

# What did Guo Moruo bring to Chinese marxist historiography?

Mu Zhiguo<sup>1,a,\*</sup>, Nicholas Wilson<sup>2,b</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>Jiangnan University, No. 1800, Li Lake Avenue, Binhu District, Wuxi City, Jiangsu Province, 214122, China

<sup>2</sup>Jiangsu Yixin Culture Development Co., Ltd., 1036-1040, 1st Floor, "China Shuyang International Book City" Market, Songjiang Road, Southern New Town, Shuyang County, Suqian City, Jiangsu Province, 223600, China  
a.mzhiguo\_12\_29@126.com, b.wnicholas\_52687400@yahoo.com

**\*Corresponding Author**

**Abstract:** During the Republic of China period, Guo Moruo made multifaceted contributions to Chinese Marxist historiography. By examining the writing and impact of "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society," Guo Moruo's outstanding achievements in the study of oracle bone and bronze inscriptions, and his research accomplishments in the pre-Qin philosophers, we can gain a more objective understanding of Guo Moruo's historiography and better evaluate Chinese Marxist historiography from the perspective of scholars during the Republic of China period.

**Keywords:** Guo Moruo, Chinese Marxist historiography, Republic of China period

## 1. Introduction

Guo Moruo is one of the pioneers of Chinese Marxist historiography and has played a significant, even decisive, role in its development and growth. He is undoubtedly a leading figure in the field of Chinese Marxist historiography. Although the Chinese Marxist historiography community is a collective effort involving a large number of Marxist historians such as Fan Wenlan, Lv Zhenyu, Jian Bozan, Hou Wailu, and after 1949, it gathered an even broader range of historians dedicated to the study of history from a materialist perspective, it is an undeniable fact that Guo Moruo is a representative figure in Chinese Marxist historiography. There have always been diverse evaluations of Guo Moruo's historical achievements and influence, including objective assessments, but also evaluations that follow old sayings, do not quite match the facts, and are overly exaggerated. There are also many evaluations that are biased and deliberately negative towards Guo Moruo, as well as criticisms, accusations, and even slander and abuse from those who do not understand the facts and follow the crowd without understanding. To a certain extent, the evaluation of Guo Moruo's historiography is related to the evaluation of Chinese Marxist historiography. Problems that arise in the evaluation of Guo Moruo's historiography also reflect, to some extent, the problems that appear in the evaluation of Chinese Marxist historiography. Although the evaluation of Guo Moruo's historiography cannot be completely equated with the evaluation of Chinese Marxist historiography, the relationship between them is self-evident.

The content that Guo Moruo brought to Chinese Marxist historiography is extremely rich, and this article cannot cover all aspects. Based on previous research, this article attempts to use various evaluations of Guo Moruo's historiography during the Republic of China period as the main material. The aim is to recapture the various responses that Guo Moruo's historiographical contributions evoked in the academic community at the time, in order to illustrate the contributions that Guo Moruo's historiography has brought to Chinese Marxist historiography and beyond, hoping to contribute to a more objective evaluation of Guo Moruo's historiography and Marxist historiography.

## 2. "A major path to studying ancient times": "A study of ancient Chinese society"

In March 1930, Guo Moruo's "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" was published in Shanghai. "This was the initial attempt by Chinese scholars to divide the stages of Chinese historical development using Marxist social and economic formation theory"[1]. "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" has become a

symbol of the establishment of Chinese Marxist historiography and is considered a classic work in the field. This view is now a consensus among scholars.

### **2.1. The relationship between "A study of ancient Chinese society" and the debate on the history of Chinese society**

When "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" was published, China was in the midst of a heated debate on the history of Chinese society. Mentioning Guo Moruo's work often associates it with the social history debate, and indeed, the publication of "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" did influence the direction of the debate. It was the publication of Tao Xisheng's "Analysis of Chinese Social History" and "History of Chinese Feudal Society" in 1929, and Guo Moruo's "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" in 1930, that brought the discussion into the realm of Chinese social history. The debate shifted from the nature of Chinese society to issues of Chinese social history, affecting the trajectory of the debate. Guo Moruo's main viewpoints in "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" were met with fierce criticism from the Dynamists and became one of the core contents of the debate in the "Reading Magazine".

However, does Guo Moruo's writing of "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" have a direct relationship with the social history debate? Did Guo Moruo write this book specifically for the debate, or was it written for other reasons and only later became intertwined with the debate? There is controversy in the academic community regarding this issue. In reality, firstly, "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" was completed by Guo Moruo while he was in Japan, far from the center of the domestic debate, and his understanding of the debate was not comprehensive; secondly, the entire book does not mention the ongoing social history debate. The book places the history of the Shang and Zhou dynasties within the framework of materialist conception of history's social and economic formation theory, and proposes that the Western Zhou was a slave society, which became key points of criticism or attack in the social history debate, yet there is no direct response from Guo Moruo (only a simple criticism of Tao Xisheng). This leads us to question the relationship between the book and the social history debate, suggesting that interpreting "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" and the social history debate as entirely linked is not comprehensive.

