

Wu Yujin and the Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of History—the significance of his Introduction to the World History Discipline in China

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Introduction¹

The following text by Wu Yujin 吴于廑 (1913-1993) is an introduction to the *Encyclopedia of China – Volume on Foreign History* (1990) that reflects the first authoritative definition of world history in Chinese academia after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Defining world history as the history of the integrated world (*shijie de zhengti lishi* 世界的整体历史) its task is to synthesize local and regional histories by combining vertical and horizontal dimensions of historical development.² This definition is reproduced in the introduction to the six-volume textbook series *World History* (*Shijieshi* 世界史) that Wu co-authored with Qi Shirong 齐世荣 in 1994.³

Wu Yujin, a member of the Jiusan Society, had studied at Harvard University during the 1940s where he received his MA in 1944 and submitted his Ph.D. thesis, titled “Kingship and Law in Feudal China; an inquiry into the nature of kingship and law in feudal China in the light of a comparison with Kingship and Law in feudal Europe (封建中国的王权和法律)” in 1946 (submitted under his birth name Wu Pao-an 吴保安).⁴ After the return to China in 1947 he became professor of history at Wuhan University

¹ I thank Fan Xin (State University of New York Fredonia) for proposing this text for translation and for discussing its first draft. I also thank Annika Kaßler and Maren Wicher for their aid in providing sources and formatting. Funding for this paper has been provided by the Volkswagen Foundation for the project “Writing History with China” (2021-28) for which I express my gratitude.

² Wu Yujin. “Shijie lishi” [World history]. *Zhongguo dabaiké quanshu: Waiguo lishi juan*, Part I [Encyclopedia sinica: Volume on Foreign History, Part 1]. Beijing: Zhongguo dabaiké quanshu chubanshe, 1990.

³ “Zongxu” [Preface]. In *Shijie lishi: Gudaishi bian: shang juan* 世界史 古代史编 上卷 [World history: Vol. 1, Ancient World History], ed. Wu Yujin 吴于廑 and Qi Shirong 齐世荣. Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994, pp. 1-31.

⁴ The Ph.D. thesis was influenced by Charles Howard McIlwain (1871-1968), a professor for Western political thought at Harvard University, as Wu states in his autobiographic text of 1983. McIlwain, an American historian and political scientist who won the Pulitzer Prize for History in 1924, had pursued a legal career before becoming an assistant professor of history at Harvard University in 1911. Two of his important works are *The Growth of Political Thought in the West: From the Greeks to the End of the Middle Ages* (1932) and *Constitutionalism Ancient and Modern* (1940).

before taking over the office as vice president of the university and the Director of the Institute of World History (世界史研究所) after the foundation of the People's Republic. He was elected secretary of the Chinese Research Association of Medieval World History (中国世界中世纪史研究会), and the first two Presidents of the China Association for the Study of Ancient World History (中国世界上古史研究会). Wu became a party member only after the Cultural Revolution in 1979.⁵

In 1962, Wu had published together with Zhou Yiliang (who had received his PhD from Harvard University for a thesis on Tantrism in China)⁶ the textbook series *General History of the World (Shijie tongshi)*. It followed the Stalinist model of five stages of world history according to which humankind develops from primitive (communal) society and slavery to feudalism, capitalism, and socialism (ultimately communism). However, it was influenced by the Soviet world view and historical materialism to such an extent that there were a number of questionable claims, such as the fact that ancient world history was first and foremost a history of class struggle between slaves and slave-owners (as stated in the preface).⁷ In addition, China does not appear as an object of analysis, even though its neighboring countries such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam are included, thereby strengthening the separation of China from world history.

The textbook was also influenced by Geoffrey Barraclough's *History in a Changing World* (1955). Both Wu Yujin and Zhou Yiliang regarded the work of the British historian to be a necessary corrective to Eurocentrism, which is reflected in the *General History of the World*. Consisting of four volumes it became the first comprehensive work on world history in China whose definition of the concept was included in the *Encyclopedia*. While closely following the Soviet model of world history Wu Yujin pointed to its serious flaws, with the most prominent one being its Eurocentrism, both in scope and in its analytical scheme, as a text published a few years later (still during the Cultural Revolution) clarified in detail:

⁵ About Wu's academic life see Li Zhizhan 1994 "Wusi fengxian kaituo jinqu—Shenqie huainian Wu Yujin laoshi". *Shixue lilun yanjiu*, 3: 5-15; as well as Tao Delin 陶德麟 (1993): *Xuexi Wu Yujin jiaoshou de xueshu kaituo jingshen* 学习吴于廑教授的学术开拓精神, in: *Wuhan Daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)*, no. 4, pp. 3-5. A longer autobiography dating from 1982 is published under the title *Wu Yujin zizhuan* 吴于廑自传 in *Jinyang xuekan*, no. 4, 1983, pp. 76-80.

⁶ Chou Yi-liang. "Tantrism in China." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 8, no. 3/4 (1945): 241-332. Accessed June 28, 2021. doi:10.2307/2717819.

⁷ Zhou Yiliang 周一良 and Wu Yujin 吴于廑 (1962): *Shijie tongshi* 世界通史. Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, pp. 1-6.

“欧洲中心论者是以欧洲为世界历史发展中心的。他们用欧洲的价值观念衡量世界一切。在欧洲文明发生以前，所有其它文明都只是它的准备；在它发生以后，全世界的历史又必然受它支配和推动，是它的从属品。他们把世界分为文明的欧洲和落后的非欧洲。虽然后者是前者在经济上事夺的对象，资本主义国家为此不知发动多少次的战争，但在世界历史上，这一大片落后的非欧洲，却是可有可无，即使被写进历史，也不过是聊备一目，用以反衬欧洲的进步和文明。只有欧洲历史才具有推动全人类进步的意义——这种观点支配着近代西方资产阶级的历史思想和世界史的编纂，也支配了那些向西方鹦鹉学舌的史家。”⁸

"Eurocentrists are those who take Europe as the center of world historical development. They measure everything in the world by the European system of values. Before the emergence of European civilization, all other civilizations were only its preparatory steps; after its emergence, the history of the world was necessarily dominated and driven by it, and was subordinate to Europe. They divided the world into a civilized Europe and a backward non-Europe. Although the latter is the object of the former's economic seizure, and capitalist countries have waged many wars for this purpose, in the history of the world, this large part of non-Europe that is lagging behind is dispensable, and even if it is written into history, it is just a preparation for the progress and civilization of Europe. Only European history has the significance of advancing all mankind - a view that dominates modern Western bourgeois historical thought and the compilation of world history, as well as those historians who parrot the West."

He was convinced that true world history is more than the addition of national or regional histories (Wu Yujin 1978), pointing to the need to view world history as a macro-history that focuses on entanglements. Increasing mutual exchanges in ideas, trade, and mobility of people followed the Marxist pattern of historical development. The innovative character of the *General History of the World*, however, resided in the fact that in contrast to earlier works on world history it dedicated one-third of its pages to Asia, Africa, and Latin America (the “third world”), more than ever before in Chinese

⁸ Wu Yujin 1964: 44.

publications. In 1994, when a new version of the book was published under the title *World History (Shijieshi)* in collaboration with Qi Shirong 齐世荣 (1926-2015) this relation was shifted in quantity, resulting in a history that again gave more attention to the first than to the third world (according to Xu Luo this would render the 1994 book more Eurocentric than its predecessor.⁹ What changed was the emphasis on revolution as the primary historical moving force. Wu and Qi presented the agricultural and industrial revolution as the fundament of historical development, and not political revolutions of the past: neither the English Bourgeois Revolution nor the October Revolution received much or any attention in the book.¹⁰ Such interpretation was in line with the changes caused by the economic development of China since the 1980s, that is increased integration of China into the world markets that was the cause and effect of economic growth in the country. Seeing the world as an interconnected whole Wu wrote numerous articles in the 1980s and early 1990s that interpreted the progress of material production and the movement from scatteredness to totality as proof of Marxist theories of world history and social development.¹¹

Proposing to combine vertical development, or *zongxiang fazhan* 纵向发展, and horizontal development, or *hengxiang fazhan* 横向发展, in a dialectical relation Wu Yujin combined in his total history both time and space. The first notion sees history occurring in chronological evolution, while the second one emphasized the growing interaction and connectedness of different regions and countries across the globe, as shown in Wu's entry to the *Encyclopedia of China*. It goes without saying that the latter notion can not only easily be reconciled with globalization, but even more is still adhering to the writings of Marx and Engels. At the same time, Wu's emphasis on socio-economic developments as a driving force of the total or integral history realigns his own early training in economic history at Harvard. The identification of the 15th and 16th centuries as a central watershed of the early modern and modern era where horizontal links emerged rapidly led to the establishment of a research center at Wuhan University (when he was vice president at the university) that was dedicated to the world history of these two centuries.

⁹ Xu Luo 2007. The new version was published posthumously as Wu had died one year before. In how far his untimely death impact the finalization of the book is unclear.

¹⁰ See the discussion in Sachsenmaier 2011: 214-215.

¹¹ The most important and influential ones were Wu Yujin 1983, 1984, 1987, 1993.

Although references to Marx and Engels are quite common in Wu Yujin's publications both before and after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and despite his focus on patterns of socio-economic development, he acknowledges influences from Geoffrey Barraclough, L.S. Stavrianos, and Arnold Toynbee, among others, in the effort of combating Eurocentrism in world history research.

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General Introduction

Wu Yujin 吴于廑

Translated by Joseph CIAUDO

World history is an important sub-field of the history discipline. It is concerned with systematically investigating and describing the development of human history and showing how primitive, isolated, and scattered human groups eventually succeeded in developing a globally interconnected totality. The main goal of world history as a discipline is to comprehensively examine the history of all regions, countries, and peoples from a global perspective, and to study and clarify the evolution of human history by building on insights from other relevant disciplines, such as cultural anthropology and archaeology. World history strives to reveal the laws and general trends underlying this evolution.

In China, roughly starting from the beginning of the 1950s, people became accustomed to pitting Chinese history against world history. This was mainly due to the division of labor within the history profession, the term “world history” being used more or less interchangeably with “history of foreign countries.” However, world history is by no means exclusively concerned with countries outside of China. Chinese history, just like the history of all other countries on earth, is an integral part of the larger process through which the history of mankind became a world history in the proper sense of the word.

