

A Comprehensive Analysis of the Research of Chinese Five Emperors Era from the Perspective of Its Systematic Historical Literature*

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1. Introduction

The word “five emperors”五帝 can be found in Chinese ancient classics, such as *The Rites of Zhou*(zhouli 周礼), *The Book of Rites*(liji 礼记), *The Rites by Daide*(dazhailiji 大戴礼记), *Strategies of the Warring States*(zhanguoche 戰國策), *Chuang Tzu* 庄子, *Han Feizi* 韓非子 and *The*

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Songs of Chu (*chuci* 楚辭) and so on. As a name of era, it originates from *Historical Records · Biographic Sketches of Five Emperors* (*shiji wudibenji* 史記·五帝本紀). The five emperors stand for the Yellow Emperor, Zhuan Xu, DiKu, Yao and Shun by Sima Qian. “The Five Emperors Era” 五帝時代 in this paper refers to their administration times.

“The Five Emperors Era” by Sima Qian 司馬遷 is equivalent to the later period of Longshan Culture in archaeology, which lasted for more than two hundred years. Although this period is short, it is the beginning of splendid Chinese civilization and exerts unparalleled influence on later generations. From the late Spring and Autumn Period to present times, this period of history occupies significant position in the minds of Chinese people. Since the twenties of the 20th century, Chinese traditional historiography began to transform to modern historiography. At that time, “the Five Emperors Era” became a research hotspot of Chinese historiography. However, due to the long-term political turmoil and the fetter of some radical concepts of historiography, the research of this period of history was beset with difficulties. After the founding of China, it turned out unpopular.

In the eighties of the 20th century, China initiated the policy of reform and opening, which led to economic prosperity and made academic research get rid of the bondage of political consciousness. The process of Chinese modernization leapt into a new stage and Chinese national self-confidence increased greatly. As the source of Chinese national memory and the original history of Chinese civilization, the research of the Five Emperors Era was put on the agenda again. In the early nineties, Mr Li Xueqin’s 李學勤 “out of suspecting ancient times” 走出疑古時代 aroused extraordinary responses among all circles of Chinese society,

which was a representative event. In 1995, under the impetus from Song Jian, who was a Chinese state councilor and the director of Chinese state science and technology commission, the academia launched the Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project. In 2000, after the completion of this project, the academia then started the project of the origin tracing of Chinese civilization. The Chinese government provided a large amount of manpower, material resources and financial resources to carry out this project, which proved that the origin of Chinese civilization and the Five Emperors Era had become a top priority of historical research. Under the social environment of contemporary China, it is of special significance to clarify the research of the Five Emperors Era and summarize the achievements, experiences and lessons of the previous researchers.

2. The Spread, Records and Explanation of “the Five Emperors Era” in Pre-Qin Era

Xia people abolished demise system when Xiaqi killed Boyi and defeated Youhu people. Xia Dynasty started and the Five Emperors Era turned to be history, but the spread of the information of the Five Emperors Era was continuous. The historical information was handed down to later generations by word of mouth, literature and customs and so on. It is difficult to present a detailed description of its spread in Xia Dynasty. But it is possible to get some by limited literature. *The Book of History* is the main literature that keeps related records of Xia Dynasty and Shang Dynasty. There are also a few more sporadic records in *The Book of History*(*shangshu* 尚書), *The Zuo's Commentary*(*zhuozhuan* 左傳), *The Ethical and Political Works of*

Motse(mozi 墨子), *The Classic of Mountains and Seas(shanhaijing 山海經)* as well as oracle bones and bronze inscriptions in the late Shang Dynasty. Most relevant materials of the Five Emperors Era are related to religion, such as Jiushao danced by Xiaqi, Xiaqi's Minister Mengtu who took charge of gods affairs, Xiagen's decapitation by Chengtang in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas(shanhaijing 山海經)*, the sacrifices to Emperors of five places, Wind Gods from four directions and Diku in oracle bones etc. It testifies that people at that time regarded emperors and famous ministers of the Five Emperors Era as gods and were full of respect and fear. Thus, the history of the Five Emperors Era has been spread via religious ceremonies and word of mouth.

In the Western Zhou Dynasty and the Spring and Autumn Period, there were well-developed systems of historical writing and literature preservation in the kingdom of Zhou and vassal states. Literature in this period kept relatively abundant records of the history of the Five Emperors Era. It mentions that Zuoshi Yixiang of Chu could recite books written in remote antiquity like *San Fen* 三墳, *Wu Dian* 五典, *Ba Suo* 八索 and *Jiu Qiu* 九丘 in *The Zuo's Commentary · Duke Lu's Twelfth Year (zuozhuan zhaogong shiernian 左傳·昭公十二年)*,¹⁾ which shows developed historiography of Chu State. Chu is a state of barbarians, but there are so many literature texts of the Five Emperors Era. It can be inferred that there are more literature texts from the kingdom of Zhou and vassal states. However, when it comes

1) Kong Yingda(1999), *Shangshuzhengyi 尚書正義*, Peiking University Press. p.p 4-7. 翦伯贊『先秦史』, 北京大學出版社, 1999年, 第102-106頁。孔安國『尚書序』: “伏羲、神農、黃帝之書, 謂之‘三墳’, 言大道也。少昊、顓頊、高辛、唐、虞之書, 謂之‘五典’, 言常道也。……八卦之說, 謂之‘八索’, 求其義也。九州之志, 謂之‘九丘’。丘, 聚也。言九州所有, 土地所生, 風氣所宜, 皆聚此書也。”(孔穎達:『尚書正義』, 北京大學出版社, 1999年, 第4-7頁)

to Western Han Period, there are only a few books that keeps literature information of the Five Emperors Era such as *The Book of Songs*(*shijing* 詩經), *The Zuo's Commentary*(*zuozhuan* 左傳), *Guo Yu* 國語, *Shi Ben* 世本 and *The Mencius*(*mengzi* 孟子) etc.

