Abstract

The present PhD thesis studies political, social and nationalist influences on the historiography of traditional Chinese astronomy written in two different periods, in the prewar and war-time Chinese Republic (1911-1949) and in the early People's Republic of China (1949-1966).

After closer examination of the works on history of Chinese astronomy written in these two periods it is apparent that in many of them Chinese historical astronomical achievements are amplified. It is a representation of encouragement of the nation's self-confidence. This phenomenon is a result of certain political and social influences that had certain development and will be researched by this thesis. For the first period, the works of Zhu Wenxin 朱文鑫(1883-1939), the most prolific pre-war historian of Chinese astronomy, as well as the works of his several pre-war and war-time fellow astronomers are studied. For the second period, mainly the works of Xi Zezong 席泽宗(1927-2008), the most significant post-war historian of Chinese astronomy, are focused.

For the first period, the questions that we aim at are the primary motivation of the establishment of the modern historiography of Chinese astronomy in 1920s after the establishment of Chinese Astronomical Society and the relation of the research principles and topics highlighted by the historians of astronomy to the 'reorganization of the national past' movement backed by many contemporary intellectuals. Logically following questions are the reasons of the deviation from these principles in 1930s, after the turn to the construction of Sino-centric cultural tradition that many intellectuals saw as the nation's self-defense against Japanese annexation of Manchuria. This led to the tendencies in historical writings that were manifested also in the works on the history of Chinese astronomy by more amplification of Chinese achievements aimed to encourage the nation's self-confidence.

In the early PRC period the motivation for professionalization of history of natural sciences including astronomy is shown to be visibly related to the encouragement of nation's self-confidence. However, it also changed the quality of research, which can be seen from a comparison of post-1949 research to the previous period. For instance, certain claims of Chinese achievements were abandoned for lack of factual basis. The influence of Marxism (historical materialism) also led to more attention to social and political context of the development of astronomy, which – despite heavy ideological constraints – was also an improvement over the previous period.