



2024

V.17

# História da Historiografia

International Journal of Theory  
and History of Historiography



ISSN 1983-9928



Sociedade Brasileira  
de Teoria e História da  
Historiografia



UNIRIO



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# Dossier

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Traditions, temporality, and narrative in  
chinese historiography

Dossiê | Tradições, temporalidade e narrativa na historiografia chinesa






# New Perspectives for the Historiography of Ancient China

## Novas Perspectivas para a Historiografia da China Antiga

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### Abstract

This article aims to present an updated overview of the new historiographical perspectives on Chinese antiquity studies developed in mainland China. For the accomplishment of this work, we will present a brief historical trajectory of Chinese historiography, quickly introducing the pre-republican traditions (1912); then we will analyze modern historiography under the influence of Western theories and Marxism-Maoism; finally, we will analyze the project of the Critique of Ancient Chinese Historiography (Zhongguo Gudai Shixue Piping 中国古代史学 批评) school, and some of its developments in the intellectual panorama of current China.

### Keywords

Ancient China. Chinese Historiography. Historiography History.

### Resumo

O presente artigo tem por objetivo apresentar um panorama atualizado sobre as novas perspectivas historiográficas acerca dos estudos da Antiguidade chinesa desenvolvidos na China continental. Para a consecução deste trabalho, iremos apresentar uma breve trajetória histórica da historiografia chinesa, introduzindo rapidamente as tradições pré-republicanas (1912); em seguida, analisaremos a historiografia moderna sob o influxo das teorias ocidentais e do Marxismo-Maoísmo; por fim, analisaremos o projeto da escola da Crítica da Historiografia Chinesa Antiga (Zhongguo Gudai Shixue Piping 中国古代史学 批评), e alguns dos seus desdobramentos no panorama intelectual da China atual.

### Palavras-chave

China Antiga. Historiografia Chinesa. História da Historiografia.



## Introduction

In Brazil, we don't have much knowledge about Chinese productions concerning their own antiquity. China tells an ancient history that goes back directly to the Neolithic and presents an epistemological challenge to Western historiography, as it has its own original tradition and a theoretical concept that requires more in-depth study. In this text, we will discuss some aspects of recent Chinese historiography on antiquity, its main schools and methods, and finally analyze Qu Lindong's 瞿林东 latest theoretical proposal, the 'Critique of Ancient Chinese Historiography' (Zhongguo Gudai Shixue Piping 国古代史学 批评). The aim here is not to present dynastic chronologies or an introduction to the history of China, but we will focus directly on the work of contemporary scholars who revisit Chinese historiographical traditions and propose new ways of reading the past based on them.

To this end, we will take the following path: first, open the text with a brief account of the general features of traditional Chinese historiography; then we will discuss the main schools of the Chinese Republican period up to 1949, when the rise of communism was to reorient the work of Chinese historiography; finally, introduce the aforementioned school of 'Criticism of Ancient Chinese historiography', one of the most important trends in the study of antiquity in contemporary China. It should be noted that in writing this paper we have focused on historiographical discussions in mainland China, as research on antiquity has developed as a result of archaeological, textual and cultural discoveries in this geographical and academic area.

## An overview of traditional Chinese historiography in the pre-republican period

Chinese historiography is certainly one of the oldest in the world and has few parallels. Since the third millennium BC, the Chinese have continuously produced historical documents, chronologically organised, and based on a linguistic structure still used today – by analogy, it is as the Egyptians would still write in hieroglyphics or the Iraqis in cuneiform. This production had a profound impact on Chinese people's ideas about the role of history (Shi 史) in their civilization. Historical records developed out of a political and cultural purpose and served as the textual basis for the notion of a Sinic culture. The Chinese did not necessarily see themselves as defined by religiosity, but by the notion of lineage based on rituals or "cultural practises" (Li 礼), and by historical continuity given by the succession of ancient dynasties and rulers. This gave rise to a series of conceptual implications that gave Chinese historiography its own contours and indeed fostered millennia-old debates about the past and theories of historical construction.



Chinese achievements in this field were extensive, and by way of introduction we will briefly offer some reflections that may help us to understand this fertile historiographical tradition.

