



# **Between History and Reality: Understanding and Theoretical Development of the Social Function of Historiography since the 21st Century of New China**

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**Abstract:** In the 70 years of the founding of New China, the research on the social function of historiography is not only characterized by stage development, but also has continuity and inheritance. In the 17 years after the founding of New China, historians attached importance to the study of the political function of historiography because of its special background of the times; in the 1980s, in order to adapt to socialist modernization, historians attached importance to the study of the educational function of historiography patriotism and the reference function of serving economic construction; in the 1990s, the study of the social function of historiography attached importance to the unity of the academic function of historiography and the social function of historiography; in the 21 century, with the development of the media, under the new era conditions, emphasis was placed on the study and discussion of the social function of historiography in accordance with the characteristics of the times, more comprehensive and in-depth. In general, the theoretical and methodological construction of the social function of historiography still needs to strengthen the interaction between historiography and reality, and the construction of theory and methodology still needs to be strengthened.

**Keywords:** New China; Social Function of Historiography; Characteristics of the Times

What's the use of history? This is a problem that haunts many people and still puzzles many historians. The important condition for the existence and development of any subject is the social function of the subject. One of the most basic problems involved in the social function of historiography is how historiography serves reality. In the 70 years since the founding of New China, many historians have discussed how historiography serves reality.

<sup>[1]</sup>In the 21 century, the leaders of the Party and the state pay more attention to the social function of historiography. Comrade hu jintao said :” only by remembering history, especially the history of chinese revolution created by our party’s leading people, can we have a deep understanding of the past, comprehensively grasp the present and correctly create the future .” We must give full play to the reference and educational functions of history, persist in studying China’s revolutionary history, and further understand China’s national conditions and the scientific nature of the socialist modernization road from the comparison between history and reality.

General Secretary Xi Jinping believes that history is a mirror. Attaching importance to history, studying history and drawing lessons from history is a fine tradition of Chinese civilization history for more than 5000 years. Contemporary China is the continuation and development of historical China. To adhere to and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, we need to study Chinese history and culture systematically, to grasp the historical law of human development deeply, and to draw wisdom and go to the future in the deep thinking of history .” It is further pointed out that it is necessary to sum up historical experience, reveal historical laws, give full play to the reference and educational functions of history, and make more contributions to the socialist modernization drive.<sup>[2]</sup>

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General Secretary Xi Jinping believes that leading cadres should read more history, study and carry forward the fine traditions of the Chinese nation, learn from the rich experience of governing the country and managing government in Chinese history, and learn from the excellent traditional culture and noble spiritual pursuit of the Chinese nation.<sup>[3]</sup>In particular, we should pay attention to the study of China's modern history, learn from the historical lessons that backwardness will be beaten, and inherit and carry forward the spirit of patriotism and fine revolutionary traditions .” We must deeply understand the history and the historical inevitability of the people choosing the Communist Party of China, Marxism, socialism and reform and opening up .”<sup>[4]</sup>

In this period, the study of the social function of historiography appeared different from the previous new situation, mainly as follows:

<sup>[5]</sup>First, in the early 17 years of the founding of New China, historiography gave full play to its own political functions and consolidated the new people's power. In the 1980s, in order to adapt to socialist modernization, history actively studied its own social functions and made great efforts to add bricks and tiles to socialist modernization, but “any frame interpretation should be based on extensive and substantial concrete research “, otherwise it will make people feel empty; In the 1990s, historiography made great efforts to strengthen its academic value and enhance its social existence value, thus promoting the development of its social function. However ,” it is possible and necessary for some historians to avoid the reality, escape into the ivory tower, do the pure learning, step by step because of the nature of the subject and the specialty of the art industry .”<sup>[6]</sup>

