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卷首语

传记（life writing）是人类的纪念碑。文化的起源中就包含着传记的因素，记载孔子言行的《论语》、柏拉图的苏格拉底回忆录和四福音书为传记树立了不朽的经典。其他文学和文化的文本形式，大都随着时代的变迁而消亡，成为历史的陈迹，只有传记以顽强的生命力绵延不绝；到了 21 世纪更是超过曾经盛极一时的小说，成为文化文本中的最大类别。传统的他传、自传、回忆录、书信、日记、游记等继续繁荣，新兴的口述历史、群体传记又异军突起。传记还超越了文字的媒介，同电影、电视以及互联网和自媒体结缘，开拓出广阔的新空间，拥有难以计量的读者。越来越多的人为自己、为亲爱者写作传记，以保留一份纪念。21 世纪是属于传记的时代。

传记的发展，提出了许许多多的问题，需要研究和讨论；本刊是中国境内第一个专门研究传记的刊物，创办本刊的目的就是提供一个发表和交流的园地，为中国传记的发展聊尽绵薄之力。

在一个全球化的时代，《现代传记研究》是一个开放性的刊物。它向中外传记界开放，它发表对各种传记类型的问题，包括历史的、现实的和理论的问题，所进行的不同角度的研究和探讨；它鼓励和欢迎专家、作者和读者之间的交流和互动；它提倡视角和方法与时俱进、不断创新，同时也倡导严谨、求实的文风。它的目的只有一个，促进传记学术的繁荣，推动传记的发展。

办好一份刊物是一件艰苦的事，我们会不断学习、不断反思、不断改善以求进步。我们也吁求国内外传记界的朋友们、传记爱好者的支持，你们的关注和参与，你们的能力和智慧，是办好这份刊物最有力的保证，期待着你们！

Editor's Note

As a monument to honor human beings, life writing has permeated culture since its origin. *Analects of Confucius* by Confucius, Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, and *The Four Gospels* are immortal classics in the history of life writing. Despite the fact that many genres of literature and culture perish over time, life writing has persisted in a tenacious manner, and the twenty-first century is witnessing a golden age of life writing, which even surpasses the novel, the once-dominating genre. Life writing now is among the most esteemed of cultural texts. Such traditional forms as biography, autobiography, memoirs, letters, diary and travel writing still maintain prominence and the emerging oral history and collective lives demonstrate great momentum. Simultaneously, life writing, having crossed the border of textual medium into the domain of movies, TV, Internet and We Media, claims an ever new and extensive space with the potential for innumerable readers. An increasing number of people have taken to life writing for themselves or for their loved ones, aspiring to erect an everlasting monument. In brief, the twenty-first century is an era of life writing.

Life writing as a genre of discourse has posed a great number of questions, requiring energies devoted to deeper studies and thorough scholarly discussions. The *Journal of Modern Life Writing Studies* takes the initiative in China as the first journal exclusively devoted to life writing studies. It aims to make a distinctive contribution to the development of Chinese life writing by providing a forum for publication and exchange of views in scholarship.

In the context of globalization, the *Journal of Modern Life Writing Studies* is an open journal, accessible to the life writing community home and abroad, publishing research and explorations on all kinds of life writing issues (historical, practical and theoretical) from various perspectives, encouraging and welcoming communication and interaction among scholars, authors and readers, and highlighting innovative perspectives and methodologies as well as rigorous and realistic style. Our over-arching commitment is to facilitate the development of life writing and to bring it to a new level of excellence.

A full-fledged journal requires arduous and painstaking efforts. We pledge to consistently aim for progress through consistent learning, reflection, and improvement. We also appeal to dear friends in the life writing community at home and abroad and devotees of life writing for your support, attention and participation. Your talents and wisdom are the most powerful assurance of our success. We are looking forward to your help!

The Editorial Board of *Journal of Modern Life Writing Studies*

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Biography is a Branch of Historical Studies: An Interview with Jonathan Sperber

Our Editor

Interviewee: Jonathan Sperber received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1980. Since 1984, he has been at the University of Missouri, since 2003 as the Curator's Distinguished Professor of History. Sperber has written extensively on the social, political and religious history of nineteenth century Europe, especially central Europe. His most recent work is *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth Century Life* (NY, 2013), which has also appeared in Chinese, Japanese, Turkish, Iranian, French, German, Spanish and Brazilian editions. Sperber's current project is writing a global history of the second half of the twentieth century, entitled "The Age of Interconnection".

标题: 传记属于历史研究的分支——乔纳森·斯珀伯访谈

受访者: 乔纳森·斯珀伯, 1980年获芝加哥大学博士学位。1984年到美国密苏里大学执教至今, 自2003年任该校董事会历史学杰出教授。斯珀伯关于19世纪欧洲社会史、政治史、宗教史论述颇丰, 其中有关中欧地区历史的研究论著最多。斯珀伯的近作是获普利策入围奖的传记《卡尔·马克思——一个19世纪的人》(2013年; 中译本, 2014年)。该书已被译为多种语言, 在中国、日本、土耳其、伊朗、法国、德国、西班牙、巴西等地出版发行。斯珀伯目前正在撰写20世纪下半叶全球史, 项目名称是“互联互通的时代”。

采访者: 本刊编辑部

An acclaimed biographer of Karl Marx, Jonathan Sperber is a historian of European History. His *Karl Marx* was translated into Chinese and got a heavyweight book review. Among all the Chinese translations of Karl Marx biography, Sperber's occupies a unique position, for he casts his view into the nineteenth century in which his

subject lived. In the field of life writing study, how does a historian look at the craft of biography? How does he regard theories in life writing? What did he experience in the course of the translation with his Chinese translator? With all such questions, we email-interviewed this biographer.

