

A Preliminary Reflection on the Research Methods of History

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Abstract:

History is a discipline with a specific object of human activities in time, and "history", as the object of history research, possesses the characteristics of Oneness and Absence, which makes the understanding of the disciplinary object, method, paradigm and characteristics of history inseparable from the methods and achievements of psychological research. The essence of the research object of history is change and development which is the past that is human-centered, motivated and purposeful, and still has influence on today and future, with the endowment of certain value for human beings. History not only needs to verify specific historical truth based on historical records, but also reasonably understand or explain it. Therefore, during the research, researchers should not only apply logical method rationally, but also pay attention to the value and function of understanding method in the historical aspect, and put various methods into rational use under the guidance of historicism principle. Through the long-term development, the research paradigm of history has no longer emphasized the authenticity of historical records, but emphasizes the interpretation of historical sources centered on problems, forming the basic structure of "problem-collection-textual research-understanding-causal analysis-situational insight-expression", and reasonably implements the guiding role of theory in the process of interpretation. The achievement of history research is finally formed with the characteristics of temporality in nature, humanism in goal orientation and narrative in external expression.

Keywords: History, Disciplinary object, Disciplinary method, Discipline paradigm, Discipline features

I. INTRODUCTION

Even though history originated very early, for a long time, it has been only a kind of knowledge, not an independent and specialized discipline in Europe until the middle and late 19th century that history "The uniqueness of historical facts lies in that they are different from the present facts. The present facts have a certain nature of presence which historical facts do not possess, while historical facts are essentially absent and absent from the present." The so-called "history"--- such practical activities of human society, have become an outmoded feature of history and cannot reoccur in any way. This makes people can't learn the research object directly like they do to natural science, but only through the trace left by history, that is, historical records to carry on indirect cognition, which inevitably brings the sense of alienation to history. Secondly, historical events, phenomena and characters are the objects of history research, but these are not

all, researchers need to study more about the motivation behind promoting the development and change of human beings, which requires the emotional and spiritual connection between the research subjects and the research objects. Because of the uniqueness of historical research objects, the understanding of historical research objects, research methods, research paradigms and research characteristics is inseparable from the reference of psychological research methods and achievements.

II. IN-DEPTH STUDY TOWARDS THE DISCIPLINARY OBJECTS OF HISTORY

The research object of history is "history". What is "history"? The common-used expression is "the past" or "past events". In fact, this expression only answers "what history has", but does not answer "what the history is". Thus, further inquiry is needed. What is "the past"? As is known to us all, past, present and future are three dimensions of time; and what is "time"? There is no time in nature, and then human beings created it to measure change. The essence of time is generation and becoming. Changes are always included in the passage of time, and the passage of time is always included in changes. Only when things change can we realize the passage of time and "the past". Therefore, **history is the past**, which is rooted in temporality, and the essence of "history" is change and development. In order to accurately display and measure this change, it must be placed in a time frame, thus "history" is related to "the past" or "time". But on the contrary, **"the past" is not equal to "history"**. If things have not changed or only periodic, predictable changes, then the past is only the past not included in history:

But the natural process is not historical; since nature has no history. All natural processes are cyclical, which means that nature is a cycle, and nothing is constructed or built through the repetition of this cycle. Every sunrise, every spring, every high tide is the same as the last one. Because the cycle repeats itself, the laws governing it remain unchanged [1].

Nature only experiences time, not history. The real history does not repeat itself; the historical movement is not an endless cycle, but consistent developments and changes. The ancients had been acutely aware of the difference between these two kinds of changes, Wang Bo wrote in *Poetry for Pavilion of Prince Teng* that "idle clouds shadowing in pool day and night, things change with stars moving for several autumns. Where is the emperor of the pavilion now? We can only see the Yangtze River outside the threshold flowing by itself." The Yangtze River outside the threshold flows day and night, seeming to change but actually not, only with time passing; However, the characters in the pavilion have experienced history, and already pasted away, remaining the pavilion unchanged.

However, individuals are subtle and the life is limited, while this imperfection exactly drives people to change and develop, thus, creating history. It is no wonder Jaspers sighed with relief: "Why can there be history? Because people are limited, imperfect, and can never be perfected...the imperfect and historic properties of human beings are the same thing" [2], once there is no human participation, history will completely retrogress into pure natural events, that is, eternal terminated state. **Therefore, the change of history research is driven by human motivation and purpose:**

Purpose is the factor of human beings in history, without which things themselves will never create history. The so-called history is made by mankind that are, driven by their purposes as well. People strive to achieve his goal by means of tools, which cultivates history. Things in nature are independent of and unrelated to human beings, while things in the historical world are the means by which human beings achieve their own goals. They are not independent of human beings, but integrated with them [3].