There is still no definitive consensus concerning the periodization of the history of the world. In the West, the Renaissance already saw the appearance of a temporal division of history into three periods, namely “ancient” (*gudai* 古代), “medieval,” (*zhongshiji* 中世纪), and “modern” (*jindai* 近代). This division was mainly based on the European experience, and since then has become commonplace in Western historiography. A number of other historians went on to add the “contemporary”

(*dangdai* 当代) or “*xiandai* 现代” (the present-time¹²) era to this scheme, thus resulting in a model that divides history into four distinct stages. Marxist historiography also adopted this fourfold periodization, but did so with reference to historical materialism and its theorization of the development of socioeconomic formations, which is quite different from periodizations based on the rise and fall of political regimes or other “major events.” In Marxist historiography, the term “ancient” denotes the stages of primitive and slave societies, “medieval” corresponds to the era of feudal societies, and modern (*jindai* 近代) refers to the era of capitalist societies, while “the present-time” refers to the new period that began with the October Revolution in Russia. Some scholars believe that the term “medieval” (*zhongshiji* 中世纪) only makes sense with reference to the history of Western Europe and cannot be universally applied to world history. To them, the “middle ages” (*zhonggu* 中古) simply means the period separating “antiquity” (*gudai* 古代) from “modernity” (*jindai* 近代). In theory, there is nothing wrong with this approach. However, we should bear in mind that the development of human history is hardly an equilibrium. Different regions of the world entered into certain socioeconomic formations at different points in time and remained within these formations for varying lengths of time. Particularly ever since history has entered the era of civilization, one would be hard-pressed to find a society that perfectly fits into one particular stage of development or that has followed a neat and uniform transition from a lower to a higher stage of socioeconomic development. This is precisely why the periodization of world history remains a controversial issue to this day.

¹² Note of translator: *Xiandai* is also understood as modern. However, Chinese historiography of the twentieth century in principle distinguishes the two historical periods of *jindai* and *xiandai*, with the former preceding the latter. Even in the 1950s the distinction was not overly clear, so that in many book titles a combination of both is used: *jinxindai* 近现代. It roughly refers to the time period from 1840 (the first Opium War) to 1949 (the year the People’s Republic was founded). The decisive event separating both eras is either the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, or the October Revolution of 1917. It goes without saying that in the Mao era and in the early years of reform after the Cultural Revolution 1917 was still considered the more apt date. Only since the 1990s did changes in historiography lead to a larger focus on the year 1911, which was for two reasons. On the one hand, socialist revolution had lost its appeal after 1989. On the other hand, in the years preceding the centennial of 1911 historians saw the opportunity to create a narrative of progress and modernization that could possibly be shared by the People’s Republic and the Republic of China on Taiwan (Sun Yat-sen, a leading figure in the Xinhai Revolution, had enjoyed a continuous popularity on Taiwan after 1949 and was seen as the father of the nation on both sides of the Taiwan strait).

Different Conceptions of World History Past and Present

As far back as antiquity, historians already broadened the scope of their inquiries to include the world known to them. World history was still far from a specialized discipline, as would only become the case much later. Although the horizon of these historians extended to the world with which they were familiar, they generally did not label their endeavors as “world history” and were not yet fully aware of the fact that they were writing the history of the then known world. That said, these historians did look upon the geographical area known to them as a world and recorded the events that took place within those areas. In this sense, the histories they wrote concerning the areas in which they were located were histories of the world in their time. The main purpose of the ancient Greek historian Herodotus (ca. 485-425 BCE) in composing his *Histories* in nine volumes was to provide an account of the Greek victory in the Greco-Persian Wars. In doing so, however, he also covered the Mediterranean, the region beyond the Danube, Mesopotamia, Persia, and the steppe zone to the north of these areas, that is to say, more or less the entire world known to the Greeks at that time. As such, we could say that Herodotus’ *Histories* counts as a history of the world with which the Greeks were already familiar. *The Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史记) written by Sima Qian 司马迁 (ca. 145-86 BCE)¹³, an ancient Chinese historian who postdates Herodotus by a few centuries, were primarily concerned with China, that is to say, the territory governed by the emperors of the ruling Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). However, the geographical scope of his book extended to the entire world known to the Chinese in the second century BCE. Furthermore, adopting an ancient Chinese expression, Sima Qian referred to the world of the Han dynasty as “all-under-heaven” (*tianxia* 天下). The term “all-under-heaven” had a very broad scope of reference, denoting a domain which stretched from Korea in the east to Bactria (*Daxia* 大夏) and the Parthian Empire (*Anxi* 安息) in the west, thus enveloping nearly half of the Eurasian continent. It does not take a stretch of the imagination to characterize a book that covers and records the historical events of such a vast geographic area as

¹³ *Note of translator:* Sima Qian, an astrologer and court historian, is considered the father of Chinese historiography for his *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史记), a general history that also includes nomadic tribes beyond Chinese civilization, a point for which he is often compared to Herodotus who distinguished between civilization and barbarity in his works.

a history of the world as known to the Chinese at that time. Polybius (ca. 200-118 BCE), a Greek historian active during the Roman era, wrote *The Histories* in 40 volumes, of which only the first five volumes and some *disjecta membra* remain. He mainly centered his narrative around Rome's expansion, but also dealt with the regions surrounding the Mediterranean Sea during the period between 212 and 146 BCE. In Book I, Section 3 of *The Histories*, Polybius begins his narrative with the 140th Olympiad (220-216 BCE). As he writes, before this period, "Previously the doings of the world had been, so to say, dispersed [...] but ever since this date history has been an organic whole, and the affairs of Italy and Libya have been interlinked with those of Greece and Asia, all leading up to one end."¹⁴ Polybius' writings bear witness to a remarkable historical insight into how the world surrounding Rome went from a state of dispersion to one of increasing integration.

Due to the development of productive technologies and communication, the scope of the knowable world has continuously expanded. That said, the world as discussed by historians always remained limited in one way or another. The 4th-century Christian theologian St. Augustine believed that history would lead to the realization of the "kingdom of God" on earth, a conception that continued to dominate Western European historiography throughout the Middle Ages. The world of Christian historiography corresponded geographically to the world in which Christianity had spread, with Europe at the center. According to the Christian doctrine, territories outside this world, with the exception of the holy land in Palestine, were pagan soil which deserved only of the wrath of God and should be excluded from the Christian world blessed by divine grace. Therefore, if we speak of a history of the world in medieval Europe, this would actually be a history of the Christian world. This historical narrative starts with the creation of the world by God, has the history of Hebrews as a prologue and Europe as its main protagonist. Such a conception of world history pervaded the European imagination right up to the 17th and 18th centuries, as is evidenced by, for example, J. B. Bossuet's (1627–1704) *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* and A. A. Calmet's (1672–1757) *Histoire universelle sacrée et profane*.

¹⁴ *Note of translator:* Wu Yujin does not give here a proper footnote. The English rendition here is taken from William Roger Paton's translation, see: *Polybius: The Histories Books 1-2* (Loeb Classical Library) Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010, 7-9.

During the Middle Ages, the Christian world coexisted with the Islamic world. Just like their Christian contemporaries, Islamic historians were also heavily influenced by religious convictions in compiling the history of the world known to them. Although Tabari's (838–923) *History of the Prophets and Kings* (*Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* تاريخ الرسل والملوك) and Ibn Khaldun's (1332–1405) *Prolegomena* (*Muqaddimah* مقَدِّمَة)¹⁵ are known as the richest “world histories” of their time, their content was mainly limited to Arab states that practiced Islam. The world these historians had in mind was actually the world in which Islam had spread, all surrounding areas being seen as beyond the reach of civilization.

In China, following Sima Qian, Ban Gu's 班固 (32–92 CE)¹⁶ *Book of the Former Han* (*Hanshu* 汉书) became the first in a long line of “official histories” (*zhengshi* 正史), a genre where the history of each dynasty would be written by its successor (*duandaishi* 断代史).¹⁷ However, most of the historians engaged in writing these official dynastic histories still regarded themselves as heir to Sima Qian's tradition. As such, while redacting the histories of their own country, they also wrote the histories of other states and peoples. What they put on paper about China was, of course, much more detailed than the passages dedicated to the “barbarians” (*manyi* 蛮夷), but these people were nonetheless included in the known world of their time. Moreover, Chinese historical writings were quite unlike the Christian historiography of medieval Europe. Historians in China recounted the activities of individuals and groups of people acting as subjects within a specific social environment. In this sense, they practiced what we might call a human-centered type of history. The world or “all-under-heaven” (*tianxia* 天下) they described was one in which individuals or groups of people engaged in various activities. This idea of considering the history of the known world as a process pertaining to human activity rather than one of divine manifestation is an outstanding feature of ancient Chinese historiography.

Histories of the known world predating the unprecedented expansion of humanity's knowledge of the world during the 15th and 16th centuries, regardless of

¹⁵ *Note of translator:* The title is translated into Chinese as “History of the Arabs, Persians, and Berbers.”

¹⁶ *Note of translator:* Ban Gu was a poet, politician and historian who established the dynastic framework in historiography that remained in place until early twentieth century.

¹⁷ *Note of translator:* the *duandaishi* is a distinctive style of Chinese historiography where the history of a dynasty is compiled by its successor and thus often served as a legitimation for the new ruling house. There are 25 official histories following this pattern, starting with Sima Qian's *The Records of the Grand Historian* and ending with the *Draft History of the Qing* 清史稿 published in 1927.

whether these were produced in antiquity or the Middle Ages, in the East or the West, were always marked by certain limitations, first and foremost the considerable lack of geographical knowledge. The world with which historians at that time were familiar was very different from the world as it came to be known after the 16th century: before this time, whether they were living on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, in eastern and central Asia, in Europe, or in Africa, historians could only write a history of their own corner of the world. As such, they did not and indeed could not write a world history that would encompass the entire planet. A second set of limitations were the result of ethnic or religious consciousness, which led historians to take their own people or people of the same creed as the protagonist or center of history, all while ignoring or disdaining foreign or “pagan” peoples, even though they were very much aware of the latter’s existence. This is why they always put forward a certain region—such as Rome, the Han empire, the Christian or Islamic world—as being at the center of things. The limitations imposed by the religious mindsets are particularly evident in the case of Western Europe during the Middle Ages and in Arabic historiography.

The writing of world history in a modern sense began in Western Europe during the Renaissance and the period of the Enlightenment that followed. This was intrinsically linked to the rapid development of the capitalist mode of production in Western Europe and to a series of historical transitions of great significance in the fields of the economy, politics, intellectual life, and culture resulting from this development. The unprecedented expansion of maritime travel after the 15th and 16th centuries and the ensuing end of the relative isolation of East and West and the different continents greatly enriched people’s geographical knowledge, which in turn vastly increased their understanding of the world. People were progressively freed from the bondage of religious thought thanks to the development of the modern natural sciences as well as a growing criticism of the medieval church and its theology. All these events created the conditions for the modern Western bourgeois historians to overcome some of the limitations of their predecessors and to propel world history to a new stage.