Around the 6th century BCE, Confucius (Kongzi 孔子, 551-479 BCE) carried out the first historiographical revision of Chinese production by reworking ancient classical texts, elaborating a historical grammar in the *Chronicle of Spring and Autumn* (Chunqiu 春秋), and defining some methodological assumptions on which historians should work. Basically, Confucius suggested that historical research was a possible reconstruction, but never perfect and complete (many sources had already been lost in his time), and that language played an important role in the etymological understanding of words and ideas. Since Chinese writing is a logographic sequence of characters, the study of words and their meanings revealed important historical and conceptual changes that allowed conclusions to be drawn about changes in the cultural patterns of a particular period (Bueno, 2015a).

Based on the available evidence, the historian should then reconcile the record with the reflection presented and propose a model. One could say that this epistemic achievement was crucial to balance the notion of 'historical truth' - an intended but deliberately elusive goal. It was assumed that the more coherent the evidence could prove the value of the discourse, the more it was confirmed (Bueno, 2013).

Authors such as Hanfei 韩非 (280-233 BC, in Bueno 2015b) and Liu Xiang 刘向 (77-6 BC in Bueno 2021) made use of these premises and showed that dealing with the past was closely linked to political projects of affirmation or cultural renewal, and for this reason history inevitably became a constant field of controversy. It was probably these experiences that led Sima Qian 司马迁 (145-86 BC) to reformulate historiography and delineate topics and subjects with didactic and ethical aims. His work, the *Shiji* 史记, became a milestone in Chinese historiography and was groundbreaking for the fields of investigation, basic research methods and theories. The posthumous success of Sima Qian's work encouraged the Chinese imperial state to create a special agency designed to produce official histories (Zhengshi 正史).

These official histories were intended to impose an official narrative on past events in order to justify the political authorities of the present; however, they stimulated the emergence of an extremely rich oppositional critical tradition that formed an important counterpoint in historical readings of China. This 'alternative' literature (Bieshi 别史) conducted several critical experiments and proposed different interpretations for problems of document analysis, the concept of time and space, deconstruction of the idea of 'truth', language use, and narrative construction, to name some examples (Richter, 1987). Nevertheless, Chinese representations of history were Sinocentric, that is, they had relatively limited global concerns and/or visions,



and the influence of the European presence after the 19th century strongly shaped the Chinese intelligentsia.

The narratives about the past, which until then had formed the basis for the continuity of Chinese civilization, no longer seemed to fit the idea of international subjugation by the Western imperialist presence. Moreover, the last dynasty, the Qing 清 (1644-1912), was of foreign origin (Manchu) and had as its official doctrine an archaizing version of the theories of the 'Academic School' (Rujia 儒家, known in the West as 'Confucianism') and built up an aulic, corrupt, content-oriented, conservative and reactionary bureaucracy that served the state extremely well, but did little to boost the country's social and economic dynamism. This is evident in the imperial records, which are increasingly laudatory and unrealistic, and in a growing crisis that would eventually lead to the fall of the Qing in 1912 (Bueno, 2022).

In this context, Chinese thinkers were gripped by a sense of cultural and technological backwardness and were forced to rethink their historical ideas and search for explanations (or even solutions) to this paradigmatic context. Thinkers such as Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927) nevertheless attempted to revitalise the academic movement through updated reinterpretations of Confucian ideas by proposing new, universalizing notions of Chinese traditions (Goossaert, 2021). His theory of the 'Great Community' (Datong 大同), for example, envisaged that the Chinese crises were a period of historical transition before China re-entered the global context and gained a new protagonist – according to Kang, these ideas had been proposed by Confucius since ancient times and needed to be rediscovered in the 20th century as a way out of the dilemmas of the new Chinese civilization (Bueno, 2011:36-39). The tensions of the time led to this proposal (as well as others) being scrapped and China embraced the republican experience and was ready to completely renew its historiographical tradition.

## **The new republican historiographical schools**

The cultural renewal movements in China gained strong momentum after the proclamation of the Republic in 1912 and were strongly inspired by theories imported from the West. The 'New Culture Movement' (Xin Wenhua Yundong 新文化运动, ref. 1915) and the 'Fourth May Movement' (Wusi Yundong 五四运动, ref. 1919) both attempted to modernize Chinese intellectuality on the basis of imported concepts such as democracy, science, capitalism and communism, pragmatism and so on. Many of these ideas were discussed fragmentarily and from a nativist perspective, but they contributed decisively to a change in traditional historiographical paradigms and formed schools and research groups that proposed new interpretations of the Chinese past.



