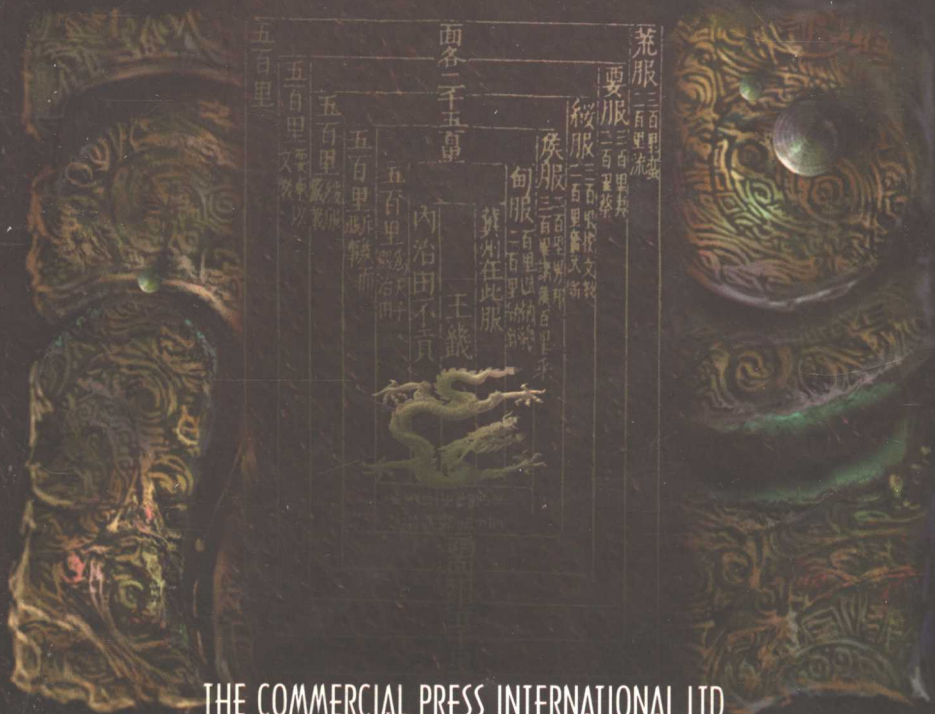


FROM
DYNASTIC GEOGRAPHY
TO
HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

A CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS
THE GEOGRAPHICAL PAST OF CHINA

TANG XIAOFENG



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PREFACE

Any society or culture, Chinese or Western, ancient or modern, rests its laurels on some prevailing self-definition mediated through time (history) and defined in space (geography). What we once pompously called “weltanschauung” or “worldview”, and what geographers call our “cognitive map” is just another way of describing that self-definition. So too are our traditional maps — those two dimensional, graphic representations of commonly-agreed definitions of where we are. In other words too, whatever else we might be, we are known to others and among ourselves by the way we define our “place in the world”. Therefore too, if and when that definition shifts ground — if and when “our place in the world” begins to change, it can be the equivalent of an earthquake leaving in its wake the rubble of centuries and, for the survivors, either the possibility of rebuilding some new combination of places, or migrating to safer ground. Naturally, such earthquakes are not everyday occurrences and, normally, their impact is only local. They tend to occur only at moment when, rather like the tectonic forces of the earth’s plated themselves, two self-definitions come into direct conflict and one is forced to give way (space) to the other. Throughout human history this has usually occurred when two cultures go “head-to-head” in mortal combat and again, normally, the consequences are only local or regional. But, what happens when such earthquakes are supernova-like in that they send shockwaves around the globe, destroying not only one parochial history at the epicenter, but also transforming the history of the world itself?