### **2.2. "A Study of Ancient Chinese society" and the transformation of modern Chinese historiography**

Ultimately, "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" is a historical work. As a classic historical work in the history of modern Chinese historiography, its motivation for writing is inevitably directly related to the state of historiography at the time. At the beginning of the 20th century, Liang Qichao advocated for the establishment of a "new historiography" in China, one of whose main themes was to thoroughly settle with old historiography, refer to Western historiography, integrate modern elements such as the "quest for truth" and "scientific" history, and establish a "new historiography" that meets the practical needs of Chinese society. Around the time of the "May Fourth" movement, modern Chinese historiography, which was different from ancient historiography, had already developed to a considerable scale in terms of historical perspectives, research concepts, methods, mechanisms, talent cultivation, and historical teaching. Wang Guowei, Liang Qichao, Hu Shi, Chen Yuan, Gu Jiegang, Fu Sinian, and Chen Yinke, among others, all made different contributions to this endeavor. The general situation at the time was that scholars such as Wang Guowei and Luo Zhenyu, through the decipherment of oracle bones, made significant progress in the study of ancient history, highlighting the value of new historical materials in historical research due to the "double evidence method"; Hu Shi's exposition of the "scientific method" in historical research, borrowing from the Qing and Jia academic research style, also received widespread attention. Gu Jiegang, through the textual criticism of historical materials, proposed the theory of "the layered creation of ancient Chinese history"; Chen Yuan's "Four Studies on Ancient Religions" and "A Study of the Sinicization of Western Regions in the Yuan Dynasty" (Part One) and other famous works had also been completed and published. Emphasizing historical materials and textual criticism became the forefront of historical research at the time. Around the same period, amidst the rising tide of the New Culture Movement, Hu Shi proposed the cultural program of "studying problems, importing theories, organizing the legacy, and recreating civilization"[2], advocating for "expanding the scope of national studies with a historical perspective", "organizing the materials of national studies with systematic arrangements", and "using comparative research to assist in the organization and interpretation of materials for national studies"[3]. The movement to "organize the legacy"

subsequently emerged, one of whose consequences was to lead academic research trends into the "organization", "management", sorting, and textual criticism of "legacy". In fact, the mainstream historiographical trend of historical textual criticism during the Republic of China period was directly related to the use of new historical materials, the advocacy of "scientific methods", and the development of the "organizing the legacy" movement.

### 2.3. Guo Moruo's critique and transcendence of the "Organizing the legacy" movement

Guo Moruo did not support the "Organizing the Legacy" movement. As early as 1924, he stated, "Whenever a certain advocacy becomes a collective consciousness, there is often a tendency for mixed elements to be confused". The writing and publication of "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" was a challenge to those who adhered to old scholarship, particularly to figures like Hu Shi who advocated for "organizing the legacy." This act represented Guo Moruo's rejection of the "Organizing the Legacy" movement and his attempt to explore new pathways for the development of Chinese historiography. This was one of the direct reasons for writing "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society."

It is noteworthy that in the "Preface" of "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society," Guo Moruo expressed his judgment on the characteristics of Chinese historiography at that time. First, he affirmed that Wang Guowei and Luo Zhenyu's research methods were "modern" and contained "modern scientific content," stating that "we cannot avoid taking the achievements of Luo and Wang as our starting point when discussing ancient Chinese studies and clarifying ancient Chinese society." Second, he questioned Hu Shi's "Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy," noting that it had dominated the new academic circles in China for several years, but it hardly touched upon the actual conditions of ancient China. He argued that without a clear understanding of the origins of society, the emergence of thought could not be discussed. This indicates that Guo Moruo highly valued the research of Wang Guowei and others as "modern," asserting that the development of "new historiography" should start from their achievements, and that the path of continued development was not the "organizing the legacy" advocated by Hu Shi, which he did not consider a model.

In Guo Moruo's view, "critique" must replace Hu Shi's "organizing," with the reasoning that "the ultimate goal of 'organizing' is 'seeking truth from facts,' while our 'critique' spirit seeks to find the reasons within the facts." He further elaborated that "the method of 'organizing' can only achieve 'knowing the facts,' while our 'critique' spirit aims to 'know the reasons behind the facts.'" He acknowledged that "organizing" is indeed a necessary step in the process of "critique," but it should not become a limitation. Here, Guo Moruo clearly articulated his intention for a "critical" historiography, asserting that to achieve the goal of "clarifying ancient Chinese society" and "recognizing the truth of so-called national studies," the "organizing the legacy" movement was inadequate. The intent behind writing "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" was to "transcend the scope of 'national studies'" and go beyond "organizing the legacy".