Marcus Antonius Coccius Sabellicus (1436–1506), a Venetian humanist historian of the Renaissance wrote a world history, *Enneades sive Rhapsodia historiarum*, that spanned from antiquity to the 16th century. This work can be seen as symbolizing the beginning of world history in the modern sense of the word, a transition

characterized by a shift from a medieval European historiography embedded in a theologically oriented ideology toward a secular world history in which humans are located at the center of the evolutionary process. In the 18th century, the French Enlightenment thinker Voltaire (1694–1778) wrote his *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756). This text not only further severed the bonds between Christian theology and history, but also broke through the limitation of traditional historiography: the whole world was no longer understood in terms of local worlds as it had been since ancient times. Instead, Voltaire tried to draw a new and more complete picture of world history. Diachronically speaking, he dismissed the biblical accounts of the creation and the flood and commenced his history from what he believed to be the most ancient society: China. Synchronically speaking, he went beyond the narrow confines of Europe to include nations and peoples of all five continents. He ridiculed traditional Western historiography by saying that “the history that has been deemed universal history” is in fact merely “the history that we Westerners have written.”¹⁸ In this respect, Voltaire indeed paved the way for subsequent works of world history. Influenced by the rationalism of the Enlightenment, German historians of the Göttingen School also began devoting themselves to the study of world history. We can think here of scholars such as Johann Christoph Gatterer (1727–1799) with his *Einleitung in die synchronistische Universalhistorie zur Erläuterung seiner synchronistischen Tabellen* and August Ludwig von Schlözer's (1735–1809) *Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie*. Around the middle of the 19th century, Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) pioneered an objectivist critical historiography (客观主义批判史学) in Germany. The seven-volume *Weltgeschichte* which Ranke compiled in his later years and was completed posthumously by his disciples on the basis of his manuscripts, is a history of the world that takes six major Latin and Germanic peoples as its main subjects. Ranke's world history reflects the rising dominance of the Western colonial powers in the modern era. Indeed, the appearance of “Eurocentrism” in Western historiography owes much to the widespread influence of Ranke and his authority within the field of critical historiography. The method of compiling different national histories into a world history gained popularity during the mid-18th century. Between 1736 and 1765, John Campbell (1708–1775) and others in England compiled *An Universal History, from the Earliest*

¹⁸ *Note of translator:* Such a sentence cannot be found in the original text of Voltaire.

Account of Time in 38 volumes.¹⁹ Thirty of these were translated by the German school of Göttingen, but the full translation was eventually discontinued because of inconsistency of the original text. Afterward, voluminous new compilations continued to appear. The most famous of these are the “Three Cambridge Histories,” namely *The Cambridge Medieval History* [first edition 1911–1936], *The Cambridge Ancient History* [1924–1939], and *The Cambridge Modern History* [1902–1912], as well as works such as the French *History of the Evolution of Human Civilization* 《人类文明进化史》.²⁰ The historians who participated in these projects not only drew on a large number of cultural artifacts, documents, and historical monuments discovered and collected in modern times, but also valued and applied the methods of the modern empirical sciences. These large compendia had a great impact on the academic world, but were not without shortcomings: firstly, the general tendency in these works is still to take Europe, especially Western Europe, as the center of world history, while treating the regions outside Europe as being of secondary importance. Secondly, they fail to treat world history as a process that moves from fragmentation to integration, the division of history along national lines continuing to be reflected in the division of the different chapters of these books. Thirdly, they do not recognize material production as being at the basis of historical development, which makes it difficult to explore and clarify the most fundamental laws and trends that govern the course of world history.

Chinese scholars did not expand their horizon to include the entire world before the time of the First Opium War (1839–1842). On the eve of the conflict, Lin Zexu 林则徐 (1785–1850)²¹ who was fighting against the import of opium into Guangzhou (Canton), led the translation and publication of an encyclopedia called *Record of the Four Continents* (*Sizhou zhi* 四洲志),²² a work which presented the geography and history of more than 30 countries on five continents. Later on, Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–

¹⁹ Note of translator: Wu Yujin is making here a mistake, the series has in total 65 volumes.

²⁰ Note of translator: The book mentioned by Wu Yujin here is probably *L'Évolution de l'humanité*, edited by Henri Berr (1863-1954) since 1920 who understood the series dedicated to a historical synthesis as an alternative to the German model of *Weltgeschichte*. I thank Fan Xin for pointing me to this.

²¹ Lin Zexu was a scholar-official during the Qing dynasty who is best known in modern historiography for his opposition against opium trade. The burning of opium, the arrest of opium dealers and the destruction of opium pipes on the banks of the Pearl River in Canton was one of the factors for the outbreak of the First Opium War of 1839-42.

²² Note of translator: it is Hugh Murray's (1779–1846) *Encyclopaedia of Geography, Comprising a Complete Description of the Earth*.

1857)²³ adopted the manuscript of *The Four Continents* and supplemented it with new materials, including a wide range of relevant documents by both Chinese and foreign authors, which resulted in a book entitled *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms* (*Haiguo tuzhi* 海国图志), published in 1842 in 50 volumes. New volumes were later added: the book was expanded to 60 volumes in 1847, and ultimately covered 100 volumes in the 1852 edition. Wei Yuan's *Illustrated Treatise* gave a systematic introduction to the history, geography, politics, economy and shipbuilding structures of many countries in the world. This masterpiece was the most detailed world history and geography available in the East at that time. Xu Jiyu 徐继畲 (1795–1873)²⁴, a contemporary of Wei Yuan, wrote a book entitled *A Short Account of the Maritime Circuit* (*Yinghuan zhilüe* 瀛环志略), which offered a meticulous discussion of the history and social evolution of various countries. However, neither Wei Yuan nor Xu Jiyu succeeded in liberating themselves from the grip of the traditional Chinese conception of history. Wei Yuan for one still believed that “within 10,000 Chinese miles, there is no better place than the China (万里一朔, 莫如中华).” On his part, Xu Jiyu remained convinced that “the vast expanse of the earth is governed by China” (坤輿大地, 以中国为主) and that “all countries are in awe before her as if she were the polar star (仰之如辰极).” This traditional conception of history began to change in the last decades of the 19th century, as is reflected in the writings of both bourgeois reformists and revolutionary historians. These two schools of historians turned to foreign histories in order to learn from reforms and revolutions abroad. As such, they started to write about the rise and fall of other countries with the aim of making clear that reform and revolution were crucial to the survival of nations. However, they were not yet able to write comprehensive world histories that included this new conception of change. Most of the works published around that time were heavily indebted to the writings of Western scholars which served as their blueprint. That said, under the influence of modern Western historiography, this new generation of Chinese historians still managed to challenge the traditional Sinocentric vision of history and denounce the

²³ Wei Yuan worked in the secretariat of Lin Zexu (1785-1850). He was an important member of the statecraft school that pushed for reforms in order to strengthen the Empire's economy and military

²⁴ Xu Jiyu 徐繼畲 (1795–1873) was a scholar-official and geographer of the late Qing dynasty. His *Short Account of the Maritime Circuit* (*Yinghuan zhilüe* 瀛寰志略, 1848) that was based on Western knowledge that he had acquired by missionary writings and direct contact to Western traders included a systematic description of the geography of the Western hemisphere.

age-old myth according to which “China is the center of civilization, people of outer realms are barbarians” (*Zhonghua wai yi* 中华外夷).

In the early twentieth century, the dominance of “Eurocentrism” began to falter in Western historiography. Anxiety about the bleak future of capitalism prompted some Western historians to question the historical beliefs of the previous century; they started to approach history with a fresh perspective, one that extends beyond the horizon of European history and civilization. In addition, Western historiography moved toward specialization. The increasingly sophisticated studies dedicated to specific countries, regions, eras, historical events and figures inescapably raised the question of how to investigate human history from a comprehensive standpoint. Historians who adhered to morphologism are a perfect example of this development. By conducting comprehensive and comparative studies of history, they developed a conception that ran counter to Ranke’s view. Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) and Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975) saw world history as the history of the rise and fall of multiple civilizations rather than the emergence and spread of one single civilization. This implied a definitive break with Eurocentrism. In the 1940s, Geoffrey Barraclough (1908–1984) included a call for Western historiography to abandon “Western Eurocentrism” and fundamentally reorient itself in his collection of essays entitled *History in a Changing World*.²⁵ This tendency was also reflected in many of the contributions to the *Times Atlas of World History* which Barraclough would later edit. During the same period, some scholars put forward different methods for subdividing world history. In his recent book *A Global History* [1970], L. S. Stavrianos (1913–2004) has tried to part with the prevalent method of compiling histories according to national or regional divisions. Instead, he has focused on the shared characteristics of different areas across time and on the interrelations between civilizations. However, suffice is to say that the shortcomings of modern Western historiography have not been fully overcome. The idealistic conception of history, with its national and cultural biases of considering the history of the Orient as one of either near collapse or an inevitable stagnation still hinders the development of the discipline of world history.

²⁵ *Note of translator:* Published in 1955, Barraclough’s book is a collection of essays that had appeared earlier in journals or as radio broadcasts. It is unclear whether Wu Yujin had access to this book, or is simply summarizing some of the earlier criticism made by Barraclough. It is important to note that the British historian is not using Eurocentrism in his book, albeit proclaims an end of European history. See Geoffrey Barraclough, *History in a changing world*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955, esp. 1-3.

The Soviet Academy of Sciences published a multi-volume *History of the World* in the 1950s and 1960s,²⁶ an editorial project that displays many differences with similar compilations available in the West. This work takes socioeconomic formations as the main criterion for dividing history into stages, attaches much importance to the role played by the masses in history, as well as to the history of the oppressed and colonized peoples, and seeks to unravel the laws of historical development on the basis of an analysis of the development of material production. This work by Soviet scholars has deepened our understanding of world history and should be regarded as an important step forward in the formation of world history as a scholarly discipline. However, this masterpiece also has its defects: it did not completely break away from the old type of Eurocentrism, since world history is still periodized with reference to different periods in European history. Within this chronological framework, the histories of peoples, nations and regions are generally divided according to the patterns and sequence evidenced by the development of socioeconomic formations, thus highlighting the uniformity of objective historical laws. Yet, the question of how history developed into world history does not occupy a significant place in these works and does not receive the attention it deserves as an issue of the discipline.

