
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Development Trend of Chinese History Studies in the United States from Philip C. C. Huang's Theory

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ABSTRACT

The development of Chinese history research in the United States has undergone a transformation from a "Western-centered view" to a "China-centered view". In this new era, scholars of Chinese history call for a new change in research methods. Philip C.C.Huang, a Chinese-American, puts forward the "crisis of normative understanding" and the "four traps" in the study of modern Chinese history. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the breakthrough of Philip C.C.Huang's theory of Chinese history research on the original model and its promotion of Chinese history research in the United States. Starting from Philip C.C.Huang's study of Chinese history, the article analyzes the transcendence of his theory to the previous dichotomy and tries to summarize the development trend of Chinese history research in the United States. It is found that Philip C.C.Huang's theory transcends the dichotomy of Chinese and Western concepts and breaks through the limitations of both theoretical and empirical research, and his Chinese-American identity as a "marginalized person" also provides evidence of the authenticity and objectivity of his theory, which, however, still needs to be further improved. This study identifies the core ideas and shortcomings of Huang's theory and helps to promote a more scientific and convincing study of American Chinese history.

KEYWORDS

Philip C.C.Huang, "normative cognition crisis", "Four traps", the study of American Chinese history

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 September 2023

PUBLISHED: 06 September 2023

DOI: 10.32996/jhsss.2023.5.9.5

1. Introduction

Philip C.C.Huang is a famous Chinese-American social historian. He was a professor of history at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). He was promoted to "Super Professor" in 1991 until his honorable retirement in 2004. He has been a chair professor at the Law School of Renmin University of China since 2012. He founded the journal *Modern China*, which encouraged the study of China across traditional boundaries and became a leading regional studies journal. He conducted a long and active exploration of modern Chinese history and offered a preliminary solution with his theory of the Normative epistemological Crisis, which discussed "how concepts and theories in line with historical reality and practice can be established through dialogue with the major modern academic theories (in the West)" (Philip 2007a:10). In *Academic Theory and the Study of Modern and Modern Chinese History -- Four Pitfalls and a Problem*, he summarized and reflected on the role of theories in the study of Chinese history by others and himself. He believes that there are four traps in theory in the study of Chinese history--uncritical application, ideological application, Occidentalism, uncritical application of culturalism, ideological application, Occidentalism and culturalism.

2. Literature Review

Philip C.C.Huang's theoretical works cover many fields such as economy, law and society. The research on Philip C.C.Huang can be divided into two categories. One is the discussion of a specific theory in a certain field. At the social level, for example, Guo Weihe's "Street public System Reform and the Soft Control of State Will - An extension of Philip C.C.Huang's" Third Field of State and Society "theory discusses the feasibility of Philip C.C.Huang's" Third field of State and Society "theory in grassroots governance.