In the following interview, Q represents the questions from our editor, while JS is short for Jonathan Sperber.

Q: *Prof. Jonathan Sperber, you're the scholar who published biographies as well as academic writings. Would you please brief your own experience working as a biographer? What are your lessons from it?*

JS: Historical scholarship, when I went to graduate school and eventually received my Ph.D., in the decade of the 1970s, was dominated by social history, especially the *Annales* school, and the neo-Marxist, culturalist approach, personified, above all, by the late E.P. Thompson. Both these scholarly tendencies were very hostile to biography. The *Annalistes* looked at mass serial data over long intervals of time, in which individual specificity disappeared. Thompson and his followers were self-consciously anti-elitist, rejecting the importance of great men, and investigating the lives of ordinary people, which generally involved interpreting just fragmentary bits of information. Both *Annalistes* and Thompson followers were interested in anthropology, emphasizing collective mentalities, and so, once again, downplaying the exploration of the specificities of individuals. Most of my own historical scholarship followed along these lines—whether it was investigating religious practices among western Germany's Catholics during the nineteenth century, studying mass movements in the revolution of 1848, doing mathematical analysis of election returns or considering civil court cases, to elucidate the role of property in individuals' lives. Biography was outdated and reactionary; I had no interest in it.

Ironically, I did end up writing a biography, which has become by far the best known example of my historical scholarship. Still, the influence of my training as a social historian has been very prominent in my Marx biography. Interpreting Marx as a figure of his era, rather than as a contemporary, was a start. Considering his ideas in the context of other contemporary thinkers—such as Hegel, Darwin and Ricardo—rather than today's Marxist theorists, was another point. Understanding Marx's private life, in terms of nineteenth century gender relations (a very important part of social history) was still another example of the influence of social history. Finally, interpreting Marx's political activism in the context of the mass movements of the 1848 revolutions

and the nationalist aspirations of subsequent decades, was one more way that my past interest in collective human actions shaped my account of an individual's life.

Q: *Would you please give us an overview of the life-writing development in the USA, or in the Anglosphere in recent years? What are the success and problems? Could you recommend one or two life writings published in recent years? What are the merits in them do you think?*

JS: The largest influence on my own writing of biography comes from my colleague and friend here at the University of Missouri, Steven Watts. He has published a series of biographies of important figures in twentieth century American culture, business and politics: life of Walt Disney (1997), Henry Ford (2005), Hugh Hefner (2008) Dale Carnegie (2013) and John F. Kennedy (2016). The biographies are part of a broader conception of transformations in twentieth century America from a culture of frugality, industriousness, capitalist accumulation, and self-reliance, to one of consumption, leisure, sociability and therapy. Watts has shown me how one can take rigorous scholarship and present it in a way that appeals to a broader, educated public.

Q: *Do you think a biographer should be guided by theories? Would you please give us an overview of life-writing theories popular in recent years? What issues concern the life-writing theorists most in the USA? What do you think are the leading works in life-writing theories in recent years?*

JS: Like a lot of historians, I am more empirically oriented and have not paid much attention to theories of life-writing.

Q: *Your Pulitzer Prize finalist biography Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life shows that you intend to give a life as the subject lived as his own in today's context of globalization. How did you manage to achieve that effect? Do you think you attained your aim in the biography?*

JS: Did I want to do that? It seems to me that I was actually accomplishing almost the exact opposite—transforming Marx from a prophet of late twentieth century globalization into a nineteenth century figure who had very limited, and rather Eurocentric ideas about global interactions. Marx's world was very different from today's world. What has been global about the experience was the world-wide resonance of the book I wrote. Being interviewed by a professor at a Chinese university is a good example of this. I have been interviewed by *India Today*, and by a literary periodical in Iran, written for a Brazilian popular science magazine, given radio interviews to broadcasters in the UK, Germany and Switzerland, corresponded with the one-time national secretary of the Communist Party of Australia, and a past Minister of State for

Culture in the Federal Republic of Germany, answered e-mails from students in Egypt, and so on.

Q: *Nowadays fictitious elements are added into life writing in a great many works. In some cases, even important characters or events are invented. Certain biographer even made believe the stories that he befriended with the late biographical subject. What do you think of this method? Is this the trend? How do you define auto/biographical truth?*

JS: I am very old-fashioned in this respect, and believe in a strict separation between factual and fiction writing. I have nothing against novels that are based on an individual's life and add elements invented by the author; one day, perhaps after I retire, I might like to try my hand at such a novel myself. But these works are fictional and should be labeled as such. Non-fiction biography should stick to explication of empirically available documentation of a person's life. The author might want to speculate about the subject of his or her writing, but such speculation should be labeled as such, and should have a basis in empirically ascertainable evidence.

Q: *The genre of life writing has long been controversial. The dispute centers on whether it is a branch of history or a branch of literature. Some also claim that it should be an independent genre. What is your opinion on this debate? Do you think historians and literary scholars differ about this issue?*

JS: As a historian, I naturally am inclined to think of biography as a branch of historical studies. I do understand literary biography, which ought to be based on the same sort of empirically ascertainable evidence as historical biography, but might pose different kinds of questions of this material. The clear separation ought not to be between literary and historical biography, but between factual biography and fictional works based on a past person's life.

Q: *With the increase of memoirs, diaries, and oral history, these sub-genres exert greater influence than auto/biography. What is your comment on this phenomenon? Should they be included in biography or autobiography? Why?*

JS: Memoirs are clearly autobiography; diaries and oral history are more the raw material for historical or literary scholarship.

Q: *The past decades feature the burgeoning biopics and TV programs in biographical fashion. Their audience may exceed biography readers. What is your comment on this phenomenon? Given the differences from printed biography, can they be included in the larger category of life writing? Why?*