In the 21st century, the development of history is still difficult, forcing many scholars to reflect again on how to develop historiography. Many scholars believe that the academic function of historiography and social function should be organically combined. “The social and academic functions of historiography are dialectically unified, there is no history separated from the ‘pure’ academic function of any social significance, nor is there a ‘pure’ social function without any academic value .” Jiang Yihua, qu Lindong and Zhao Jihui thought :” History has such a characteristic: it takes the study of human past society as the starting point and serves the present era as the destination .” Wang Xuedian believes that history is the unity of seeking truth and using. There is opposition and tension between seeking truth and using, and history is maturing in the process of adjusting and balancing their relationship .” “The development of historiography has been remarkable for thousands of years ,” Liu said. And the achievement, rely on the promotion of historiography,...<sup>[7][8][9][10][11]</sup>In the same way, the development of historiography “s truth-seeking has opened up new fields and new levels for the use of historiography, so as to ensure the continuous development of historiography .” Chen Guocan believes that “the cultural form of historiography function is the embodiment of the potential value of historiography. Only when it is reflected in social life and transformed into social expression form can it have practical significance .” Dai Jihua believes that :” History is a subject of both academic and social functions, which has the characteristics and consciousness of consciously obeying and serving the society. Only the two have the proper and symmetrical history .” It is necessary to continue to adhere to the unity of academic and social functions of historiography.<sup>[12]</sup>

Second, with the increasing progress of the media, television, the Internet, smart phones are highly popular, historical documentaries and film and television dramas frequently appear on the screen, but are widely concerned by the public, but different praise and criticism; experts and scholars’ television history is loved by the audience, resulting in a large number of “academic stars” and controversy; popular history books are popular, network history works increase, its writing style and content and previous similar works are very different; WeChat, Weibo history knowledge spread faster, people can learn history anytime and anywhere; In order to develop tourism, all over the country vigorously promote historical celebrities, historical relics, so that people can learn history and culture while leisure and entertainment.

Compared with the previous stages, the research results of historical social function in this period are the most, and the theoretical achievements are the most remarkable, mainly in the following aspects:

First, the new progress of the study of the function of historiography education.

Pay more attention to the national education of the people. The historical conditions of a country constitute the basis and foundation for the further development of a country, and also limit the conditions and environment for the further development of a country. “Today’s China is the development of historical China, if you want to know today’s China,

you must first understand the history of China .” “Education of national conditions is an important education to turn patriotic thought into action and make national patriotism love into practice .”<sup>[13][14]</sup>

Pay more attention to EQ education. Some scholars believe that EQ is to understand the emotions of others and to achieve interpersonal harmony by properly managing the emotions of others. “Through the experience and lessons of our predecessors, we can cultivate students’ self-control, perseverance and ability to get along with others .”<sup>[15]</sup>

The study of aesthetic education function of historiography is more comprehensive and concrete. Some scholars believe that historical figures should be more fully displayed through vivid language, teaching feelings, making full use of illustrations in teaching materials, modern teaching means and organizing visits, so that students can fully get the education of historical beauty.<sup>[16]</sup>

The cognitive function of history should not be overemphasized. The cognitive function of history is one of the important functions of history. However, some scholars believe that the cognitive function of history should not be overemphasized. Because of over-emphasizing the social function of history ,” historiography will lose its lively nature, and then break away from reality and lose its social foundation .”<sup>[17]</sup>

The function of historical moral education should have the characteristics of the times. In the new century, the moral education function of historiography can not copy and copy the standards and contents of the past, and must have the characteristics of the times according to the needs of the times. Especially the personal moral cultivation with the characteristics of the times.<sup>[18]</sup>

Second, the reference function of historiography has been weakened.

In contemporary Chinese society, the reference function of historiography has been weakened. First of all, the reference function of traditional historiography is mainly for political service. After the country takes economic construction as the center, the reference function of traditional historiography does not adapt. Secondly, the reference function of traditional historiography is more suitable for the closed society with natural economy and planned economy. In an information society based on market economy, people can draw lessons from groups similar to their own culture and situation, but not necessarily from history.<sup>[19]</sup> Some scholars believe that :” the function of historiography has changed in the long river of historical development, historiography is respected as an oracle, is in the era of theocracy; is considered to be a general guide or political textbook, is in the era of imperial power .” “Now is the information society, all kinds of information such as surging, ups and downs, rapidly changing people’s judgment and decision-making of things, no longer rely on the teachings of history books, mainly to enhance the grasp of information thinking .” Some scholars also believe that :” although history still plays a vital role in governance, but in economics, sociology, futurology, information theory, cybernetics, systems theory, computer, the impact of the Internet, historiography’s dominant position has been weakened by a number of emerging science, the study of experts serving a small number of people into a dilemma .”<sup>[20][21]</sup>

Third, the leisure function of historiography is brought into play to a greater extent through the new media and the popularization and popularization of historiography.