And its role in promoting the construction and development of the urban community; On the economic level, Wang Jiange's *Agroecology and Social Change in Modern North China -- On the Invalidity of Philip C.C.Huang's Overdensification Theory* refuted Philip C.C.Huang's overdensification theory through the analysis of the agricultural ecosystem in the North China Plain. At the legal level, Wang Hongbing and Zhang Si's article "Research Path of Legal History in Qing Dynasty: Centered on Philip C.C.Huang's Law, Society and Culture in Qing Dynasty" analyzed the enlightenment significance of Philip C.C.Huang's "Third field" theory to the study of modern Chinese history. The second is to include Philip C.C.Huang in the development trend of American Chinese history. Qiu Huafei, in his book *From "Impact-Response" to "China-Centric View" on the Evolution of the research Mode of American Sinology*, analyzes in detail the research trend of American Sinology from the 1960s, starting from the "impact-response" theory of Fei Zhengqing, and concludes that Philip C.C.Huang's research has become the latest trend of American Sinology. Qiao Xinhua's book *Two Turns in the Study of Chinese History in the United States in the Past Fifty Years* puts forward two turns in the study of Chinese history in the United States from "Western-centric" to "China-centric" and then to "space-time bidirectional cross comparative historical view", and analyzes the theories of its representatives Cohen and Wang Guobin. The author holds that Philip C.C.Huang, as a scholar of Wang Guobin's school, has broken away from the Western norms in his deepening and detailing of Chinese traditional institutions and social changes in order to establish a sinology in line with China's national conditions. However, there are few papers and works related to Philip C.C.Huang's research on Chinese history. Tang Jiman and Li Song, *Philip C.C.Huang and China Studies in Modern China* focus on Modern China, a journal founded by Philip C.C.Huang, and analyze its guidance to China studies in theory and practice. Philip C.C.Huang's *Reflection on the Research Paradigm of Chinese History and Its Value* by Zhang Jianping and Dai Xiaojie sorted out Philip C.C.Huang's research paradigm of modern and modern Chinese history and gave the scholars' mixed evaluation, showing Philip C.C.Huang's research results on Chinese history in a more comprehensive and objective way. The shortcoming is that the latter does not put Philip C.C.Huang in the overall perspective of American Chinese history and lacks the overall care of diachronic. This paper will look at Philip's promotion of the study of Chinese history in the United States from a historical perspective, analyze the content and influence of his main theories, and point out its shortcomings and the possible development trend of American Chinese history in the future.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Transcending the Sino-Western Dualism

After the Second World War, John K.Fairbank, the pioneer of modern Chinese studies in the United States, based on the "Weberian proposition" of "whether rational capitalism can emerge in China", He used the "impact-response model" to explain China's modern history. He argues that traditional Chinese society lacks intrinsic motivation, "In every field of social activity, a series of complex historical processes -- including political, economic, social, ideological and cultural processes -- have challenged, attacked, weakened and even subdued the ancient order. These processes within China are driven by the invasion of a more powerful foreign society" (Fairbank 1988:169). In the United States, this model soon became the "mainstream of American studies of modern Chinese history" (Qiu 2011:65) and spawned the "traditional-modern" model and the "imperialist" model. Joseph R. Levenson, a representative of the former, argued that only under the smash of the West could a static China give birth to a "society remarkably similar to modern Western society", namely industrial modernization (Leveson 193:8). James Peck's "Imperialist theory" argues that the onslaught of Western industrialization and the invasion of China are harmful. Despite his contrary attitude to Fairbank and Levinson, he still does not escape the premise of the argument based on Western standards of judgment. With regard to the three models, Philip argues that under the guidance of the "Western-centric view", scholars have ignored "the internal vicissitudes of China before the capitalist invasion" (Philip 2000a:20). He further argues that "we must consider from the perspective of how imperialism and China's internal economic and social structures function. I don't think it is consistent with objective historical facts to simply highlight the factor of imperialism or to treat it as a kind of laboratory that can be added and extracted at will. Once imperialism invaded China, it was integrated into China's original social, economic and political system." (Philip 2000a:21)

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, under the influence of the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, and the worldwide national liberation movement, the position of Western-centrism was gradually shaken in the unstable social environment. Philip said that after the "Vietnam War", people questioned the modernization theory, thinking that it could not fully explain the changes in China's modern history, and were dissatisfied with the "ideology" too serious research method, calling for real academic research (Philip 1988:187-188). In this context, scholars represented by Paul A. Cohen put forward the "China-centered Approach", criticizing the three models of the Western-centered view, arguing that the impact of the West was greatly exaggerated and focusing instead on China's endogenous dynamics. In *Discovering History in China -- The Rise of China-Centrism in the United States* (2002), Cohen views modern China "not only as the product of external forces, but also as the product of internal evolution that occurred in the last centuries of the imperial era" (Cohen 2003:3). Translator Lin Tongqi argues that one of the "most central" concepts of the "Sinocentric view" is "empathy", "empathy" to the "Chinese world", and "the reconstruction of Chinese history according to Chinese experience rather than Western ideas" (Cohen 2003:21,247). Although he opposes the one-sided application of Western standards to the discussion of Chinese history, as well as the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, he goes to the other extreme. The identity of China's "other" inevitably generates binary opposition in the Western domain. "In a strict sense, the premise of the existence of Cohen's 'China-centric theory' is itself based on the analysis of another binary opposition, that of 'West-China'" (Zhou