One of the best-known schools in this context was the 'Xin Shixue' 新史学 ('New Historiography', 1902) founded by Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929), who wanted to shed light on the past from new angles. Liang believed that Hegel's theory of historical development, combined with the interdisciplinary use of multiple sciences to construct a more comprehensive historical scenario (and Liang anticipated the advances of the *Escola dos Annales* by decades here), provided a surer inspiration for reading China's ancient history by trying to understand how philosophical and intellectual movements guided the development of societies. Thus, the history of China first had to be adapted to a synchronic world chronology in order to correctly identify the historical events and periods and link them to a possible Middle Eastern origin. Instead of simply denying the past or assuming the impossibility of Chinese documentation, the New Historiography sought to bind Chinese historiography to Western standards, but on the basis of a scientific and philosophical analysis of ancient sources. The reinterpretation of the Chinese classics through a European historiographical reading grid could add a new dimension to Chinese history (Liang, 2014).

In another sense, the 'Yigupai' 疑古派 school, which can be roughly translated as the 'Sceptical School on Antiquity', followed a radically opposite trend. Founded by Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), Gu Jiegang 顾颉刚 (1893-1980) and Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896-1950) and closely associated with the New Culture Movement, the Yigupai School proposed a complete deconstruction of traditional Chinese narratives and advocated a broad, comprehensive and profound critique of ancient texts. For this group, all classical documents were riddled with errors in dating, verification of evidence and fanciful - but not historical - narratives. Hu and Gu reinterpreted the Chinese sources using the methodology of literary criticism by examining contradictions and problematic constructions, comparing text passages and identifying possible distortions in the structure of the texts and chronology (Hou, 1997; Chen, 1999). In comparing texts, Yigupai was not far removed from the ancient Chinese historians, but his conclusions were radically different. In matching documentary passages, where traditionalists understood the evidence of an event with a certain diversity of interpretation on the part of the authors, Yigupai understood that these different viewpoints converged in the improbability of the event - which they took to be a sign of falsification according to a criterion of Rankean 'historical truth'. In this way, historical events, persons and entire passages were systematically discussed and refuted, whereby a possible incomprehensibility was postulated about a large part of the past and above all about antiquity. In his seven-volume collection entitled *Gushi Bian* 古史辨 ('Debates on Ancient History', 1926-1941), Gu organized a general deconstruction of ancient Chinese history, starting from its founding narratives and myths. In his view - and this may seem paradoxical - it was the falsification of the past that had led to the weakening of the sense of sinfulness, and only a complete revision of history could effectively contribute to the construction of a new Chinese national sentiment (Lin, 2005).





Interestingly, both schools also advocated the application of a new science that would ultimately be responsible for their downfall: archaeology. The Chinese had developed basic forms of research into material culture, but these were largely related to art and collecting, without detaching themselves from textuality. Archaeology, practised in a Western manner, provided a new means of exploring the past that could justify the positions advocated by the 'Xin Shixue' and the 'Yigupai', and formed a new evidence base for the past that served as an alternative to classical literature. In 1921, the Swedish researcher Johan Gunnar Andersson (1874-1960) carried out a series of excavations in the country. He was responsible for the discovery of the Neolithic culture of Yangshao 仰韶(1921) and began training Chinese scholars in the latest archaeological techniques. At the same time, Liji李济 (1896-1979) trained in archaeology in the United States and returned a few years later to spread new knowledge and establish archaeological missions across the country (Clayton, 2008). In 1929, Li discovered several sites associated with the Shang Dynasty 商(1600-1046 BC), and the joint work of these experts proved that many statements in classical texts were correct. Material culture gradually revealed that the ancient documents were not fanciful versions of non-existent historical episodes; on the contrary, the ancient dynasties began to emerge from the ground, and their characters appeared with their names engraved on a wide variety of materials. So the texts may not be entirely accurate, but they were largely linked to real episodes. Similarly, Chinese culture began to show signs of originality, which directly challenged the hypotheses linking the emergence of China to the Mesopotamian world.