### 2.4. The composition process and academic exploration of "A study of ancient Chinese society"

Looking at the composition process of "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society," after completing "The Social Life of the Zhouyi Era" in Japan, Guo Moruo, in his subsequent article "The Social Transformation and Ideological Reflections of the 'Book of Songs' and 'Book of Documents' Era," identified the period as "the transition from primitive communal system to slavery" and "the transition from slavery to feudalism." He initially attempted to place the history of the Shang and Zhou dynasties within the framework of Marxist social and economic formation theory. At the same time, he deeply felt the lack of materials and the resulting errors in research methods: "I began to doubt the materials I was studying," "My early research method, without any concealment, suffered from the problem of formulaism. I almost rigidly applied the formulas of historical materialism to ancient materials. And the materials I relied on were so problematic. The conclusions I reached in this way could not only not win my confidence, but also... affected the method." [7] As a result, he began to focus on studying oracle bone and bronze inscriptions, based on which he wrote "Ancient Society in Divination Inscriptions" and "The Social History View in Zhou Dynasty Bronze Inscriptions" (the original title was "The Social History View in Zhou Bronze Inscriptions"). During this period, based on his research insights into ancient texts and previous considerations of combining historical materialism with the history of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, he wrote "The Stages of Development in Chinese Social History," which became the earliest chapter to systematically elaborate on

the phased development of Chinese history using historical materialism. It was published in the fourth issue of the 1928 Shanghai "Thought" magazine. When he intended to compile these articles into a book, the article "was originally not intended as an introduction to this book, but because of its similar nature, it is included here"[8], becoming the "Introduction" part of "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society."

## **2.5. The book composition process and academic exploration of "A study of ancient Chinese society"**

Upon examining the composition process of "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society," after finalizing "The Social Life During the I Ching Era" in Japan, Guo Moruo proceeded with his article "The Social Transformation and Ideological Reflections in the Era of the 'Book of Poetry' and 'Book of Documents'," where he characterized the period as "a shift from the primitive communal system towards slavery" and "a transition from slavery to feudalism." He made preliminary attempts to situate the history of the Shang and Zhou dynasties within the framework of Marxist social and economic formation theories, while also expressing concerns about the scarcity of materials and the methodological errors that resulted: "I began to harbor doubts about the materials I was researching," "My initial research methodology, candidly speaking, was plagued by dogmatism. I rather rigidly applied the formulas of historical materialism to ancient data. And the data I relied upon were so questionable. The conclusions I derived from this process could not inspire confidence in myself, and moreover... they impacted the methodology." [7] Consequently, he shifted his focus to studying oracle bones and inscriptions on bronzes, which led to the creation of "Ancient Society in Divination Inscriptions" and "Social History in Zhou Dynasty Bronze Inscriptions" (originally titled "Social History in Zhou Gold Inscriptions"). During this period, drawing on his insights from the study of ancient texts and his previous integration of historical materialism with the history of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, he composed "The Stages of Development in Chinese Social History," marking the earliest comprehensive discussion on the phased development of Chinese history through the lens of historical materialism. It was published in the fourth issue of the 1928 Shanghai magazine "Thought." When he decided to compile these articles into a book, the article, "though not originally intended as an introduction to this book, was included due to its relevance," [8] becoming the "Introduction" section of "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society."

From Guo Moruo's own clear statement of the motivation for writing "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" and the process of its creation, we can gain several insights: First, whether the writing of "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" was related to the social history debate or other "difficult to write" (see the "Introduction" in the original book) reasons is difficult to conclude due to insufficient materials. However, the author's intent expressed in the "Preface" is very clear, which is to build upon the "modern" Chinese historiography pioneered by Wang Guowei and others as the "starting point," to resist Hu Shi's advocacy of the "organizing the legacy" movement, to replace Hu Shi's "organizing" of "national heritage" with the "criticism" of history using historical materialism, and to reveal a new path for historical research that "settles accounts with past societies" using historical materialism. The direct consequence of this intent was the establishment of Chinese Marxist historiography. Secondly, the completion of each chapter of "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" demonstrates a logical process from specific research to general research (from "social life" to "ancient society," from "social transformation" to "social history view," from the society of the Shang and Zhou era to "the stages of development in Chinese social history") and a conscious effort to overcome "formalization" (from doubting the materials to studying oracle bones and inscriptions, from self-reflection on "committing the problem of formalism" to continuously revising the views in the book). These characteristics have very positive academic significance for the continued development of an emerging historiographical trend.

## **2.6. Academic evaluation and influence of "A study of ancient Chinese society"**

From the beginning of its publication, "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" not only sparked debates on its viewpoints in the social history debate but also received comments from an academic value perspective. For instance, Ji Wenfu's book review published in "The Ta Kung Pao" on October 12, 1931, stated: "Mr. Guo Moruo's 'A Study of Ancient Chinese Society' can be considered a famous work that shook the academic world at the time. Generally speaking, his original spirit and new insights have cleared the old historiography's fog and paved the way for new historiography, which is worthy of our admiration." [9] The

following year, on January 4th, "The Ta Kung Pao" published another book review by Zhang Yinlin: "Its contribution is not only in several important discoveries and powerful hypotheses... but especially in demonstrating a major path for the study of antiquity." [10] Both reviews coincidentally evaluated "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" as "paving the way for new historiography" and "demonstrating a major path for the study of antiquity," which can be said to hit the nail on the head.