2010:15-16). Philip C.C.Huang also questioned Cohen's "overcorrection". He opposed the extremes of radical culturalism, arguing that Cohen overemphasized the complexity and continuity of traditional Chinese culture and that modern China is constantly learning from Western experience. "In fact, 'modern China' can only be bicultural, and today it is not simply socialist or capitalist. But is both capitalist and socialist" (Philip 2016:175). He admires a "new cultural history" that looks at society and culture as a whole, an approach that "draws on the insights of critical theory without going to extreme anti-empiricism and extreme cultural relativism" (Philip 2003:123).

3.2 From theory to practice

Li Xuezi believes that "Cohen's criticism and even negation of the" shock-response "model are mainly not from the specific study of modern Chinese history, but from the author's reflection and further deduction of his own social phenomenon, so as to build a new explanatory framework for the existing model. And then apply it to modern Chinese history (Li 2010:94). In fact, since Fairbank's theory, Chinese studies in the United States seem to be all about the analysis and explanation of presuppositions. From the "impact-response" model, the "traditional-modern", the "imperialist" model and the "China-centric view", Western scholars first clarified their positions and attitudes and then explained them based on historical facts. "When studying a certain event or phenomenon, if we carry a predetermined orientation or pattern, it often prevents people from getting a correct understanding of these events or phenomena, or even distorts the historical truth, which has long been proved by the practice of historical research" (Li 2010:96). Philip C.C.Huang was also deeply aware of the drawbacks of the research method of "starting from theory and returning to practice". Inspired by Bourdieu's practical theory and the research of modern Chinese sociology and anthropology, he combined the methodology of the Chinese revolution to form his own unique research method of "practical history".

Philip either borrowed the original materials reflecting the reality of China or went to China to investigate. On the economic front, he went deep into the North China Plain and the Yangtze River Delta to analyze the neglected problem of agricultural labor productivity and reveal the root cause of China's economic backwardness. For example, *The Development of Small Peasant Families and Villages in the Yangtze River Delta* was the result of the addition of 43 local Chronicles to the data and archives of the Manchurian Railway (South Manchurian Railway Co., LTD., a Japanese research agency). Moreover, in order to verify the credibility of the Manchu Railway data, he also conducted field investigations in two villages in the area of his study, "conducting 101 interviews, totaling about 328 hours" (Philip C.C.Huang 2000b:326). He focused on the neglected problem of agricultural labor productivity, dissected the micro problems of China's economy, and combined them with macro research to reveal the root cause of China's economic backwardness. In terms of law, he is interested in the research of the legal system that "combines social and cultural history" and "finds the center ground" between the "materialist trend" and the "idealist trend". Based on his years of empirical research on the social and economic history of China and the social and legal system of the Qing Dynasty, he has repeatedly confirmed the derailment of Western theory and Chinese reality. Modern Chinese law can only be perfected through practice (Philip 2003:126).

Philip C.C.Huang believes that his research on practical history "is definitely not purely retrospective, but has certain forward-looking/value concepts" (Philip 2012:72-73). The research based on China's actual national conditions is free from the "sinology confined to a narrow field" that Philip comments on Cohen, which "completely limits its concern to the upper culture and ignores the ordinary people". (Philip 2003:113-115).

Combined with Philip's transcendence of the binary dichotomies between China and the West, it stands to reason that he interprets the meaning of the binary dichotomies more deeply than Cohen because he recognizes that the field of Chinese studies has long been dominated by two dichotomies: the dichotomies of either/or Westernization and localization, and the dichotomies of theory and experience related to it. Therefore, in order to transcend these two opposites, he advocates that "the current crisis of normative cognition should be understood from the perspective of the common crisis of two generations and two ostensibly opposing modes and theoretical systems", and therefore, he advocates a new view of dualistic connection and dualistic combination (Philip 2000a:421).

