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Conversations in Writing

Public Interpretation and Historical Interpretation

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Editor's note: "Interpretation" is a basic concept with meta-theoretical attributes in the humanities and social sciences. "Hermeneutics" is an ancient form of knowledge, and has a close relationship with historiography. In 2017, the theory of "public interpretation" proposed by Chinese scholars attracted attention. This journal aims to promote the establishment of Marxist historical hermeneutics in contemporary China to achieve the flourishing development of the theoretical study of historiography in the new era and to build Marxism of the 21st century. For this purpose, we invited five scholars of history to express their opinions in their research field on the academic platform of the theory of "public interpretation." We are looking forward to gaining attention and criticism from the historical community.

Research Articles

Xia Dynasty Archaeological Culture from the Perspective of "Mid-Period Qualitative Change"

Bi Jingwei(37)

Changes in archaeological culture are gradual while dynastic change tends to be abrupt, giving rise to a marked temporal dislocation between the two. The archaeological culture of the early period of a new dynasty is generally basically the same as that of the late period of a previous dynasty; it does not develop its own characteristics until midway through the dynasty. This phenomenon can also be found in prehistoric and protohistoric dynastic or clan succession. The archaeological culture of the early Xia belongs to late Henan Longshan culture; its middle period belongs to Xinzhai culture; and its late period is from Phases I and II of Erlitou culture. The dividing line between Xia and Shang culture comes at the transition to Phases III and IV of Erlitou culture. The main factors influencing the speed of the change from the old to the new culture are the demographic, economic, technological and mental differences between the survivors of the former dynasty and the new regime and its clans, with its new ruling strategy. Archaeological culture did not generally change immediately upon the change of dynasties, but cultural change could be swift. The dividing line between the old dynasty and the new does not generally coincide with the change from the old to the new archaeological culture, but is likely to occur at the juncture of two periods or phases of the old archaeological culture. The organic samples previously used for dating prehistoric clan changes are in fact the remains of changeovers that were completed at least a hundred years later.

"Selection of the Finest of the Literati": A Study of the Tang *Boxue Hongci* Examination

Jin Yingkun(52)

In the Tang dynasty, the Board of Personnel (*Li Bu*) held the *boxue hongci* ("breadth in learning and vastness in letters") examination, comprising the three subjects of *shi* (poetry), *fu* (rhapsody), and *yilun* (argumentation). The content and criteria of this examination were so similar to those of the *jinshi* examination, which comprised *shi*, *fu* and *celun* (political discourse), that almost all of those who passed the *boxue hongci* were already *jinshi* (presented

scholars). The examiners for the *boxue hongci* were mainly officials with the Board of Personnel, but the emperor also temporarily appointed vice-ministers (*shilang*), directors (*langzhong*) and vice-directors (*yuanwailang*) from the other five boards of the Department of State Affairs to assist with the examination, as well as vice-ministers with the Board of Personnel. Most of these also held the *jinshi* degree. The *boxue hongci* examination had been established in the early Tang to solve the problem of the selection or transfer of candidates with “unfulfilled qualifications”; later, it became the main gateway to officialdom for *jinshi* who ranked high in the palace examination. By the late Tang dynasty, it was a way to select “the cream of the literati.” This “selection of the best of the best” identified graduates for the more important of the base-level positions of compilers (*jiaoshu*), proofreaders (*zhengzi*), heads of security department of the counties in the vicinity of capital cities (*jiwangxianwei*), and advisers to the prime minister or to the supervision minister, or entered the secretariat of officials. Their training focused on preparing them for “becoming generals and ministers.” The majority took positions as compilers, with those entering secretariats coming next. The most distinguished post was that of *jiwangxianwei*. Those who became advisers of the prime minister or the supervision minister were the fewest, but they were the most likely to become ministers, followed by those who had taken the position of *jiwangxianwei*. In the late Tang dynasty, whether a *jinshi* who had ranked high in the palace examination and passed the *boxue hongci* could ascend to high office, and whether he could make minister, were largely decided by the level and status of his initial destination after passing the *boxue hongci*.

Interest-Bearing Commercial Loans and Late Qing Finance

Li Wenjie(68)

Interest-bearing commercial loans were domestic debts issued by the Qing government during the first Sino-Japanese War. Their interest rate, the issuance of printed notes documenting the loan, and the sources of repayment were copied from the Qing government’s foreign debts at the time. The loans focused on borrowing from merchants in the developed areas and port cities, with the dual maritime customs system being applied to bond sales and repayments. The great majority of the borrowed money was delivered to the Ministry of Revenue after the war rather than being directly used for the purposes of the war. Because the Ministry of Revenue set the amount of the loans and because local governments in some provinces appropriated loan administration, arbitrary apportionment and extortion were inescapable. However, owing to the unique functioning of the dual maritime customs system, the repayments were guaranteed by customs revenue. Except for a handful that became factory equity or were retained as donations, the loans were repaid on schedule.

