Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies

Chen, Huaiyu. Conversations and Conflicts: The Encounter of PRC Scholars with European Sinologists in the 1950s. *Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies*, vol. 7.1 (2026): 141–168.

DOI: 10.25365/jeacs.2026.7.1.chen_huaiyu

EACS AT FIFTY: RESEARCH ARTICLE

Conversations and Conflicts: The Encounter of PRC Scholars with European Sinologists in the 1950s

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Drawing on numerous primary sources such as memoirs, diaries, reports, and correspondence in multiple languages, this paper aims to offer a critical analysis of the encounters between PRC scholars and their Western counterparts at the two Conferences of Young Sinologues of Western Europe held in Leiden and Paris in 1955 and 1956. These conferences constituted the first and only contact between PRC scholars and European sinologists during the early Cold War era, between 1949 and 1978. This study situates this episode within the broader history of limited Sino-foreign academic exchange during the 1950s, a period when ideological divisions and diplomatic isolation constrained contact. Chinese delegates promoted Marxist historiography and presented new archaeological discoveries, while also navigating ideological tensions with Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and Western scholars. Social historians of China from Europe and America engaged in conversations with Chinese Marxist historians, focusing on the nature of Chinese society and the periodization of Chinese history. This study contextualizes the political, intellectual, ideological, and academic dimensions of this encounter. Against the background of the onset of the Cold War, the rise of the Chinese Communist revolution, and the aftermath of the Korean War, these early exchanges laid the groundwork for the globalization of Chinese studies and the formation of an international Sinological community. This study provides a vivid case for understanding the richness and complexity of the interplay between politics and academia in Cold War history.

本文基於回憶錄、日記、報告及多語種書信等一手史料，對 1955 年與 1956 年萊頓和巴黎兩屆“西歐青年漢學家會議”上中國大陸學者與歐洲漢學家的首次接觸進行多重解讀。在冷戰格局下，這兩次會議是中方與西方漢學界唯一的正式交流渠道。文章將其置於 1950 年代中外學術交流受限的歷史脈絡中，探討中方代表如何在推廣馬克思主義史學、介紹考古新發現的同時，周旋於與臺灣、香港及西方學者之間的意識形態分歧；並梳理歐美社會史學者與中國馬克思主義史家就中國社會性質與歷史分期展開的對話。研究從政治、學術與思想多重維度揭示此次交鋒的複雜性，指出其為漢學研究的國際化與全球漢學共同體的形成奠定基礎，也為理解冷戰時期政治與學術的互動提供了典型個案。

Keywords: European Sinology, Cold War, Marxist Historiography, Historical periodization, globalization

關鍵詞： 漢學，冷戰，馬克思主義史學，歷史分期，全球化

The Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies (JEACS) is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the EACS, www.chinesestudies.eu. ISSN: 2709-9946

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Introduction

Nowadays, scholars of China from across the globe can easily convene for academic conferences and engage in intellectual exchange regardless of their ideological, political, religious, ethnic, or gender backgrounds. This openness resulted first from the "Open Door" policy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and, subsequently, from the end of the Cold War. When attending the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) or the biennial conference of the European Association for Chinese Studies (EACS), it is common to encounter scholars representing nearly every continent. Such collaboration should not be taken for granted given the constraints of the Cold War era. Interestingly, between 1949 and 1979, there were only three occasions when American or European Sinologists and scholars from the PRC attended the same conference: the VIII Conference of Junior Sinologues in Leiden (1955), the East Asian Studies Conference in Leipzig (1955),[1] and the IX Conference of Junior Sinologues in Paris (1956).[2]

Several seismic historical events, particularly the founding of the PRC, the Korean War, the death of Joseph Stalin, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and a series of political campaigns within China, profoundly shaped the development of Chinese historiography during the 1950s. In the early stages of the Cold War, although the Korean War and various decolonisation movements drew sharp boundaries between the Eastern and Western blocs, a unique space for confrontation, conflict, and conversation persisted. This was facilitated by the network established through the annual conferences of Junior Sinologues in Western Europe.

The involvement of PRC scholars in this network during 1955 and 1956 represents a singular exception in the period spanning from 1949 to the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. The VIII Conference of Junior Sinologues in Leiden, where the PRC was represented by Jian Bozan 翦伯贊 (1898–1968) and Zhou Yiliang 周一良 (1913–2001), marked the first direct contact between historians from the PRC and the West since the onset of the Cold War. This momentum continued into 1956, when the PRC sent a larger delegation of four scholars including Jian Bozan, Zhou Yiliang, Zhang Zhilian 張芝聯 (1918–2008), and Xia Nai 夏鼐 (1910–1985) to the IX Conference in Paris. In a significant move of cultural diplomacy, this delegation also organised an exhibit on Chinese archaeology, showcasing recent finds to the international scholarly community. The most striking feature of this conference was the debate on the periodisation of Chinese history; initiated by Chinese and French scholars, it immediately drew in China scholars from around the world. This debate

[1] This conference was organised by the Sinology Department of Leipzig University and mainly hosted Sinologists from the communist bloc, though some Sinologists from West Germany were also invited (Chen 2022, 39–58).

[2] For a historical survey of these events, see Chen 2024.

centered on a central theme remains a unique instance of such a discussion occurring on a global scale in the history of China Studies.

Over the past three decades, as the older generation of Sinologists who established or experienced the early history of European Sinology have left the stage, their memoirs, diaries, and personal communications have become accessible through publication or public archives. Numerous new materials have surfaced in both Europe and China. For example, Frederick W. Mote (2010), Wolfgang Franke (1995), and Zhou Yiliang (1999) all published memoirs, and Xia Nai's diary (2011) has also been released. These materials supplement one another, offering rich information regarding their participation in these conferences and the political and intellectual contexts in which they navigated the conversations and conflicts of the 1950s.

This paper aims to recover a lost chapter in the early history of contemporary European Sinology by documenting the brief yet significant contact between European Sinologists and PRC historians in 1955 and 1956.[3] To reconstruct this brief but pivotal engagement, this study employs a multi-dimensional methodological approach. By triangulating official records with private narratives and public discourse, the research accounts for both the formal diplomatic objectives and the personal intellectual exchanges of the era. The "skeleton" of this study is built upon the proceedings of the VIII and IX Conferences of Junior Sinologues. In addition, this paper draws extensively on the memoirs, diaries, and personal letters of key participants, such as Frederick W. Mote, Wolfgang Franke, Zhou Yiliang, and Xia Nai. These private records reveal the "hidden transcript" of the conferences—the anxieties, political pressures, and genuine scholarly curiosities that the participants felt but could not always express in an official capacity. These documents provide the objective data of the meetings: the official list of attendees, the titles of papers presented, and the formal resolutions passed by the body. In the meantime, the external perception of these encounters is captured through journal articles and media reports from the 1950s. By analysing how these meetings were framed in both Western and Chinese media at the time, we can discern the role of "cultural diplomacy" and how these academic gatherings were interpreted within the broader geopolitical context of the early Cold War. In sum, by examining the historical background, process, and implications from political, cultural, and intellectual perspectives, I argue that these conferences in Western Europe witnessed the rise and fall of a short-lived global community for Chinese studies—a community whose construction was prompted by a complex confluence of political and intellectual factors.

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[3] Many recent works in Western languages on the history of European Sinology seem to skip this chapter. For example, a series of articles on national Sinology in Europe were published in *Journal of Chinese History* vol. 7, no. 2 in July 2023 (Idema 2023, 327–347; Barrett 2023, 349–373; Paternicò 2023, 375–408; Standaert 2023, 409–442; Ess 2023, 491–524; Will 2023, 525–574; Guleva 2023, 591–611).