3.3 From "outsider", "player" to "marginal person"

In the study of modern Chinese history, the "outsider" viewpoint, represented by Fairbank, Levinson and Peck, initially dominated, and then Cohen proposed that it was necessary to "adopt the powerful perspective created by the players" and "go inside China" to "understand how the Chinese people themselves understand and feel their recent history" (Cohen 2002:1). However, his "China-centric view" is based on the refutation of Fairbank's "impact-response" model, and he ignores the Chinese scholars' discussion of the "impact-response" problem. Therefore, "after all, the value standard and discourse system based on it are still from the West", so some scholars "doubt whether it can get close to the truth of Chinese history" (Wang 2001). At the same time, his overemphasis on China's internal dynamics has been criticized as "an attempt to weaken or even deny the connection between modern Chinese history and Western shocks by claiming that China has a long tradition of reform that has nothing to do with Western influence" (Li 2010:94).

In *Discovering History in China: The Rise of the China-Centric View in the United States*, Cohen said: "When I wrote this book, I had in mind primarily Western, especially American, sinologists" (Cohen 2001:1). The limitation of the target audience led to his intentional or unintentional neglect of Chinese scholars and Chinese scholars' research on Chinese history. Chinese scholars such as Zhang Zhongli, He Bingdi, Xiao Gong Quan, and Qu Tongzu are credited with opening up some new fields of Chinese studies in the United States, but in his view, "the vast majority of their academic research" is handled according to the "impact-response" theory" model (Cohen 2002:54-55). Chinese scholars have adopted the Western model for self-reflection in the midst of the historical tide, while Western scholars have gradually "empathized" to defend China, and the latter's non-acceptance of the former has formed another kind of binary opposition. The "biased" research of Chinese scholars and the "empathic failure" research of Western scholars can no longer adapt to the development requirements of modern China. How should the research of Chinese history find the best way out?

Philip's identity as a Chinese-American has shaped his unique research perspective and method to some extent. In his early years, he received a formal education in "Chinese studies", represented by Fairbank in the United States. After graduating from Princeton University with a bachelor's degree, he studied for a doctorate at the University of Washington. He became a professor of history at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and was promoted to "Super Professor" in 1991. Since 1991, under the joint influence of American cultural education and Chinese cultural roots, Philip C.C.Huang has begun to reflect deeply on the autonomy of Chinese studies and Chinese academia as an academic "marginal man": He not only identified four major pitfalls that have long existed in China studies, but also raised a question that has been lingering in the minds of scholars of Chinese history -- What is the picture of China's future that we seek?.

In 1992, he held a symposium on "Paradigms in China Studies" at the University of California, Los Angeles, in which he discussed a wide range of academic issues in China, including the paradoxes of Chinese socio-economic history, the ideology and theory of modern Chinese literary studies, the public sphere and civil society in China, and more. As well as the theory and practice of the study of modern Chinese history in the Chinese Revolution, and the results of the discussion were published in *Modern China*. Philip C.C.Huang advocated starting from China itself, through practice or experience, so that "China" as the object of research has a subjectivity in China studies and constructs a research paradigm based on China's own characteristics, rather than simply adopting the research paradigm from the Western theoretical perspective.

After retiring from UCLA in 2004, Philip became a chair professor at Renmin University of China Law School in 2012. His academic identity is increasingly characterized by a fusion of Chinese and Western ideas. He made even sharper criticisms of the "Western-centric view" and "China-centric view" that had long dominated Western ideology: "They embody a particularly tenacious dualistic way of thinking, so much so that they have always highlighted either the superiority of the West and China as the opposite 'other,' or, as in recent generations, the emphasis that China and the West are equal, equal, or even superior -- using, in fact, the original Western standards and the binary framework of either/or. Both arguments are largely derived from Western theory and problem consciousness, and both seriously violate the basic reality of modern China: the inevitable mix of ancient and modern, East and West." (Philip 2016:156) Therefore, "Western theorists should turn their attention to the question of how binary opposites coexist, interact and reshape each other in the larger real world, in order to seek ways to better understand the real world and better explore ways to improve it." (Philip 2019:21)