After the social history debate ended, the academic influence of "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" continued to ferment. He Ganzhi said in 1937 that "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" "indeed opened a new era for the study of ancient Chinese history." [11] In the "Preface" of "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society," Guo Moruo criticized Hu Shi's "Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy" for "barely touching the actual circumstances of ancient China." In contrast, Gu Jiegang, in his 1947 publication "Contemporary Chinese Historiography," evaluated "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" as having allowed us to "barely touch the edges of the truth about ancient Chinese society" since its publication. [11] In 1949, Qi Sihe wrote that "the study of Chinese social history truly embarked on an academic path with Mr. Guo Moruo." [12] At the same time, Chinese Marxist historiography quickly developed from this point.

The most significant importance of Guo Moruo's "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" for modern Chinese historiography is that it "demonstrated a major path for the study of antiquity," a "path" that opened a "new era" for Chinese Marxist historiography.

### 3. Pioneering exploration of ancient Chinese characters: Guo Moruo's studies

#### 3.1. The practice and achievements of Guo Moruo's historiography

In recent years, much of the criticism directed at Guo Moruo's historiography accuses him of rigidly applying the dogma of the "five modes of production" to Chinese history. He is seen as the instigator of Chinese Marxist historiography that disregards the "truth-seeking" nature of historical studies in pursuit of its "practical application" characteristics, and as a typical figure who values theory over historical materials and facts. Due to space limitations, this article will not delve into this debate but rather aims to clarify whether Guo Moruo's historiography is truly an "ivory tower" that values theory over historical materials. A phenomenon worth noting is that some criticisms of Guo Moruo's historiography focus on and exaggerate the dogmatic and formulaic shortcomings of Marxist historiography, while seldom mentioning Guo Moruo's outstanding achievements in deciphering ancient characters and his research contributions to the study of ancient history using these materials, as well as his basic judgments on the nature of pre-Qin society. In stark contrast, some renowned scholars from the academic atmosphere of the Republic of China period, whom some people "long for," placed great emphasis on and highly appraised Guo Moruo's contributions to the study of ancient characters.

Guo Moruo successively completed and published "A Study of Oracle Bone Inscriptions" in 2 volumes (1931), "Comprehensive Compilation of Divination Inscriptions" in 1 volume, "Exegesis" in 3 volumes, "Index" in 1 volume (1933), "Remaining Discussions on Yin Inscriptions" (1933), "A Collection of Ancient Inscriptions" (1933), "A Continuation of the Collection of Ancient Inscriptions" (1934), "Essence of Yin Inscriptions" in 2 volumes, "Exegesis" in 3 volumes (1937), and other specialized works. In the study of bronze inscriptions, he completed and published "A Study of Inscriptions on Shang and Zhou Bronzes" (1931), "A Great Series of Inscriptions on Bronzes from the Two Zhou Dynasties" in 2 volumes (published in 1932, and later revised and expanded into "Illustrated Catalogue of Inscriptions on Bronzes from the Two Zhou Dynasties" and "Exegesis of Inscriptions on Bronzes from the Two Zhou Dynasties" between 1934-1935), "A Collection of Studies on Bronze Inscriptions" (1932), among other books. These works have made creative contributions in the research methods of divination inscriptions and Shang and Zhou bronzes, the interpretation of oracle bone and bronze inscriptions, and the research on the periodization and dating of oracle bones and bronzes.

Guo Moruo's achievements in the study of ancient Chinese characters were widely recognized by historians during the Republic of China period. Tang Lan summarized the state of oracle bone studies by saying: "In the study of divination inscriptions, since Xuetao paved the way, Guantao continued with historical examination, Yantao categorized the times, and Dingtang revealed the patterns of the inscriptions, it has indeed reached the pinnacle of its time." [13] Gu Jiegang and others, in their work

"Contemporary Chinese Historiography," stated: "After the death of Mr. Wang (Guowei), it is Mr. Guo Moruo who has carried on his research in oracle bone inscriptions." "Those who have organized and summarized the existing bronze inscriptions are Mr. Guo Moruo and Mr. Wu Qichang." [12] Li Yanong, in the postscript of his 1941 published book "Study of Bronze Inscriptions," wrote: "The theories cited in this book mostly originate from Mr. Guo Dingtang. Dingtang is a senior fellow townsman of the author. The grandeur of his 'Great Series of Inscriptions from the Two Zhou Dynasties' is indeed unprecedented in the history of Chinese bronze studies. The fruits of a thousand years of diligent research by bronze scholars are, of course, included in the series, and Dingtang's own rich contributions have far surpassed those of his predecessors." [14] These evaluations highlight the significant impact and recognition of Guo Moruo's work in the field of ancient Chinese character research.