In China, the study of world history developed at a very slow pace during the first three to four decades following the Xinhai 辛亥 Revolution of 1911.²⁷ It is only in the early 1940s that Zhou Gucheng 周谷城 (1896–1996) began teaching and researching world history as a whole, publishing a three-volume *General History of the World* (*Shijie tongshi* 世界通史) in 1949. This book was the first piece of Chinese scholarship to break away from the inherited framework of using the histories of separate countries to compile a world history, opposed Eurocentrism, and proposed examining world history from a comprehensive perspective. Zhou Gucheng believed that world history should be written by contrasting different regions and emphasizing the importance of mutual interaction, influence, and competition within and between

²⁶ This is the *History of the Old World* (3 vols.), compiled by V.N. D'jakov and Nikolaj M. Nikol'skij, *Istorija drevnego mira. Učebnik dlja učitel'skich institutov*, Moskau 1952. This textbook was also translated into Persian and French: *Tārīḥ-i ǧāhān-i bāstān*, translated by Hamadānī, 'Alī-Ilāh (Teheran: Širkat-i Sihāmī-i Našr-i Andīša, 1968); *Histoire de l'antiquité* (ed. by V. Diakov and S. Kovalev (éd. du Progrès, 1973).

²⁷ The Xinhai Revolution started with a military uprising in Wuchang on October 10, 1911 and the following establishment of a new local government. In a matter of weeks more and more provinces deserted the Qing Regime, finally resulting in the abdication of emperor Puyi 溥儀 (1906-1967) and the founding of the Republic of China.

regions, without completely excluding the idea of focusing on one particular region during a specific period. His views contributed much to the development of Chinese historiography, not only as a reference work, but also because of its seminal influence on the field.

After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the study of world history in China made enormous progress. Indeed, the past forty years have seen the appearance of a large number of histories: histories of foreign countries, of specific regions, of specific periods, biographies of key historical figures, or other types of specialized works. The journals edited and published by the Institute of World History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (*Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan shijie lishi yanjiusuo* 中国社会科学院世界历史研究所), such as *World History* (*Shijie lishi* 世界历史) and *Studies in Historical Theory* (*Shixue lilun yanjiu* 史学理论研究) have become important forums for Chinese scholars to publish their research results and conduct academic discussions on world history. In 1962, the *General History of the World* (*Shijie tongshi* 世界通史), edited by Zhou Yiliang 周一良 (1913–2001) and Wu Yujin 吴于廑 (1913–1993), was published. This was the first comprehensive work on world history to have appeared since the founding of the People's Republic. Grounded in the basic principles of Marxism—particularly that of privileging temporal continuity over regional diversity—this book provides a systematic account of the history of the whole world from the origins of the human species to the end of the First World War. It reflects the depth of Chinese scholars' understanding and research on world history at that time. Somewhat more recently, several other world histories have been produced, each introducing certain changes and improvements. At present, the duty of Chinese scholars is to tackle the question of how to make use of correct theories and methodologies to foster the development of world history as a comprehensive rather than a fragmented narrative, and as a scholarly inquiry grounded in materialism instead of idealism.

“Vertical” and “Horizontal” Development in World History

Large-scale industries and the world market of modern capitalism put an end to the longstanding isolation of peoples and countries that had been brought forth by history. On an economical level, these developments have increasingly changed the world into an interconnected whole, thus “producing world history for the first time.”²⁸ In their writings, Marx and Engels were the first to clearly break with Western bourgeois historiography, a historiography permeated by idealistic conceptions of history as well as nationalist prejudice. This was “the revolution [...] in the whole conception of world history.”²⁹ According to Marx’s and Engels’ conception of world history, the latter is not simply the aggregate sum of the histories of various peoples, countries, regions, or civilizations as suggested by the theories of the morphological school; rather, world history is the result of a historical process governed by laws of its own.

The development of human history into world history required a long and gradual process, which can be divided into two main aspects: “vertical” and “horizontal” development. What I call “vertical development” refers to the evolution of different modes of production within the history of human material production and the corresponding changes in social formations. By taking into account the typical features resulting from the fundamental contradiction between the forces and relations of production within society, Marxism divides the historical development of humanity into five modes or stages of production, namely primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and communism, with each of these stages corresponding to different

²⁸ *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* 《马克思恩格斯选集》, vol. 1, p. 67, People’s Publishing House (人民出版社), 1972. English translation adapted, with modifications, from Karl Marx, with Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998, p. 81.

²⁹ *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* 《马克思恩格斯选集》, vol. 3, p. 40. English translation taken from Engels, Friedrich, *On Marx*, Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 1975, (online document: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/06/karl-marx.htm>). In this 1877 biography of Karl Marx, Engels considers the breakthrough of Marx a “revolution” that in the text of Wu Yujin is decribed as *biange* 变革. To prefer *biange* over *geming*—the term most commonly used for revolution in twentieth century—reflects the view of Liang Qichao who in 1902 had written an essay on the character *ge* 革. He points out that this character corresponds to both reform and revolution in the English language. Differentiating between the successive and the sudden change he neither sees *geming* as an appropriate term because it referred to change where one ruler is replaced with another (a change that in some cases can also be a dynastic one), thus a people’s revolution with massive social and political transformation cannot be called *geming*, but only *guomin biange* 国民变革. Accordingly, the Japanese translation of the French Revolution would be wrong. See Liang Qichao 梁启超, *Shige* 释革 [*Explaining the character ge*], in *Yinbingshi wenji dianjiao* 饮冰室文集点校, Kunming, 2001, vol. 4, 2242-2245.

socioeconomic formations. These stages constitute a vertical sequence of development that proceeds from lower to higher levels. This vertical sequence is, however, not a mechanistic formula: not all peoples, countries or regions have followed this sequence in a uniform manner. Some do not pass through a certain stage at all, others linger at a certain stage for a very long period of time, and even when different societies can be characterized as belonging to the same stage, their forms of development often display significant differences. Nevertheless, the historical diversity of peoples, countries or regions, does not rule out the unity of world history. In general, the development of human history goes from lower to higher socioeconomic formation; it proceeds from a primitive classless society to a class society where producers are subject to different forms of slavery and exploitation. In turn, such a class society will in the future give way to a communist classless society free from slavery and exploitation. Although there may be formal and sequential differences, the general process of vertical development still has a universal and necessary significance. This interpretative model has enabled Marxist historiography to arrive at a number of valuable insights into the vertical development of human history.

What I have called the “horizontal development” of world history refers to the objective historical process in which the isolation and dispersal of different regions give way to an openness to and gradual connection with the outside world, and finally to the development of world history as a totality. As Marx and Engels pointed out in *The German Ideology*: “The further the separate spheres, which act on one another, extend in the course of this development and the more the original isolation of the separate nationalities is destroyed by the advanced mode of production, by intercourse and by the natural division of labour between various nations arising as a result, the more history becomes world history.”³⁰ In prehistoric times, human beings were still in a primitive state; they lived in clans, tribes, or villages scattered at different places across the globe. Although archaeologists have provided physical evidence for the fact that these communities were not completely isolated from each other and had some occasional contacts, only a limited degree of exchange and interaction was possible. Due to the extremely low level of material production at that time, there was hardly any division of labor in these communities, making it impossible for them to significantly

³⁰ *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* 《马克思恩格斯选集》, vol. 1, p. 51. English translation reproduced from Karl Marx, with Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, Amherst, New York: Prometheus Book, 1998, p. 58.

expand their scope of activity. As a consequence, primitive communities were basically closed to each other and their horizontal connections were virtually non-existent, or, at the very least, extremely limited. After entering the stage of farming and animal husbandry, we witness a development of material productivity and the genesis of private property, which led to the appearance of class society in some areas. This put an end to the extremely isolated state of primitive clans and tribes and led to the formation of states covering well-defined pieces of territory. More interactions, either peaceful or violent in nature, began to take place between different states and regions. However, in the pre-capitalist stages of class society, even the more economically advanced agrarian regions were still essentially subsistence economies. Social division of labor and relations of exchange developed, but only to a limited extent. Craftsmanship and commerce continued to be regarded as subordinate and supplementary activities. As long as production did not exceed the scope of the natural economy, peoples, states, and regions were to remain isolated. In the 15th and 16th centuries, capitalism emerged and developed in Western Europe. In the wake of the “Great Geographical Discoveries,” with the overseas colonial expansion of Western countries and the formation of a world market, the relative seclusion in which states, regions, and peoples had long found themselves came under increasing pressure. The whole world gradually became more and more interconnected, interdependent, and conflicted on the level of the economy, politics, culture, and so on. Marx once pointed out that “world history did not always exist; history as world history is a result.”³¹ This historical result only emerged after a series of major twists and turns that took place during the 15th and 16th centuries. World history, which “did not always exist” in the pre-capitalist era, only came into being at that time.

The decisive force driving the horizontal development of history is none other than the continuous development of material production. The rise of material production allowed for a transition from the scattered life of primitive communities to what would become an interconnected and unified world. As a result of the continuous development of material production, the exploration of new regions, exchange of goods, and interactions between neighboring regions increased also steadily. These events inevitably put an end to the state of seclusion in which different regions had been

³¹ *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* 《马克思恩格斯选集》, vol. 2, p. 112. English translation reproduced from Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1970, p. 215

trapped and ushered in the gradual transformation of history into world history. Although these developments took place at a different pace and with varying degrees of intensity in different regions, the process of the horizontal development of history still retains its universal and necessary significance on a theoretical level.

In the long process of history's development into world history, vertical and horizontal developments have not simply run parallel to or remained independent from one another. Instead, they have been mutually constitutive. At first, the pace of interaction between the vertical and the horizontal was slow, but eventually gained increasing momentum, thus enabling the course of history to transition from a fragmented to an integrated state of world-historical development. In the process, vertical development placed certain constraints on horizontal development, with the stage and level reached by the former defining the scale and breadth of latter. Human beings at a lower stage of social development cannot develop a complex social division of labor or engage in a significant degree of specialization or socialization of production. This makes it unlikely for them to interact with others economically or in any other way within a broader territorial space. Lacking a higher level of material production as well as a deep and extensive socialization and specialization of production meant that history could only be a history of isolated regions rather than a closely interconnected and integrated world history. This is the basic feature of history at all stages of social development in the pre-capitalist period, regardless of the specific degree of isolation resulting from the varying level of material productivity at each stage. It was only when the mode of production became more sophisticated and the social formation evolved into a higher stage, i.e., capitalism, that the development of material production necessitated an increasingly interdependent division of social, regional, and national labor. From then on, people's dependence on society gradually became more important than their previous dependence on nature. With different societies coming closer to one another, as well as the growing exchanges and interactions between them, human beings were able to overcome regional, state, and national boundaries. The higher the level of material production, "the more history becomes world history." In this sense, the vertical development of history—which goes from barbarism to civilization and from lower to higher social formations—constrains its horizontal development that proceeds from tribes to nations, and from scattered regions to a unified world.