The Author, Source Texts and Narrative of *The History of Chinese Secret Societies*

Sun Jiang(87)

The History of Chinese Secret Societies (中国秘密社会史) (1912), is an important source for the study of Chinese social history and the Revolution of 1911. However, scholars have been rather unsure about it for the last hundred years, and misguided views have proliferated. Our examination of the Chinese, Japanese and English sources of the work shows that it was translated from the Japanese *Chinese Revolutionary Parties and Secret Societies* (支那革命党及秘密结社)(1911), which is itself based on the Japanese *Chinese Secret Societies* (支那の秘密结

社)。In composing the latter work, its author Shu Hirayama(平山周)translated and incorporated William Stanton's *The Triad Society or Heaven and Earth Association* in the first three chapters, while the last two chapters and the appendix include his participation in and observation of Sun Yat-Sen's revolution. Yamaguchi Noboru's highly regarded report in the Japanese diplomatic archives, *The Situation in Qing China and the Secret Societies*, was in fact written with reference to Shu Hirayama's work. *The History of Chinese Secret Societies* has had an enduring impact since its publication because it creates a linear modern narrative of how secret societies went from rebellion to revolution.

The Intrinsic Theoretical Contradictions in Sun Yat-Sen's Principle of the People's Livelihood: Sun's Class Viewpoint Zhang Haipeng(102)

As a theoretical position, Sun Yat-Sen's principle of the people's livelihood has profound inner contradictions and several theoretical pitfalls that are hard to rationalize. He acknowledged that class struggle between the working class and the bourgeoisie had emerged and would continue in the course of the development of capitalism in Europe and America, but subjectively he sought to avoid the emergence of similar class struggle in China. At the same time, his theory of class struggle was divorced from the practice of class struggle. Epistemologically, acknowledging European class struggle is materialistic, but subjectively, trying to prevent the emergence of class struggle in the course of the development of Chinese capitalism is idealistic. His subjective attempt at prevention shows that Sun is epistemologically dualistic both in relation to class struggle and to his principle of the people's livelihood, which is obviously idealistic.

Maritime Trade between Egypt and the Indian Subcontinent and Its Role in the Economy of the Roman Empire Chen Siwei(113)

In the first and second century AD, with the discovery of the regularity of the Indian Ocean monsoon, the spread of the shipbuilding technology of the Mediterranean world on the Egyptian Red Sea coast, the improvement of transportation between Red Sea ports and the River Nile, and the expansion of the eastern commodity consumption market, the maritime trade between Egypt under the Roman Empire and the Indian subcontinent developed rapidly. According to the Muziris papyrus, the participants in the maritime trade of the second century took various measures to avoid risks and maximize profits. Merchant ships sailing between Egypt and the Indian subcontinent were loaded with a diverse and valuable range of goods, so the traders were economically powerful. With the advent of the *Pax Romana*, increased consumption intensified political competition and the fashion for luxuries, the Roman demand for oriental products grew, and the eastern trade via Egypt became increasingly prominent in the Roman economy. In the heyday of the Roman Empire, the eastern trade was on a larger scale and its operations were more complex than scholars have generally emphasized; it held a vital position in the imperial economy.

The Cold War and African-American Civil Rights Reform: The Decision of Brown v. Board of Education from the Perspective of International History Xie Guorong(134)

After WWII, the racial issue in America became increasingly internationalized due to America's changing international role, the Cold War, the rise of third world states, the

importance attached to human rights protection by the international community and the international turn of African Americans' fight for civil rights. In order to safeguard its national image and "world leadership," and strive to win third world countries over to the capitalist camp, the US government had no choice but to take protection of African Americans' rights seriously. In a series of black civil rights cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Department of Justice, as "a friend of the court," submitted a written statement on behalf of the US government demanding the abolition of segregation couched in terms of US foreign relations and the national interest. In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ultimately handed down a decision overturning the principle of "separate but equal," a decision affected in many respects by international factors. The US government made the most of this result and the ensuing favorable international opinion to improve its national image and reputation. Its political use of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision helped the US government gain some results, and international public opinion in turn became a driver of African-American civil rights reform.

Academic Review

Some Issues Concerning Research on the Shuihudi Bamboo Slips and the Qin Land Distribution System

Jin Wen(158)

With the discovery of the Qin Shuihudi bamboo slips, research on the land allocation system (*shoutian zhi*) became a major topic in the reassessment of ancient Chinese history. Many scholars argue that the land in the *shoutian zhi* was state-owned in nature, but others claim it was privately owned. However, neither claim is supported by the evidence. Overall, the land system was a form of transition from state land ownership to private land ownership. The previous interpretation of some legal texts, such as 入顷刍粟 (paying *chugao* taxes) 盗徙封, 赎耐 (unauthorized movement of land boundary marks will be punished by forced shaving according to law), 部佐匿诸民田 (officials concealing the true size of people's land holding), 封守 (declaration of forfeiture) and 百姓不当老, 至老时不用请 (lying about age) are misreadings; the criminal acts in these legal texts are basically unrelated to land ownership. In the Qin and early Han, the collection of land taxes in fact used two simultaneously operative land tax rates: one taxed land as a proportion of distributed land, that is, the tax was based on area, and was fixed and unchangeable; the other was the differential land tax or grain tax, which depended on crop yield and had a changeable rate. Although it is rare to see land sales or annexation in Qin land distribution, the *Shijie An* shows that the distribution of land to "non-statutory persons" and widespread debt relationships indicate that the distributed land was allowed to be inherited in part and to be transferred within families, and that land sales existed in a disguised form. A growing number of studies have tended to question or revise the theory of state land ownership.

Historical Notes

Exploring the Problems of the Tang Hui Yao (Laws and Institutions of the Tang Dynasty) Compiled in the Qing Dynasty

Liu Anzhi(178)

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