In recent years, Philip C.C.Huang's research has been more heated and widely discussed, and more than 230 related papers can be found in CNKI's keyword search. Zhang Jianping believes that Philip's research "undoubtedly sounded the alarm to the academic community, and helped to further avoid the 'four traps' in historical studies, and also helped to promote the further healthy development of Chinese studies" (Zhou 2010:139). In the article "Possible Positions and Paradigm Reconstruction of Chinese Studies", Zhou Xiaohong, taking Philip C.C.Huang and other contemporary Chinese scholars as examples, proposed the possibility of paradigm reconstruction of Chinese studies "from object to subject and then to subject-object juxtaposition" (Zhou 2010:18). Qiu Huafei also regards Philip C.C.Huang's view of "normative cognition crisis" as a "new trend" in the study of Chinese studies in the United States, and believes that Philip C.C.Huang's theory "is a major development of Calvin's theory of China-centric view, and also a new trend of the development of contemporary American Sinology studies to diversify. Regardless of whether this theory can become a new research model, this research method does provide a new understanding Angle for the study of modern Chinese history in the United States" (Qiu 2000:54). From the fact that Philip C.C.Huang's research has been widely concerned by Chinese scholars, we can see the research advantage of "marginal man" scholars in the new situation: their special academic experience has given them unique research methods and quite novel academic insights.

4. Conclusion

Based on China's national conditions, Philip C.C.Huang's research on Chinese history transcends the long-dominant "West-centered view" and "China-centered view", breaks through the dualistic opposition between theory and experience, and forms a unique "experience-theory-experience" research method of practical history. As a marginal Chinese American, his academic

achievements have been better understood than those of American scholars who hold a "West-centered view" and "China-centered view".

However, his theory still needs further improvement. For example, the main theoretical basis and basic stance of the authors of Modern China are still in the Western academic circle. They understand China from the perspective of examining others and exploring the problems existing in past studies of China by taking China as the object and object through discussion and discussion. Their theory of running the journal is "to find a research method that is more suitable for the present and the actual situation of Chinese society and expresses Western theories" (Tang 2020:42). For another example, he advocates avoiding the trap of binary opposition but does not put forward specific research perspectives and research methods.

In the 1990s, Wang Guobin, also a Chinese American scholar, proposed "the bidirectional cross historical view of time and space", which to some extent, made up for the shortcomings of Philip's theory and provided an effective way of practice. He advocated that the research objects should be placed in an equal analytical framework. That is, he denied the scientific nature of the one-dimensional reference system, "We should not assert that it is wrong to compare Europe as a standard because we oppose the Eurocentric theory. On the contrary, we should expand this comparison, in order to make more comparisons, we should especially evaluate Europe according to Chinese standards." (Wang 1998:3) In the book, a series of effective research methods such as "symmetry view", "prospective analysis" and "retrospective analysis" are called by Qiao Xinhua as "undoubtedly will continue to deepen the study of Chinese history, and also have the great significance of the paradigm change mentioned by Kuhn" (Qiao 2004:147).

5. Limitations and Suggestions

This paper analyzes Philip C.C.Huang's inheritance and breakthrough in the study of Chinese studies in the United States and affirms the uniqueness and deficiency of his theory of Chinese history research. However, Philip C.C.Huang's theory of Chinese history research is not limited to the theory of "normative cognition crisis" and "four traps", which are not described in more detail in this paper. Moreover, Philip's research on China is not limited to historical research but also includes the analysis of contemporary economy and society. This paper is limited to his research on modern Chinese history, which is not comprehensive enough. Therefore, increasing the breadth and depth of the demonstration is conducive to promoting the systematization and diversification of Philip C.C.Huang's research. The subsequent research should subdivide Philip C.C.Huang's research by research field, form an overall research perspective, and longitudinally analyze his unique value in the history of Chinese studies in the United States, which will contribute to the promotion of Chinese studies in the United States and the formation of objective and effective Sino-American cultural exchanges.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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