Like the monsoon in the Mediterranean Sea, running for a long time with circulation, it was not until Philip II's influence on shipping and real involvement in the development of history in the 16th century that included in the scope of history study by Braudel, for even though the monsoon itself had no history, people influenced by the monsoon were constantly creating history. The interaction of events, no matter important or subtle, driven by people's purpose and changing with time, make the development of history more complicated, but fundamentally, history is not a special personality that human beings use as a tool to achieve his own goals, but the activities of those who pursue their own goals.

However, not all human-related changes will be noticed. History is concerned with the past of present, that is, **the past connected with the reality and still having an impact on the future.** "*History is not only the past, but also a whole of beings that are connected with events and functions throughout the past, present and future and the evolution in time*" [4]. If the past changes have collapsed in the river of history, then, no matter how earth-shaking it is, it still won't be included in history. In other words, **history is the past that has some realistic meaning**, with certain values to mankind. Only in this way, the study of history as a kind of social practice can have value, exist and develop. Undoubtedly, the connections between these past events and the reality, and the significance to the reality, are often complex and diverse:

For example, Karl argues that, although millions of people had crossed the Rubicon River, historians would only be interested in Caesar's crossing because it affected the course of history. But by the 1980s, it turned out to be untrue: social historians would have been more interested in the millions of civilians crossing the river, including the transportation patterns revealed by their repeated crossing; Economic historians will be interested in trade patterns and river crossings for millions of people; Medical historians will be interested in the diseases that these river-crossing people transmit and infect on the road, and so on [5].

The demand of reality drives historians to look at the past from different perspectives and explore the values contained therein. For the same thing, the meaning and revelation obtained may also be quite different with different focus. The historical facts that do not have values in history may have values in historiography, thus playing an important role in the historical interpretation. History is memory, and we not only know it, but also live according to it. If we do not want to become nihilistic, but want to acquire part of humanity, history is the foundation that has been laid, continuing to restrain us, even in the future, we will continue to live in this way.

To sum up, what is "history" as the object of history research? The essence of history is change and development. History is the past, while the past is not equal to history. The past belonging to history is

human-centered, affected by their motivation and purpose, and still has influence on reality and future, by endowing human beings with certain value.

III. RENEWAL OF DISCIPLINARY METHODS OF HISTORY

The disciplinary method is the bridge to achieve the disciplinary objective. *"It is the dual function of history to make people understand the past society and increase the power to grasp today's society"* [6]. In order to achieve this function, the restoration of the past is the foundation. Therefore, the historiography method is the method of knowing the "real" past based on historical records. "Authenticity" here is divided into two parts: one is to affirm the specific historical truth according to historical records, that is to say, to obtain historical facts; On the other hand, rational understanding or interpretation of specific historical facts should follow logistics and cognition, which can be regarded as a weakened authenticity. Therefore, historiography methods can also be roughly divided into technical methods and guiding methods. The method of obtaining historical facts from historical records is called technical method. The technical methods are basically logical methods, mainly inductive and deductive methods of formal logic, including historical record collection, textual research, identification, historical event analysis, reasoning method, historiography compilation and expression, etc. The guiding method is used to understand and explain historical facts, which is the theoretical principle used by researchers to guide themselves in judging and reasoning, and directly related to the historical view held by researchers. It can be divided into experienced empathic historical understanding methods, such as intuition, insight, imagination, concentration, projection, empathy and spirituality, etc. And empirical law or scientific theory interpretation methods, including class analysis, structural analysis, psychological analysis, quantitative analysis and so on. The technical method and the guiding method constitute the historiography method together. Although they are emphasized in different research stages, and they can not be separated completely. This is not to say that historical facts can be obtained by guiding methods and explanations can be formed by technical methods, for historical research as practice is a process of continuous circulation and spiraling upward as a whole. The identification of historical facts promotes the formation of interpretation, while the form of interpretation further clarifies the meaning of historical facts. The two interact and are inseparable. There is no way to talk about interpretation without historical facts, and interpretation cannot be transformed into evidence without interpretation of historical facts.

The historiography methods are not unique after division, since many specific methods of it are drawn from other disciplines: induction, comparison, analysis and synthesis are typical methods of natural science. Imagination, experience and empathy are often related with the humanities, but when these methods are applied to the study of historiography, their uniqueness are lost and integrate as a monolithic method of historiography, which plays a link role in the principle of historicism. All specific methods of historiography must be combined with the principles of historicism. As the methodology of historiography research, historicism is a very complex concept. Mandelbaum in the *MacMillan Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defined "historicism" as:

Historicism is the belief that we can only obtain a proper understanding of the nature of any event and

its value in light of its place in a given development and its role in it [7].