Globalizing European Sinological Community

Before World War II, Europe boasted several prominent centers for Sinology, most notably Paris and Berlin, where numerous scholars were trained across various institutions, and even students from China and America also studied there. For example, during the 1920s and 1930s in Paris, Liu Fu 劉復, Wang Li 王力, and Edwin O. Reischauer took courses with Paul Pelliot, Marcel Granet and Henri Maspero. Meanwhile, in Berlin, Chinese students such as Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, Mao Zishui 毛子水, Fu Sinian 傅斯年, Jiang Fucong 蔣復璁, and Yao Congwu 姚從吾, along with Hungarian-born Etienne Balazs, studied under Otto Franke at the University of Berlin, later becoming leading historians. However, as Martin Kern documents, the war severely interrupted the development of European Sinology, particularly in Germany. This disruption led many Sinologists to migrate to Britain before eventually settling in the United States (Kern 1998, 507–529). After World War II, the European Sinology community underwent a period of reconstruction, centered largely around the annual Conference of Junior Sinologues, which launched in 1948. As the Cold War intensified, dividing Europe into Western and Eastern blocs, these conferences were initially restricted to scholars from Western Europe. By the 1950s, however, these gatherings began to include Sinologists from the Eastern bloc, eventually evolving into a global forum for scholars from around the world.

The genesis of the European Conferences of Junior Sinologues (ECJS) was rooted in the profound sense of isolation felt by scholars in the immediate aftermath of World War II (Franke 1999). In the summer of 1947, a small delegation of British Sinologues traveled to Leiden University, a historic bastion of Dutch Oriental studies. This meeting was not merely social; it was a recognition that the "ivory towers" of pre-war European academia were no longer sustainable. The war had disrupted communication, scattered library resources, and decimated the ranks of young researchers. The Dutch and British cohorts realised that without a structured network for the exchange of information, personnel, and rare texts, European Sinology risked falling behind the rapidly advancing American scholarship of China Studies.

This collaborative spirit culminated in the first meeting from January 6 to 12, 1948, at the University of Cambridge.[4] This inaugural conference owed its success to the significant backing of senior British Sinologists, including Gustav Haloun (Cambridge), Walter Simon (SOAS), Lionel Giles (British Museum), and Homer H. Dubs (Oxford). While the conference spanned six days, its primary focus was networking and institutional observation rather than a heavy schedule of presentations. The "Junior Sinologues" participated primarily as observers and discussants since many of them had not yet completed their doctorates and

[4] "Introductory Note," Proceedings of the *Conference of Junior Sinologues held at Cambridge, London, and Oxford*, January 6th–12th, 1948.

were intensively working on their dissertations. This cohort included future luminaries of the Sinological field such as Anthony F. P. Hulsewé, Edwin Pulleyblank, Mary Wright, Jacques Gernet, Hans Bielenstein, and Piet van der Loon. Beyond the formal sessions, the attendees dedicated considerable time to visiting the Chinese book collections at Cambridge, Oxford, and SOAS. They also viewed a specialised exhibition of Dunhuang manuscripts at the British Museum. A key highlight occurred on January 9, when the young scholars shared and exchanged details regarding their current research projects, fostering a sense of collaboration that would define the post-war Sinological community.

The second Conference, held at Leiden University from April 8 to 14, 1949, represented a transformative moment for the Junior Sinologues as the event's focus shifted decisively toward the younger generation of scholars. While the inaugural Cambridge meeting had been dominated by senior figures, this Leiden conference saw doctoral candidates and early-career researchers like Mary Wright, Piet van der Loon, A.F.P. Hulsewé, and Edwin Pulleyblank taking centre stage to present their dissertation research. Organiser R. P. Kramers highlighted this evolution, noting that while the previous year was dedicated to institutional planning, this second conference was designed to showcase the tangible academic fruits of individual and collective labor. Despite the absence of several invited "giants" of the field, such as Paul Demiéville and Bernhard Karlgren, the conference successfully expanded its reach to dozens of participants from seven Western European universities, including the notable addition of Herbert Franke representing the University of Cologne.

A hallmark of this second conference was its experimental interdisciplinary approach, which sought to professionalise the field of Chinese studies by looking outward. The organisers invited specialists from the realms of Classical Studies, History, and Biblical Studies to deliver reports on their respective methodologies for textual criticism and documentary analysis,[5] providing the young Sinologists with a broader toolkit for rigorous scholarship. The only senior Sinologist to present a paper was J.J.L. Duyvendak, the conference host from Leiden, who provided a historical context for this conference by lecturing on the academic lineage of Dutch Sinology. This combination of interdisciplinary methodology and the rapid expansion of participating scholars signaled the successful reconstruction of the European Sinological community and its transition into a more structured, collaborative, and professionalised global network.

The third conference, organised by Edwin Pulleyblank at the School of Oriental Studies (SOAS) in London in 1950, saw a significant expansion in both institutional representation and individual attendance. Over sixty participants gathered from nine universities across the

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[5] *Proceedings of the Conference of Junior Sinologues held at Leiden*, April 8–14, 1949, 2–7; these papers included W. Den Boer, "The Struggle Against the Supremacy of the Philological Method in Classical Studies;" J. G. Locher, "On the Methods of Textual Criticism in the Field of History;" and J. de Zwaan, "On the Method of Textual Criticism in New Testament Studies."

United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Germany, and Sweden. This meeting served as a debut for several future leading scholars of the field, including the medieval China historian Denis Twitchett and the French scholars Yves Hervouet and Michel Soymié. Notably, the host institution provided a deep bench of talent, including Michael Sullivan, A. C. Graham, and John Chinnery.[6] The presence of overseas Chinese scholars then studying in London, including Fu Le-huan 傅樂煥, Huang Xi-ling 黃錫齡, and D. C. Lau 劉殿爵, added a crucial transnational dimension. While Fu and Huang departed for mainland China and Hong Kong shortly after the meeting, D. C. Lau remained to take up a lectureship in Chinese Philosophy, later serving as a recurring bridge between Western and Chinese academic circles.

The fourth conference, held at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1951, provided an impressive showcase of the enduring strength of French Sinology under the leadership of Paul Demiéville, Etienne Balazs. This event was a nexus for both established figures and rising stars, such as Wolfgang Franke, Herbert Franke and Piet van der Loon. However, some active Sinologists, including Max Kaltenmark, Alexis Rygaloff, and Robert Ruhlman, remained stationed in Beijing at that time, highlighting the complex geopolitical currents that continued to influence the movement of scholars between the East and West during the early Cold War (Franke 1999, 4).

The fifth conference organised by Herbert Franke in Wahn in September 1952 truly achieved global reach. The academic program featured specialised research from doctoral candidates such as Liu Mau-tsai 劉茂才 on East Turkic history, Denis Twitchett on Tang economic history, and Wu Chi-yu 吳其昱 on Chinese grammar. However, the most striking development was the arrival of delegates from outside Western Europe. This conference welcomed scholars from Australia (Hans Bielenstein and B. McKillop), Canada (W.A.C.H. Dobson), Indonesia (Tjan Tjoe Som), and Japan (Tatsuro Yamamoto 山本達郎). This diversification transformed the conference from a regional European gathering into an international scholarly network, proving that even as political borders tightened elsewhere, the study of China was becoming a worldwide collaborative endeavour.

The Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (IsMEO) hosted the sixth conference in Rome in 1953, which was marked by a significant increase in international participation and interdisciplinary prestige. Under the direction of Giuseppe Tucci, the organizing committee consisted of Luciano Petech, Mario Bussagli, Giuliano Bertuccioli, and Lionello Lanciotti. They welcomed delegates from twelve countries, including newcomers from Turkey, Switzerland, and Austria. The gathering facilitated crucial networking among established and emerging Sinologists such as Wolfgang Bauer, A.F.P. Hulsewé, Etienne Balazs, Walter Fuchs, Vadime Elisseeff, and Denis Twitchett, while also attracting Buddhist studies experts

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[6] *The Third Conference of the Junior Sinologues*, London, 1950, 16.

like D.T. Suzuki 鈴木大拙 and André Bareau.[7] This sixth meeting notably featured many contributions from overseas Chinese scholars, including Wu Shichang 吳世昌, then teaching at Oxford, and Wolfgang Franke's wife, Hu Junyong 胡雋詠, who presented a paper in Chinese on the performance techniques of Peking Opera.[8] The presence of specialised researchers like James Hamilton, who was working on Dunhuang manuscripts, further underscored this conference's role as a vital hub for diverse scholarly inquiry into Asia's cultural and historical heritage.

The seventh conference, held at Hatfield College, Durham University, from August 28 to September 2, 1954, was a milestone with the first-ever inclusion of delegates from the United States and the Soviet Union. James R. Hightower represented the American contingent, while E. Kovalev and S. Tikhvinsky arrived as the pioneering Soviet representatives.[9] Tikhvinsky's later memoirs reflect the geopolitical weight of this moment; after years of academic isolation following the Russian Revolution, the Soviet government's decision to re-engage with international scholarship was significant enough to be highlighted by *The Times* on August 30, 1954. Interestingly, Tikhvinsky boldly claimed that the Junior Sinologues formed specifically to challenge the "classical school" of the Russian scholar Vasily Alekseyev.[10] It likely reflects a touch of Soviet academic nationalism rather than historical fact. In reality, the group remained an informal association of Western European scholars, primarily focused on professionalising the field rather than competing with specific Russian lineages. Despite the burgeoning Cold War, this conference remained largely free of overt ideological conflict, focusing instead on ambitious international cooperation. A major resolution was passed to support Piet van der Loon's project to compile a union catalogue of Chinese classical *congshu* 叢書(collectanea) held in European libraries, marking perhaps the first formal international collaboration in the organisation's history. Etienne Balazs proposed his influential Song Project for an international handbook on Song dynasty history.[11] A new perspective was proposed. For example, Jean Chesneaux, a French scholar and Communist Party member, discussed the integration of Chinese history into world history. This conference also highlighted the rapid professionalisation of the discipline, noting Denis Twitchett's appointment at SOAS and the arrival of Joseph Levenson from

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[7] "The VI Conference of Junior Sinologues," *East and West* 4: 3 (1953): 181.

[8] *VI Conferenza Sinologi Juniores*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1953, 26–28.

[9] Raymond Dawson, "Preface," *VII Conference of Junior Sinologues*, School of Oriental Studies, Durham, Aug. 28–Sept. 2, 1954, iii.

[10] Mu Dan and Li Junsheng, "Eluosi Zhuming Zhongguoxue Qihexuandisiji Fangtanlu (Interview with the Famous Russian Sinologist Tikhvinsky)," *Guowai Shehui Kexue* (Social Sciences Abroad), Issue 3 (2010): 142.

[11] In 1955, Balazs was appointed to be a "Directeur d'études" at the Sixth Section of EPHE and worked on socio-economic history of China with Lucien Febvre (1878–1956) and Fernand Braudel (1902–1985) (Will 2023, 39–40;). Many scholars have noted the scholarly collaborations between Balazs and Braudel (Zurndorfer 2004, 189–221; Aymard 2010: 37–65).

Berkeley as a visiting professor, signalling an era where Sinology was becoming increasingly integrated with the broader social sciences and global historical narratives.

The conferences of Junior Sinologues from 1955 to 1961 represent the peak of the development of European Sinology, as they transformed into a high-stakes arena where global geopolitics and academic idealism collided. The eighth conference in Leiden in 1955 was a watershed moment, marking the first time a delegation from Mainland China, represented by renowned historians Jian Bozan and Zhou Yiliang, participated in a post-war international forum. This session also drew prominent American scholars like John King Fairbank and Owen Lattimore, who overcame the restrictive pressures of McCarthyism to attend (beMcAuliff 1978). Wolfgang Franke described this as a brief window of Chinese "openness," characterised by a mix of ideological struggle and genuine scholarly friendship. As I will show later in this paper, a highlight of the Leiden conference was the intellectual duel between Etienne Balazs and the PRC historians. Balazs, known for his multilingual fluency and sharp dialectical method, engaged the Chinese scholars in fierce debates that, while ideologically charged, were conducted with a level of mutual respect that left a lasting impression on both sides.

The momentum continued at the Paris conference in 1956, where the delegation from Beijing consisted of four high-level scholars. This conference, despite having two honorary chairs of the conference committee, namely Paul Demiéville and Robert des Rotours, was organised by a committee under the leadership of Etienne Balazs, along with Jean Chesneaux, Jacques Gernet, Vadime Elisseeff, and Yves Hervouet. Due to the connection with Balazs, Fernard Braudel also attended this conference and met Sinologists across the globe. Despite the hospitality of organisers like Balazs, political tensions were unavoidable, leading to heated debates over historical interpretation and sovereignty. According to Jian Bozan's report (Jian 1956), this Paris Conference was a major international gathering of 195 participants, with the largest delegations hailing from France, West Germany, and the United Kingdom. Jian specifically tracked the thirteen scholars from the socialist bloc—including representatives from China, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany—reflecting his focus on the ideological balance of the event. A more detailed breakdown by Italian scholar Lionello Lanciotti highlighted the conference's global reach, including attendees from Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the United States (Lanciotti 1956, 262).

By the tenth meeting in Marburg in 1957, the conference of European "Junior Sinologues" had grown to over 100 participants from 15 countries, including scholars from Hong Kong (Jao Tsung-I 饒宗頤, Lo Hsiang-lin 羅香林) and Taiwan (Fang Hao 方豪). However, Mainland Chinese scholars were absent, largely due to Beijing's refusal to participate alongside Taiwanese scholars—a condition the conference organisers rejected on the principle of academic inclusivity. This pattern of absence continued through the 1958

Venice/Padua meetings and the 1959 Cambridge session, often exacerbated by visa delays and the hardening of political lines.[12]

The limits of academic cooperation were reached in 1960. A meeting scheduled for Moscow—intended to follow the International Congress of Orientalists—was abruptly canceled as Sino-Soviet relations soured. This served as a stark reminder of how scholarship remained subordinate to political necessity. By the 13th conference in Hamburg (1961), the fragmentation was complete: scholars from the USSR, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany withdrew at the last minute, and Beijing ignored the invitation. Despite this, this conference maintained its global character with attendees from Poland, Hungary, and the West, including Albert Feuerwerker from the US and Wang Gungwu 王賡武 from London. Despite the fracturing of the Eastern Bloc, these years proved that a global community of Sinologists was indeed emerging, creating a vital space where, even under the shadow of the Cold War, the exchange of ideas remained a powerful aspiration.