With the spread of archeology, the 'Yigupai' school lost much of its vigor and was considered an outdated current in the 1940s (Zhang, 2018). As for Liang Qichao's ideas, they continued to be used in attempts to adapt Chinese chronology to a global history, but they were largely devalued in the face of the adoption of a new historiographical model based on Marxism.

### **New Marxist historiographical model**

After 1949, mainland China became a communist-oriented republic, which had a direct impact on historiography. In addition to the adoption of Marxist theories, historiography took on an intensified nationalist tone, fulfilling the political agenda of a new cultural project for the country. The reappraisal of the past – in the form of historical attempts that reoriented characters according to modern viewpoints – led to a series of new interpretations and models about the past. One of the founders of Yigupai, Gu Jiegang, was eventually arrested for refuting the past in a generalized way, which shows the degree of politicization the academy was involved in.

Experience with Western theories had led Chinese thinkers to develop a complex relationship with the study of antiquity. On the one hand, they tried to meet the requirements



of a historical science in the sense of Marxism; on the other hand, they felt uncomfortable abandoning the heritage that was growing out of the ground in abundance thanks to the efforts of archaeologists. After the 1950s, China became the scene of some of the most spectacular discoveries of the 20th century. During this period, several prehistoric sites were unearthed, proving the originality of Chinese culture, such as Longshan 龙山(1950), Banpo 半坡(1953), Erlitou 二里头(1959) and the capital of the Xia Dynasty 夏(in Yanshi 偃师, 1959). After a brief interregnum caused by the conflict-ridden years of the 'Cultural Revolution' (Wenhua Dage 文化大革命, between 1966-1971), explorations resumed, revealing a whole new material culture. This is the case of the texts and mummies found at Mawangdui 马王堆(1972-74) and the sensational discovery in 1974 of the tomb of Qinshi Huang 秦始皇, Emperor of the Qin Dynasty 秦 (221-206 BC), a monument that until then was considered a legend – mainly due to the description of Sima Qian, which in modern eyes seemed exaggerated or fanciful. The megalomaniac mausoleum showed once again that Chinese historical texts should never be trivialised.

Situations like this led Chinese intellectuals to gradually develop a series of their own theories that harmonised Marxist ideas with the particularities of Chinese culture, combined with Mao Zedong's own interpretations and writings on communism and history. The tendency of these new elaborations was to try to adapt China's historical development to the phases described by Marx, which led to certain epistemic conflicts. This civilization did not know slavery on a large scale, as in the Mediterranean world; on the other hand, in the period of the Zhou Dynasty 周(1045-221 BC), long before Europe, the Chinese experienced a political, social and economic system very similar to what was called 'feudalism' (in Chinese Fengjian 封建). And how can pre-industrial economic development (characteristic of the mercantilist phase) be explained in an imperial society?

The solution found was to create their own interpretations that used Marxist concepts in a certain logic. To justify China's technological lag behind the world in the 19th and 20th centuries, Chinese thinkers argued that there had been 'imperial slave feudalism' in China since ancient times, i.e. that Chinese society had experienced an imperial regime ruled by a feudalized bureaucracy that kept society in an undeclared slave system (the 'subjects' would not be servants but masked 'slaves'). To a more conservative Western Marxist researcher, these statements would raise eyebrows; but to the Chinese, they seemed to be a response to the theoretical juggling necessary to fit China into the history of the Marxist world. These ideas were discussed at length by big names among Chinese intellectuals, such as Guo Moruo 郭沫若(1892-1972) and Bai Shouyi 白寿彝(1909-2000), and promoted in official historical collections, notably the *General History of China* (Zhongguo Tongshi 中国通史, 12 vols.), the final version of which was published in 1999, summarizing fifty years of research and theoretical revision.



However, after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the period of long and gradual reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, strict Marxist orientations began to be questioned and alternatives were sought that were less ideological (or more distant from state guidelines) (Hermman, 1991; Bueno, 2016). Works such as Feng Tianyu's 冯天瑜(2014) dismantled the conceptual construct of 'Imperial Slavery Feudalism' and demonstrated a new academic freedom to criticize official publications. On the other hand, António Carvalho (2017) rightly pointed out that while the opening of new perspectives of study allowed for a flirtation with different (new or old) theories, it also left a void that calls into question the very craft of the historian in China. For what role will the historian play in this new society? What is their political and intellectual role? Although Carvalho focuses on discussions of modern historiography, the problem also extends to productions on Chinese antiquity. What theories, what methods should be used to reconstruct the Chinese past? What agenda (and is there one?) should guide historiographical constructions about the past - what might this mean in traditionalist or combined movements? In the following, we will see some answers to this problem.

