the Communist system means the triumph of humaneness." . . . We are firmly opposed to substituting the theory of human nature in the abstract and the preaching of fraternity for the standpoint of class analysis and class struggle; we are against describing Communism as humanism and against placing humanism above Communism.

² *Kuang-ming Jih-pao (Kuang-ming Daily)*, November 10, 1963.

³ Chou Yang, "The Fighting Task Confronting Workers in Philosophy and the Social Sciences," *Peking Review*, January 3, 1964.

Liu Chieh was singled out for chastisement, but the convention and theme of the philosophy and social science conference referred to immediately above—at which Liu Shao-ch'i, Chairman of the People's Republic of China, delivered an "important speech"⁴ and which was attended by many Party officials as well as by scholars and research workers—indicated that there were others too guilty of "modernising the ideologies of ancients" and asserting that "they are something which transcends classes and time."⁵ The rub is that while it is easy to agree that the principles of historicism and the class viewpoint have an "internal and organic" connection, this is of little help in guiding actual historical research. "If the unity of the class viewpoint with historicism is taken as complete agreement of content and the relations between them are regarded as necessary ones, so that possession of the class viewpoint inevitably implies possession of historicism, the resulting interpretation will be mechanical and oversimplified." On the other hand, historical relativism which abandons "revolutionary responsibility and fervour for changing present realities" and does not ask what significance the narration and portrayal of the past has for "today's life and struggles," emasculates historicism which degenerates into merely a restoration of ancient things.⁶ To inherit "correctly" the legacy of the past, the historian must steer between Scylla and Charybdis guided only by the Maoist star that signals, "Another task in our study is to examine our historical legacy and *sum it up critically from the Marxist approach*,"⁷ while the shifting clouds of domestic and international policy cast doubts as to direction from which the beacon really beckons.

What happens in such circumstances to the historical record as we know it? What contributions can be or have already been made towards illuminating a tradition once condemned out of hand as a feudalistic embarrassment? How shall we evaluate them? How new in fact is the current historical process? How revisionist? How flexible? What are its theoretical and organisational constructs? How accurate a barometer is it of current social and political concerns? These are some of the questions that were discussed at the Conference on Chinese Communist Historiography. In attempting to generalise on the conclusions reached it will be useful to consider two broad areas of inquiry: the varieties of history—the theory, methods, and organisation of historiography—and the contents of history.

⁴ New China News Agency, Peking, November 24, 1963.

⁵ See *Kuang-ming Daily*, January 23, 1963; *Hsin Chien-she (New Construction)*, No. 1, 1962.

⁶ Ning K'o, "Lun Li-shih-chu-i Ho Chieh-chi Kuan-tien" ("On Historicism and the Class Viewpoint"), *Li-shih Yen-chiu (Historical Research)*, No. 4, 1963.

⁷ *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Eng. ed., London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1954-56), Vol. II, p. 259; emphasis added.

THE VARIETIES OF HISTORY

It is tempting to conclude that China's new historiography is simply a variation of the old—the substitution of one orthodoxy (Maoism) for another (Confucianism) and the continuation of a tradition which emphasised the here-and-now, public, essentially political, purpose of history. This may be true, but it is also too simple. Continuities and similarities there are to be sure: The need to legitimise the present by appeals to the past, the bureaucratic historian paid to praise the “throne,” the avowed didactic purpose of history, the organisation of the record from the centre, the hardening of methodology into a moralistic scholasticism, the inclusion and suppression of preferred data, the pride in preserving the record and rearranging it in vast compendia—all are common to both traditions. The differences, however, outweigh the similarities. So great are they in fact that a traditional historian would be hard put to recognise much of the new past as at all relevant to his own experience. The substantive priorities—the contents of history (see below)—are markedly different today; so are the norms and principles which guide their choice and the organisation of the effort itself.

The Chinese classically regarded history as a mirror which, properly angled, would reflect the cherished precedents of a golden age upon which present action had to be based or at least rationalised.⁸ As the mirror became tarnished in the long years of methodological complacency after the Sung dynasty (960–1278) the reflection paled into a scholastic acceptance of the praise-and-blame moralism of Chu Hsi (1130–1200). History came to resemble not so much the arrangement of facts as the recitation of dogma. And even the eighteenth century reaction to this, represented by the empirical methods of the school of Han learning, ended in a rigid pedantry.