Horizontal development is constrained by vertical development, but the former also has a countervailing effect on the latter. When horizontal development is compatible with a certain stage of vertical development, it tends to increase and deepen vertical development. When the early Greek city-states reached a certain level of development, they began to migrate to the surrounding areas, establishing extensive migrant settlements, which remained connected to their native city-states in many different ways. This is especially evident in the case of slavery: the possible sources for slaves expanded and, in turn, slavery facilitated the development of the Greek city-states to a higher level. In the 3rd century and later, the Xianbei and Tuoba tribes in northern China as well as the Germanic tribes in Europe began to master the production of iron tools and agricultural techniques, thus entering class society. As a result, the conditions for their expansion were met: they either migrated peacefully, or violently invaded and expanded into the advanced farming areas adjacent to them. This was a horizontal development adapted to their vertical historical development. The horizontal development in question not only liberated them from a situation of isolation, but also accelerated their transition to a more advanced feudal social formation. In this case, horizontal development facilitated the vertical development of history. The countervailing effect of horizontal development on vertical development is particularly evident during the historical transition to capitalism. The maritime commercial expansion and colonial activities of Western countries during this era led to the emergence of unprecedented interactions between different regions of the world. In turn, these intricate worldwide interactions contributed to the primitive accumulation of capital and to the erosion and disintegration of the feudal agricultural system. This subsequently led to the emergence of capitalist industries. If a region lacks horizontal connections with other regions, its vertical development is bound to be beset with difficulties. Although the Mayan civilization in the Americas managed to reach a relatively advanced level and even invented writing, it remained completely isolated from the outside world until the Europeans reached its shores. The lack of the requisite horizontal development to match its degree of vertical development is undoubtedly one of the main reasons why Mayan civilization remained stagnant for such a long time.

All this makes it clear that the vertical and horizontal development of history are the two fundamental aspects of the process leading to world history. Their common basis and ultimate driving force is none other than progress in the realm of material

production. Marx and Engels wrote that the “transformation of history into world history is by no means a mere abstract act on the part of ‘self-consciousness’, the world spirit, or of any other metaphysical spectre, but a quite material, empirically verifiable act, an act the proof of which every individual furnishes as he comes and goes, eats, drinks and clothes himself.”³² This is the materialist basis for the Marxist theory concerning the emergence of world history. The development of the production of material means of subsistence is the most fundamental factor determining the vertical and horizontal developments of history. It effectively brings them together into a unified process of world-historical development.

A General Overview of World History

The history of mankind, from its very inception to the world as we know it today, is the result of a gradual acceleration of vertical and horizontal historical developments.

Around 3 to 3.5 million years ago, humans appeared on earth. The prehistoric period of human history could be seen as the first stage of human social development or the stage of primitive society. The vast majority of primitive societies belonged to the Paleolithic period. During this period, humans went through several stages of evolution: *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus*, early *Homo sapiens* and late *Homo sapiens*, thus eventually completing the transition of primitive to modern humanity. During the Paleolithic period, labor in primitive communes did not produce much surplus. As a result, there was no exploitation, no class divisions, and very little exchange of goods. Different groups of people lived in extreme isolation from one another. However, because of changes in climate that affected the geography of the regions where these groups lived, early humans had to divide into smaller groups and migrate to new areas in order to find enough food to sustain themselves. We know from archaeological findings that humans of the *Homo habilis* stage were mainly if not exclusively present in eastern and southern Africa. By the time of *Homo erectus*, the human species had become distributed across wide areas on the Eurasian continent, in addition to central and southern Africa. At the stage of *Homo sapiens*, especially by the time of the late *Homo sapiens*, the range of human migration was further expanded: some groups

³² *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* 《马克思恩格斯选集》, vol. 1, pp. 51–52. English translation reproduced from Karl Marx, with Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, Amherst, New York: Prometheus Book, 1998, p. 59.

reached America by crossing the land bridge that might have existed at that time at the easternmost point of Siberia, others went to Oceania from present-day Indochina and Indonesia. These human migrations occurred at a very slow pace, lasting for more than 3 million years, but should still be seen as signifying a tentative break with a primitive state of isolation. In the process of migrating, people brought their rudimentary productive technologies and social organizations from one place to another. This was the first step on the path to the development of history into world history.

Around 10,000 years ago, humans entered the Neolithic period. After a long career as hunter-gatherers, human beings learned to cultivate plants and domesticate animals. They invented primitive farming and animal husbandry. As such, they went from being food gatherers to food producers. This was a first major historic leap in the history of human material production. Since then, the climate and soil suitable for growing grain have been reserved for farming activities, while dry and grazing areas have been dedicated to livestock. The invention of agriculture made it possible for humans to gradually shift to a relatively sedentary lifestyle and congregate in villages. From 8000 to 7000 BCE, several distinctive agricultural centers emerged in West Asia, East and Southeast Asia, Central and South America, and in the interior of Africa. The superior efficiency of farming in those areas and the resulting population growth made expansion to surrounding areas inevitable. For more than 3,000 years, wheat and barley—, crops which were first cultivated in Mesopotamia—spread in two major directions: east and west. Seeds traveled across Europe and reached as far south as India. The rice cultivated in China and Southeast Asia, as well as the corn cultivated in Central and South America, also gradually spread to their respective surrounding areas. Thus, as far as Eurasia was concerned, many territories successively became agricultural and semi-agricultural areas. This was the case for China in the region from the Yellow River to the Yangtze River, for India from the Indus River to the Ganges River, for West Asia and Central Asia from Anatolia to Persia and Afghanistan, for Europe from the Mediterranean coast to the south of the Baltic Sea and from Britain to Ukraine. As such, a long arc of farming societies stretching southward between the eastern and western ends of the Eurasian continent gradually took shape. This agrarian world was bordered in the north by regions more suitable for nomadic and semi-nomadic modes of existence. With the expansion of nomadic and semi-nomadic societies, a nomadic world stretching across the north of Eurasia from east to west

also emerged. Rising from the east in Siberia, nomadic peoples settled themselves in the northeast of China, Mongolia, Central Asia, the north of the Aral Sea, Caspian Sea, the Caucasus, southern Russia, and the central part of Europe. In other continents, a distinction between the agrarian and nomadic zones also emerged one after the other.

After human beings entered the Neolithic period and began to engage in farming and animal husbandry, surplus products grew and private property sprang up. As a consequence, the primitive system of clan communes started to disintegrate by the end of the Neolithic and the beginning of the Bronze Age. In agrarian areas, the rate of production and population growth were both high. Thanks to the abundance of available food, it became more feasible to divide the labor force and engage in activities other than farming, such as handicraft manufacturing, metal mining and smelting, river and canal excavation, civil construction, social management, religious rituals, etc. As a result, class differentiation in farming areas was realized faster and public power emerged earlier in these areas, thus giving birth to civilization. Around the late 4th millennium BCE, the Tigris and Euphrates River valleys in West Asia became the first to break free from the isolation characteristic of primitive communes. Horizontal connections between villages were formed and strengthened on a larger scale. Dense settlements of inhabitants were established, and many small town-centered states emerged from them. Later on, the Nile valley, the Indus valley, the Yellow River valley, the Aegean region, etc., all gave birth to different civilizations. Similar to the developments in Mesopotamia, small states started to surface. From then on, history entered into the stage of class society, and simultaneously began to develop horizontally on a larger scale. In nomadic areas, production growth went at a slower rate, while social differentiation remained incremental. As a result, over a long period of time, these primitive tribes remained mired in their inherited state of simplicity and backwardness. Farms in the south, nomads in the north; riches and development in the south, poverty and sluggishness in the north: this was the common situation in Eurasia until the emergence of the large industries in modern capitalism.

In the period following the entry of the agrarian centers of Eurasia into the stage of class society, it is necessary to distinguish between societies at the slavery stage and those at the feudal stage, which is not always as straightforward as it may seem. It is shown by many specialized studies that the manner in which the direct producers of material wealth were enslaved and exploited in the ancient world differed

substantially from region to region. The same applies to the systems of ownership over the means of production, including the remnants of the original communal property system. The exact population share of slaves who had completely lost their freedom, semi-free workers in a dependent position, and free workers was also different from place to place. This was the case not only in the ancient world, but also during the Middle Ages. After the 5th century, direct producers of goods continued to be enslaved and exploited under the feudal system. Their respective shares in the economy compared to that of dependents and free peasants, however, remained unchanged. Thus, it is difficult to use a particular regional situation as a typical historical example for differentiating between the two forms of pre-capitalist class societies, i.e., slave and feudal societies. Similarly, it is not at all easy to use the stage of development reached by a particular society as a criterion for distinguishing between these two social formations in world history as a whole. Moreover, it is often hard to draw a clear line between laborers who were in a dependent position in ancient societies and feudal peasants in a dependent position during the Middle Ages. The existence of these two types of dependent laborers was not an accidental but rather a universal phenomenon. Furthermore, each of these groups took up a considerable share of the population during the periods in question. Indeed, their precise share in the population also differed from place to place. This applies not only to dependent laborers, but also to free laborers, who can be found both in the ancient world and during the Middle Ages. All of this makes distinguishing between slave and feudal societies a very complex issue in world history. Yet, adopting, as is it usually the case, a model which draws a uniform chronological boundary between slave and feudal societies regardless of regional differences does not seem to be helpful in this case. For it is quite clear that, with the exception of a few central areas such as those where slavery was concentrated in Western antiquity, it is difficult to explain how the dependent and free laborers of slave societies became dependent and free peasants as soon as they crossed this boundary. Why were they branded as part of slavery in one period and tainted as part of feudalism in another? At present, this remains an important topic that must be further discussed in Marxist historiography.

Although this is a difficult problem to solve, it nonetheless does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle impeding a generalized cross-sectional examination of the history of the pre-capitalist period. Understanding humanity's entry into class society

is neither impossible, nor an academic exercise in futility.

Throughout the pre-capitalist period, that is to say, before the 15th and 16th centuries, during which time Europe and Asia entered into the stage of civilization and saw the appearance of class antagonism, societies were generally all grounded in agriculture, both in the case of slave and feudal societies. As Marx writes in his *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*: “Among agricultural people—settled already to a large extent—[...] agriculture predominates as in the societies of antiquity and the feudal period.”³³ This essentially comes down to saying that both slave and feudal societies were based on agriculture. Even though slave and feudal societies cannot be adequately distinguished for each country and region of the world, both of these societal types were, in economic terms at least, agriculture-based. This implies there we are perfectly justified in examining the common historical development of slave and feudal societies throughout the pre-capitalist period.