In the Spring and Autumn Period, people could basically interpret myths and legends of the Five Emperors Era. There is the record of Confucius's telling of Fangfeng's death by Dayu in *Guo Yu · the Second Volume of Lu Yu* (*guoyu luyuxia* 國語·魯語下). The second volume of *Chu Yu*(楚語下) writes down Guan Shefu's explanation of cutting off the tie of earth and sky by Chong and Li. There is also the interpretation of two gods Shishen and Taitai by Zichan in *The Zuo's Commentary · Duke Lu's First Year* (*zhaogong yuannian* 昭公元年). Besides, it can be found that there is Zichan's explanation of Xiajiao's sacrifice to Gun in *Duke Lu's Seventh Year*(*zhaogong qinian* 昭公七年), Tanzi's interpretation of the Bird Officer Shaohao in *Duke Lu's Seventeenth Year*(*zuozhuan zhaogong shiqinian* 左傳·昭公十七年) and Shimo's explanation of Huanlong, Yulong and the five elements related officers in *Duke Lu's Twenty-ninth Year*(*zhaogong ershinian* 昭公二十九年). As learned gentlemen in the Spring and Autumn Period, Confucius, Guan Shefu, Zichan, Tanzi and Shimo can reveal the historical truth behind myths and legends of the Five Emperors Era. There are two reasons that account for its possibility. For one thing, there were rich literature classics in that period. For another, hereditary system still existed at that time so the noblemen could trace their descent back to sovereigns and ministers of the Five Emperors Era. And those noble families must retain a wealth of historical information, myths and legends of their own ancestors in the Five Emperors Era so their interpretation is equipped with credibility.

During the period of Spring and Autumn Warring States, with the

disintegration of noble hereditary system, the historiographer families of the kingdom of Zhou and vassal states gradually reduced to civilians and literature and historical materials that were inherited from their previous generations began to get lost. The First Emperor of Qin burned historical books from other states after he unified China, which made literature of ancient history nearly become extinct. Except for limited literature classics, the historical information of the Five Emperors Era was mainly spread by myths, legends, records of supernatural events, folk sacrifice, customs and rites that were converted from the word of mouth. Due to the disintegration of noble hereditary system and the lack of historical literature, myths, legends, records of supernatural events, folk sacrifice, customs and rites lost connection with history and turned into rootless duckweeds and leaves, thus became “collective unconsciousness” 集体无意識 by Jung. “Collective unconsciousness” means that those myths, legends, records of supernatural events, folk sacrifice, customs and rites originated from the public’s collective consciousness while the public could not provide rational explanation in terms of contents. Gradually, these materials entered into the view of historians and played a role in the study of the Five Emperor Era.

3. The Study of the Five Emperors Era from the Western Han Dynasty to the Late Qing Dynasty

In Chinese history, the study of the Five Emperors Era started from Sima Qian in the Western Han Dynasty. *Historical Records • Biographic Sketches of the Five Emperors* (*shiji wudibenji* 史記 • 五帝本紀) can be

regarded as the study achievements of Sima Qian. The literature classics survival in the folk were converged into the royal court when the Western Han Dynasty promulgated a decree to collect books. For the first time, Sima Qian systematically sketched the contours of the Five Emperors Era by collecting literature from *The Book of History*(*shangshu* 尚書), *The Zuo's Commentary*(*zuozhuan* 左傳), *Guo Yu* 國語, *Shi Ben* 世本, *The Rites by Daide*(*dazhailiji* 大戴禮記) as well as genealogical almanac and referring of legends that were spread in the folk. *Biographic Sketches of the Five Emperors* (*wudibenji* 五帝本紀) represents the highest achievement of the study of the Five Emperors Era in the Han Dynasty. In the whole feudal society of China since Sima Qian, the view of history and the useful historical data of historians did not change much, so there was no breakthrough of the study of the Five Emperors Era in the next two thousand years. During this period, however, there were still many people tirelessly engaged in the study of ancient history and achieved some results. Among them, the relatively important two are Huangfu Mi's 皇甫謐 *Imperial Century*(*diwangshiji* 帝王世紀) and Luo Bi's 羅泌 *The History of Road*(*lushi* 路史).

There were rich historical data during Sima Qian's 司馬遷 creation of *Biographic Sketches of the Five Emperors*(*wudibenji* 五帝本紀). He chose the relatively refined historical materials and rejected the unrefined. The unrefined ones refer to the materials that are deficient of research, credibility and origin. Sima Qian called those materials the unrefined ones possibly because those were colored with mythological elements and could not be explained with rationality. The probable content of those are strange appearance of the five emperors and their virtuous ministers as well as the legends of their birth without fathers. Later, such materials

were collected in Confucian literature and *Wei Books* by Confucians. Viewed at present times, those still have certain historical value, because to a large extent, they can reflect the marriage and totem worship of the tribes in matriarchal age. Huangfu Mi from the Western Jin Dynasty adopted the materials of *Wei Books* in his historical works *Imperial Century*, which enriches the knowledge of the Five Emperors Era and is a kind of progress. After the Eastern Han Dynasty, some materials of the Five Emperors Era were written in Taoist scriptures by Taoists and some were written in genealogy by literati and officialdom. Luo Bi from the Southern Song Dynasty absorbed this kind of literature and finished *The History of Road*(*lushi* 路史). After his death, his son Luo Ping added the notes for his work, which indicates the sources of historical materials and provides convenience for the researchers at present times. These two books combine the written information of the Five Emperors Era and save precious historical data for present study. So the value of the two books lies in their great importance to present study via scientific analysis.