<sup>[22]</sup>In today’s society, people’s life pressure, competition pressure are very great, few people can have enough time to quietly read historical works. Therefore ,” in order to realize the social function of historiography smoothly, we must reduce the difficulty of acquiring historical knowledge and take the popularization work as the premise .” With the development of mobile phone, computer and other new media, popularization and popularization have become an important way to realize the social function of historiography in the new century. The popularization and popularization of historiography can change the traditional history teaching mode of political education, and make history teaching more interesting and leisure.<sup>[23]</sup>

Fourth, the political function of history.

For a long time, there has been a demand to dilute the role of Marxism in the guidance of historical research. However, most experts and scholars believe that Marxism is a scientific theory and should continue to adhere to and strengthen the guiding role of Marxism in historical research.<sup>[24]</sup>

Fifth, there are other new developments in the study of the social function of historiography.

It is necessary to increase and attach importance to the teaching content of historical social function in teaching.

In the past, due to the improper understanding of the position and function of the content of the social function of historiography in the curriculum system, as well as the knowledge system and thinking mode of the traditional teaching materials, many teachers have some outstanding problems such as neglecting, not deeply studying and publicizing the social function of historiography. Therefore, some scholars believe that the teaching of history in the new century should increase and attach importance to the teaching content of social function of history.<sup>[25]</sup>

It emphasizes the important role of historiography workers, especially historiography editors, in exerting the social function of historiography. Some scholars believe that only when the achievements of historiography are accepted by the general public can its role be actively and fully played. The bridge between the achievements of historiography and the audience is the editing of historiography, which plays a key role in the function of historiography.” History editors must have a strong sense of service, theoretical literacy, accumulation of historical materials and a large number of historical information. Only by adhering to the principles of authenticity, science, innovation, value and policy when examining historical manuscripts can the social functions of historiography be brought into full play.<sup>[26]</sup>

The study of the history of mentality expands the scope of the study of the social function of historiography. Mentality refers to the unique way of thinking and perception. The study of mentality has been widely used in the field of history, which is initiated and flourished with the emergence and development of the Yearbook School. “The study of psychology historiography has made a new way for the combination of academic and popular historiography, which makes the social function of historiography more effective.”<sup>[27]</sup>

The study of the social function of minority historiography is more in-depth. The social function of ethnic minority historiography has a remarkable feature, that is, the function of cohesion and integration of ethnic minorities themselves. “The ancient Yi people took history as a discipline and evolved the division of production and social stratification in the later stage of clan society into a unique social structure frame of monarch, minister, teacher and people. This stable structure has always played an important role in social integration.”<sup>[28]</sup>

In the new century, the study of the social function of historiography has some new characteristics: first, the scope of the study of the social function of historiography has been expanded, from the initial attention to the study of political function, educational function, reference function, to the study of historiography leisure function, aesthetic education function, training function, communication function, etc. Second, the study of the social function of historiography is more in-depth. The educational function and reference function of traditional historiography have been discussed more deeply.

## Conclusion

Looking back on the social function of historiography since the founding of New China 70 years ago, we can find such facts. First, the study of the social function of historiography is not only characterized by stage development, but also has continuity and inheritance, and is gradually deepened. The so-called stage is mainly influenced by the political, economic and cultural development and changes in different historical periods, with specific historical marks. The so-called continuity and inheritance mainly refers to the study of the social function of historiography in each period before, after, and gradually deepened. Second, the scope of the study of the social function of historiography has gradually expanded, from the initial attention to the study of political function, educational function, reference function, to the study of historiography leisure function, aesthetic education function, training function, communication function, etc. Third, the study of the social function of historiography has made great achievements, but it is still in the stage of scattered and not systematic. This is mainly because many historians still attach importance to the academic function of historiography, not enough attention to the social function of historiography. It is this lack of attention to the social function of historiography that leads to the lag of theoretical and methodological construction and can not keep up with the practice of social function of historiography. In fact, the construction of historical social function theory and methodology must strengthen the interaction between history and reality in order to promote the development of historical social function theory.

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