As the Conference of Junior Sinologues expanded its geographic reach to include scholars from Asia, the invitation of representatives from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan became a natural progression. Despite the onset of the Cold War and the political "Iron Curtain," Western scholars remained profoundly eager to engage with their counterparts in Mainland China. This desire cut across ideological lines; both left-leaning scholars sympathetic to the socialist bloc and those firmly rooted in the capitalist camp sought dialogue for two primary reasons. First, they were desperate to understand the latest academic developments within China. Second, they sought access to the wealth of new archaeological data and primary materials emerging from the mainland, which were essential for their own historical and cultural research. Consequently, the European and American Sinological communities viewed Chinese scholarship as an indispensable resource for both primary documentation and secondary analysis.

This period of academic curiosity coincided with a sharp ideological divide within the Western intelligentsia, which was then largely dominated by left-wing thought. The Soviet contribution to the victory at the end of World War II, the rise of socialist regimes across Eurasia, and the decolonisation of Asia and Africa were celebrated by many Western intellectuals (Jachec 2015; Tromly 2014; Bonfreschi and Maccaferri 2015). This pro-Soviet and pro-communist tilt was not merely theoretical but had practical institutional consequences; for example, UNESCO, based in Paris, moved quickly in 1950 to expel representatives of the Nationalist government after its retreat to Taiwan.[13]

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[12] Lionello Lanciotti, "The X Conference of Junior Sinologues," *East and West* vol. 8, no. 3 (1957), 281–282.

[13] These representatives included Zhang Xinhai and Cheng Qibao. Zhang and Cheng were forced to exile as research professors at Long Island University afterwards (Chen 2023, 45–60). However, Cheng's son Françoise Cheng refused to leave Paris and later became a student of Paul Demiéville and a celebrated writer in French. For a detailed study on the relations between

The U.S. State Department's China policy had previously been influenced by left-leaning Sinologists, and after the "loss of China" in 1949, these scholars faced intense scrutiny and federal investigations. China experts like John King Fairbank and Owen Lattimore had their passports revoked and were barred from international travel by the CIA and other agencies (Fairbank, 1982; Fried 1997, 1990; Lichtman 2012; Suanders 1999; Wilford 2003). By the mid-1950s, these restrictions began to ease, allowing Fairbank and Lattimore to travel to Leiden for the conference in 1955. Paradoxically, while these Americans were persecuted at home as "red" sympathisers, they were simultaneously being denounced in the PRC as "imperialist cultural spies" and also sharply denounced in the ROC for their betrayal of "Free China." Nevertheless, as Xia Nai revealed in his diary, the Chinese delegation adopted a strategy of "seeking common ground while reserving differences" to win over Western friends, leading to a surprisingly restrained and friendly interaction between the two sides (Xia 2011, 251).

When Jian Bozan and Zhou Yiliang arrived in Leiden in 1955, they formed lasting bonds with Western scholars like Jean Chesneaux and John Chinnery. Chesneaux, a member of the French Communist Party, went so far as to act as a personal guide for the Chinese delegation in Paris in 1956, even greeting them at the airport. However, as Xia Nai indicated (Xia 2011, 259), these interactions were often coloured by political motives; Chesneaux viewed these academic visits as prime opportunities for "political work" and propaganda, lamenting when other delegations failed to coordinate with the Franco-Chinese Friendship Association.[14] Despite this ideological lens, the hospitality shown by French and British leftist scholars provided the Chinese delegation with a vital sense of support in an otherwise unfamiliar Western environment.

For American scholars like Frederick W. Mote, the Leiden conference in 1955 was a deeply personal reunion. A former student of Zhou Yiliang's wife in the Chinese language class for the Army Specialized Training Program at Harvard in 1944, freshly graduated with his PhD from the University of Washington, Mote was eager to reconnect with his old mentor. Invited by Hulsewé to meet the Chinese delegation, Mote spent the duration of the conference serving as an interpreter for Jian Bozan. His memoirs capture the palpable excitement of Western scholars, including Etienne Balazs, who were desperate to integrate China into the international academic community. Balazs famously championed the Chinese presence, even intervening during a heated dispute between Zhou Yiliang and the translator for Hong Kong scholar Lo Hsiang-lin to ensure the "friends from China" had every opportunity to

China and UNESCO in the early Cold War era, see Barrett 2019, 1516–1542.

[14] Chesneaux acquired a lot of academic information about the project of compiling historical sources on modern Chinese history from Chinese scholars and reported to the French scholarly community (Chesneaux 1955, 95–98, 1956, 274–282, and 1958, 384–411).

speak. This period represented a peak of mutual interest, where the desire for academic exchange temporarily outweighed the burgeoning tensions of the Cold War.

Frederick W. Mote's memoir provides a poignant, firsthand account of the human and psychological friction that characterised the Leiden Conference in 1955, illustrating how the geopolitical "Cold War" manifested in personal silence. Mote describes a chilling encounter orchestrated by Hulsewé, where his attempt to warmly greet his old acquaintance Zhou Yiliang was met with a calculated, dismissive coldness. Through Mote's eyes (Mote 2010, 185–189), we see a Zhou Yiliang who was paralysed by "class anxiety" and the watchful presence of Jian Bozan, the delegation's political-academic overseer. Mote perceptively notes that Zhou's desperate attempt to downplay his Harvard education and elite lineage, treating a former student as a mere passing acquaintance because of his American identity, revealed the immense pressure on the PRC's intellectuals to perform ideological purity. This narrative transforms the conference from a mere list of academic papers into a site of profound personal tragedy, where the "battle lines" of the era forced scholars to prioritise political survival over long-standing intellectual and personal friendships.

The presence of Mainland Chinese scholars at the 1955 and 1956 conferences represented a highly structured effort by the newly established academic bureaucracy in Beijing. Although the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) was not formally established as a separate entity until much later, its precursor the Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences within the Chinese Academy of Sciences was founded on June 1, 1955, specifically to oversee such intellectual mobilisations. Under the leadership of Marxist historians like Jian Bozan and Fan Wenlan, the Chinese historical community focused heavily on the massive undertaking of compiling the primary sources on Modern Chinese History in order to reshape the historical narratives of Chinese revolution. This period prior to the Anti-Rightist Movement saw a remarkable flurry of international exchange. Some leading Marxist historians in China reported meeting numerous cultural delegations from Europe and Oceania, though not much that was related to Sinology.

The logistical reality of the PRC's participation in the Junior Sinologues conferences revealed a tension between European academic individualism and the PRC's state collectivism. While European organisers addressed invitations to individual scholars, the Chinese Academy of Sciences acted as the centralised gatekeeper, selecting and organizing the delegations. For the Leiden conference in 1955, the Academy dispatched Jian Bozan and Zhou Yiliang; for the Paris meeting in 1956, the team expanded to include Xia Nai and Zhang Zhilian. This selection was politically strategic. Xia Nai, as Deputy Director of the Institute of Archaeology, was brought specifically to present the new archaeological finds that Western scholars craved, while Zhang Zhilian was selected for his fluency in French to manage finances and translation. The Chinese delegation to Paris in 1956 followed a rigorous travel circuit that underscored the geopolitical realities of the era.