4. The Study of the Five Emperors Era From 1920s to Present

The historical works form feudal society such as *Historical Records* · *Biographic Sketches of Five Emperors*(*shiji wudibenji* 史記·五帝本紀), *Imperial Century*(*diwangshiji* 帝王世紀), and *The History of Road*(*lushi* 路史) cannot satisfy modern readers' needs for the description of the history of the Five Emperors Era. Modern people have a deeper and more systematic knowledge of human history so meanwhile it is necessary that

the present researchers can illustrate the marriage, political systems and historical development of the Five Emperors Era with proofs and the accordance of modern academic norms. The study of the Five Emperors Era has entered into the modern stage since the 1920s.

In the 1920s, as the incoming of the western historiography theories and works, Chinese scholars also began to reflect on their own history and constructed their own historiography system by following the western mode. Mr Gu Jiegang found that the ancient history of China, especially the history of the Five Emperors Era, often intertwined with the myths and legends, which violated the authenticity principle of modern history. The releasing of this finding by Mr Gu caused extensive discussion in the society. This discussion has broken the superstition to Sima Qian's historical system of the Five Emperors Era. Thus, it requires researchers' focus to explore the historical truth step by step. The series of "Discrimination of Ancient History" (*gushibian* 古史辨) works are valuable literature materials that are possessed with wisdom and efforts of the organizers and discussants.

Since the 1920s, some scholars have started to devote themselves to the explanation of the history of the Five Emperors Era. The prominent predecessors can be divided in the following categories.

The first group is the experts of Oracle and epigraphy, for instance, Wang Guowei, Hu Houxuan, Xu Xusheng, Chen Mengjia and Li Xueqin etc. They creatively explained the relevant historical problems of the Shang Dynasty and the Pre-Shang Times by absorbing the latest research results of Oracle and epigraphy and combining with historical documents, which laid a good foundation for the historical study of the Five Emperors Era.

The main works are Wang Guowei's 王國維 *A Study of the Emperor of*

the Yin Dynasty in Oracle 卜辭所見殷先公先王考, Hu Houxuan's 胡厚宣 *A Study of Wind from Four Directions in Oracle* 甲骨文四方風名考, Xu Xusheng's 徐旭生 *A Legendary Times of Chinese Ancient History* 中國古史的傳說時代, Chen Mengjia's 陳夢家 *The Myths and Witchcraft in the Shang Dynasty* 商代的神話和巫術 and Li Xueqin's 李學勤 *The Ancient Civilization of Cultural Relics* 文物中的古文明 etc.

The second category is the experts who innovatively utilized historical materialism as pioneers, for example, Guo Moruo, Lv Zhenyu, Jian Bozan, Wang Yuzhe and so on. They provided a sociological interpretation model for Chinese history and laid a solid theoretical basis for the historical study of the Five Emperors Era. The representative works are Guo Moruo's 郭沫若 *Social Studies of Ancient China* 中國古代社會研究, Lv Zhenyu's 呂振羽 *Social Studies of the Early Stage in Chinese History* 史前期中國社會研究, Jian Bozan's 翦伯贊 *History of the Pre-Qin Period* 先秦史 and Wang Yuzhe's 王玉哲 *Ancient Chinese History* 中華遠古史 etc.

The third one is the specialists in the field of ethnology, anthropology and mythology, such as Wen Yiduo, Sun Zuoyun, Yang Kuang, Ding Shan and Li Xuanbo etc. They found the relation between Chinese myths and the history of the Five Emperors Era and offered a reasonable explanation for the phenomena that are relevant to the Five Emperors Era. The typical works are Wen Yiduo's 聞一多 *A Study of Fux(fuxikao 伏羲考)* and *An Analysis of Goddess of Gaotang* 高唐神女傳說之分析, Sun Zuoyun's 孫作云 *The Research of Chinese Ancient Myths and Legends* 中國古代神話傳說研究 and *The Archaeology of Art and Folk* 美術与民俗考古, Yang Kuang's 楊寬 *An Introduction to Chinese Ancient History* 中國上古史導論, Ding Shan's 丁山 *Chinese Ancient Myths and Nations* 古代神話与民族 and *A Study of Chinese Ancient Religion and Myths* 中國古代宗教与神話考, and Li Xuanbo's

李玄伯 *A New Research of Chinese Ancient Society* 中國古代社會新研 and soon.

Fourthly, archaeologists have studied the origin of Chinese civilization, Li Ji, Xia Nai, Yinda and Su Bingqi, for instance. This issue has close connection with the history of the Five Emperors Era. Xia Nai's *The Origin of Chinese Civilization*,²⁾ Li Ji's *The Beginning of Chinese Civilization*³⁾ and Su Bingqi's *A New Exploration of the Origin of Chinese Civilization* ⁴⁾ are three representative works. The following will talk about the detailed contributions of these experts.

Mr Gu Jiegang followed the research of experts in the Qing Dynasty and went further on the way to literature discrimination. The experts include Yan Ruoku, Cui Shu, Cui Shi, Liao Ping and Kang Youwei etc. Mr Gu Jiegang pointed out the suspicious parts of the ancient history system and materials, which prompted people's reflection and was the beginning of the rebuilt of Chinese ancient history. He put forward the theory of "layered view of ancient history" and found that ancient history changed over times, namely, the later generations would inevitably add the social ideas of their times when they described ancient history. He also proved that "the Three Emperors' History" built by people in the Warring States, the Qin and Han Dynasties were unreliable. His scrutiny of the literature urged people to have a deeper study of the complexity of the pre-Qin literature classics and had positive significance for the historical study of the Five Emperors Era.⁵⁾

2) Xia Nai(1985) 夏鼐, *The Origin of Chinese Civilization* 中國文明的起源, Cultural Relics Press.