The fundamental characteristic of the agrarian economies of class societies during the pre-capitalist period was that of ensuring maximum self-sufficiency. People worked to make a living instead of for profit; they produced to consume and not to exchange. Therefore, these societies were necessarily closed. Agriculture was predominant in the whole social economy at that time, and by comparison, handicrafts and commerce remained insignificant. The level of development achieved at that time could not fundamentally change the state of the economy; agriculture was to remain at its core. The mutual isolation of peoples, countries, and regions in the pre-capitalist period was a necessary consequence of this basic state of affairs. In the nomadic regions neighboring agrarian zones, different tribes were also more or less closed to each other, and their lives seldom extended beyond the confines of their own small pastoral areas. The only exceptions were the multi-tribal unions formed during the great migrations and the great waves of aggression against sedentary populations. One can therefore say that the Eurasian continent and the adjacent regions of North Africa where the earliest human civilizations were born—areas that were composed of both farming and nomadic zones—being in isolation was a common state, before the emergence of capitalism. History could not develop into world history without first breaking away from this prevailing isolation.

³³ *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* 《马克思恩格斯选集》, vol. 2, p. 109. English translation reproduced from Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1970, p. 212.

In order to escape from this state of isolation, an increase in the number of interactions between different regions and peoples was needed. Interactions grew by the day with economic and political development. This makes it clear that the level of socioeconomic development is the decisive factor for increasing interactions. Since the agrarian economy was more advanced than the nomadic economy, interactions between various peoples, countries and regions first started to become more frequent within the agrarian zones in the south of Asia and Europe. After small states located at the center of ancient civilizations became more unified and various great powers began to confront each other—a situation particularly evident in West Asia, North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean region—the situation of isolation progressively came to an end. This was mainly due to frequent interactions within the centers or between the centers and their peripheral zones. Furthermore, increased interactions were often carried out through peaceful means. Production techniques, local products, works of art, as well as writing, scientific knowledge, ideas, religious beliefs, etc., were all exchanged directly or indirectly by merchants, envoys, travelers, scholars, pilgrims and preachers. This took place in ever-expanding areas, which gradually coalesced toward the centers. As a result, people's space of activity and vision gradually expanded. Many isolated points scattered in the periphery gradually became connected with centers of civilization in a precarious but promising way. However, such interactions were not always peaceful. When a people or a state became powerful, it often clashed with neighboring countries and tribes over land exploration, population transfers, resource plunder, and control of trade routes. They sometimes engaged in violent interactions, especially in places where large groups existed side by side. Still, violent interactions were unlikely to become the norm. Though they were intermittent and destructive in nature, these violent exchanges nonetheless had a much greater impact than peaceful interactions. Such violent shocks were often followed by a significant shift away from a previous state of isolation. After Alexander the Great's invasion of the East, an unprecedented range of economic and cultural interactions took place from the Aegean region to the Indus Valley. When the Mongol army crossed the Eurasian continent in the 13th century and established an empire, it opened up major transportation routes connecting East and West by land. Both of these violent and destructive encounters played a major role in breaking through the shackles of isolation.

The classical civilized world of Eurasia, ranging from the Yellow River basin to the

Mediterranean coast, covered the longest possible distance between the extremities of the East and the West. Between these two poles, isolated as well as more sustained interactions had occurred intermittently since ancient times. On land, the Silk Road was gradually formed: it ran from Western China into Central Asia and then passed through Bactria and Persia, which were connected to the Black Sea roads leading to Rome thanks to the postal routes left by the Persian Empire. In the territory of Bactria, there were also roads leading south to India. In terms of historical development, the significance of the Silk Road does not lie in the transportation of silk as such, but rather in the fact that due to the existence of this network of trade routes, the products of human material and spiritual civilization could follow the evolution of times and move back and forth along this path. Buddhism and Buddhist art, Persian craft patterns, Islam and the Arabian calendrical system and medicine all successively traveled along this road or sections of other routes into China. Chinese papermaking and printing, two processes that had a great influence on the development of later cultures, and possibly well-drilling and other techniques as well, also passed through this route to Central and West Asia. Later on, papermaking and printing technology eventually reached Europe. As to interactions by sea, according to the available historical records, an emissary of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius came to China in the ninth year of the emperor Huan's 桓 reign (166 CE) to offer treasures from South-East Asia.³⁴ From the perspective of historical development, what is most remarkable about this event is not that this was the earliest instance of communication between the emperors of the East and the West. Whether the visitors in question were merchants or emissaries is also of secondary importance. Most important here is the fact that the sea route that crossed the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Bay of Bengal, and reached the South China Sea had already been established, thus connecting the East and the West. Afterward, Arabian merchants became active along the southeast coast of China during the Tang and Song dynasties. During the Ming dynasty, Zheng He 郑和 (1371–1433)³⁵ sailed westward to visit more than thirty countries in Southeast Asia and East Africa. All of these historical events have to be traced back to the initial opening of this sea route.

³⁴ *Note of translator:* the latter part of the sentence is actually a direct quotation from *The Book of Liang* 梁书, chapter 48, about the “Numerous Barbarians” (*zhu yi* 诸夷). Here is the complete sentence: 汉桓帝延熹九年, 大秦王安敦遣使自日南徼外来献, 汉世唯一通焉。

³⁵ Zheng He was an explorer, fleet admiral and court eunuch during the early Ming dynasty who commanded several voyages from 1405 to 1433.

The fact that China occupied a relatively peripheral position in comparison with other civilizational centers on the Eurasian continent but was still able to communicate with these centers by land and sea at such an early stage shows that the isolation of various regions in ancient times was only relative. The fact that there were economic and cultural interactions between the Maurya Empire in India and the Seleucid Kingdom in Syria, as well as between Greece and Egypt, is yet another indication for the fact that, historically speaking, isolation is a relative term. The gradual overcoming of this relative isolation is a characteristic trend of a historical development that already started in ancient times.

That said, we should not overestimate the importance of such horizontal developments. At that time, the goods exchanged, both by land and sea, were mostly small quantities of valuable and luxury items, contact was little, and exchange via the sea route was more limited. Before the end of the 15th century, maritime interactions were mostly limited to offshore, either sailing ashore or crossing from island to island, that is not far from land. Phoenicians and Greeks could exchange goods in the Mediterranean Sea because the latter was much like a large lake. The same applies to Chinese, Indian, and later Arab traders who navigated along the coast of Southeast Asia and among the islands of the southern seas for commerce, migration, and missionary work. Between China and Japan, travel was greatly limited because the sea separating these two countries was too wide. At the time of the Northern Wei Dynasty and before, the Japanese had to come to China following the land route through Korea. From the end of the 7th century to the 8th century, when the emissaries to the Tang court were at their most active, they crossed the East China Sea from Japan to the mouth of the Yangtze River. However, because of fierce winds, there were accidents, with boats being lost and people drowning. As such, contact was still quite limited. Before the improvement of navigation and shipbuilding technology, people were confined to offshore traveling, the only exception being seasonal cross-sea voyages after the discovery of the monsoon in the Indian Ocean. In terms of long-distance travel, the sea route could only serve as a complementary solution to the land route. This supplementary route was rarely used and far from stable, because it was not possible to fully benefit from the larger capacity and greater reach of naval transportation. Still, one cannot say that naval voyages were completely absent in the pre-capitalist period. The Normans and Vikings in Northern Europe did reach Iceland

at one point and even managed to drift across the North Atlantic to Greenland and Vinland. But these were more or less accidental exceptions that were of little or no consequence to the overall horizontal development of history. In this way, overland interactions, relying on camels, horses, and manpower, remained the main channel of communication between regions in the ancient and medieval agrarian worlds of Eurasia. The farther the distance, the more difficult it proved to maintain a permanent route, and the more limited the possibilities for establishing economic connections between regions that had been closed to each other remained. Aside from the Eurasian continent and adjacent parts of Africa, the world beyond the oceans was almost entirely unknown. The minimal level of development of land and sea transportation also had the effect of limiting the occurrence of violent interactions. The foreign expansion of any powerful state in antiquity, be it a slave empire such as Rome or great feudal empires such as Tang China and the Arab empire, was held in check by the level of development of the agrarian economy, which limited the amount of military support that could be provided and was also subject to the constraints of available transportation technologies. Moreover, even within the reach of these powerful states, the economy was still predominantly closed and agrarian. Without a fundamental change in the agrarian economy, this state of isolation could not be completely broken by isolated peaceful or violent interactions.

It is worth noting that despite the limited nature of interactions on land and by sea, the pre-capitalist isolation of Asia and Europe did not impede the spread of various ideologies and religious beliefs to all corners of the earth. Some of these were transplanted and took root in fairly wide areas, leaving a long-lasting impact on them. Christianity, which originated in a remote corner of Southwest Asia, gradually spread widely to the West and became the dominant spiritual force in social life throughout Europe for an extended period of time. Chinese Confucianism also spread throughout East Asia and was almost as prominent in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam as it was in China until modern times. Indian Buddhism was generally accepted in Burma [today's Myanmar], Sri Lanka, and other countries in Southeast Asia. It was also introduced into China, where it evolved into a Sinicized form, which in turn migrated from China to Japan. Islam was diffused throughout Central Asia, West Asia, and North Africa as a result of the Arab expansion, and later reached South Asia and Southeast Europe, thus forming an Islamic world that stood alongside European Christendom. Within the

major regions of Eurasia, narrow, local, and mutually closed agrarian economies managed to support three major religious belief-systems and a system of ethical thought that played a quasi-religious role, each of these crossing national and ethnic boundaries. These developments had considerable historical consequences for the creation of horizontal ties between different regions of the agrarian world.