### 3.2. Guo Moruo's achievements in ancient Chinese character studies and academic evaluation

During the Republic of China period, even those who disagreed with Guo Moruo's achievements in historical materialism or those who did not agree with the historical materialism school, all sincerely admired Guo Moruo's research accomplishments in oracle bone and bronze inscriptions. A typical example is Fu Sinian, who was completely opposed to historical materialism in terms of political stance and academic philosophy. In 1930, Fu Sinian, who placed great emphasis on the study of new historical materials, saw Guo Moruo's "A Study of Oracle Bone Inscriptions" completed in Japan and wished to publish it in installments in the "Collected Papers of the Institute of History and Philology" and then as a separate volume in the "Special Publications of the Institute of History and Philology," with generous remuneration. Although this did not come to fruition for various reasons, it shows Fu Sinian's full recognition of Guo Moruo's research in ancient characters. In 1947, while recuperating in the United States, Fu Sinian specifically nominated Guo Moruo as a candidate for the Academician of the Central Research Institute via correspondence. In the "Explanation of the Qualifications of the Nominee," Fu Sinian praised Guo Moruo for his "pioneering and exploratory contributions to the study of the Zhou Dynasty's bronze inscriptions" and for his research on oracle bone inscriptions, which "systematically classified and arranged, forming a unique system." [15] When recommending a candidate for the Academician, it was required to list three representative works of the nominee and evaluate them. Fu Sinian listed Guo Moruo's "A Catalogue of Inscriptions on Bronzes from the Two Zhou Dynasties," commenting that "this book collects more than three hundred pieces of bronze inscriptions with verifiable dates and nationalities from the Two Zhou Dynasties, meticulously examined and supplemented with illustrations, creating the theory of the northern and southern systems, marking a significant advancement for the study of ancient bronze inscriptions"; he listed "A Collection of Studies on Bronze Inscriptions," commenting that "this is a sister volume to the catalogue, using bronze inscriptions as material, interpreting the text, discussing their meanings, and comparing them with historical records, offering many original insights, and is a work that pays the most attention to primary sources in the study of ancient thought and social history"; he listed "A Comprehensive Compilation of Divination Inscriptions," commenting that "this book selects eight hundred of the finest pieces of extant divination inscriptions, arranges them by category, compares and interprets the terms, and presents numerous original views, making it the most systematic work on the study of Yin Dynasty divination inscriptions." [15] On April 1, 1948, the Central Research Institute officially announced the list of the first 81 Academicians of China, and Guo Moruo was elected as an Academician of the Central Research Institute (Humanities Group).

Due to different political and ideological positions as well as different academic philosophies, Fu Sinian could not possibly recognize Guo Moruo's achievements in Marxist historiography, and of course, he could not nominate him for the Academician of the Central Research Institute based on his achievements in "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society"; however, precisely because of this, Fu Sinian was able to put aside the factors of different political and ideological positions and, strictly from an academic standpoint, give a high and realistic evaluation of Guo Moruo's achievements in the study of ancient characters, nominating him as an Academician of the Central Research Institute. This not only indicates that Guo Moruo's achievements in this field were widely recognized but also demonstrates the academic attitude and scholarly character that Fu Sinian showed in evaluating Guo Moruo. In recent decades, more and more people have paid attention to

and engaged in the study of Fu Sinian's scholarship; therefore, Fu Sinian's actions in recommending Guo Moruo as an Academician seem to warrant attention and serve as a model for emulation.

### 3.3. Guo Moruo's research on ancient Chinese characters and the empirical exploration of ancient social history

It should be clear that Guo Moruo did not study ancient Chinese characters for the sake of studying characters themselves; his goal was to use the deciphering of ancient textual materials to substantiate his research on ancient society, seeking "the reasons within the facts" and "understanding the causes". Guo Moruo stated, "My study of divination inscriptions aims to explore the origins of Chinese society, not just to be confined to the study of characters and history. However, recognizing characters is a necessary step in all explorations, hence I cannot help but pay attention to this. Moreover, characters are one of the key indicators of social culture, and to some extent, they are related to the state of social production and organization. To further pursue the general aspects of its culture, one cannot abandon this path." [16] This layer of meaning was also recognized by scholars of the Republic of China period. For instance, Guo Zhanbo in "A History of Chinese Thought in the Last Fifty Years" said, "Guo Moruo is a figure representing social thought. To solve the problems of Chinese society, it is necessary to settle the history of Chinese society in the past. To understand the entirety of Chinese social history, one must first understand the origin of Chinese society—antiquity. To understand the truth of ancient Chinese society, one must study oracle bone inscriptions, following the path of Luo Zhenyu and Wang Guowei." "This is Mr. Guo's continuation of Luo and Wang's research on oracle bone inscriptions, a contradiction, a dialectical development. In summary, Mr. Guo is the person who has achieved the most in studying Chinese social history with the materialist view of history and is also the person who has achieved the most in studying oracle bone inscriptions. He not only opened a new era in Chinese historiography but also made a great contribution to the intellectual history of China in the last fifty years." [17] Wang Senran in "Critical Biographies of Modern Masters" also said that Guo Moruo's study of Yin and Zhou ancient texts "is used to investigate the history of ancient society and to lay the foundation for the study of ancient Chinese society." He further believed that Guo Moruo's "A Study of Oracle Bone Inscriptions" and "A Study of Inscriptions on Shang and Zhou Bronzes" "although following the two families of Luo and Wang, there is no great essence; however, the purpose of his study is to prove ancient society. His book 'A Study of Ancient Chinese Society' is indeed sufficient to open a new era for the history of ancient China." [18] Qi Sihe pointed out: "The research in 'A Study of Ancient Chinese Society' is limited to the Yin and Zhou dynasties, and each article is based on very clear historical materials. Moreover, he not only relies on book materials but also studies oracle bones and bronze inscriptions because of the study of Chinese society, applying divination inscriptions and bronze inscriptions to the study of social history." [12] From the perspective of ancient social research, it is precisely because Guo Moruo has put effort into the study and organization of oracle bone inscriptions and bronze inscriptions, making his "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" rare and unmatched; from the field of ancient Chinese character research, it is an example of effectively applying new materials to specific historical research.