3) Li Ji(2005) 李濟, *The Beginning of Chinese Civilization* 中國文明的開始, Jiangsu Education Publishing House.

4) Su Bingqi(1999) 蘇秉琦, *A New Exploration of the Origin of Chinese Civilization* 中國文明起源新探, Joint Publishing.

Mr Yang Kuang conducted the summary and analysis of the close relation among the myths series of Boyi, Danzhu, Gun and Yu, which generated a lot of enlightenment to present researchers. He said:

“The most import issue for the study of history is the criticism of historical materials. Except for the collection of historical materials, we have to give comprehensive analysis of historical data to distinguish the false ones and pursue the truth, then the historical studies can be continued. The prototype of ancient history and legends before the Xia Dynasty came from myths. If we want to discuss about it thoroughly, it is necessary for us to review their historical background from the original myths and restore their original value. This book just restores ancient history and legends into myths for a preliminary study, so the name of this book is ‘an introduction’.”⁶⁾

- 5) Li Xueqin(1997) 李學勤, *The Lost Civilization* 失落的文明, Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House. p.p226-231. 20世紀後半期, 由于大量古書的出土, 一些學者對於先秦古籍的真偽問題有了新的理解。李學勤在『失落的文明』一書『一〇五 對古書的反思』中, 他從簡帛古籍整理的經驗出發, 揭示出先秦文獻流傳過程中出現的“后人修改”、“后人增广”等种种情况, 認為大多數我國古代典籍是很難用“真”“偽”來判斷的。Li Ling(2004) 李零, *Ancient Books on Bamboo and Silk and Academic Origin* 簡帛古書與學術源流, Sanlian Publishing. p.215. 第六講『帛書的體例與分類』中說: “辨偽學家講‘真偽’, 着眼點主要是‘年代矛盾’。這樣的矛盾本來可以通過年代本身去解決, 而不一定非得歸入‘真偽’的範疇。如果一定要講‘真偽’, 就要把作偽動機、作偽環境、作偽手段這些都考慮進去, 有‘案情調查’, 有‘罪行認定’, 拿出真凭實據。……現在有了出土古書(這些古書都是真古書, 它們對審查古書最有說服力), 大家翻回頭來再看傳世古書, 則情況為之一變: 我們手頭的古書, 年代早一點的古書, 它們中的哪一種真正够得上叫做‘偽書’, 這倒是值得考慮的問題。”
- 6) Edited by Lv Simian (1982) 呂思勉、童書業編, *The Seventh Volume of Discrimination of Ancient History* 古史辨 第七冊上編 中國上古史導論, Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing house. p.401. “史學之研究, 首貴乎史料之批判。吾人除搜集史料外, 必須對史料分析綜合, 辨其偽而求其真, 然後史學之能事盡也。夏以前之古史傳說, 其原形本出神話, 經吾人若是之探討, 可無疑義, 然吾人尚須由其原始神話而檢討其歷史背景, 以恢復其史料上原有之價值, 然後古史學之能事盡也。本書所論, 僅將古史傳說還原為神話, 特初步之研究耳, 故命名為『導論』。”

His work proved that the predecessors of a lot of characters in ancient history and legends were merely birds and beasts in myths.⁷⁾ He also pointed that the Yellow Emperor, Zhuan Xu, Di Ku, Yao and Shun were simply the differentiations of the Emperors (God) from myths.⁸⁾

Mr Wang Guowei created a new situation for the historical study of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties in the built of Chinese ancient history. The breakthrough of the historical study of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties created conditions for the historical study of the Xia Dynasty and the Five Emperors Era. He put forward “the way of double evidence” 兩重證據法, which is the verification of the existent literature by the unearthed literature. The excavation of the underground literature grant the existent literature a new life. His works like *A Study of the Emperor of the Yin Dynasty in Oracle* 卜辭所見殷先公先王考 prove that mythologies like *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*(*shanhaijing* 山海經) have irreplaceable historical value.

In the 1930s, Guo Moruo's 郭沫若 *Social Studies of Ancient China* 中國古代社會研究 led historical materialism into the studies of Chinese ancient history, which created a new situation for historical studies. Historical materialism, based on the theory of sociology, reveals the connections of social phenomena, namely, the contradiction between productive forces and relations of production, economic basis and superstructure, which determine the development of society and history. The application of historical materialism to the historical studies greatly enhances the researchers' ability to grasp the organic connections of historical phenomena. The study of the history of the Five Emperors Era also needs

7) Ibid., p.3.

8) Ibid., p.206.

the guidance of historical materialism. If the researchers' conclusion is not in conformity with the theory of historical materialism, most likely, the conclusion is wrong. As for the study of the Five Emperors Era, Guo Moruo believed that the demise system was the democratic system of matriarchal society.⁹⁾ In terms of the demise system, historians like Jian Bozan,¹⁰⁾ Lv Zhenyu¹¹⁾ and Yin Da¹²⁾ had similar opinions with Guo Moruo. They admitted that China had experienced the matriarchal society and determined the transition period from matriarchal society to patriarchal society was the time of throne succession from Yu to Qi. Their works have important value for present historical study of the Five Emperors Era.