The four-member team first traveled to the Soviet Union for several days of consultation before flying through Prague to reach Paris on August 29, 1956. Their twenty-day stay concluded on September 18, after which they returned via Russia, arriving back in China on September 23. This strategic route through the socialist bloc was a logistical necessity, reflecting the "leaning to one side" foreign policy that defined the early years of the PRC. Upon their return, the conference participants embarked on a high-profile domestic reporting campaign, publishing detailed accounts in major national and academic outlets such as *People's Daily*, *Historical Research*, and the *Journal of Peking University*. These reports indicate that the mission was as much about diplomacy as it was about history. While Jian Bozan focused on disseminating the materialist view of history and advocating for Sino-French friendship, Zhou Yiliang emphasised the importance of mutual cultural exchange and institutional learning. Zhang Zhilian provided the academic community with a systematic overview of the international papers presented, effectively turning a single conference into a comprehensive study of global Sinological trends. Collectively, these writings transformed the Paris trip into a symbolic success, framing the delegation as a bridge-builder between the new China and the Western intellectual world.

However, the collapse of this "global community" was as rapid as its rise. After 1956, domestic political shifts in China, most notably the Anti-Rightist Campaign, it became nearly impossible for the PRC scholars to travel to the West. Regarding the 10th conference in Marburg in 1957, Wolfgang Franke noted that the Chinese authorities insisted on "official delegation" status rather than individual participation, a condition the European organisers found difficult to reconcile with their traditions of academic autonomy. Furthermore, the presence of scholars from Taiwan became a non-negotiable point of contention. The late 1950s signaled the end of the brief "thaw" in Sino-Western academic relations. For the 11th Conference in Padua in 1958, unlike previous years, the PRC scholars did not even send a congratulatory telegram. While a tentative delegation had intended to go, the decision to withdraw was made abruptly in late July.

The final death knell for this era of exchange was the Sino-Soviet Split. The 12th conference in Cambridge in 1959 saw no PRC representation due to "visa delays" which was a common euphemism for political blocking. The most fateful loss was the conference in Moscow in 1960. Following the International Congress of Orientalists, this meeting was intended to be the ultimate showcase of Soviet socialist Sinology (Kemper 2010, 170–210). However, as the ideological rift between Khrushchev and Mao Zedong widened, the PRC withdrew from the conference at the eleventh hour. As Roderick MacFarquhar noted, the international community had been led to expect a massive Chinese delegation, only for them to be met with a total absence. This "extreme disappointment" became the primary topic of conversation among Western delegates at the Hotel Ukraina, marking the end of a unique window of collaboration and the beginning of a long period of academic isolation for the

PRC (MacFarquhar 1960, 114–118). By the 13th conference in Hamburg in 1961, the boycott was nearly total since even Soviet Union, Czechoslovak, and East German scholars declined to attend. The "global Sinological community" that had seemed so within reach in Paris in 1956 had fractured along the lines of the Cold War's deepest divisions.

The two-year window of 1955–1956 remains a "great pity" in the history of Chinese studies. For a brief moment, the Conferences of Junior Sinologues functioned as a truly global forum where Marxist, liberal, and traditionalist scholars could argue in the same room. These meetings allowed for a brief thaw where the humanity of the participants could, for a moment, transcend their ideological labels. The legacy of these meetings, however, did not entirely vanish. The networks established in Leiden and Paris survived in the form of bibliographical projects, such as Piet van der Loon's union catalogue of Chinese books. More importantly, the young "Junior Sinologues" of the 1950s, such as Mote, Gernet, Zürcher, and Twitchett, became the senior leaders of the field in the 1970s and 1980s. When the PRC finally reopened during the "Open Door" era, these scholars were the ones who remembered the "gentle but firm" discussions of the 1950s. They provided the institutional memory that allowed the global Sinological community to rebuild itself, eventually leading to the massive, integrated gatherings of the AAS and EACS we see today. In this sense, the 1950s was not a failed experiment; it was a dress rehearsal for the globalised Sinology of the 21st century.

Conversations and Conflicts within the Globalised European Sinological Community

The main organisers of the 8th Junior Sinologues Conference in Leiden in 1955 were Hulsewé and Zürcher. Hulsewé, renowned for his rigorous work on Han Dynasty law, and Zürcher, then a rising star who would soon publish his Ph.D. dissertation *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, represented a bridge between classical philology and structural historical analysis. The Leiden conference in 1955 functioned as a high-stakes arena where multidisciplinary scholarship collided with Cold War cultural diplomacy. The academic program was remarkably broad, covering a wide range of topics, such as Tang Buddhist festivals and Shang jade carvings, and contemporary Marxist socio-economic analyses of Chinese warlordism and historical periodisation. For example, Cheng Te-k'un 鄭德坤, an archaeologist from Cambridge presented "Jade Carving of the Shang Period;" John Fairbank presented "Problems of Teaching and Research at Harvard;" Jean Chesnaux presented "The Political and Economic Bases of Chinese Militarism 1911–1927;" K. Marks presented "Recent Chinese Theories on Slavery and Feudalism in ancient China;" and E. F. Kovalev presented "Periodization of Modern and Recent Chinese History." However, the true "main

theme" of the gathering was the reintegration of the People's Republic of China into the international academic community.

Through "state-of-the-field" surveys presented by prominent scholars like Jian Bozan and Zhou Yiliang, the Chinese delegation sought to assert the legitimacy of the PRC's historical and archaeological progress. Jian Bozan was scheduled to give two presentations "On the General Conditions of History, Linguistics and Archaeology in the People's Republic of China" and "Economic Background of the Hung Lou Meng." Zhou Yiliang presented "On the History of Asian Peoples." Apparently, as the first-time delegate from the PRC to the Junior Sinologue conference, Jian Bozan was granted a privilege for giving two presentations, which never happened to other scholars in the same conference.

Originally trained as a historian of medieval Chinese history and religions, Zhou Yiliang was assigned by the Chinese state to present on Asian history. Since the breakout of the Korean War, driven by ideological awareness and political pressure, Zhou had shifted his concentration of research to northeast Asian history, Japanese history, and Asian history in general. His expertise in Japanese culture was rooted in a rigorous early education under Kyoto University's Makino Tatsumi 牧野巽 and deepened during his doctoral studies at Harvard under Serge Elisséeff. After returning to China, Zhou transitioned from teaching Japanese at Yenching University to a pivotal role at Peking University following the 1952 institutional reshuffling. Under state directives, he spearheaded the establishment of the Asian History Teaching and Research Section at Department of History, becoming the mastermind of Asian History as a new field. Consequently, by the time he arrived in Leiden, Zhou's academic identity had shifted entirely toward the history of Japan and Asia, providing the professional authority necessary to represent the PRC's new regional research priorities on the international stage with its ambition of leading revolutions across Asia and the development of the decolonisation movement across Asia and Africa (Chen 2022, 282–302).

During the conference Q&A, Jian addressed high-level ideological questions with a cautious but authoritative air. This posture of academic supervision created a rigid environment that directly contributed to the visible unease of his colleague, Zhou Yiliang, whose own expertise was forced to align with Jian's mission of transforming Chinese historical studies into a unified tool for the state's revolutionary narrative. At this conference, Jian Bozan functioned less as a traditional researcher and more as the ideological "guardian" of the PRC's historiography, tasked with defending and disseminating Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy.[15] As Wang Xuedian 王學典 noted, in the early 1950s, Jian posed as the primary interpreter of Maoist historical

[15] Clifford G. Edmunds' MA thesis at the University of Chicago in 1968, *"Bureaucracy, Historiography, and Ideology in Communist China: The Case of Chien Po-tsan, 1949–1958,"* offers a systematic look at how historical scholarship was integrated into the state apparatus; part of this thesis appeared in F. Gilbert Chan, Harlan W. Jencks eds., *Chinese Communist Politics: Selected Studies* (Asian Research Service, 1982), chapter 3.

theory, a position that shifted the focus of his contributions toward political propaganda and the "rectification" of Western academic inquiries (Wang Xuedian 2000, 11–22).