For the development of Chinese historiography since the 20th century, many researchers are willing to divide it into two major trends: the historical material school and the historical view school. This view is not inappropriate if looked at with a broad brush, as there are indeed extreme manifestations in modern Chinese historiography that separately "deduce" "historical materials" and "historical views" in historiography. When it comes to "historical materials," there is the slogan "history is the study of historical materials," and when it comes to "historical views," there is also the phenomenon of "almost rigidly applying the formulas of historical materialism to ancient formulas." [19] However, if the two are seen as distinctly separate and inversely proportional relationships, it may not be entirely accurate. Looking only at Marxist historiography, as the major school of "historical view," its pioneering work "A Study of Ancient Chinese Society" was written based on the study of historical materials such as oracle bone inscriptions and bronze inscriptions. Its pioneer, Guo Moruo, is one of the "Four Halls of Oracle Bone Inscriptions," and due to his contributions to historical materials in the field of ancient Chinese characters, Guo Moruo was listed among the Academicians of the Central Research Institute. Therefore, it is not accurate to identify Chinese Marxist

historiography as an absolute "historical view school"[20], and the evaluation of Guo Moruo should also be objective from his multiple contributions to "historical views" and "historical materials."

In "Ten Criticisms," Guo Moruo once cited Wang Guowei's sentiment in the "preface" he wrote for Luo Zhenyu's "A Study and Interpretation of Yin Ruins Inscriptions," which said, "In creating new knowledge and exploring the profound, there has been no news." [21] This illustrates the significance of ancient Chinese characters for the study of ancient history; Fu Sinian also used "the merit of creating new knowledge and exploring the profound" to evaluate Guo Moruo's achievements in the study of bronze inscriptions from the two Zhou dynasties in his "explanatory note" recommending Guo Moruo as an Academician of the Central Research Institute. Here, the phrase "the merit of creating new knowledge and exploring the profound" is also appropriately used to summarize Guo Moruo's contributions to oracle bone and bronze inscriptions and other ancient Chinese characters. Because Guo Moruo's "creation of new knowledge and exploration of the profound" in the study of ancient Chinese characters has brought a tradition of valuing historical materials to Chinese Marxist historiography, and historical materials and textual criticism are also one of the characteristics of Marxist historiography.

#### **4. Guo Moruo's research on pre-qin philosophers**

##### **4.1. The study of the history of marxist thought in chongqing during the anti-japanese war period**

The history of thought was a new field of Marxist historiography opened up by Marxist historians in the Chongqing area during the Anti-Japanese War period. As Hou Wailu said, "The early focus of Marxist researchers was on politics and economy, on the analysis of social forms, and there was little time to consider the history of thought and scholarship." [22] The development needs of Marxist historiography and the circumstances in Chongqing during the Anti-Japanese War period made it possible for Marxist historiography to expand into the field of the history of thought and scholarship. Guo Moruo's "The Bronze Age" and "Ten Criticisms" "have compile out a relatively complete outline of the structure of ancient society and its transformation, as well as the reflection of the transformation process in the ideological realm." [23] During the Republic of China period, Guo Moruo also made significant contributions to the study of pre-Qin philosophers, with the results mainly concentrated in the two works "The Bronze Age" and "Ten Criticisms". After the publication of the two books in 1945, they quickly attracted the attention of the academic community, and articles introducing and commenting on them appeared in newspapers and magazines one after another. In 1946, in the combined issue of volumes 1 and 2 of the new 7th volume of "Book Quarterly", "Ten Criticisms" was placed at the top of the 42 academic works introduced in that issue: "The value of Mr. Guo's book lies in making a new attempt on pre-Qin philosophers, in order to have a more accurate understanding of the philosophers. It also re-evaluates the value of the philosophers, such as the evaluation of Mozi, which is different from the views of Liang Qichao and Hu Shi. His view that Xunzi can be considered a syncretist, and that Han Feizi's thought cannot be regarded as true rule of law thought from a modern perspective, is different from the recent general reasoning. The article on Lv Buwei and Qin King Zheng reveals the subtleties of thought and politics at the end of the Warring States period and is the most insightful article in the book." [24]