That is, to put things in a time frame with its occurrence, development, extinction as the core to understand and grasp the methodological proposition. Therefore, the development process of human history is continuous and inheriting, and the general trend is rising and advancing, all historical things are in a specific historical development stage, all are the products of specific historical environment; all have a historical process of continuous occurrence, development and extinction restricted and influenced by complicated historical factors around. Only by analyzing its special historical relation from its period can we understand and know it.

The historical understanding method plays a unique role in the historiography method, which restricts the depth of historical research. On the one hand, limited by records, the researchers can not understand the past with insufficient historical records. In this case, they have to restore the complicated past depending on imagination and reasoning. Historians can't "annihilate" a section of history actively because of the vacancy of historical records, but must give full play to the historical imagination and find connections with any possibility. On the other hand, history should not only study what happened in the past, but also find out why it happened and what impact it had. The past and the present are different from each other, while the people here and there are connected. Only by holding the attitude of "understanding sympathy", the researchers can only understand their words and deeds and motives by means of experience, empathy, imagination and so on, and placing themselves in the position of historical figures, feeling their situations and thinking as they did. Similarly, the past institutions, ideas, trends, etc. should be understood in this way, connecting the past to the present and turning the strangers into familiar ones. Therefore, the historians won't only obtaining historical facts through historical records, but to further develop rational imagination and reasoning, and to immerse themselves into the hearts of the historical parties to discover the motives of their actions on the basis of mastering these facts as more as possible.

Assuming that he was reading The Code of Theodosius, before him are an imperial decree, reading these words and being able to translate them do not mean understanding their historical significance. In order to do so, he must see through the emperor's way clearly the situation which the emperor was trying to deal with, and then he must figure out how to deal with such a situation by himself as if he is the emperor in such situation; He must see the possibilities and the reasons for choosing one rather than the other, so that he must go through the process that the emperor went through in deciding on this particular approach. Therefore, it was in his own mind that he experienced what the emperor had experienced; and it was only when he did that that he had a real historical knowledge of the meaning of that decree, unlike mere linguistic knowledge [8].

Just reading these words and being able to translate them does not mean understanding their historical significance. To understand the historical significance of these historical facts, that is, the role of historical facts in the development and change of history, we must not only "see clearly the situation that the emperor was trying to deal with", that is, to put themselves in the situation of those historical events and make the information obtained contextualized. And " must look at it just as the emperor saw it", that is, to go into the

heart of a historical figure, finds out all possible choices from his situation, difficulties and goals he pursues, and justifies his final choice, that is to say, look for the reasons from the historical figure himself. Historical events and phenomena are emotionless, but the people who promote the occurrence and development of historical events and phenomena contain invigorating thoughts and emotions. Behind the seemingly identical historical representations, the ideological motivations of historical figures are quite different. Without empathizing experience and mechanically talking about things, we can only know that history is in this way, but can not know why history is in this way, and then we cannot truly understand history. The method of historical understanding is not limitless imagination, but the pointing speculation based on the existing arguments in a specific situation, which is to "reoccur it in his own knowledge structure;" therefore, when it is repeated, he criticizes it, forms his own judgment on its value and corrects mistakes he can identify in it, that is, the embodiment of critical thinking and an indispensable method to excavate the intrinsic development motive force of historical events.

What should be noted is that both technical and guiding methods must be guided by the principles of historicism. Taking Dong Zhongshu's theory of telepathy between God and human beings as an example, if we look at it from the present perspective, "*God also has the emotion of joy and anger, as well as sorrow and delight, like human beings. That's the basis to achieve the telepathy*" [9]. Although it sounds ridiculous today, the public at that time totally believed that. On the one hand, Dong Zhongshu maintained imperial power and the stability of a unified country by transforming ethical norms into political order. On the other hand, "*God does not create the people for the emperor, but cultivates the emperor for the people. Therefore, if emperors' virtue is enough to make people happy, then God will save them; if emperors' evil is enough to harm the people, then God will perish them*" [10], that is, harness the expansion and deterioration of the imperial power, the people must submit to the emperor, and the emperor must submit to God, so that they can finally achieve the purpose of protecting the people. To understand the value of this set of theories, and give a correct evaluation of it, historical examination to this set of theories is a must.