Mr Xu Xusheng 徐旭生 had profound reflection of the research theories and methods of "School of Suspicion of Ancient History" and put forward his own research theory in his *A Legendary Times of Chinese Ancient History* 中國古史的傳說時代. He divided ancient Chinese history into legendary era and historical era. The era before Pang Geng's times in the Shang Dynasty was legendary era and the era after that was historical era in a limited sense. Speaking of legends, he hold that the legends of the ancient times always had historical qualities and cores and were not imaginary. The emperors Yao, Shun, Yu and their times were not faked by later generations and possible to understand. Mr Xu considered legends

9) Guo Moruo (1982) 郭沫若, *Social Studies of Ancient China* 中國古代社會研究, People's Publishing House. p.98.

10) Jian Bozan(1999) 翦伯贊, *History of the Pre-Qin Period* 先秦史, Peiking University Press. p.p 102-106.

11) Lü Zhenyu(2000) 呂振羽, *Social Studies of the Early Stage in Chinese History* 簡明中國通史, Hebei Education Press.

12) Yin Da(1989) 尹達, *Historical Selections of Yin Da* 尹達史學論著選集, People's Publishing House. p.18.

were equipped with the historical qualities while myths were pure fantasy. He said:

“There is differences between the legends with myths mixed and the pure myths. As for how many mythological elements are mixed in legends, it can be approximately estimated that the farther, the more; the closer to present times, the less. Legends and myths are two adjacent but different concepts, which should not be mixed up.”¹³⁾

In fact, it is hard to distinguish myths and legends. As consciousness in human mind, they are the reflection of social life, therefore, myths and legends contain real social content. The exclusion of mythological materials is the limitation of Mr Xu's historical studies. In this book, he hold that during the legendary era, there were Huaxia, Dongyi and Miaoman three groups, which began to fight with each other after their meeting but later got along with each other peacefully, and finally achieved complete assimilation and formed Han Nationality. Mr Xu's ancient historical concept based on the archaeological excavations at that time, which had a certain scientific quality and caused a huge impact on academia during that period.¹⁴⁾ From the publishing of Mr Xu's book to present, Chinese archaeology has achieved rapid development and the view of three divisions (Huaxia, Dongyi and Miaoman) has been out of date.¹⁵⁾ Researchers at present time should put forward more logical

13) Xu Xusheng (2003) 徐旭生, *A Legendary Times of Chinese Ancient History* 中國古史的傳說時代, Guangxi Normal University Press. p.25. : “摻雜神話的傳說同純粹的神話有區別……至于傳說里所摻雜的神話多少, 大致是越古越多, 越近越少。……傳說與神話是很相鄰却互有分別的兩種事情, 不能混為一談。”

14) Ibid., p.4.

15) Yang Jun, Zhang Naihe(2006) 楊軍、張乃和, *History of East Asia* 東亞史, Changchun Publishing House. p.40. 楊軍、張乃和的『東亞史』中說: “三分說的最大弱點, 在于無法與考古學發現相吻合。蒙、徐都從文獻出發, 很少使用考古學資料。傳受仰韶、龍山文化呈

concepts that corresponds to history to a larger extent on the basis of new archaeological achievements.

Mr Li Xuanbo's 李玄伯 *A New Research of Chinese Ancient Society* 中國古代社會新研 is also one of the representative works of the historical studies of the Five Emperors. He was fond of *The Ancient Greek and Roman Society* 古代希臘羅馬社會 written by French scholar Fustel de Conlanges and translated this book into Chinese. In the preface, he originally intended to make a comparison of the states of ancient China with Greek and Roman, however, due to the large number of words, it was not probable to put it into the translation version, so he revised it and published the book *A New Research of Chinese Ancient Society*. This book proposed a new explanation of the history of the Five Emperors Era from the perspective of anthropology by the comparison of Greek and Roman to Chinese ancient society. Cai Yuanpei wrote his comment in the preface for this book: "It is my great honor to read the first draft of this book. The following are its representative points: Firstly, there was totem system in Chinese ancient society. Secondly, there was fire worship custom in Chinese ancient society. Thirdly, ancient Chinese once had matrilineal system. The fourth one is the alteration of Zhaomu (Zhaomu is the patriarchal clan system in ancient China that refers to the arrangement of ancestral temples and cemeteries). The author gave a clear explanation of it by referring to the marriage levels which was mentioned frequently in ethnology. Fifthly, Confucians praised the emperors Yao and Shun's demise and recommendation of talented men. Mencius also decorated the history of Yao's recommendation of Shun and Shun's recommendation of Yu as the successors. The author made a contrast of

東西分布的考古學影響，也存在相當大的局限性。”

the Emperor Mao's killing ceremony in ancient Africa and Heb-sed Festival in ancient Egypt. Then, the legend of Yao and Shun do not have brilliant value any more. " The strengths of this book can be seen by Mr Cai Yuanpei's preface.

In present academia, the expert who has most important contributions to the study of the Five Emperors Era is Mr Li Xueqin. In 1992, his proposal of "beyond the era of historical skepticism" marked that the Five Emperors Era became a research hotspot again. In terms of the historical research methods, he advocated the combination of archaeology, literature and legends as well as the absorbing of the achievements of related disciplines and the innovation of theories. Meanwhile, he made a lot of constructive work on the discrimination of historical materials. Embarked from the sorting experience of ancient books on bamboo and silk, he pointed out the situation of the "modification or augment by later generations" in the spreading process of pre-Qin literature and proved that the so-called "false books" were not false. Speaking of the relationship between the ruling center and four directions during the Five Emperors Era, Mr Li put forward a concept of unified culture "field":

"Many scholars use the word 'Longshan Era' in archaeology, which means that all kinds of culture have common characteristics in a wide range from the north to the south. This kind of circumstance can be described as the form of a cultural 'field' that is equipped with incomparable scope in ancient world. From my point of view, this cultural 'field' is the foundation of unification of the country in the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties. The legend of the emperors Yan and Huang's possession of twenty-five sons and twelve surnames has connection with the cultural 'field' which owns common points. It will achieve a further exposition of the origin and forming process of Chinese civilization to inspect all kinds of culture in Longshan Era by

the combination of ancient history and legends. It has to be stressed particularly that it can be got from here that the solidarity and unity of the nation are important features of our traditional culture. Although there have been a number of split during the long history, it finally came to unification. This kind of national spirits had been revealed in prehistoric times.”¹⁶⁾

This viewpoint is of certain guiding significance in the present study of the Five Emperors Era.