##### **4.2. Zhu Ziqing's evaluation of "Ten criticisms" and Guo Moruo's academic contributions**

On January 4, 1947, the first issue of the "Book Review" section of "The Ta Kung Pao" published an article by Zhu Ziqing (under the pen name Pei Xian) reviewing "Ten Criticisms." The article stated: "The ten criticisms are almost all new interpretations and evaluations of ancient culture, and are almost all unique insights of Mr. Guo." "I recommend it to those who care about Chinese culture and suggest they all read this 'Ten Criticisms'." [25] Zhu Ziqing also evaluated "Ten Criticisms" in conjunction with the development trends of ancient history research at the time. After elaborating on the meaning of "interpreting the ancients" proposed by Feng Youlan in the context of "believing in the ancients," "doubting the ancients," and "interpreting the ancients," he believed that "interpreting the ancients" means "objectively interpreting the ancients," yet "no matter how objective, it cannot be separated from the standpoint of modern people." Zhu Ziqing emphasized and affirmed the two major characteristics of "Ten Criticisms": the evaluation standard of "people-oriented" and the theoretical guidance of "dialectical materialism," thereby highlighting the



uniqueness of Marxist historiography in China at that time. Zhu Ziqing's views also coincide with Guo Moruo's self-evaluation mentioned above.[25]

### 4.3. The academic evaluation and controversy of "Ten criticisms"

On April 5, 1947, an article with a "focus on criticism" of "Ten Criticisms" was published in "The Ta Kung Pao." However, the article still acknowledged that "looking at the whole book, there are many pioneering insights, although there are also many places where the evidence is insufficient and close to being arbitrary, yet there are even more insights that are firmly established and meticulously examined. The author is originally a literary figure, so the writing is extremely smooth. Even though it is a textual research, it is lively and engaging, which is rare." [26]

Contrary to the above review is Qi Sihe's comment. Qi Sihe, in the "Book Review" section of the 30th issue of "Yanbing Academic Journal" (published in June 1946) which he edited, wrote: "Guo is originally a talented literary figure, and his study of philology and history also shows the color of a literary figure. Therefore, his discussions have many original gains, but there are also many biases, because his talent is transcendent, and his imagination is like a heavenly horse flying through the air, which cannot be controlled by truth and logic." Qi Sihe concluded: "This book is specifically written for the study of ancient thought. If viewed from a philosophical perspective, it is far less rich in gains and dense in thought than Feng Youlan's 'History of Chinese Philosophy.'" "The book's textual criticism of pre-Qin philosophers is far less precise than Qian Mu's 'Chronological Study of Pre-Qin Philosophers,' and its discussion of thought is even less detailed than Feng Youlan's. The value of the two books has already been appraised by the world, but Guo is very contemptuous of them, which is enough to see Guo's strong personality and the heavy flavor of a literary figure." [25]

### 4.4. The academic controversy and evaluation of "Ten criticisms"

Within the camp of Marxist historiography, there are also disputes over "Ten Criticisms." For instance, Hua Gang, in his 1945 book "The Overturning of Chinese History," believed that: "Mr. Guo Moruo recently made a big case in 'Ten Criticisms,' especially attacking the Mohists and praising the Confucians, hence some say that Guo Moruo has become a pro-Confucianism and anti-Mohism theorist. His arguments are very far-fetched, and the historical significance is often reversed. Mr. Guo is one of China's top historians and a revolutionary fighter whom I admire, but in his work of historical overturning, he often wins by being surprising rather than by being correct, which I cannot agree with." [27] On the other hand, Lv Zhenyu, in the revised edition of "Chinese Society in the Yin and Zhou Dynasties" (1946), said: "After the publication of Mr. Guo Moruo's great work 'Self-Criticism of Ancient Studies,' it involves many points related to my 'History of China's Primitive Society' and this book 'Chinese Society in the Yin and Zhou Dynasties' as well as 'History of Chinese Political Thought.' I admire Mr. Guo's spirit of self-criticism from the bottom of my heart and thank him for giving me a lot of inspiration. I have read Mr. Guo's great work three times carefully and, after considering Mr. Guo's insights carefully, I am more determined to review all my past opinions in depth." [28]

In addition, the 32nd issue of "Yanbing Academic Journal" (June 1947) also published a book review of "The Bronze Age" written by Rong Yuan. After introducing the main content of "The Bronze Age," the article said: "The above-mentioned points show Mr. Guo's strong imagination, often making innovative opinions, and with smooth writing, it is a masterpiece that attractive." [29]

The above comments are mainly affirmative, reflected in the praise of Guo Moruo's new insights and smooth writing in the two books. Critical opinions, represented by Qi Sihe, mainly question the literary imagination shown in the book, which goes against the rigorous logical demonstration that historical research must follow. Hua Gang is dissatisfied with the excessive case-turning articles in the book and the far-fetched arguments that win by being surprising. Rong Yuan's comment on "The Bronze Age," "It can be seen that Mr. Guo's imagination is strong," also implies this.

The study of pre-Qin philosophers falls within the category of intellectual history, where researchers' historical concepts, basic positions, and motivations for writing have more room for subjective interpretation, potentially increasing the chances of achieving "revisionist articles." Undoubtedly, Guo Moruo's turn to the study of pre-Qin philosophers in the 1940s was quite intentional. As he stated, "I also