### **The new school of 'Criticism of ancient Chinese historiography'**

In the years 1980-1990, a series of studies attempted to fill the theoretical-methodological vacuum regarding the historiography of ancient China. Zhu Jieqin 朱杰勤(1980), Li Zongtong 李宗侗(1984), Gao Guokang 高国抗(1984), Tao Maobing 陶懋炳(1987) and Bai yun 白云(1998) stood out as works of renewal in the critical analysis of the subject, but they basically followed the same script; they presented the historiography since antiquity, its main authors and ideas, and ended their presentations in the Qing dynasty (between 1840, with the Opium War, or 1912, depending on the author). Their discussions of Chinese concepts eventually attempted to relate them to Western counterparts, but proposed the originality of the classical authors from the perspective of forming their own Chinese tradition. Finally, they varied in their relation to Chinese Marxist discourses, highlighting in particular themes such as the importance of popular participation in the construction of history, the critical stance of certain ancient authors, and the dimension of interrelation between past and present that linked the concept of the nation-state to Chinese ethno-civilization. Along with the work of Baiyun, who pioneered a 'critique of historiography' based on the comparative reading of texts - a notion that will become important later (Wang and Li, 2013) - all writers at the time tended to regard the basic ideas of Marxism as part of Chinese culture, and Liu Danian 刘大年(2000:429) even stated that 'dialectical materialist thought has been known since time immemorial, and of course its original form is a Chinese tradition'. While this conceptual hybridization allowed for a broader use of theories, it did



not yet correspond to a reformulation of the means of studying the past, and antiquity continued to represent a complex space of inquiry and discourse formation.

In the mid-1990s, one of the central figures of the revolution in the study of Chinese antiquity emerged, Professor Qu Lindong 瞿林东 – today the most important theoretical and methodological reference in the field. Qu was one of the most outstanding students of Bai Shouyi (Qu, 2012) and was always close to the theoretical discussions that determined the development of Chinese historiography. When he moved to Beijing Normal University, he found a suitable space to develop his research in this field. The university already had its own department, 'Studies on the History of Ancient China' (Zhongguo Gudai Shixue 中国古代史学), which brought together many of the researchers involved in the discussions on the future of Chinese historiography (Zhao, Chen and Wang, 2002). Qu found there a fertile environment for the development of his own historiographical vision, which he would call 'Criticism of Ancient Chinese Historiography' (Zhongguo Gudai Shixue Piping 中国古代史学批评), a project that would innovatively articulate the reading of the Chinese past with an interpretive method that combines elements of tradition with a conceptually contemporary reinterpretation of Chinese history. In a series of works, Qu Lindong would expound on his proposal, which would reach a milestone in imperial China studies (Qu, 2020) with the publication of the seven-volume collection *History of Ancient Chinese Historiographical Criticism* (Zhongguo Gudai Shixue Pipingshi 中国古代史学批评史) in 2020.

Qu's proposal lies in the use of the term 'critique of historiography' (Shixue Piping); in his view, historiographical concepts are produced in accordance with the positions and intellectual projects of an era and are seen in the present as part of a developmental structure of historical thought. Only a critical evaluation of the historiographical material from a theoretical and comparative perspective could then help to clarify possible explanatory models about antiquity. For this reason, any view of the past is a projection that arises from the present moment. However, in the case of China, it inevitably includes the layers of thought created and recreated within the framework of traditional culture, which means that there is a game of projection of past and present in current theoretical elaborations.