The Leiden Conference became a direct battlefield for the ideological struggle over academic freedom, centred specifically on the PRC's domestic campaign against Hu Shih 胡適. Etienne Balazs and German scholar Tilemann Grimm launched a pointed critique against the Chinese delegation, with Balazs provocatively claiming that the PRC lacked the intellectual liberty to write its own history, going so far as to suggest that figures like Hu Shih would be erased from the record. Jian Bozan, acting in his capacity as the state's ideological guardian, delivered a sharp rebuttal by drawing on the traditional Chinese historiographical precedent of the History of the Song Dynasty. He argued that just as ancient historians had written about both the hero Yue Fei 岳飛 and the traitor Qin Hui 秦檜, so modern Chinese historians would indeed chronicle Hu Shih, albeit with a "realistic evaluation" that might leave some to "stink for ten thousand years" (Zhang Chuanxi, 1996). This exchange illustrates how the domestic "Anti-Hu Shih" campaign in the PRC, which Zhou Yiliang had recently supported by publishing an essay "Western Sinology and Hu Shih 西洋漢學與胡適" in the *Historical Research* (Lishi yanjiu), the journal of the Institute for Historical Research at Chinese Academy of Sciences, was not merely an internal affair but a volatile point of contention that extended the Chinese political front line directly into the heart of European Sinology.

The interaction between the Chinese delegation and American scholars at the Leiden Conference, as detailed in the *Biography of Jian Bozan* (Zhang 1996, 280–283), reveals a landscape of calculated coldness and mediated diplomacy. Initially, Jian Bozan and Zhou Yiliang strictly adhered to a policy of non-engagement with American scholars Owen Lattimore and John K. Fairbank, whom they viewed as ideologically hostile and "unfriendly" toward the PRC. It was only through the persistent mediation of the host, Hulsewé, that a formal introduction was finally broken. During these tense exchanges, Lattimore specifically confronted Zhou Yiliang regarding his recent published critiques of Fairbank as a "cultural agent 文化特務" in his essay against Hu Shih. Lattimore indicated that Zhou's harsh assessments of Fairbank were based on a "misunderstanding." This standoff underscores that even in a neutral setting like Leiden, the personal and professional ties of the past were being systematically severed or re-evaluated through the rigid lens of Cold War political alignment. However, Jian Bozan intervened with a calculated defence, reframing the political attack as a standard exercise in "criticism and self-criticism," a typical Chinese revolutionary rhetoric. Jian asserted that because Fairbank "spoke for American imperialism" and "attacked New China," Zhou's hostility was not a misunderstanding but a necessary ideological correction. By transforming a personal and professional grievance into a matter of national defence, Jian confirmed his role as the "guardian" of Chinese historiography, ensuring that the domestic campaign against Hu Shih and Western influence was projected onto the international stage

as an uncompromising unified front. For many Chinese historians, the defence of Marxist-Leninist principles took precedence over objective historical inquiry.[16]

The Leiden Conference served as a transformative intellectual catalyst for the conference organiser Hulsewé, shifting his trajectory from a specialist in Han law to a key mediator between Western and Chinese Marxist historiography. Deeply influenced by his personal interactions with scholars like Jian Bozan and Zhou Yiliang, later Hulsewé published a landmark article in 1965 that systematically introduced Western academia to the debates of the first generation of Chinese Marxist historians—including Guo Moruo 郭沫若, Fan Wenlan 范文瀾, and Hou Wailu 侯外廬—regarding the social and political nature of the Qin and Han dynasties. While Hulsewé acknowledged the extensive use of newly unearthed bronzes by figures like Chen Mengjia 陳夢家 and categorised the divergent methodologies of non-Marxist scholars such as Qian Mu 錢穆 and Lao Gan 勞幹, his ultimate critique was one of theoretical stagnation. He concluded that these discussions rarely evolved beyond the framework established in Guo Moruo's early works and noted that even within China, scholars like Lei Haizong 雷海宗 had already begun criticizing this rigid historiographical model during the "Hundred Flowers" movement of 1956 (Hulsewé 1965: 78–105).

Interestingly, the Paris conference of Junior Sinologues in 1956 focused on the periodisation of Chinese History. The Chinese delegation presented a coordinated front to showcase the ideological and empirical advancements of the PRC's new scholarship. Jian Bozan delivered the address on the Periodisation of Chinese History, asserting that historical divisions must be defined by the Marxist framework of production relations to accurately reflect China's social nature. This theoretical stance was supported by Zhang Zhilian, who reported on new developments in modern Chinese history, and Zhou Yiliang, who provided a survey of ancient history research on the mainland. Complementing these academic reports, Xia Nai presented a detailed account of recent archaeological excavations, underscored by a massive exhibition of 150 photographs of unearthed cultural relics. Together, these presentations aimed to demonstrate that Marxist theory was not merely an abstract formula but was supported by a rigorous new wave of archaeological and historiographical evidence.[17] This academic output did not go unnoticed across the Taiwan Strait. Li Ji 李濟, the preeminent archaeologist at Academia Sinica in Taiwan, closely monitored the mainland's activities despite Taiwan's absence from the 1955 and 1956 conferences. In a personal communication with K. C. Chang in December 1956, Li Ji asked to obtain a transcript of Xia Nai's presentation at the Paris conference. However, Li Ji's interest was tempered by

[16] Some scholars have discussed the trend of Marxist theory over historical analysis in that era, see Weigelin-Schwiedrzik 1996, 74–95; Wang Xuedian 2000.

[17] Xia Nai's efforts extended beyond the conference; he published a paper "Our Neolithic Ancestors" in the Italian journal *East and West* (Hsia/Xia 1956, 162–167), maintaining a warm professional relationship with Giuseppe Tucci, and Lionello Lanciotti.

professional skepticism; while he was eager to track the data coming out of the mainland, he expressed doubt to Chang as to whether Xia Nai's ideological framing made the speech truly worth the effort of transcription (Li and Chen 2005).

The periodisation of Chinese history emerged as a central theme that engaged nearly every participant at the Paris conference, an occurrence that may be unique in the history of European Sinology. While the Chinese delegation insisted on a rigid periodisation of five-stage social history in China based on socioeconomic relations, a diverse array of international scholars presented counterarguments. Pulleyblank opened the discussion by tracing the terminology of "Ancient, Medieval, and Modern" from traditional Chinese historiography to the influence of Meiji-era Japanese scholars like Naito Konan, who first argued that these periods possessed distinct qualitative characteristics. Hulsewé and Benjamin Schwartz criticised the Marxist model as "formulaic," while Herbert Franke questioned the "meaningfulness" of the Marxist periodisation itself, favoring empirical facts over abstract labels. Hulsewé compared the rigid application of social stages to the "formulaic" error of forcing Chinese grammar into Latin rules. Schwartz launched a sophisticated intellectual assault on the Chinese delegation's ideological foundations and he argued that self-proclaimed Marxist scholars had backed themselves into two equally flawed corners, either viewing China as a stagnant "Asiatic Society" or forcing it into a universal five-stage progression identical to Western history. Most provocatively, Schwartz leveraged his deep knowledge of the Marxist-Leninist canon to argue that neither of these views actually aligned with the core tenets of Marx or Lenin. By citing the "Marxist classics" to dismantle Jian Bozan's claims, Schwartz effectively challenged the PRC scholars' monopoly on Marxist interpretation, transforming the debate from a clash of ideologies into a high-stakes battle over who possessed the true "scientific" authority to interpret history.[18] Soviet scholar Kovalev asserted a "Soviet-centric" position, arguing that the 1917 October Revolution served as the definitive starting line for modern Chinese history. But British scholar Piet van der Loon quickly dismissed this claim by questioning whether such a "unanimous" opinion was based on genuine consensus or institutional coercion. In contrast, Wolfgang Franke argued for the central importance of the 1911 Revolution, which he viewed as a transformative break that swept away two millennia of Confucian monarchical thought. Franke proposed a more nuanced, continuous timeline of revolutionary change, spanning from the 1898 Reforms and the Boxer Rebellion through the May Fourth Movement, culminating in the 1949 establishment of the PRC.