Between the nomadic and agrarian worlds, peaceful encounters alternated with violent interactions. The nomadic world needed grain, cloth, and metal tools from the agrarian world, while the agrarian world depended on nomads for horses and leather. Both sides had to meet these needs through the peaceful exchange of goods. But there were also times of conflict: the tribes of the nomadic world, including those that had adopted farming, were sometimes forced to enter the rich farming world; while similarly, the rulers of the farming world occasionally had to extend their borders and overtake the land of the nomads. From the middle of the 2nd millennium BCE to the 13th century CE, the tribes of the nomadic world triggered three long-lasting waves of migration which deeply impacted the agrarian world. The first wave took place during the 1st millennium BCE. The agrarian world was mainly the destination of Indo-European peoples originating from the far northwest. In the east, they went down into the valley of the Indus River; in the west, they descended to territories adjacent to the Aegean Sea; in the central regions, they also settled in Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. One can also mention the Semites here, who entered Mesopotamia and Egypt, bringing horse-driven two-wheeled chariots and, a little later, cavalry with them. The second wave began in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE and lasted till the 7th century. At first, it was mainly initiated by the *Xiongnu* 匈奴 and Tujue 突厥 [the Turkic people in Central Asia], later followed by the Xianbei 鲜卑 and Tuoba 拓跋 tribes³⁶ who found their way to the Yellow River basin. The Hephthalites 嚙哒 [also called the White Huns] entered Persia and India, while the Germanic tribes descended upon the Roman Empire, as they themselves were under considerable pressure from the Huns, and later from a number of Slavic tribes. The nomadic Arabs made way for Western and Central Asia in the 7th century, and later expanded into North Africa and Southwest Europe. The last wave began in the 13th century. The main invaders during this wave were the Mongols and the Turkic peoples who joined them. Impacting both Asia and Europe, their invasions

³⁶ Wu Yujin is mistaken here: the Tuoba is a subtribe of the Xianbei.

were the widest in terms of their geographical reach, but also the shortest in terms of duration: by the end of the 14th century, this wave had already subsided. Afterward, the over 3,000-year long conflict between the nomadic world and the agrarian world more or less came to an end. The military superiority of the nomadic world's peoples during these periods of invasion gradually disappeared once they became part of the agrarian zone and experienced an ever-deeper process of agrarianization (*nonggenghua* 农耕化). Time and again, the agrarian world absorbed the invading nomadic, semi-nomadic, and farming-tending tribes into its own economic and cultural system. In the end, the result of these three waves was a shrinking of the nomadic world and an expansion of the agrarian world. Throughout its long opposition with the nomadic world, the relatively closed economies of the agrarian world of Asia and Europe finally revealed their superiority and resilience. However, the emergence of new historical forces was still needed for the agrarian economy to completely break out of the isolation between peoples, countries, and regions. In other words, it was necessary to first enter a new phase in the vertical as well as horizontal development of history.

While the Eurasian agrarian world was on the eve of a new historical transition, agricultural civilizations and states had also sprung up in the interior of sub-Saharan Africa and in the central and southern Americas. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa traded across the Sahara Desert with the Islamic states of North Africa. They exchanged gold and ivory for handicrafts and, in the course of these exchanges, came to embrace Islam. Their economic and cultural development also reached a very high level. By contrast, the Aztecs and the Incas in central and southern America remained completely isolated from the outside world. While their distant ancestors had migrated from Asia these civilizations had no contact with the those of the Eurasian continent. The theory according to which ancient Chinese once migrated to Mexico is still not conclusive, and even if it were true, it would not change anything about the fact that the Americas were in a state of isolation before the 15th century. China already had chariots and horses during the Shang Dynasty. But when American Indians first came into contact with the Spanish colonists, they were still unfamiliar with these technologies. Despite sharing the same continent, the two major centers of northern and southern America experienced much difficulty in communicating with one another, let alone having horizontal connections with civilizations outside the Americas.

Isolation and seclusion inevitably led to the stagnation of these civilizations.

Starting from the 15th and 16th centuries, history reached a new turning point. A comprehensive change gradually came to affect the relative seclusion of the agrarian world in Eurasia, the greater isolation between sub-Saharan Africa and Eurasia, and the complete isolation of America and Oceania from the rest of the world. These two centuries were a major breakthrough in the development of history into world history. The decisive turn in question took place because of unprecedented socioeconomic changes within the Eurasian agrarian world, most notably in Western Europe. The pre-capitalist period of human history came to an end with this change: capitalism began to appear on the horizon of history, along with its new forces and relations of production.

The birth and development of capitalism in Western Europe pressed onward with the erosion of natural economies based on agriculture. The capitalist economy, grounded in maximizing profit through market exchange, was incompatible with a closed agrarian economy. Once capitalism emerged, it was bound to expand the scope of market exchange, reaching into and dominating what had formerly been closed agrarian economies. It was to expand endlessly in all possible directions. In order to develop markets to sell a maximum amount of goods, capitalism broke through the natural boundaries of geography as well as national borders. The navigation and shipbuilding techniques that had been tested and tried since the late Middle Ages were adapted to the needs of Western Europe's emerging bourgeoisie and provided the necessary means for the latter's overseas expansion. After Columbus opened the route through the Atlantic Ocean, the Western bourgeoisie traveled all over the world; wherever the sea reached, one could now find traces of them. Thus, the world was no longer a Eurasian world plus the southern shores of the Mediterranean. North and South Americas, the eastern and western shores of sub-Saharan Africa, and later Oceania, all joined a civilized world in which Eurasia was the center. The scope of the world was expanded as never it had been before. Simultaneously, as the economic ties between various peoples and regions became closer and closer, the state of isolation in turn became less and less sustainable. In sum, the world became more compact. Long scattered, the world became whole, and this unity of the world became visible for the very first time. It is only in this period that history began to turn into world history. This was the result of a long journey, which went from primitive man roaming the earth in search of food to capitalism inaugurating the world market. At this point,

the horizontal development of history had reached an unprecedented acceleration.

From about the 16th century onward, Western European countries, where capitalism had first developed, adopted mercantilist policies to promote overseas trade and colonial activities. They encouraged the primitive accumulation of capital and fostered industrial production adapted to foreign markets. This stood in stark contrast with the tradition of agrarianism. The change from agrarianism to mercantilism was a major economic shift in Western European countries experiencing the early phases of capitalist development. During the same period, several countries in East Asia, including China and Japan, whose level of development did not exceed, but was by no means inferior to that of Western Europe, remained stagnant. They restricted or even abandoned their maritime activities and focused on their own traditional agrarian economies by closing themselves off from the outside world. In Western Europe, especially in Britain, after the bourgeoisie overthrew the yoke of feudalism and gained power, mercantile policies became strongly conducive to the development of capitalism. By the middle of the 18th century, the Industrial Revolution, characterized by the production of large machines and the widespread adoption of steam power, first occurred in England. After the invention of farming and animal husbandry, which had turned human beings from food gatherers into food producers, this was another far-reaching leap in the history of human material production.

France and other countries in Western Europe soon followed England's industrial revolution. Industrial output and foreign trade increased dramatically. From then on, the original situation in which there were roughly equal levels of development in the eastern and western poles of the agrarian world in Eurasia definitely lost its balance. The West ushered in the Industrial Revolution by going through a stage of mercantilism and by ridding itself of the traditional model of an agrarian economy. Thus, it gained a decisive advantage over the other countries that doggedly remained agrarian. This was the advantage of the newly hatched industrial world over the agrarian world. It enabled Western capitalist countries to expand into all regions of the world with blood and fire, turning into ashes any closed barriers still willing to resist. Closed doors were opened everywhere, thus allowing for the rise of capitalist internal markets, the supply of raw materials and labor, and the gain of profitable investment. The Americas, Africa, West Asia, South Asia, the Southwest Pacific islands, and Oceania were all colonized one after another, even if some of the American colonies

inhabited by whites and their descendants later gained independence. Other regions, including many European countries, had to react to the surge of influence and pressure exerted by the great industrial superiority of Western Europe. They did so in many different ways. There were up and downs in their efforts, to be sure, however, they were all pervaded by the following two goals: firstly, overthrowing or transforming the feudal rule that had been based on the agrarian economy, and secondly, achieving industrialization.

The overall result of these responses was quite simply the expansion of the new industrial world. Central and Southern Europe, Northern and Eastern Europe, including Tsarist Russia, were the first to follow in the footsteps of Western Europe. Their rulers sanctioned the realization of capitalist industrialization, either because the bourgeoisie had already acquired power, or in an attempt to adapt to the demands of the bourgeoisie. Agriculture also parted ways with the well-trodden paths of the feudalist agrarian economy. In terms of business methods and operational techniques, it began to develop in line with capitalist industrialization. After that the process moved eastward. Several major Asian countries, such as the Ottoman Empire, Iran under the Safavid Dynasty, India under the Mughal Dynasty, China under the Qing Dynasty, and Japan under the Shogunate, also reacted differently and with varying consequences. Japan's response had the most visible effect: the feudal shogunate was forced to return political power to the Tennō emperor. Reformers with knowledge of Western economic and political systems, in cooperation with a growing number of merchants and entrepreneurs, wished to implement bourgeois revolutionary reforms. This quickly led Japan down the road to capitalist industrialization. For more than 2,000 years, China had maintained a despotic system over a peasant-based economy, a system that suppressed peasant struggles against feudalism and colonial aggression. Thirty years after the Meiji Restoration, a number of relatively powerless enlightened Chinese figures also promoted reforms, but it lasted only a "hundred days"³⁷ and failed in the twinkling of an eye. In the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire also underwent reforms and coups, but its short-lived fate was not much different from that of China's late-Qing

³⁷ *Note of translator:* the Hundred Days' Reform was an effort to reform cultural, political, and educational institution in late Qing Dynasty from 11 June to 22 September 1898. Started by the young Guangxu Emperor and reform-minded scholars it was suppressed by the conservative opposition led by Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧太后 (1835-1908).

reforms. Iran of the Safavid Dynasty³⁸ and India of the Mughal Dynasty also witnessed anti-feudal and anti-colonial uprisings as well as various reform movements in the 19th century, but they all ended in failure. The revolutions and national independence movements of these countries would end up going through a tortuous process in the 20th century. Under the control or direct domination of Western colonial powers, the national industries of these Eastern countries developed to a certain extent. However, in an ever expanding Western-centered industrial world, they remained dependent and unable to retain their right of self-governance. From the east of the Rhine to the Japanese islands, countries reacted differently to the impact of the new industrial world that had emerged in Western Europe. They experienced criticism and struggle between old and new systems, social classes, and ideologies. This has been a major theme in the Eurasian agrarian world with regard to the horizontal development of world history in the last 200 years.

For more than two centuries, the capitalist industrial world has gone through the stages of liberal capitalism, monopoly capitalism, and even state monopoly capitalism. Thanks to the tremendous impetus provided by the Industrial Revolution and modern technology, it has achieved an unprecedented degree of vertical and horizontal development in human history. This is an unparalleled development in comparison to any era of pre-capitalism, both in terms of speed and in terms of scale. But as it continued to expand and develop, capitalism became faced with contradictions that are difficult to resolve. The first is a contradiction inherent in the capitalist system, namely, the contradiction between the socialization of production and the private appropriation of the means of production. This contradiction has constantly manifested itself in the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, which may have its ups and downs, but is grounded in a contradiction that never disappears. Moreover, this struggle developed into an international confrontation: an international communist movement with a complete political program designed to unite proletarians all over the world was formed in reaction to the internationalization of the capitalist forces. The second contradiction is that between the subordinated colonial states and their colonial masters. This conflict has spread across the continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and has resulted in an alliance of movements fighting for the national

³⁸ *Note of translator:* Wu Yujin seems to sin by anachronism here. The Safavid Empire ended in 1736. It should be the Qajar Empire.

liberation from colonial rule and the international communist movement, an alliance that presents a great threat to the international order of the capitalist industrial world. Simultaneously, the tensions that existed between the major colonial powers have also led to a number of colonial wars. In less than half a century, two world wars, which have further weakened the ruling power of the colonial powers, broke out. The historical dominance of the industrial capitalist world, with the colonial powers at its core, is thus far from consolidated.