Today the mirror has been replaced by the calibrating instrument, the scientific tool, which, according to Marxist dogma, if properly read will measure the inexorable march of progress through time to the present. But the danger of rigidity remains, for the proper reading of the new instrument also depends on a set of revealed truths. History in these circumstances begins to look more like propaganda than science. Yet ironically the historiographical situation in China today seems in some ways more fluid than in the past. This is not because dogma is less strict but rather because it has not yet gained the absolute approbation which comes of old age. For the moment the new scholasticism is still in flux. The Chinese historiographers may have their Aquinases or Chu Hsis in Marx and Mao, but not all of them know the scriptures. And

⁸ The most recent study of traditional historiography is W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleyblank, eds., *Historians of China and Japan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

even if they did they could not be overly complacent, for the scriptural ground keeps shifting under them as exigencies of policy call for new approaches. The new history, it was agreed, is really a variety of histories, a shifting, unsure, uneven, confused ground which has a high emotional content as well as a doctrinal rationality. For the first time the question, "what, really, is this China of ours?" is being asked—a question irrelevant in the traditional historiographical context and too mortifying in the imperialist context of nineteenth and twentieth century China.

The break with tradition, then, while not complete is irrevocable. There can be no going back to the old and pre-eminent concern for the supremacy of Confucianist politics; the new order instead proclaims the transcendence of economic and social forces in history. It does not, of course, deny the primacy of political concerns, for the Marxist-Leninist canon admits as much, but rather casts them in a vocabulary of class struggle alien to the tradition. By doing so it is changing the very language of Chinese history. For emperors and courts we now read peasants and people; the cycle of history recedes before the straight line of progress; former villains—Genghis Khan, for example, or the Manchus, even Ts'ao Ts'ao, the arch villain of popular history—become heroes and heroes—above all Confucius⁹—villains. The danger, of course, is that this will produce just one more oversimplification of the record, another static view of Chinese history just when its complexities are beginning to be appreciated. Yet it was recognised that there is promise in the new methodology as well, for behind the more egregious claptrap of Marxist ideology and language is evidence of an acceptance of new ideas, new techniques in the writing of history. It has been through Marxism-Leninism, in fact, that, sometimes in a blurred form to be sure, much of the new historical technique and methodology that developed in the modern West came to China. Notwithstanding its cramped ideological boundaries, Marxism does in some directions border upon the modern social sciences the fruits of which illicitly but undeniably penetrate into her confines. Marxism, moreover, in its claim to universality is more truly *historically* universal than Confucianism, which never recognised the possibility of national sub-universes, ever could be. In a word, in history as in other areas of Chinese society, the new dispensation is evidence of a back-door entrée into the world of modernisation.

Historical research in Communist China is conducted by the Institute of Historical Research of the Chinese Academy of academic bodies. In addition, the Communist Party itself carries on a certain

⁹ See Joseph R. Levenson, "The Place of Confucius in Communist China," *The China Quarterly*, No. 12, October-December, 1962.

amount of historical activity, and government archival offices, national and local, from time to time publish collections of historical source materials. The Institute of Historical Research is part of the Department of Philosophy and Social Science of the Academy of Sciences. Kuo Mo-jo, who is President of the Academy, is simultaneously Director of this Department. The Institute consists of three Offices: the First Office (Ancient History) is also headed by Kuo Mo-jo; the Director of the Second Office (Medieval History) is Ch'en Yuan, a specialist on T'ang history and the history of Buddhism; the Third Office (Modern History) is directed by Fan Wen-lan, a scholar who began his career as a student of the Chinese classics, but later turned to modern history. Research in economic history is also carried on at the Peking Institute of Economics of the Academy of Sciences, whose Deputy Director, Yen Chung-p'ing, is one of the most capable scholars in Communist China. The work of these research organs is carried on both by a permanent research staff and by leading faculty members of universities throughout China who are associated with the several institutes.

Nearly every university and college has a Department of History; in some cases there are two departments, one for Chinese history and one for foreign history. These departments, the members of which are, of course, engaged in both teaching and research, are under the general supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education. While the curricula of the several schools are not uniform, they tend to be quite similar as a consequence of the fact that many courses are taught from "pedagogical outlines" prepared by conferences of historians which are sponsored regularly by the Ministry. In general, the undergraduate history curriculum—there is very little graduate study—extends through four academic years. The ideological content of instruction and research in the field of history, as in other academic areas, is under the constant scrutiny of the Communist Party units in the universities and colleges. It has not been possible to determine how many active historians there are at present in the People's Republic of China. It was estimated by the editor of *Li-shih Yen-chiu (Historical Research)* that in 1957 there were 1,400 "teachers of contemporary history and history of the Revolution in institutions of higher learning in all parts of the country." This figure refers only to those who are primarily concerned with the period after 1919; it is unlikely, however, that the specialists in any other single period outnumber these modern historians.