One such massive earthquake is represented by the story that unfolds in the following study — the collapse of China’s so-called “traditional” or “Confucian” elite definition of itself and its place in the world, and the rebuilding of that sense of place in modern China. Although in its beginnings only one of many parochial quakes in this century, as its shock waves travelled around the world and through time, by the end of the century that new Chinese sense of “our place in the world” would have remarkable consequences for the world as we know it. Tang Xiaofeng’s study traces the intellec-

tual origins of that shift of ground as it occurred in the worldview and cognitive map of key Chinese scholars and writers at the turn of the century and into the mid—twentieth century. Tang begins with the first tremors (the early weakening of the *yan—ge di—li* tradition), focuses on the epicenter (Gu Jiegang and the Yu Gong movement), and follows its immediate aftershocks (the work of Hou Renzhi and others in the establishment of a modern historical geography of China).

While it was perhaps not Tang Xiaofeng's intention, it is mine to add one additional thought. If this process of change began as an elite intellectual shift of consciousness and self—definition, it did not end there. It worked its way into the consciousness of virtually all those who would today declare themselves to be "Chinese". It also worked its way into the very structure of the place we call China — on the land, the rivers, the towns, the networks of regions and sub—regions and, in sum, the entire human geography of China. It remade China into something it was not before — — shattering much of the past, but creating a new landscape in its wake. And, as we have all witnessed over the past twenty years, the process has not ended. Along the way, it also transformed the rest of us in our relations with China. There is, in short, a message in this story. Whatever nostalgia there may be for the remnants of "Old China" it is, in fact, only nostalgia, because China has a new place in the world. How that place will look a decade from now is in the hands of a new generation of thinkers and builders. But, that new generation also owes a great debt of gratitude to the likes of Gu Jiegang and Hou Renzhi who figuratively and substantively re—designed the map of China, and began to build China's new place in the world.

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The research and writing for this book were done primarily at Syracuse University, in the United States in 1994. I would like to express my appreciations of the geographical community at Syracuse University, where I have spent several student years during the latter 1980s and the early 1990s. I had been greatly inspired then by the studies of the professors like Donald W. Meinig, James Duncan, John C. Western, and, of course, Marwyn S. Samuels, my advisor. I also owe thanks to Michael Nylan, my old friend, who not only revised the English, but also made very important comments to this study. I have very benefited from the discussions with my schoolmates and friends including Lin Weiren, Liu Feiwen, Unryu Suganuma, and J. Fay Collier Kelle. As always, I would present my great respect to the path breakers of China's modern historical geography, who are Hou Renzhi, Tan Qixiang, and Shi Nianhai. However, the responsibility for both the opinions and the mistakes in this work must rest with me.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This study, which concerns the development of the field of historical geography in China over the course of the twentieth century, reviews some fundamental changes in the interpretations of China's geographical past. Through such changes, the traditional approach to geographical questions (which this study terms "dynastic geography") gradually gave way to modern historical geography.

The Modernization of Historical Geography

About a half century ago in the West, historical geography became a commonly accepted subfield of geography, with its own distinctive procedures and scholarly contributions. Before that time, the study of what we now call historical geography had been practiced by non-geographers, especially by historians such as Michelet (in England) and Turner (in America). Of course, the geographical perspectives of certain of those historians would by no means qualify today as "authentic" historical geography. In the West, because of Kant's notion, which was introduced to geography by A. Hettner, geography was generally defined as a study of areas and of areal differentiation; any discussion of changes through time, therefore, was typically assigned to the province of history.^① During the 1940s and 1950s, modern geographers (primarily in England and in America) finally "broke through the thin surface of Kant's static, two-dimensional representation of the world and began to explore the transformations of societies, economies, and environments."^② This breakthrough was accomplished by a series of scholarly studies, including those by C. Sauer, R. Brown, and A. Clark in

① Although some German geographers (some Hettner's students) have made important contributions of late years to historical geography, the spokesmen of geography of that days, like Hartshorne, gave "it tolerance only at the outer fringes of the subject." (Sauer 1941, p. 352)

② Prince 1980, p. 230.