This clash revealed how Soviet academic hegemony sought to anchor Chinese historical progress to Russian milestones, while Western scholars like Franke sought to locate the

[18] This presentation later appeared as "Some Stereotypes in the Periodization of Chinese History." (Schwartz 1968, 219–230 and also reprinted in Schwartz 1996, 18–29)

drivers of change within China's own long-term social and political evolution. Even among those who accepted the concept of stages in Chinese history, such as Lo Hsiang-lin and Wolfgang Franke, the definitions varied significantly from the PRC's orthodoxy claims based on Marxist-Leninist principles. The conflict was notably synthesised by Owen Lattimore during the closing session; he pointed out that papers like those by Arthur Wright (on Buddhism) and Liang Peizhen 梁佩真 (on poetry) proved that cultural and artistic timelines do not neatly align with social history. Lattimore's conclusion—that China's historical path need not mirror the West's and cannot be viewed solely through the lens of economic structures—served as a direct, sophisticated challenge to Jian Bozan's insistence on a singular, production-based historical narrative.

In the concluding discussion, Jian Bozan laid out a five-point defence of Marxist historiography, framing the debate over periodisation as a battle for "scientific truth." He began by dismissing the notion that periodisation was "meaningless" or purely political, arguing instead for a materialist standard of social development over "idealist" or "pluralist" Western theories. Responding to the "slander" that Chinese scholarship lacked freedom, Jian advocated the "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom" policy as evidence of a vibrant academic culture, while simultaneously launching a scathing attack on non-Marxist models, such as Lo Hsiang-lin's theories of "elective" or "civil service" societies. Despite this rigid ideological stance, Jian concluded with a strategic diplomatic overture, inviting international scholars to join the debate; he argued that while their political standpoints differed, a shared commitment to empirical "historical materials" and the pursuit of objective truth would eventually bridge the gap between divergent viewpoints.

It is worth noting that the periodisation theme was not new to the European Sinological community. Even earlier in 1953 when Edwin G. Pulleyblank inaugurated his chair in Sinology at Cambridge, he presented a paper "Chinese History and World History."[19] In his retrospective analysis, Pulleyblank examined the contentious debates surrounding Marxist periodisation of Chinese history, focusing specifically on the evolving definition of the "Asiatic Mode of Production." Pulleyblank traced the lineage of this concept from Soviet scholars—who defined it by a lack of private land ownership and the presence of large-scale irrigation and "Oriental Despotism"—to the German-American scholar Karl August Wittfogel. Wittfogel developed these ideas into a theory of "total power" in his work, *Oriental Despotism* later published in 1957. However, Pulleyblank noted a significant divergence that Wittfogel's view of an "eternal" or stagnant East was rejected by Far Eastern revolutionary movements, including the Chinese Communist Party. For political and ideological reasons, the CCP transitioned from labelling Chinese society "Asiatic" to "Feudal," eventually aligning with Guo Moruo's view that China followed the universal five-stage

[19] This speech was eventually published in 1956 and reprinted in Pulleyblank, 2001, 1–20.

Marxist progression from primitive society to communist society. This shift allowed the CCP to frame its struggle as an "anti-feudal" revolution rather than a fight against a stagnant Oriental system.

Pulleyblank's overview demonstrates that despite his background as a philologist, he possessed a sophisticated understanding of how ideological frameworks shaped Chinese historiography, consistently striving to situate Chinese history within a global, comparative context. In his critique of Chinese historical periodisation, Pulleyblank aligns himself with Karl Popper's critique of historicism, arguing that these Marxist models mistakenly treat human history as a single, organic organism following a predetermined path. He rejects any singular theory that attempts to unify Chinese and Western history under a universal formula, advocating instead for a more fragmented and comparative approach. He proposes two valid methods for integrating China into world history. First, comparing specific historical "fragments," such as Max Weber's analysis of the conflict between Confucian "gentleman" ideals and rational bureaucracy. Second, tracing the tangible historical links and influences between cultures, such as the global impact of China's "Four Great Inventions." In sum, by prioritising philological evidence and diverse historical contexts over rigid evolutionary stages, Pulleyblank asserts that the true value of Chinese history lies in its unique complexities rather than its conformity to Western-centric historical laws.

More broadly, the "Western" bloc's interest in Chinese historical periodisation also had its own intellectual and academic foundations. As early as the 1940s, European and American scholars had begun to focus on the issue of Chinese historical periodisation (Cameron 1946, 171–177). With the start of the Cold War, the ideological struggle became more urgent. The globalisation of the capitalist world-economy and the dominant ideology of capitalism, served as the cornerstone of the ideological dome of historical capitalism, emphasizing modernisation, science and technology, and rationality (Wallerstein 1991, 29–36; Sitton 1996, 226–229; Amin 2009). Intellectually, there was also a "Marxist turn" in Europe and America at the time (Wang and Iggers 2015; Dworkin 1997). As Natalie Zemon Davis noted, after World War II, "The first social wave involved writing history where the main actors were the working people or lower classes-slaves, serfs, peasants, artisans, tradesmen, industrial workers, and more: the menu peuple, as they were called in France and as I named them in the 1950s when I started my doctoral research; 'the exploited or oppressed classes' in Marxist terms; the 'subaltern classes' as they were called by the school of social historians in India in the 1980s" (Davis 2010, 188–202). Although many European and American Sinologists did not politically accept the communist regime or the five-stage historical periodisation theory, their emphasis on economic, social, and labor history was extraordinary, and they achieved significant accomplishments. In the field of ancient Chinese history alone, there emerged a "golden generation" of economic and social historians. Etienne Balazs, Jacques Gernet, and Denis Twitchett, all devoted themselves to the study of medieval

economic history, while Zürcher's research on Buddhism also adopted a social history approach.

The theoretical discussions in the PRC's historical circles at the time centered on the so-called "five golden flowers," which were the periodisation of ancient Chinese history, the forms of feudal land ownership, the issue of peasant wars in Chinese feudal society, the sprouting of capitalism in China, and the formation of the Han ethnicity. Wang Xuedian suggests that these "five golden flowers" emerged from a "wartime historiography" system, which was composed of a wartime historical framework, a wartime academic orientation, a wartime cultural psychology, and a wartime historical concept. This system was heavily influenced by the successive political campaigns of class struggle in China and the international Cold War situation.[20] Wang specifically and meticulously analysed the domestic historical background that produced the "five golden flowers," noting that the historical materialist school, as a historiographical school, has significance in both social and academic history, which echoed the global historical trends of the time, being characterised by the rise of economic and social history.