The personnel of the new historiography are not yet unified in a single, ideologically respectable camp. Remnants of the capitalist and feudal scholarly élite active in the Kuomintang years exist side by side with representatives of the new curriculum. And the latter come and go as interpretative shifts render their works heretical or obsolete. This is

a period of transition. Existing scholarly resources must be mobilised and exploited even if they do not always conform to the new standards of excellence. Thus the conference was able to distinguish three groups of historians now at work: the older generation of non-Marxist trained scholars, the middle-aging party liners, and the new hotheads.

Among the first group are those, such as the eminent T'ang scholar Ch'en Yin-k'o and the old Academia Sinica archaeologists, whose reputations and expertise have until recently spared them from excessive criticism. Most notably in archaeology, a subfield of history where political pressures are minimal, are these scholars allowed to continue their work in relative methodological peace. On the whole, however, the trend seems to be to shunt them off into the obscurity of local historical commissions and boards where they are tolerated, neutralised, and counted as curios from a bygone age. The middle group is the most unstable. Its members, including Fan Wen-lan, Kuo Mo-jo, Chien Po-tsan, Hou Wai-lu, Liu Ta-nien, Shang Yüeh, and Lo Erh-kang, learned their Marxist lessons early and often too well, and in some cases have not always been able to keep up with changes in the text. Thus, for example, Fan Wen-lan has had to confess his doctrinal tardiness with every revision of his general studies of Chinese history, Shang Yüeh was left with a handful of withered sprouts when the argument for a pre-nineteenth century development of capitalism dried out, and Lo Erh-kang, the dean of China's Taiping scholars, is currently fighting a rear-guard action to save his patriot peasant hero, Li Hsiu-ch'eng, from being downgraded by the revisionists. The third group is a native product of the revolution. Its members are in a sense Mao's men, trained largely since 1949 in the new school of doctrinaire historiography and more at ease with the party line than the historical document. Academically inferior to their colleagues they are politically more enlightened and hence publicly safe and louder in their scholarly pronouncements. They represent, disconcertingly some feel, the wave of the future. The quality of Chinese historical scholarship in the next generation will in any case depend largely on their ability, or that of their students, eventually to escape the more cumbersome canonical strictures of Maoism and work out, even with the blunt tool of class analysis, a more sophisticated and hopefully more realistic past.

The performance to date has been mixed, but on the whole discouraging.¹⁰ The exception is in the field of archaeology where the work, both in quantity and quality, has by and large maintained the

¹⁰ For a review of the accomplishments in modern history see Albert Feuerwerker and S. Cheng, *Chinese Communist Studies of Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961).

high standards set in the 1930s.¹¹ Generally, however, specialists agreed that in their respective fields little new information has appeared, the main effort rather having been confined to reinterpretations of existing data. Monographic work has given way to the compendium, the polemic, the "proof." The academic journals serve as forums for the latest debates but rarely for original ideas. Curiously it is the large national newspapers, such as the *Kuang-ming Daily*, that often carry the first notices of tentative departures from the accepted norms—as if acting as a sounding board for controlled public opinion.

Doctrinally the single most important measure of success remains the ability to produce popular history—history about the people and essentially for them. This has inevitably meant a decline in professional standards but has also led to the encouragement of a growing body of amateur historiography which may in time act as a leaven on the more portentous products of official history. Results of the popularisation move are already in. A janitor has been transformed into an honoured archaeological worker for his careful work in preserving an unexpected find; six million poems have been produced in the province of Szechwan alone; vast collections of folklore and songs and ethnic tales are being compiled as repositories of the most primary data of popular history. Whether or not this will eventually change our picture of the past remains to be seen.

By far the greatest contribution to international scholarship so far has been the publication of conscientiously and expertly edited collections of historical documents.¹² Their appearance, unencumbered by moralistic trappings, has significantly expanded our knowledge of modern Chinese history. In the field of classical scholarship and literature, too, much work has been done to simplify the record. An ongoing programme of republication of seminal works and modern punctuation and annotation of classical texts promises to facilitate research not only by Western students but by the growing number of Chinese students who no longer can handle the earlier texts with ease.

THE CONTENTS OF HISTORY

Ever since the 1930s when Chinese Marxist scholars began the attempt to reshape history after the Socialist model, Chinese history has been caught in the artificial vice of periodisation. This need to torture an exceptional, in many ways unique, historical experience into the classical stages of development as defined by Marx, primarily on his knowledge

¹¹ See Cheng Tō-k'un, *Archaeology in China*, 3 vols. to date (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959 *et seq.*).