North America, by H. Darby in England, and by Dion in France.^① In such studies, new innovative themes were introduced into the field of geography, such as the “reconstruction of past geography” (in Brown), the “genetic study” (in Clark), “vertical themes” (in Darby), the “geographical process” and the “changing cultural landscape” (in Sauer). As a result, historical geography was established as a subfield of geography with a particular emphasis on dynamic geographic changes over time. Chinese scholars were greatly influenced by this new Western approach to historical geography; prompted by domestic social forces, a critical change in the field of geography took place in China some years later. This change has been identified by Hou Renzhi (1962) as “the modernization of historical geography of China.”

In both China and the West, the development of a modern historical geography ultimately depended upon bringing a historical perspective to bear upon the field of geography, both theoretically and practically. When traditional studies of geography written by historians proved inspiring to geographers, this constituted the prelude or “first step” toward the whole enterprise of modern historical geography. However, insofar as the studies were restricted by historiographical conventions, they were subject to criticism by geographers. In the development of modern historical geography, then, geographers have called for the integration of geography and history so as to explore the time dimension of geographical questions. At the same time, in order to justify and preserve the separate identity of their own professional field, geographers have also stressed some critical differences between their own research and that of the historians. That has led to various attempts by geographers to formally distinguish the geographical approach from the historical approach. Darby, for example, has talked of the study of “the history behind the geography” instead of “the geography behind the history”; Meinig and Clark have spoken of “geographic change” in terms not only of the “geographic change between times,” but also in terms of “geographic change through time.” Meinig has suggested that questions be “based more upon area than environment,” while Hou Renzhi has written of “geographical processes rather than chronological

① See Meinig 1978; Prince 1980; and Harris 1991.

changes.”^①

In developing a modern historical geography, the attempts to readjust the traditional relationship between history and geography have been closely related to broader intellectual movements in the rapidly changing world environment. The particular emphases found in individual works of historical geography have varied according to the specific cultural contexts of their authors. For example, geography did not have a close relation with history in the United States because the Kantian idea of the separation of history and geography, as disseminated by Hartshorne, dominated American geographical thought for a long time. Since American scholars of history and geography “have paid little attention to one another,”

American historical geographers have felt the need to seek for a more fully integrated relationship with history, as is evident from the writings of R. Brown, C. Sauer, and especially A. Clark.^③

The situation in China was vastly different. China's first modern historical geographers were the students of history, not of geography. When these history students tried to develop the field of historical geography into an independent, professional, and rigorous discipline, they began to recognize its profoundly geographical nature. As a result, these history students came to deliberately employ geographical theories, concepts, terms, and themes (in short, the “geographical mind”) to improve the caliber of their own research. They also invited students from Departments of Geography to join with them. For Chinese historical geographers, who claimed a legitimate position within the community of geographers, the real

① See Darby 1953; Meinig 1978a; and Hou Renzhi 1962.

② Meinig 1978a, p. 1187.

③ Sauer's cultural historical geography (often known as the Berkeley School) enjoyed the greatest influence in the period of the 1940s and 1950s, “when the discipline [of geography] was not otherwise particularly open to the historical perspective.” See Conzen, Rumney, and Wynn 1993, p. 30. Two books by Brown, his *Mirror for Americans: likeness of the eastern seaboard, 1810* (1943) and his *Historical Geography of the United States* (1948), were considered “the first substantial modern products of that field.” See Meinig 1978a, p. 1187. Brown focused on “the geography of the past,” reconstructing the character of regions and landscapes from original documents, so as to put his geographic study “on a sounder historiographic basis.” See Mitchell and Groves 1987, p. 6. Clark had “close working relationships with scholars in several subfields of history,” according to Meinig 1978, p. 6. Both the style and the character of Clark's work, along with that of Sauer and Darby, were influenced by the work of Harold G. Innis, the economic historian. See *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

question, then, was how to devise a field free of the age-old domination of history.