wanted to test the 'adaptability' of dialectical materialism in China in terms of Chinese thought, Chinese society, and Chinese history" [30]. Such a clear subjective desire would inevitably influence the researcher's objective stance to some extent. Guo Moruo had his own criteria for evaluating the academic thoughts and related figures of the pre-Qin period, saying, "What is the standard for my likes and dislikes? In a word, it all comes down to: people-oriented!" [31]. However, overemphasizing the "people-oriented" standard to judge the "good" and "evil" of historical figures and replacing the role they played in historical development with mere judgments of good and bad can be overly absolute. When considering the context of the times, evaluations of the thoughts of pre-Qin philosophers and related historical figures that are entangled with reality may inevitably conflict with assessments made purely from an academic perspective.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, through the various contemporary evaluations of Guo Moruo's historiography, we can not only understand and examine what Guo Moruo brought to Chinese Marxist historiography but also gain a clearer understanding of the role Guo Moruo's historiography played in the development of Chinese Marxist historiography. It is important to recognize both the direct and potential impacts that Guo Moruo had on Chinese Marxist historiography without attributing all the achievements and lessons of Chinese Marxist historiography solely to him. By doing so, we can achieve a targeted and factual evaluation of Guo Moruo's historiography, which also aids in the objective assessment of Chinese Marxist historiography as a whole.

## 6. References

- [1] Lin Ganquan. 20th Century Chinese Historiography. *Historical Research*, 1996(2).
- [2] Hu Shi. The Significance of the New Tide of Thought. In: *Collected Works of Hu Shi (Volume 3)* [M]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1998.
- [3] Hu Shi. Declaration of the Launch of the National Studies Quarterly. *National Studies Quarterly (Volume 1, Issue 1)*, January 1923.
- [4] Guo Moruo. Evaluation of Organizing the Legacy. *Chuangzao Weekly (Issue 36)*, January 13, 1924.
- [5] Guo Moruo. Preface to the Reprint of *A Collection of Studies on Bronze Inscriptions* [M]. People's Publishing House, 1954.
- [6] Guo Moruo. Preface to *A Study of Ancient Chinese Society* [M]. Shijiazhuang: Hebei Education Publishing House, 2000.
- [7] Guo Moruo. *Sea Waves* [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai New Literature and Art Publishing House, 1954.
- [8] Guo Moruo. Introduction to *A Study of Ancient Chinese Society* [M]. Shijiazhuang: Hebei Education Publishing House, 2000.
- [9] Wenfu. Review of Guo Moruo's *A Study of Ancient Chinese Society* [N]. *The Ta Kung Pao*, October 12, 1931.
- [10] Su Chi. Review of Guo Moruo's *A Study of Ancient Chinese Society* [N]. *The Ta Kung Pao*, January 4, 1932.
- [11] Gu Jiegang. Contemporary Chinese Historiography [A]. In: *Complete Works of Gu Jiegang - Collection of Gu Jiegang's Ancient History Papers (Volume Twelve)* [M]. Zhonghua Book Company, 2010.
- [12] Qi Sihe. The Development of Chinese Historiography in the Past Hundred Years [J]. *Yanbing Social Sciences*, 1949, 2(12).
- [13] Preface to the *Collection of Oracle Bone Inscriptions from Tianrang Pavilion* [M]. Fu Jen University, 1939.
- [14] Li Yanong. Postscript to *Studies on Bronze Inscriptions (Kong De Research Institute Series No. 4)* [M]. Lai Xun Ge Bookstore, 1941.
- [15] Wang Rongsheng. Fu Sinian and Guo Moruo [J]. *Literature, History, and Philosophy*, 2005(3).
- [16] Guo Moruo. Preface to *Studies on Oracle Bone Inscriptions* [M]. Da Dong Book Bureau (Shanghai), 1931.
- [17] Guo Zhanbo. *A History of Chinese Thought in the Last Fifty Years* [M]. Renwen Bookstore (Beiping), August 1936.

- [18] Wang Senran. Critiques of Modern Masters (First Collection) [M]. Sanlian Bookstore, 1998.
- [19] Guo Moruo. Guo Moruo's Collected Works (Volume 8) [M]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1958.
- [20] Zhang Yue. An Analysis of the emphasize of Historical Materials and Methods of Historical Examination by Chinese Marxist Historians in the 1940s [A]. Collected Essays on Historiography, 2006(2).
- [21] Guo Moruo. Ten Criticisms [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Qunyi Publishing House, 1947.
- [22] Hou Wailu. Early Pursuits [M]. Sanlian Bookstore, 1985.
- [23] Guo Moruo. Postscript to Ten Criticisms [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1954.
- [24] Book Quarterly, New Volume 7, Issues 1 & 2 Combined Issue (June 1946).
- [25] Pei Xian. (Review) Ten Criticisms [N]. The Ta Kung Pao · Book Review Weekly (Issue 1), January 4, 1947.
- [26] The Ta Kung Pao, April 5, 1947.
- [27] Hua Gang. The Overturning of Chinese History [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1981.
- [28] Lv Zhenyu. Chinese Society in the Yin and Zhou Dynasties [M]. Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 1962.
- [29] Rong Yuan. Review of The Bronze Age [J]. Yanjing Academic Journal (Issue 32), June 1947.
- [30] Guo Moruo. Crossing the East China Sea [A]. In: Guo Moruo's Collected Works (Volume 8) [M]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1958.
- [31] Guo Moruo. Preface to Historical Figures [A]. In: Guo Moruo's Complete Works - Historical Compilation Volume 4 [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1982.