To solve this dilemma, Qu suggested that the traditional elements of Chinese history (such as the dynastic chronological arrangement) should be criticized in the light of a critical reinterpretation of the expressions of ancient Chinese historiography itself. In other words, the historical phases need to be reorganized according to the historiographical writings that provide alternative views to the official historiography and reveal its discontinuities and tensions. At the same time, it is acknowledged that the versions that are created about events or people,



even if they are historical constructs, become the narratives that shape the idea of a particular historical moment and must be considered valid. In this sense, the collaboration of archeology and etymology is crucial to show that the articulation of discourses and narratives takes place at a level of cultural choices and programs whose guidelines ultimately determine the choices made in the past. An example of this is the discovery in Mawangdui 馬王堆, a version of the text of Laozi 老子 (6th century BC), in which the order of chapters is reversed and the book is called *Dedaojing* 德道經 and not *Daodejing* 道德經 as it was classically known (Henricks, 1992). In the theoretical framework of Qu, the discovery of the text is extremely important to show the diversity of thought in this first century CE during the Han 漢 period; but it is not relevant when considering that the formation of the classical Daoist canon defined the form of the book as the *Daodejing*, making it the dominant version and therefore formative for this school of thought. This work was done by critics and thinkers of the past, and it is from this reading that our interpretations have been constructed. The attempt to question the value of a tradition on the basis of its variants should therefore be treated with extreme caution and may characterize a desire to project the political and intellectual claims of the present onto the past.

According to Qu Lindong (2011:45), the understanding of the dynamics of these historical structural relationships that determine the possibilities of interpreting the concepts and ideas of an era is organized in a series of nine major themes that have been present in Chinese historiographical literature since the time of Sima Qian and have been gradually developed over time by other authors, which are;

- 1) The relationship between heaven and being (or the relationship of the harmonious search between ecology and humanity);
- 2) The relationship between antiquity and modernity, seeking to understand the dichotomies in the intertemporal relationship of contexts and historical strata (and thus the perception of what might or might not be an anachronism);
- 3) The role of the state in the production of history, as custodian of official productions and ideas, and as a guide to an alternative critique of history;
- 4) Ethnohistory and the concept of nation, or how Chinese historiography implemented the idea of developing the concept of Chinese civilization from the ethnic concept and the formation of imperial government;
- 5) The bureaucratic-monarchical structure as a form of political leadership and as the center of China's social and economic organization;
- 6) Control of the calendar and rhythm of life; management and manipulation of time and the ordering of social life;



- 7) Deepening the geographical and social environment conceptualizing the dimensions of a sinosphere of influence;
- 8) Theory of the cyclical regulation of power through the yin-yang relationship (the existence of the political-social system follows the natural rhythm of the world of mutation and is conceived through the alternating movement of rise and fall of political bodies, expressed through dynasties);
- 9) Pedagogical, didactic and ethical use of historical material; use of content (events, people, treaties) as exemplary models of the past.

Based on these nine themes (or 'main areas' of ancient history), Chinese historiography developed by investing in the study of each of these areas in turn, conceptualising them anew in different times and scenarios. Thus, historians such as Liu Zhiji 刘知几 (661-721) worked on historiography and thought about techniques of data verification and conceptual writing; Sima Guang 司马光 (1019-1086) already proposed the existence of temporal, geographical and social discontinuities in the emergence of Chinese civilization, noting that the dynastic cycles of the model histories represented versions of political discourses but did not effectively synthesise the material available in the sources. These two authors are but examples of a constellation of historians familiar with the Chinese tradition who have developed conceptual aspects of one or more of these themes and who provide a fruitful substantive framework for understanding antiquity (Qu, 2005).

The publication of the *History collection of ancient Chinese historiographical criticism* (Zhongguo Gudai Shixue Piping shi 中国古代史学批评史), organized and directed by Qu, made his proposal an influential theoretical guide in scholarship. Involving several authors in exploring the 'Critique of ancient Chinese historiography', Qu presents a detailed preface in the first volume, summarizing these concepts and guiding the critique of the historical development of Chinese historiography. One of the fundamental elements in these discourses is once again the reintroduction of the concept of the authenticity of Chinese tradition and how it should be contrasted with Western theories and methods as a valid form of historiography. This work has consistently exerted a new and powerful influence on current historiographical productions and is a beacon for the formation of studies on antiquity. The collection served as a theoretical and methodological reference for the study of antiquity and was distributed by the government to a wide college network in the country.

The consequences of Qu's proposal were clearly perceived in new productions on Chinese antiquity (Li, 2021) and formed the basis both for the writing of textbooks and for more detailed theoretical discussions directly addressing the relationship between concepts and the



central topoi of the historiography of the past. Again, within a very extensive framework of diverse productions, we can cite only a few examples of recent research that are directly related to the ideas of the 'Critique of Chinese historiography of Antiquity' and that express the renewal of historical productions on antiquity.