In recent period, there are some new works in historical academia about the Five Emperors Era, for example, Wang Changlin's 汪昌林 *The Research of Chinese ancient civilization* 中國上古文明研究, Xu Shunzhan's 許順湛 *A Study of the Five Emperors Era* 五帝時代研究 and Wang Hui's 王暉 *A New Exploration of Legendary Times of Ancient History* 古史傳說時代新探 and soon. In his book, Wang Hui put forward a series of innovative ideas, for instance, the titles of the Yellow Emperor “Xuan Yuan” and “You Xiong ” came from their totem “Tian Yuan”¹⁷⁾; Di Ku was the God of the Shang¹⁸⁾ and Zhou Dynasties; the reason for the change of “starring night ” to the Yellow River centered of Chinese civilization laid in the flood during the late Neolithic Age¹⁹⁾; Hou Ji's contribution to agriculture

16) Li Xueqin, (2007) 李學勤, *Beyond the Era of Historical Skepticism* 走出疑古時代, Changchun Publishing House, p.45. “在考古學上, 不少學者都在使用‘龍山時代’這個詞, 這意味着從北方到南方很廣大的範圍里, 各種文化都有其共同點。這種情況, 也可譬喻為形成了一個文化的‘場’, 其範圍之大在古代世界是罕與倫比的。我覺得, 這個文化的‘場’正是後來夏商周三代時期統一國家的基礎。炎黃二帝以及黃帝有二十五子得十二姓的傳說, 與這一具有共同點的文化‘場’是有聯系的。結合古史傳說來考察龍山時代各種文化, 將對中國文明的起源和形成過程有進一步的闡發。特別要指出的是, 從這裡可以看到, 民族的團結統一是我們傳統文化的重要特點。雖然在漫長的歷史上有過多次分裂, 但最後歸於統一。這樣的民族精神, 在史前時期已經露出其端倪了。”

17) Wang Hui (2009) 王暉, *A New Exploration of Legendary Times of Ancient History* 古史傳說時代新探, Science Press, p.p 9-13.

18) Ibid., p.p16-24.

was the introduction of barley and wheat to central plains²⁰⁾; Da Yu was known as the patriarch of wizard because he conducted water conservancy, named mountains and rivers, knew names of all things on earth.²¹⁾ Though some points are not proposed by him firstly, it is of great value that he put forward them. This book is of high academic value during the recent period because of its rich materials and ample proofs.

In archaeology, the scholars Xia Nai, Li Ji, Yin Da and Su Bingqi and so on have studied the origin of Chinese civilization. And this issue has close connection with the historical study of the Five Emperors Era. There are a large number of works discussing this issue. Paying attention to the archaeological achievements, meanwhile, most of them emphasized the value of Chinese ancient historical documents, myths and legends. Yin Da mentioned:

“Although archaeology has made lots of contributions to the historical study of Chinese ancient society, it is impossible to have a comprehensive view of Chinese ancient society. It merely pointed out a right backbone, provided a reliable outline and offered rich material basis of social life. As for the social organization and ideology of that time, it is likely to get some points from historical relics and sites, however, it is impossible to create more documents due to the relative considerable limitations. This is the defect of archaeology and also the difficulties we have met when we studied Chinese ancient society simply according to archaeological materials. Can this defect and these difficulties be overcome? The answer is yes. There are many legends that look like myths concerned with Chinese ancient history. They are not much too reliable but also allude to some historical facts. Based on the outline from archaeology and equipped

19) Ibid., p.59.

20) Ibid., p.167.

21) Ibid., p.120.

with research achievements of ancient social history, it is a proper way to explore historical materials of Chinese ancient society from Chinese ancient legends.”²²⁾

Mr Yin pointed out the defects of the archaeological study of Chinese ancient social history and hold that the study of Chinese ancient social history should carry out the combination of archaeology with myths and legends.

Mr Su Bingqi is the founder of the Chinese archaeological typology, who has divided densely populated region of the Chinese Neolithic Age into six major cultural areas: “1. the north centered at the Great Wall in north and south of Yanshan; 2. the east part centered at Shandong; 3. the central plains centered at Guanzhong(Shaanxi Province), the south of Shanxi Province and the western region of Henan Province; 4. the southeast part centered at Tai Lake; 5. the southwest part centered at Dongting Lake and Sichuan Basin; 6 the south part based on the central axis from Fanyang Lake to Peral River Delta.”²³⁾ He summed up the origin of Chinese civilization as “ancient culture, ancient cities and ancient countries” three stages. He summarized the development of Chinese

22) Yin Da(1989) 尹達, *Historical Selections of Yin Da* 尹達史學論著選集, People's Publishing House. p.176. “考古學對於中國原始社會史上的貢獻固然不少；但是只依靠着考古學上的材料，還不能夠看出中國原始社會的全面；它只是指出一个正确的骨干，提供給我們一个可靠的提綱，給我們許多丰富的社會生活中的物質基础；至于當時的社會組織和意識形態等，我們雖說還可以從遺物和遺迹上看出一些道理來，但是，終於受到了相当大的限制，不能夠鉅出更多的材料。這是目前考古學上的缺陷，這是我們僅僅根据考古學上的資料去研究中國原始社會史時所遇到的困難。……這個缺陷，這樣的困難是不是不能克服呢？可以克服的困難。中國的古史向來有不少神話似的傳說；它們固然不盡可靠，但其中還是隱約的影射着一些過去的史實。依據着考古學上所提供的提綱，配備着世界原始社會史上研究的成果，從中國古代傳說里鉅出中國原始社會的史料，自然是一个比較妥善的辦法。”