Based on the development of international academia, the issues of historical periodisation and peasant wars were also clearly influenced by Soviet historiography in Eastern Europe. The topic of historical periodisation, which Soviet historiography focused on based on the Marxist theory of societal development stages (Schlesinger 1952, 152–169; Yaresh 1957, 241–259), was also highly regarded in other socialist countries, such as Yugoslavia and Bulgaria (Vucinich 1951, 41–57; Pundeff 1961, 682–693). This situation was not unfamiliar to European and American scholars. However, among these "five golden flowers," only the issue of historical periodisation sparked sustained debate in international historical circles regarding the social nature and periodisation of Chinese history since the 1950s. This discussion also found a response at the European Conferences of Junior Sinologues. This may have been the first time in the history of Chinese academia that major theoretical and methodological issues received a huge response in the international academic community.

At that time, the debate on the historical periodisation of China can be also found in Japan. When Jian Bozan and Yin Da 尹達 visited Japan with a delegation from the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 1955, Jian Bozan spoke primarily on the issue of Chinese historical periodisation in a lecture organised by six Japanese historical societies on December 7. This sparked intense interest and discussion among Japanese historians such as Shun Suzuki 鈴木俊, Sadao Nishijima 中西進, and Noboru Niida 仁井田陞 (Zhang 1996, 286–287). Later,

[20] Wang Xuedian (2013, 265–279) reviews the origins and development of the major "five golden flowers" debates. He points out that these discussions were influenced by ideology, primarily from two sources: the central authorities' interest in historiography and the preferences and aversions of key leaders. However, he also specifically notes that the so-called Asiatic Mode of Production within Marxist-Leninist historiography was merely Orientalism in red clothing, and the theory of the five modes of production remains a Eurocentric way of thinking.

Suzuki and others edited *The Periodization of Chinese History*, published in 1957, which summarised the discussions with the Chinese historians (Suzuku and Nishijima 1957). On December 21, Jian Bozan and Yin Da held another discussion with Tatsuo Masubuchi 増淵龍夫 and Shigeki Toyama 遠山茂樹 on modern history and ethnic culture. Jian Bozan also gave a lecture introducing historical research in the PRC, mainly discussing the acceptance of the Marxist view of history in Chinese historiographical circles.

Thanks to the PRC's advocacy of the scheme as part of its political strategy, the simplified Chinese character reform was another interesting theme in the Paris conference. Zhou Yiliang presented the PRC's progress on language and literature, distributing pamphlets on the newly proposed simplified character reforms, while Jian Bozan acted as an official envoy for the Committee for Regulating the Chinese Language, delivering a letter—translated into French by Paul Demiéville—to solicit feedback from Western Sinologists. The response from Western scholars was decidedly mixed. On the one hand, many of Western Sinologists strongly opposed Simplified Characters, arguing that they doubled the burden on students who would still need to master traditional characters for classical research. On the other hand, they expressed support for Latinisation as it brought Chinese closer to Western linguistic structures. Jian noted with interest that this was the exact opposite of his experience in Japan, where scholars favored simplification but rejected Latinisation, illustrating how the international reception of China's cultural modernisation was deeply influenced by the specific regional and academic backgrounds of the observers.

Beyond academic exchange, the Paris Conference in 1956 served as a volatile arena for ideological warfare, particularly between the PRC delegation and ethnic Chinese scholars from Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. On September 4, a major confrontation erupted when Lo Hsiang-lin presented a paper on historical periodisation; during the subsequent discussion, Zhou Yiliang delivered an extensive critique centered on the Marxist definition of feudalism. This prompted a sharp intervention from the translator, Ho Kwang-chung 賀光中 from Malaya, who accused Zhou of using his rebuttal time to preach state ideology rather than address the paper's merits. Jian Bozan immediately escalated the conflict, framing Ho's attempt to limit Zhou's speech as an "unbearable" act of hostility against the PRC and threatening a delegation walkout unless the presidium intervened. While the session chair Schwartz and organiser Balazs ultimately allowed Zhou to continue, tensions remained so high that Ho, Lo, and Jao Tsung-i walked out during the following presentation. The political nature of the clash was further cemented behind the scenes as Jian claimed that Balazs privately disparaged Ho to the Chinese delegation, labelling him "extremely reactionary" and a former collaborator with the Japanese occupation, illustrating how personal histories and Cold War allegiances transformed a technical debate into a high-stakes diplomatic standoff.

In a significant shift of tone from his academic reports, Jian Bozan's article in the *People's Daily* published in October 1956 reframed the Paris Conference as a major triumph of

cultural diplomacy rather than a mere scholarly exchange. Moving beyond the fierce ideological debates over periodisation, Jian adopted a highly politicised and optimistic register, characterising the event as a bridge to restoring normalised relations between Beijing and Paris. He specifically lauded the "hospitality and warmth" of (leftist) French Sinologists—noting that regardless of their personal Marxism, they shared a collective desire for cultural and political rapprochement. By highlighting invitations for institutional cooperation from the CNRS and the Ministry of Education in France, Jian positioned the delegation as the vanguard of a new era in Sino-French relations. This strategic narrative suggests that while the academic front line remained rigid, Jian recognised the "friendship" of Western scholars as a vital diplomatic tool to break through China's international isolation and secure future scientific collaboration.

While the Junior Sinologues conferences offered a rare platform for a global academic community, the Paris conference in 1956 laid bare the deep ideological fractures of the Cold War. These tensions were not merely binary clashes between the capitalist West and the socialist East; rather, they manifested as a complex web of internal and external conflicts. These included direct confrontations between the PRC and the Hong Kong/Taiwan delegations, friction between West and East Germany, and sharp disagreements within the Western bloc between leftist scholars and their more conservative peers. Furthermore, the relationship between Western scholars and their Asian political allies remained "subtle" and strained, while emerging Sino-Soviet rifts began to compromise socialist solidarity, eventually leading to Chinese boycotts of major congresses in Moscow. Ultimately, the conference served as a microcosm of global instability, where academic discourse was frequently eclipsed by the volatile politics of a divided world.

Conclusion

The early development of the Junior Sinologues conferences represented a remarkable anomaly in the Cold War landscape, evolving from a regional gathering of six Western European universities into a premier global forum. By 1956, the conference had expanded to include prominent scholars from the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan, and the PRC, briefly becoming the world's largest platform for Chinese studies. This expansion hinted at the emergence of a truly global academic community, facilitated by a temporary "Golden Age" of Chinese outward engagement in the mid-1950s and a post-Stalin Soviet openness to international exchange. However, this fragile unity was soon shattered by geopolitical turbulence. The Sino-Soviet split led to the cancellation of the Moscow conference and Chinese absences in 1960, while the PRC's internal Anti-Rightist Movement restricted its

scholars from traveling after 1957. Simultaneously, the ideological divide caused the Eastern Bloc to boycott meetings in West Germany, effectively stifling the momentum toward a stable, integrated global community.

Despite its short duration, the Paris Conference in 1956 stood as a "miracle" of international exchange, specifically through its focus on the periodisation of Chinese history. This theme reflected a global leftward tilt in academia that prioritised economic and social history, allowing Chinese Marxist historiography and new archaeological findings to exert a profound influence on Western and Japanese scholars. The resulting international debate on Chinese social history far surpassed the scale and depth of the 1930s debates (Dirlik 1989), involving a sophisticated cross-pollination of ideas between Marxist-Leninist frameworks and Western empirical methods.

This phenomenon was a unique product of the early globalisation of scholarship, where political, ideological, and academic forces converged to create a brief "dawn" for a global academic community. Though this dawn was fleeting, it served as a vital precursor to the large-scale international academic cooperation that would eventually re-emerge in the post-Cold War era.

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