The victory of the October Revolution in Russia during the First World War as well as the successes of the democratic revolutions in many central and eastern European and Asian countries after the Second World War, especially the Chinese Revolution, opened up a new horizon in world history. In opposition to the capitalist industrial world, a new socialist industrial world started to emerge: a world characterized by the realization of public ownership of the means of production and the elimination of class exploitation. This was inevitably a shock with historical significance for the capitalist industrial world, which had been dominant for more than two centuries. Will the capitalist industrial world continue to exist and develop, or will the socialist industrial world expand and eventually take its place? This question has become the focus of the global conflicts pervading our contemporary world. Human beings still lack the historical wisdom to assert how this global conflict will be resolved and how many generations it will take to do so. However, as the situation has evolved in recent years, one thing is certain: the two worlds are gradually shifting from confrontation to dialogue, they are moving into a setting of coexistence combined with competition, i.e., a situation in which they are constantly competing with one another in terms of economic, political, and cultural strength and influence. It is common knowledge that, given present conditions, neither side can eliminate the other in one fell swoop by military means. Therefore, it can be expected that this situation of competitive coexistence will change in one way or another, but as a historical process, this situation of great changes will be limited in time. Coexistence and competition are interlinked, and either party will take various measures to improve its position in order to gain and maintain an advantage over the other: the countries of the capitalist industrial world will carry out reforms to ease their inner contradictions, while the countries of the socialist industrial world will carry out reforms to improve their institutions. In the long run, the changes implemented by either side will inevitably be

constrained and influenced by the other. Therefore, we can foresee that the situation of competitive coexistence between these two worlds is simultaneously a situation in which they are constantly undergoing changes because of mutual constraints and reciprocal influence.

The history of countries and state building within the socialist industrial world is still very brief. The earliest countries to have achieved victory by revolution and established socialist systems are less than three quarters of a century old. Their inherited economic base is relatively weak; in terms of depth or breadth, their level of modern industrialization is still not comparable to that of the developed capitalist countries with their long history of industrialization. The level of development of the productive forces determines the potential impact the socialist industrial world can have on the capitalist industrial world. So far, this impact is still insufficient to be comparable to the impact the new capitalist industrial world had on the traditional agrarian world. The socialist industrial world is still far from gaining an overwhelming advantage over its competitor as the capitalist industrial world did back then. Furthermore, in recent years, the socialist industrial world has repeatedly suffered serious setbacks on the European side. However, from a long-term historical perspective, the current gap in power between the two worlds is not a foregone conclusion. As the competitive coexistence between the two worlds persists, the discrepancy between the ever-evolving forces of the two sides will inevitably undergo changes, which will in turn alter the current situation. If historians can manage to look beyond the past and extend their gaze to the future of both the capitalist and socialist industrial worlds, they will be able to at least make a general estimation of the problems the two worlds will have to cope with in their long-term competitive coexistence, the tendencies to change required by the situation, and the possible prospects resulting from such potential changes.

In the long run, the fundamental problem that the capitalist industrial world must face remains the contradiction between the socialization of production and the private ownership of the means of production, that is to say, the opposition between workers and capitalists. Since the previous century, capitalist countries have implemented reforms to ease this contradiction. For example, the socialization of workers' rights, of welfare guarantees, of parts of capital gains, of cultural and educational facilities, and so on, has been enacted by legislative means. It can be argued that such reforms in

capitalist countries display an obvious tendency toward socialization. The long-term competitive coexistence between the two worlds will in the future undoubtedly give a new impetus to such reforms in capitalist countries. Not only will the tendency to implement socializing reforms continue, but there is also the possibility that once the socialist industrial world has made clear progress in such reforms, the majority of citizens in capitalist countries will intensify their demand for keeping capital in check. These types of change will perhaps be imposed by the competitive situation, yet at some point they will have no choice but to go beyond their existing scope and extend toward the question of ownership. In recent years, the repeated nationalization of large enterprises in some capitalist countries has not only reflected the wavering policy of those in power, but it also implies that changes regarding the ownership of the means of production are no longer off-limits. The capitalist system has historically proven to be a flexible system. It can accommodate and withstand some of the social changes demanded by the progressive or lower strata of society. Once such changes have penetrated the realm of the capitalist system of ownership, thus causing multilayered changes in capital ownership to the point of breaking through the limits of what the capitalist system can accommodate and endure, the threshold on the fundamental issue of ownership, which defines the class structure of society will inevitably be crossed. The possible prospect of this would be the realization of a historical metamorphosis in which the capitalist system would negate itself. Such a metamorphosis in one country will likely be followed by a chain reaction in other countries in similar situations. The way in which this historical metamorphosis is achieved will depend on the historical result of changes toward socialization, on the class relations in each country, and on future historical circumstances. It should be noted here that the historical accumulation of incremental changes leading toward socialism in capitalist countries, and the possible metamorphosis of the capitalist system these changes might engender, is a very important dimension to consider in the anticipation of the future of the world.

The problems facing the socialist industrial world are fundamentally different from those of the capitalist industrial world. They are not due to irremediable contradictions inherent to the socialist system itself, nor to the fact that socialist ideals are incompatible with the interests of the majority of society, but should be attributed to difficulties inherited from history that cannot be overcome in the short term: firstly,

the late start and low level of industrialization; secondly, elements ill-suited to the requirements of modern industrialization such as the heavy burden posed by historical traditions, the unsound and imperfect economic and political system, as well as human errors and defects in the mechanisms for correcting the latter. At present, the general tendency of the reforms carried out in socialist countries is to eliminate the difficulties bequeathed by history and selectively learn from the experiences of the capitalist industrial world in terms of science and technology, management methods, and market mechanisms, as a way to accelerate the progress of modern industrialization. This tendency toward reform will continue in the future, as the two worlds will continue to coexist for a long time. Otherwise, we will not be able to compete with and eventually rival the capitalist industrial world. The longer these reforms continue, the greater the changes they will produce: by changing a rigid system that fetters economic dynamism and labor creativity, by making public ownership the mainstay of the economy and other components only supplements, by expanding political democracy, by defining the boundaries between public and private rights and interests, by improving the legal system, and by renewing the ideological and cultural quality of society as a whole. The more the socialist industrial world will be able to learn from the experience of human history and apply it creatively to its own development, the greater the chance it will catch up with or even surpass the level of industrialization in the capitalist industrial world. This gives us reason to expect that the socialist system will attain gradual maturation and perfection and show its superiority over the capitalist system, not only in terms of the public ownership of the means of production, but also in terms of the level of development of the productive forces. Once one or several leading countries in the socialist industrial world will have caught up with and surpassed the developed countries of the capitalist industrial world in the main aspects of industrialization, a fundamental change in the balance of power between the two worlds will surely follow. The whole world situation will then be greatly altered. The countries that were once hovering between the two industrial worlds and were still basically stuck in the traditional agrarian world will be increasingly inclined to turn to socialism and embark on the path of socialist industrialization through different ways. One of the most important aspects in estimating the world of the future is thus the maturation and perfection of the economic and political systems of socialist countries that adhere to the leadership of the proletarian party, the socialist path of continuous reforms, and the

far-reaching impact on world history it could entail.

The problems facing the two worlds of the present age are far more complex than I outlined above. In a situation where the two worlds coexist and compete with each other, the contradictions and struggles between the two social systems will not disappear by themselves. The forces hostile to socialism in the capitalist world, while opposing internal changes, will continue to overtly or covertly infiltrate socialist countries by political, economic and cultural means. They will even wait for an opportunity to subvert these countries in order to realize their strategic goal of “peaceful evolution.” Facing such a situation, socialist countries will certainly have to take corresponding anti-infiltration, anti-subversion and anti-“peaceful evolution” measures to contain and counter international and domestic hostile forces, to consolidate their existence, and to develop the fruits of reform. Having different histories and facing diverse predicaments, many countries in both worlds are now located at a time of the transition from the old to the new. The priority and urgency of reforms for each country, and their successes or failures will end up bringing a host of diverse and tumultuous situations to light. However, as far as the tendency of historical development and the previous estimates are concerned, human reason, which has experienced war, will gradually make a historical choice regarding these two worlds after they go through a period of adaptation and stabilization: competition and exchange will become increasingly dominant, while rivalry and hostility will tend to de-escalate. After a long and unpredictable evolution, it is all more likely that the capitalist system will achieve its own metamorphosis, while the socialist system will achieve its own perfection. Once these two historical changes become a reality, a completely new trend will emerge in the entire world: the capitalist industrial world will tend to contract, and the socialist industrial world will tend to expand. The vertical and horizontal development of world history will thus enter a new era of a higher level.

At present, human society is facing huge problems such as the depletion of energy resources and serious environmental pollution and destruction. The advent of a new era in world history will certainly lead the development of science and technology onto a better path, one beneficial to the whole of humanity rather than private capital alone. Thanks to the cooperation of the whole world, and by removing of obstacles caused by private capital’s vested interests, it will be possible to find reasonable and effective solutions to the problems plaguing human society. The current accelerating

gap between a majority of poor countries and a minority of rich countries will also be gradually reduced or even eliminated thanks to the abolition of the various explicit and implicit forms of colonial exploitation and to the extensive development of socialist industrialization. A rational future of world history—in which we rationally produce goods, rationally distribute them, rationally apply science and technology, and rationally satisfy the ever-increasing material and spiritual needs of human groups and individuals—lies not in the prolongation of the well-worn paths of the capitalist industrial world, but in the renewal of the socialist industrial world, a renewal that should also include the self-metamorphosis of the capitalist system as such. History rarely proceeds in a linear fashion. The weakening, shrinking, and even metamorphosis of the capitalist industrial world, and the concomitant growth, expansion, and eventual spread of the socialist industrial world throughout the world is a process that goes along a long, winding, and difficult road. Nevertheless, we cannot change the general trend of human historical development. The Yellow River with all its twists will eventually flow back to the sea (黄河九曲，终将流归沧海).

The discipline of world history is still in a phase of development. Since history has become world history thanks to its continuous vertical and horizontal developments, the study of world history must follow suit and take the world as a whole by examining how it has developed from a state of mutual isolation to a world bound altogether by close connections, from a situation of fragmentation to one of integration, for this complete process is precisely what is known as world history. We will not be able to meet the need for the development of world history as a scholarly discipline by compiling histories of separate countries or regions exclusively studying countries and regions while neglecting to provide a more comprehensive perspective. As the world has already entered a brand-new stage since the 15th and 16th centuries, the discipline that examines world history accordingly needs to move up to the next level.