IV. DEVELOPMENT OF DISCIPLINARY PARADIGMS OF HISTORY

Disciplinary paradigms are the rules accepted and followed by all researchers, including the definition of disciplinary characteristics, the "discourse system" used in research, and the common methods of forthing and answering questions. The fundamental task of history is to restore the original appearance of history, so the paradigm of history can be traced back to Lank's "truthful book" at the earliest:

History is considered to have the function of judging the past and guiding the present for the future. But this book does not dare to expect to fulfill such a significant goal. It is merely intended to state what really happened...to state the facts accurately, although it may be boring and without logical necessity, but it is undoubtedly the supreme principle [11].

The truth of the past is contained in historical records. As long as historians can combine critical study of authoritative documents, unbiased understanding, and objective narration, and they can also reveal

objective truths like natural scientists, so that certain aspects or fragments of the past can be presented automatically. According to different sources, Frank divides historical records into first-hand historical ones and second-hand historical ones, which are indispensable for historical research. First-hand historical ones are works written by the parties involved in the event, mainly including official archives, memoirs, diaries, letters, diplomatic reports and witness accounts, which are authentic and true; Other non-personal experiences or documents transferred from other people's works are second-hand historical ones which are questionable and need to be verified. In Lank's view, history is always written by different people over and over again, making historical events themselves ambiguous and complicated. There is nothing to help us understand past history except to return to the original first-hand historical records, for these records include the concern for the certainty of facts, the accuracy of details, the authority of people's accounts at that time, especially the opposition to mixing personal emotion and prejudice into historical interpretation, which ultimately separated historiography from legends, literature and philosophy.

In the 20th century, Lank's belief was questioned to some extent: because events in the past could not be single-dimensional and occurred successively, the causal relationship between events must be complex and diverse, so only the comprehensive history is real, because if the subjective creation of historians is excluded, hinders the presentation of the past history will be hindered as well. Only by letting historians select historical records in their research, ask questions and organize historical research centering on raising questions and answering questions instead of expecting the historical records to speak on their own initiative. Only then can they really understand the past and construct the bidirectional relationship between the past and the reality:

It used to be said that let the facts speak themselves. Of course, this is not true. Facts can speak only when historians want them to speak; it is up to historians to decide which facts are spoken, in what order, or in what context...The belief that historical a fact is objectively independent of the historian's interpretation is a fallacy, which still hard to be eradicated [12].

Historians are active in the process of historical records selection and interpretation. "Strictly speaking, the historical imagination is not decorative but structural [13]", the "reappearance" or "repetition" of the past is regarded as the result of the interaction between historical records and historians.

However, since 1960s, with the emerging of linguistic turn, the new post-modern historiography completely denies the relationship between historical records and the real past, thus disintegrating the scientificity of history. Post-modern historiography does not deny the authenticity of any past, but this real past cannot be touched, except with the aid of historical records; However, historical records, whether documentary or records in kind, are not the real past, but man's imitation of the past, just like the relationship between scenery and paintings; Historians then rely on historical records, especially the use of plot settings or narrative structures in order to explain history, that is to say, writing stories based on scenery paintings inevitably brings their own thought in the stories. Thus, as Hayden White says, our so-called "history" is actually a kind of relationship with "the past" by means of a kind of specially written discourse, in other words, history is not equal to the past, but written words; Moreover, history can only be

written first, and then people can relate to the past through reading and understanding, so far historical research no longer has the ability to reproduce the truth of the past, but just has been equated with literary creation. The difference between historical works and literary works is only being the writers. All the work of historians is to create texts (historical works) based on texts (historical records). In deconstructionist historiography, the linguistic characteristics of historical records as texts are highlighted:

The quest for pure, unprocessed records to provide newer and truer views is doomed to disappointment. There is no unprocessed history; once an object or document has been identified as a historical record, it has profoundly reflected a cultural system [14].

First of all, historical records are produced as texts, which are the products of a cultural system. The producers use the language rules of that cultural system to hide common sense and ideas in that cultural system; the identification of text, as historical records, must also be subject to the user's background and their own cultural background. With the continuous development and perfection of historiography, the basic paradigm of contemporary historiography can be summarized briefly as follows:

1. *To study the process of formation and change of things, not in the static state;*
2. *Possession a large amount of historical records first and find out problems through sorting and interpreting. This process is also a process in which potential realistic problems are gradually clarified through unconscious reading;*
3. *Carry out the research in the problem-centered way, pay attention to the question of "how is in reality" and "why it is like this", put the problem in the concrete historical situation;*
4. *Pay attention to the criticism towards historical records with evidence.*
5. *Any argument is extracted from historical records rather than from predetermined concepts or assumptions;*
6. *Theory is a tool to study history, which must meet the need of historical explanation. It should not only avoid replacing history with theory or taking theory as evidence, but also avoid using theory to tailor historical facts, put historical facts forcefully into the established theoretical framework, or deliberately extend and forcibly generalize historical facts;*
7. *The emphasis of historiography research is on the discussion of concrete historical process, not the explanation of abstract theory or mode;*
8. *Argumentation must conform to general thinking logics;*
9. *Take textual research, narration and analysis as the main methods, complementing with analysis and*

description, promote the order of description by analysis, strengthen the sense of analysis with description, and construct the historical explanation of analysis and narrative blending together;

10. *The language used must be neutral and accurate.*

The above-mentioned historical paradigm can be summarized as "problem-collection-textual research-understanding-causal analysis-situation entering-expression". As the backbone of historiography structure, the paradigm of history runs through the whole process of historiography research, which standardizes how to use historical methods to analyze historical objects, generate new historical knowledge and promote the development of historiography.

V. CONCLUSION

The disciplinary characteristic is the explicit of the disciplinary thinking. Compared with other disciplines, the most outstanding characteristics of history discipline are as follows:

Timeliness is the essential characteristic of history. History studies events of the past, which is the development and change of things in the dimension of time. The beginning and the end are both in time, and time is the basis for establishing causality within and between events. On the one hand, tracing back the evolution of the continuity of social things is the most important way to understand the nature of this thing. Only by doing concrete and dynamic analysis in the specific space-time environment can we accurately grasp the appearance and essence of events. On the other hand, the isolated events are meaningful only when they are placed in the time series, and the events present different meanings and values in different time and space frames. Without special space-time conditions, it is difficult to understand any historical phenomenon and its influence on us today and even in the future. In addition, different time concepts also directly affect the understanding of historical development and the writing form of historiography achievements.

Humanism is the goal orientation of history. The historical process is not the process of simple event, but is also a process of thought under the surface of event. Therefore, historians should not only seek to revise historical facts, but also answer the humanistic motive of promoting the change and development of historical facts, even to probe into and reconstruct the values and significance of historical events. Studying the traces left behind can only restore historical facts. In order to understand history, we need direct contact with past life and activities. In the face of past life activities, we must invest in feelings, experience and put ourselves in a position to truly understand and feel. The essence of historical cognition is self-cognition and reflection of human beings. What historiography fundamentally pursues is not declassification but cleverness, that is, the interpretation of human behavior, motive and meaning on the basis of common sense. The declassification of nature is directly used to control and utilize the natural force, while cleverness changes the world indirectly by explaining how the world changes man's ideas and behaviors. Therefore, on the basis of seeking truth, historiography also asks for beauty, attention and understanding of individuals or groups, and pursuit of human values, dignity and freedom.

Narrative is the expressive characteristic of history. Narrative and individualism are two sides of one coin. In the course of history, there is no natural consistency between things, so it is impossible to do typicality study, let alone pursue the universal and effective connection and law of things and phenomena like science. History "does not want to sew a set of standard clothes suitable both for Paul and for Peter, that is to say, they want to explain reality from the individualism, since reality is never prevailing, but always individual". In history, individualism cannot be categorized or reduced; instead, each individual expands our particular understanding of a particular history. Because history is not measured by the ever-deepening understanding of laws, it pays attention to the variety and richness of what happens on specific occasions. Therefore, on the one hand, everyday words become the working language, and there are few professional terms and concepts created or exported by itself; On the other hand, it takes documentary narration as its main form of expression to facilitate the construction of images of the past society. As the objective reality independent from any theory or method, human society from ancient to modern times has formed the basis for the narrative existence of history, which also enables history to retain its independence and can even embrace the theories and methods of other disciplines.

History is a discipline with a specific object of human activities in time. On the level of experience and cognition, history shows us the diversity of human existence and provides rare and non-renewable spiritual resources for the creation of new life of human beings through different life practices such as nationality and culture. On the level of thinking, it helps people understand things from the angle of time, construct the relations among the past, present and future, and then complete the self-cognition and orientation in the course of historical development and the critical thinking of realistic problems; On the individual level, it is the hermeneutics aiming at grasping or leading to the uncertain spiritual world of human beings; On the group level, it is a way for human beings to plan for the future through studying the past in reality; On the social level, it is the discipline to explain the history of mankind and its law. In order to do well in the study of history, drawing lessons from the research methods and achievements of psychology is indispensable.

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