For scholars intent upon developing the modern field of historical geography, different problems arose because intellectual conditions varied considerably by country. As each particular cultural tradition and social context of each country gave rise to a distinctive agenda, this, in turn, lent a separate character to the creation of this subfield. In China, traditional scholarship had developed a single paradigm for inquiries dealing with issues in past geography. This paradigm, usually called *yan-ge di-li* (chronological geography) by Chinese geographers, will be considered the last stage of traditional "dynastic geography" in this study. This chronological (*yan-ge di-li*) approach, naturally enough, became the main target of criticism by the modern historical geographers of China, who felt that they must clearly draw the line between history and geography, between the traditional and the modern. This criticism of the traditional chronological (*yan-ge di-li*) approach has shaped the modern discourse of historical geography in China. What was *yan-ge di-li*, or dynastic geography? What role did it play in the scholarly community and in the wider society of imperial China? How did the modern historical geographers criticize it? In what social and intellectual context was such criticism undertaken? What kind of modern historical geography was developed in China in consequence? All of these questions are critical to our understanding of the development of modern historical geography in China.

Historical geography is a inquiry of past, which is a very complex enterprise involving different interpretations led by interpretators' different attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, values, and even moralities. For us, the "past world" encompasses broad areas of inquiry, which could be a warmer land, or a "foreign country".^① The geography of the past could conceivably have been determined by God or by the sages, by the "Tao" or by scientific laws. For historical geographers, in other words, there could be "real, imagined and abstract worlds of the past",^② and the study of past geography could be focused on the changes of landscape (as in Sauer and Darby), on the shaping of a cultural and social regional

① Lowenthal 1985.

② Prince 1971.

system (as in Meinig), on the patterns of socioeconomic distribution within a given region (as in Clark), on the meanings attached to landscape features of the past (as in Lowenthal or Hou), or on the spatial aspect of power in sociocultural discourse.^①

Changes in the study of historical geography (whether from the historical to the geographical or from the traditional to the modern) inevitably have reflected greater changes in social theory and in value systems. In China, as we will see, the gradual modernization of historical geography was simply one component of the modernization of the entire Chinese world view; it has been tied to new cultural movements, nationalist campaigns, sweeping criticisms of Confucianism—in short, to all the many challenges to the traditional ideological orthodoxy. In the case of geography, this has meant the rejection of some traditional concepts (e. g., the “Central Kingdom,” the “Unity of All-under-Heaven,” the “Nine Regions of the *Yu Gong*,” and the “Five Dominions”), no less than the acceptance of certain Western ideas.

On the History of Geography: Theoretical Considerations

By convention, histories of geography have been written in chronological fashion.^② In such histories, the development of the field of geography has often been treated as a continuous unilinear process, a cumulative progression from achievement to achievement, or as successive revolutions from the old “normal science” to a new improved science, from old paradigms to new paradigms. This construct for the discipline’s history can be seen in terms of Kuhn’s model for the paradigm shift,^③ which seeks to give a positive interpretation for scientific generalizations, while identifying common elements in the history of scientific disciplines. Critics of Kuhn have questioned his emphasis on the sudden character of revolutionary shifts in paradigm, and doubted the existence of a “normal science”; they have suggested that several paradigms, rather than a

① Harris 1991.

② E. g., Baker 1931; Freeman 1961; James 1972; and Dickinson 1969.

③ Kuhn 1962, 1970. For the Kuhnian concept as applied to geographical literature, see Haggett and Chorlett 1967.

single dominant paradigm, tend to coexist within any given discipline. Even more importantly, they have called for a contextual approach, which presumes

that both the ideas and the structure of the subject have developed in response to complex social, economic, ideological and intellectual stimuli.^①

The French historian Foucault has outlined an alternative framework for the analysis of the social sciences, a framework which requires reference to such stimuli. Foucault views each science as a description of a "discourse," defined as a unified system of statements that can only be understood within its own cultural context.^② According to Foucault's analysis of power-knowledge, geography, as a subset of knowledge, never evolves *sui generis*; rather, it is always shaped and justified by the dominant theoretical discourse of a specific time and place. Foucault therefore argued that is essential to reconceptualize the relation between "factual" knowledge and the authorized discourse of the day. It is Foucault's ideas, which place the study of the scientific disciplines firmly within the context of the wider environment of practice, that have inspired my own study.