23) Su Bingqi(1999) 蘇秉琦, *A New Exploration of the Origin of Chinese Civilization* 中國文明起源新探, Joint Publishing. p.p 35-37.

civilization as trilogy and three patterns: “ The trilogy refers to ancient countries – square countries – empires; the three patterns are: native type: Hongshan culture of the northern area and low-level culture of Xiajiadian; secondary type: central plains which centered at the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties and also included Yao and Shun Times as well as the Qin Dynasty. From four thousand to two thousand years ago, these five dynasties all regarded the flood of Yao and Shun Times as their ancestor source and overlap and interchange as their characteristics; recurring type: the northern prairie nations, represented by Xianbei, Qidan and the Qing Dynasty which entered into central plains after the Qin Dynasty, in the same way, had the forms of overlap and interchange during those two thousand years.²⁴⁾ As for the development of civilization in central plains, Mr Su generalized:

“ The formation of the countries in central plains from Taosi to the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties was mainly driven by the process from flood to water conservancy, which was the driving force that could produce the political entity and was generated by the surpassing of the big division of social labor. The Taosi ruins has been mentioned in previous part.

As a form of the origin of Chinese civilization, it is the civil spark generated by the fusion of many kinds of culture. If viewed from the pattern of state formation, it is a typical example of ‘secondary type’ ancient country that mainly affected by external factors. It contained northern elements and was related to the northern part in the Jia, Li,

24) Ibid., p.130. “發展階段的三部曲是古國—方國—帝國；發展模式的三類型是：原生型：北方地區的紅山文化、夏家店下層文化、秦（六千年前、四千年前、兩千年前）；次生型：中原，以夏商周為中心，包括之前的堯舜，其后的秦、共五代，均以堯舜時代洪水為其祖先源頭，從四千年前到兩千年前，重疊、立體交叉為其特征；續生型：北方草原民族，于秦漢后入主中原的鮮卑、契丹、清朝三代為代表，同樣在此兩千年間，重疊、立體交叉形式，各自經歷過三階段模式的國家。”

pottery plates with colored dragon pattern and black pottery with colored or red drawing. Pottery with colored dragon pattern had emerged since the Hongshan Culture Period and black pottery with red drawing had been made in the late Hongshan Culture Period. The prototype of Li sequence that was knead by round bottom Jia in Taosi to 'three feet' could be tracked back to sharpened round bottom Jia which was unearthed at the northeast corner of Hetao(Hequ) and the northwest of Hebei Province. There was also a kind of flat pot series in Taosi, whose relatives could only be looked for from the Dawenkou Culture in Shandong Province. The stone cutters that looked like kitchen knives (∠shaped) and were used as burial objects for tombs had to go to Hangjia Lake in the north of the Zhengjiang Province to find their kinship. The instrument combination of 'chime stone and drum' were not general instruments, but were positioned in halls or other more ceremonious places as etiquette facilities with the company of black-lacquer woods. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that the Taosi Culture of the south of the Shanxi Province was a fusion spark with higher levels and larger scales. Archaeological discoveries gradually reveal a clearer background of 'the Five Emperors Era' in ancient history and legends."²⁵⁾

“It also experienced the development of trilogy from ‘consensus’ China (the communication and mutual consensus of legendary Five Emperors Era

25) Ibid., p.158-161. “從陶寺到夏商周，中原地區國家的最終形成，主要是在從洪水到治水的推動下促成的，這是超越社會大分工產生政治實體的推動力。……關於陶寺遺址，前面已經談過一些。把它作為中國文明起源的一種形式，是多種文化熔合產生的文明火花。如從國家形成的模式看，它是以外部因素影響為主形成的次生型‘古國’的典型實例。陶寺遺址發現的罍、鬲、彩繪龍紋陶盤，彩繪、朱繪黑皮陶器，包含了北方因素，根與北方有關，紅山文化已出現彩陶龍紋，紅山文化末段已出現朱繪黑皮陶器，陶寺圓底腹罍到三袋足捏合而成的鬲的序列的原型可以追溯到河套東北角（河曲）與河北西北部出土的尖圓底腹罍，陶寺還出土一種扁壺序列，它們的近親只能到遠方的山東大汶口文化中去尋找，墓葬隨葬品中類似‘廚刀’（∠字形）的石制切割器，更要到遠方的浙北杭嘉湖去攀親。與它們共出的‘磬和鼓’的組合不是一般民樂器類，它們是擺在廳堂或更隆重場所，作為禮儀性質的設施，還有成套的朱黑漆木器。所以晉南陶寺文化是又一次更高層次，更大規模的聚變火花。……考古發現正日見清晰地揭示出古史傳說中‘五帝’活動的背景。”

and the big cultural districts) to ideal China (the political and cultural restructuring of the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties), then to realistic China(the empires of Qin and Han Dynasties).”²⁶⁾These assertions of Su Bingqi’s summarized the archaeological achievements of the 20th century and created conditions for the connection of archaeology and historiography.

5. Conclusion

The Five Emperors Era is the beginning of Chinese civilization, which has four- thousand-year history. This is a brilliant era that is filled with myths and legends. The historical information passed down by it deeply affects the formation of Chinese culture. The respect of Confucians and the modesty of Taoists are both from the culture of the Five Emperors Era. Thus, the Five Emperors Era has been the essential topic for Chinese history researchers in every dynasty.