As early as 2012, Yan Jing 阎静 discussed the role of historians in the construction of a new historiography, noting that in this new theoretical-methodological context, there would initially be 'three paths for the development of historical criticism: understanding the writing and responsibility of the historian, the function of historiography, and understanding the relationship between the development of historiography and the changing times' (2012:64). This definition, while basic, attempted to detach the role of the historian as an agent of the state or an ideological instructor by deploying the idea of 'criticism' (piping) as a valid instrumental form for the development of research. In 2021, Yan returned to this theme and explored the sources of ancient Chinese historiographical criticism by collaborating on the first volume of the collection organized by Qu Lindong.

Lei Jiali 雷家骥(2018) compiled a synthesis of the history of ancient Chinese historiography based on the principles of the Qu school and published his volume two years before the collection organized by the author; Liu Kaijun 刘开军 has already published a highly acclaimed study on 'The Definition and Implications of the Concepts of Ancient Chinese Historiography and the Construction of Historiographical Discourse' 中国古代史学概念的界定, 意蕴及其与史学话语的建构 (2020) in which he clarified how the ancient authors attempted to clarify their concepts through four basic means, namely direct definitions, the presentation of general characteristics, the use of examples, and the construction of analogies, the appearance and application of these very concepts being inextricably linked to the historical context of production and the intellect and creators of these concepts. In the case of China, it is a very complex and specific problem that concerns not only the emergence of concepts, but also their change (or non-change) in the course of the historical and cultural transformation of civilization.

In another sense, Zhu Luchuan 朱露川(2020) proposed a historical analysis of the stylistic, etymological and structural development of narratives (Xushi 叙事) and how they were used in the elaboration of historiographical discursive systems to reveal their intentions and agendas; and Wang Gaoxin 汪高鑫 e Wang Zengxiang 汪增相 (2021) conducted an outstanding study on the problem of the search for 'truth' (Zheli 真理) in Chinese antiquity, in which they revealed the tensions between conservative reliance on historical records and critical intellectual consciousness, which understood how such writings were produced on the basis of models or propositions about the past, and which questioned the issue of veracity as an interpretative consideration.



These examples show that the proposals of the 'Critique of ancient Chinese historiography' have spread rapidly and deeply in Chinese academia, providing a new paradigm for the study of the past. Qu Lindong continues to be active, producing new writings, conducting research and bringing scholars together, making this school the most important current in the study of Chinese antiquity, both challenging it in epistemological terms and valuing the traditional Chinese heritage, placing it as a fundamental production in history of world historiography.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the historiographical schools on ancient China discussed here shows the complexity and challenges faced by the Chinese intelligentsia in the face of political and cultural changes in their country, especially in the 20th and 21st centuries. In a turbulent context of change, where foreign theories played an important role compared to traditional studies, Chinese thinkers tried to find answers to their own past by considering its integration into a new global cultural and scientific perspective. While historical criticism in the first moments characterized the general review of traditions by analyzing them with the help of Hegelian historical-philosophical theories in Liang Qichao's 'New Historiography' or investing in radical deconstruction as in the 'Skeptical School of Antiquity', the emergence of Marxism (and later Maoism) opened up new ways of interpreting the Chinese past by gradually reclaiming the historical heritage, reformulating the indigenous intellectual heritage, and finally revising Chinese historiography in the light of new theories aimed at reconciling traditional knowledge and imported ideas. In this sense, the emergence of movements such as the 'Critique of Ancient Chinese Historiography' represents an important intellectual trend in the study of historiography and Chinese antiquity, giving new meaning to the founding narratives and methodology of writing and production based on new concepts that combine elements and ideas of traditional thought with newer tools and concepts of world historiography. Such reflections allow us to draw a picture of original historical production that can contribute significantly to broadening our perspectives in the field of historical studies.

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### Funding

Not applicable.

### Competing interests

No conflict of interest has been declared.

### Ethics Committee approval

Not applicable.

### Evaluation

Double-blind peer review.

### Preprints

The article is not a preprint.

### Availability of research data and other materials

The underlying contents of the article are contained therein.

### Responsible Editors

Flávia Varella – Editor-in-Chief

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### **Peer Review Dates**

Submission date: March 27, 2023

Modification date: August 7, 2023

Approval date: December 25, 2023