Science, as the organization of knowledge, can no longer be seen as a disinterested result of objective inquiries. It appears now as a product of society, which compels intellectuals to operate within the confines of certain processes. The history of geography must be far more, then, than a chronological list of the achievements of a few great scholars.^③ It should refer to ideological issues and contextual discourse. It must consider not only the fact of change, but also the questions why and how those changes occurred. In theory, it should reveal the external influences of the societal structure on the progress and content of geography. Only then will we understand why some individuals made their special contributions to geography at certain times. Just as we should not separate geographical ideas

① Stoddart 1981, p. 1. Critiques of Kuhn's model can be found in Lakatos 1970; and Stoddart 1981, 1986.

② Foucault 1972.

③ The conventional model of writing the history of geography has been criticized since the 1980s. See Stoddart 1981, 1986; and Godlewska 1989.

from the individuals who created them, we should not separate those creative individuals from the society in which they lived. We must seek to understand how geographers as individuals and as social beings interpreted their intellectual assignments within the cultural environment of their day.

Since geography is a broadly-defined field, with critical distinctions between its branches, we never have a general history of geography that does justice to its every branch. Nor can one ideological trend that appears in a given society at a certain period equally affect the development of every branch of geography simultaneously. For instance, in the West, the so-called quantitative revolution of the 1960s-70s had a great impact on economic geography and on regional geography, but relatively little impact on cultural geography and historical geography.^① To give an example drawn from China, in the 1950s-60s, Chinese economic geography was almost entirely copied from Soviet economic geography; Soviet ideas and Soviet geographers were widely cited in the writings of the time. In the field of historical geography, by contrast, Chinese scholars generally ignored the Soviet models.

Inevitably, any history of geography will be highly subjective, and not only because any such history could yield a variety of different interpretations. Even the starting point for studies on the history of geography is uncertain. One study might focus on the ways of identifying and solving the geographical problems, while another might discuss the networks and institutions formed by geographers. Still another study might compare and contrast descriptions of the field by its members or by outsiders, particularly philosophers.^② This study makes no claims for completeness, then. It focuses on the changes brought to the study of Chinese historical geography by its leading scholars. Its main concern is with shifts in these scholars' basic assumptions, in their systems of description and values, and in their methods of approach. These shifts, taken cumulatively, resulted in the emergence of a new paradigm for historical geography, which I call "modern historical geography." Although this study centers on a few influential scholars and their works, it does not intend to serve as a typical example of the "great men" approach. The

① Johnston 1987.

② Godlewska 1989.

text intends to convey my understanding of a complex process involving several critical stages of ideological change.

Western Influence and Chinese Inherence

An intellectual history of modern China cannot ignore the question of Western influence and Chinese inherence. In the 1950s and 1960s, the dominant American model for discussing modern Chinese history was the "Western challenge and Chinese response" model, as represented in the writings of John K. Fairbank and Joseph R. Levenson. Fairbank and Levenson, two leading American historians of modern China in the older generation, tended to attribute change in China solely to the Western impact, overlooking its intimate connection with China's own tradition. Over the last decade, however, a new generation of American scholars in the field of modern Chinese history have gradually developed a new perspective, which aims at replacing the model generated by Fairbank and Levenson. This new approach, thoroughly discussed in Paul Cohen's book *Discovering History in China, American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (1984), greatly widens the scope of contemporary research, for it would have historians describe not only the sociopolitical changes produced by the Western impact, but also the changes that resulted largely from China's indigenous development. According to Cohen, the impact-response model contains within it a serious historiographical flaw: Overly mechanistic, the impact-response model tends to cloud the historians' ability to see Chinese history as a process of change and transformation. In order to reach a more complete understanding of modern China, Cohen's book advocated a "China-centered approach"; by this he

intended to delineate an approach to recent Chinese history that strives to understand what is happening in that history in terms that are as free as possible of imported criteria of significance. ①

While it would be hard to find an important intellectual movement in modern China that remained unaffected by the Western im-

① Cohen 1984, p. 196.