After the end of the Five Emperors Era, Chinese history entered into the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties. The historical information of the Five Emperors Era was spread by word of mouth, texts and other ways. There were official historians in those three dynasties. They also wrote the historical information of the Five Emperors Era that was spread by word of mouth into the historical records and other literature when they took notes for their contemporary history. In the literature of the pre-Qin

26) Ibid.,p.161. “從共識的‘中國’（傳說中的五帝時代，各大文化區系間的交流 and 彼此認同），到理想的中國（夏商周三代政治文化上的重組），到現實的中國—秦漢帝國，也相應經歷了‘三部曲’的發展。”

Period, the books that keep relative rich information about the Five Emperors are *The Book of History*(*shangshu* 尚書), *The Zuo's Commentary*(*zhuozhuan* 左傳), *Guo Yu* 國語, *Shi Ben* 世本, *The Mencius* (*mengzi* 孟子) and *The Book of Rites*(*lij* 禮記) and so on. At that time, few people devoted to the special research of the Five Emperors Era.

To finish the book *Biographic Sketches of the Five Emperors*(*wudibenji* 五帝本紀), Sima Qian read the historical literature about the Five Emperors Era that were collected in national special places and visited the places that were related to the Yellow Emperor, Yao, Shun and Yu in order to confirm to the literature and then choose the proper one, which ensured a clear clue of the history of the Five Emperors Era. In the late Western Han Dynasty, some oral historical information related to the Five Emperors Era was written into *Wei Books* by Confucians and used by Huangfu Mi for his creation of *Imperial Century*(*diwangshiji* 帝王世紀) later. During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Periods, Taoism was popular and Taoists adopted part of the oral historical information in civil society to create a large number of books. The historian Luo Bi in the southern Song Dynasty created *The History of Road*(*lushi* 路史) by referring to these materials. Despite the controversy of Huangfu Mi and Luo Bi's works in historical academia, it is undeniable that their contribution to the preservation of historical literature is significant. It can come to the conclusion that the progress of the historical study of the Five Emperors Era is closely related to the expansion of the researchers' vision.

In the 1920s, Chinese historiography moved into the process of modernization. School of Discrimination of Ancient History, led by Gu Jiegang, destroyed the historical system of the Five Emperors Era built by Sima Qian and started the reconstruction. Over the past century, there

were frequent meaningful discoveries in Chinese archaeology which provided fresh and precious materials for the historical study of the Five Emperors Era, for instance, the digging of imperial tombs of the Zhou Dynasty and the discovery of a large number of bronze wares and oracle bones, the finding of silk books from the tombs of the Han Dynasty as well as the showing of bamboo books like Guodian, Shangbo and Qinghua etc. Besides, the incoming of western anthropological theories offered theoretical support for the interpretation of the literature of the Five Emperors Era. A large group of scholars made a series of significant achievements in archaeology, mythology, historiography and other fields that are connected with the historical study of the Five Emperors Era, which created conditions for the establishment of a scientific historical system of the Five Emperors Era.

The present historical study of the Five Emperors Era mainly has two problems: firstly, it is difficult to achieve the fusion of difficult disciplines. Archaeology cannot be combined with historiography. A scholar from Taiwan said: "Prehistoric archaeological data and the traditional literature are two parallel lines that do not cross. So they always discuss the different topics." Secondly, it is necessary to attach importance to myths and legends and admit their historical value if we want to carry on historical research of this period. It is a matter of historical view. The scholars Wang Guowei, Hu Houxuan, Xu Xusheng, Li Ji, Xia Nai, Yin Da and Su Bingqi etc. paid great attention to myths and legends, but historiography circle has not reached a consensus. If the contemporary scholars can get through the boundaries of archaeology, mythology, historiography, the historical study of the Five Emperors Era can inevitably achieve a breakthrough.

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Abstract

A Comprehensive Analysis of the Research of Chinese Five Emperors Era from the Perspective of Its Systematic Historical Literature

Fu, Xiliang · Choi, Chang-won

The Five Emperors Era mentioned here refers to the Yellow Emperor, Zhuan Xu, Di Ku, Yao and Shun's times recorded in Sima Qian's Historical Records · Biographic Sketches of Five Emperors. This period of history is the source of Chinese history, which has been valued from Han Dynasty to present days. Sima Qian's Biographic Sketches of the Five Emperors (wudibenji 五帝本紀) in the Western Han Dynasty, Huangfu Mi's Imperial Century (diwangshiji 帝王世紀) in the Western Jin Dynasty and Luo Bi's The History of Road (lushi 路史) in the Southern Song dynasty are the important research results of Five Emperors Era in China's feudal era. In the early 20th century, Chinese historiography embarked on the way to modernization. School of Discrimination of Ancient History, represented by Gu Jiegang, had reflection on the study of Five Emperors Era in China's feudal era and put forward "layered view of ancient history". They thought that this history recorded by Sima Qian has a strong mythological element, which was built bit by bit by scholars from Shang and Zhou Dynasty to Qin and Han Dynasty and turned out to be fake and unreliable. School of Discrimination of Ancient History broke the traditional understanding of Five Emperors Era. On the basis of ruins, Chinese scholars have started the difficult reconstruction of five emperors' history for one hundred years. During the one hundred years, the study of five emperors' history has made a lot of achievements in history, archaeology, mythology, environmental science and creates the conditions for the establishment of a scientific history of the five emperors system.

Key words : Five Emperors Era, *Biographic Sketches of Five Emperors*, School of Discrimination of Ancient History, *Beyond the Era of Historical Skepticism*, *Imperial Century*

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