¹² For a discussion of some of these see John K. Fairbank and Mary Wright, *et al.*, "Documentary Collections on Modern Chinese History," *Journal of Asian Studies*, November 1957.

of European history, has led to endless and on the whole sterile debate over the course of Chinese history.¹³ There is no indication that the controversy is near settlement and until it is, the conference agreed, much scholarly energy is doomed to be wasted on essentially peripheral matters. When the slave period ended, how long, if at all, the embarrassing (because unclassical and somehow second-class) stage of the Asiatic mode of production lasted, when the modern period begins—are questions more amenable to exegetical than historical solutions.

The problem has been compounded by a countervailing need—the need to find in China's past not just a correspondence to classical models but the models themselves. This trend, exacerbated by the Sino-Soviet split and the growth of an increasingly self-conscious nationalism, has had the effect of creating a new sinocentrism in the historical writing, a kind of classicism in reverse where China, not the West, represents the archetypal experience of progress towards Socialism.¹⁴

As a result of these political and ideological agonies Chinese history has emerged as a lopsided story with a beginning and an end but hardly any middle. The vast stretch of some 2,000 years from the formation of the Han states to the mid-nineteenth century constitutes a feudal embarrassment that seems safer left alone for the time being. Emphasis rather has been on the nodal points, the transitional periods of history, as defined by the Marxist-Maoist canon. These are the real problem areas of the new historiography, for upon them depends China's ultimate acceptance or rejection as a respectable historical member of the school of materialist progress. Yet even for these periods the Chinese historians have tended to restrict themselves to a limited number of topics more or less directly related to the problem of constructing a new past to replace the discarded Confucianist interpretation. Besides periodisation as a legitimate concern in its own right, they seem particularly concerned with such problems as the interpretation of peasant rebellions, the formation of the Han nation, the nature of landholding in "feudal" China, the controversy over the origins of capitalism in China, and the role of imperialism in modern Chinese history.¹⁵

These historians of course have not been able fully to ignore the middle period. But they approach it with notable caution. The trouble is that while doctrine defines a feudal epoch as static, history indicates that this period was decidedly dynamic. It witnessed, among other things, a radical change in class relationships, from the dominance

¹³ For the early debates see Benjamin I. Schwartz, "A Marxist Controversy in China," *Far Eastern Quarterly*, February 1954.

¹⁴ The Marxist-nationalist dichotomy and its effects on the substance of current historiography is examined more closely in Albert Feuerwerker, "China's History in Marxian Dress," *American Historical Review*, January 1961.

¹⁵ See *ibid.*

of a small, monied aristocracy to the ascendance of a much broader-based land-owning commoner élite; the partial implementation for several centuries of a suspiciously egalitarian land tenure and allotment programme known as the "equal field" system; the gradual acceptance of the alienability of land and the right of private ownership; the increase in living standards, even for the peasantry, with marked improvements in agricultural techniques and handicraft trades; the growth of large cities and an urban work force; the expansion of the realm by the periodic incursion of proto-imperialists such as the Mongols and Manchus; the development from the Sung dynasty on of a thriving commercial capitalism. Many of these developments, however, were initiated or led by the throne, and it is still difficult for the Chinese historians to admit that a reactionary political force could or would energise progressive socio-economic forces. Understandably, then, the role of the "Crown," except as a negative force, has been underplayed and the role of the personalities who wore it all but ignored.

In downgrading the monarch and the court the new historiography has performed one useful service. It has rescued from traditional neglect the common man and made of him an historically relevant creature. The treatment of peasant rebellions, while often excessively enthusiastic itself, has provided a needed corrective to the old obsession with battles and kings and the sanctity of orthodox power. While it was noted that there is no brief for the claims of a progressive growth of peasant class consciousness as peasant unrest grew in intensity through the centuries, it was agreed that concentration on this shadowy area of history has brought to light much new and useful information. Popular history perhaps is being misused, but it is, nevertheless, being well documented. Unfortunately the most important rebellion still awaits definitive treatment. While much individual work has been done on the Taiping rebellion (1851-64), the very complex sociological and ideological problems it poses seem as intractable to the new Chinese methodology as they still are to various non-Chinese approaches.

In the realm of ideas much has been written but little accomplished. Studies in Buddhism, for example, both in its doctrinal and socio-economic aspects, have progressed little beyond the pre-1949 level of general surveys and hostile attacks. Part of the reason for this is the lack of trained scholars in this highly difficult field. Part, however, is the political rather than historical preoccupation of the régime with the religion. Rather than suppress the Buddhist church it has sought to reform it. It is rewriting the scriptures to emphasise the positive, progressive nature of this worldly service and the reactionary nature of superstitious belief. The pantheon, so to speak, is being brought down

to earth and the sutras, together with the Maoist writ, being made the litany of the five year plans.

Classical philosophy is being restudied from a materialist base which paradoxically still seems hyper-interested in traditional metaphysical questions. Materialism itself appears ill-defined by the new historians of philosophy and they have yet to make the distinction, assumed in Western philosophy, between metaphysical or mechanical materialism, the heritage derived from Greek atomistic thought, and dialectical materialism, the heritage from German idealism. But more important than philosophical distinctions, even for the philosophers, are historical distinctions. Until the periodisation of the classical age (6th-3rd centuries B.C.) is fixed, the class affiliations of the early thinkers, upon which rests a correct evaluation of their worth, must remain strictly provisional. Not so with the neo-Confucians. As early as the May Fourth movement Chu Hsi orthodoxy was declared modern China's greatest intellectual enemy and nothing has changed to alter that view. It is recognised, nevertheless, that the early neo-Confucians of the mid and late T'ang period performed a progressive role in their attacks on Buddhism, for the Buddhism of this period is seen as the captive of an aristocratic class and Confucianism the ideology of a materialist landlord class. However, just as peasant leadership in the feudal age was corrupted by success, so neo-Confucianism was spoilt by its victory, and by the Sung had lost its materialist content to a new and odious idealism. Ever after it would be a force of reaction. In this interpretation finer distinctions than those between idealist and materialist do not occur and the class analysis is still so rough that thinkers are often assigned to classes that did not exist. Clearly the historians of philosophy have a formidable task before them. Not only will they have to refine their techniques but they will eventually have to decide what weight to give ideas in history. Are they to be considered to have played a reflective or independent history-making role, *i.e.*, did they simply reflect their times or actually affect them? The question seems still to be open.

No area of Chinese history is more beset by interpretative problems than the modern period. As events move closer to the revolution they become more sensitive, as if proximity, unless correctly handled, somehow might detract from the lustre of that event. This is well illustrated in the problem of the growth of capitalism. Essentially it is the problem of cultural pride. Did China have a legitimate history of her own which could account by domestic factors for normal development away from feudalism and into the modern age? Or did external events—the invasion of China by Western capital in the nineteenth century—determine the course of history? At first it appeared that the former was the case and the origins of capitalism were discovered in a few

large-scale handicraft industries in the Ming period. But this denied to Western imperialism the full value of its dual function as exploitative villain and necessary accomplice to the growth of a modern economy and modern class-conscious revolutionary proletariat. And so for the time the second interpretation holds the field, armed with a quotation from Mao that modern history began with the invasion of the West. The sprouts of capitalism, never very hardy anyway and seeded by a fallacious assumption about the inevitable evolution of commercial capitalism into industrial capitalism, are allowed to die on the vine. The content of modern history, like that of all periods, is still decided more by fiat than fact, and meaning in history remains an elusive goal.

It was apparent from the papers presented to the conference and the lively discussions which they occasioned that the writing of history in China continues to occupy under the present régime, as under its predecessors, a critical place among the preoccupations of the ruling strata. From its beginnings, history in China has been intimately associated with the politics of the Chinese state—as a justification for bold departures which, it was claimed, were merely restoring the “golden age” of the great sages of the past, as a means of legitimising the succession of one ruling group to the throne of its predecessor, as a powerful weapon in the struggles of factions and cliques over the centuries. The Government of the People’s Republic of China has been acutely aware of the political uses of history, and since coming to power in 1949 it has vigorously promoted the rewriting of the Chinese past.

The Chinese Communist reinterpretation of China’s history has, in considerable part, been offered as propaganda designed to perpetuate support of the present régime among the Chinese people. But there is something more to it than this. Historical writing in China today, as viewed by the nation’s leaders, also represents a genuine attempt to find legitimisation in China’s past for the domestic and external developments of her most recent present. For the Confucian ideology of imperial China, the Communist government in Peking has, of course, substituted a still developing Maoist version of Marxism-Leninism as the touchstone for the assessment of the past. The deep-running current of nationalism, which surfaced in the late 1950s, would make it misleading to suppose, however, that what was peculiarly Chinese, either in motivation or in substance, has been totally expunged from the historiography of China by the Communist revolution.