

Chun-chieh Huang / Jörn Rüsen (eds.)

Chinese Historical Thinking

An Intercultural Discussion



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Foreword

To a certain degree this book follows the example of a book about Western historical thinking in an intercultural perspective, which was published in 2002. Another forerunner could be seen in a collection of texts in *History and Theory* presenting a discussion on Huang Chun-chieh's attempt to identify the peculiarity of Chinese historical thinking. In a similar pattern the distinctive nature of Chinese historical thinking will be discussed here. Its main aim is to contribute to a recognition of different traditions of historical thinking and historical culture of today. The editors made use of the opportunity of a conference on humanism and history, which took place at the Institute of Advanced Study in Humanities and Social Sciences of the National Taiwan University from October 11th till 12th, 2012. Two papers (by Huang and Wong) in this conference discussed the peculiarity of Chinese historical thinking by referring to its essentially humanistic character. The theme of 'Humanism' introduces a new idea into the intercultural discussion about Chinese historical thinking: It is the inquiry into the efforts of how to reconcile cultural differences by transgressing ethnocentric elements in historical culture. The issue of cultural difference is not at all ignored but addressed. But Humanism could be an answer to the question for the chances of transgressing cultural limits and finding a common ground for intercultural discussion.

The two papers mentioned above are complemented by two other presentations of fundamental features of Chinese historical thinking. One (Huang) focusses on the inbuilt philosophical or theoretical character of classical Chinese historiography and the other (Hu) describes the structural change by which Chinese historians, philosophers and public intellectuals have met the challenge of modernization.

The editors want to thank all contributors for their willingness to enter this attempt of an intercultural communication on historical thinking in China and to undergo the procedures of editing their texts. Their special thanks go to Angelika Wulff for her careful editing the whole manuscript, to Shari Gilbertsen for her useful proposals to enhance its linguistic form, and to Achim Mittag for his

checking the Chinese transcriptions. Furthermore, they are grateful to Prof. Chang Chih-ming for his important logistic support in organizing the work on this book in Taipei. Finally, their deep thanks also go to Professor Kirill Thompson, of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, National Taiwan University, for his thoughtful comments and invaluable suggestions and to Inga Rüsen for her contributions to the linguistic enhancement.

Huang Chun-chieh, Jörn Rüsen

Taipei, November 2014

Introduction

The humanities and social sciences have been permanently challenged by the changes in their contexts. They have to answer to new challenges since the questions they are confronted with by their research are always influenced by the topical problems in practical human life. One of these ongoing challenges is the growing density of intercultural communication in the academic life of today.

For a long time the work of the humanities and social sciences had been based on academic traditions which have emerged within the cultural context of the West. But in the meantime this Western dominance has come under strong criticism – in the West itself and, of course, in the intellectual life of non-Western countries as well. These criticisms stem from the needs to reshape the academic labor of understanding the human world according to the growing self-confidence of non-Western cultures and their attempts to shake off the burden of Western dominance so that they may find an outlook of their own.

This strong tendency leads to a complex situation: On the one hand there is a powerful desire to separate oneself from one tradition of doing the humanities and to create a tradition specific to one's own culture and tradition. But on the other hand, this new way takes place and ought to take place in a worldwide discourse which relates different traditions to each other; thus it transgresses principally the limits of cultural particularity and has to conform to generally accepted normative rules in order to be recognized. The Western tradition has stressed the universalistic scope of academic thinking. Should the critique of Western domination give up this universalization in favor of cultural relativism? Some post-modern tendencies in the academic world follow this way of pluralism, but the cognitive costs of this approach are rather high, much too high. Why? The academic procedures of developing a solid knowledge base rest on concepts of method which provide knowledge with claims for validity that transgress the context of research and representation, thereby allowing an argumentative interrelationship between different contexts equally high validity.

If the standards of universal criteria for cognitive validity are maintained the problem of approaching different traditions arises: How can a confrontation

between different universalisms be avoided which logically oppose each other? On the level of epistemology this question reflects the complex situation of pluralization. In essential dimensions like economics, the media etc. the opposites – power of uniformity and the need for diversity and difference – have to be mediated. In this context the slogan of ‘*glocalization*’ has become intellectually attractive, although its concrete meaning for human life is a matter of controversy. The humanities and social sciences are confronted with these controversies, and it is this inbuilt bundle of problems within them, which forms a constant challenge to their task of delivering solid knowledge, by which the public, especially normal, everyday people are empowered to understand what is going on in their lives.

All this is true for historical thinking in its different forms in academic life. But history is asked to give a special emphasis of input with respect to its role in culture. Here we have one of the most important areas of forming and discussing the issue of identity. Identity is the answer to the question of who somebody – a person or a social unit – is. This answer can’t be given without a reference to history. In order to know who somebody is one has to know his or her background, through which he or she has become what he or she is and will be. Therefore, the form of doing history always carries along elements of identity-formation. This is the reason why identity politics can’t be withheld when doing history, which includes its modern academic forms. The critique of the Western dominance in historical studies therefore has to be accepted as a legitimate demand for acquiring the recognition of non-Western cultural identities.

Identity cannot be conceptualized without making distinctions, the most fundamental of which is that of belonging and not belonging, of selfness and otherness. This is the reason why within the intercultural discussion on historical thinking delimitations play such an enormous role. The growing need for recognizing cultural references (and thereby differences) have such a powerful impact on history as a cultural medium of identity-formation. And it is this issue of identity which gives the intercultural discussion about history its profile (and political relevance).

One of the most powerful factors of this profile is the attribution of values to the juxtaposition of selfness and otherness. It belongs to the basic factors of cultural life that a livable identity needs a positive self-evaluation. Therefore, the image of one’s own culture is normally painted in positive, light colors and empowered with positive values. The image of the other, in turn, is composed of darker colors, and less positive or even negative values attributed to them. A widespread, if not anthropologically universal example is the distinction between civilization and barbarism when identifying one’s own place of belonging to, and of being different from, other people. It can be observed universally as a human strategy. This is the burden of ethnocentrism in the cultural processes of identity-

formation when doing history. It can easily be detected in the topical intercultural discussion about history. Here most, if not all, criticisms of Western dominance in historical studies coincides with the argument of the ethnocentric devaluation of others. The counter-argument in turn has it that this critique itself revives that much-criticized ethnocentrism by simply inverting the evaluation.

With these remarks, we have marked out the field of interculturally reproducing history as a cultural means of understanding the human world. How does cultural difference (and with it: cultural identity) work as a moving force inside historical thinking? And at the same time, how do different traditions refer to each other within a common field of academic study?

This book is conceptualized as a contribution toward answering these questions. The theme of 'Humanism' introduces a new idea into the intercultural discussion about Chinese historical thinking: It is the inquiry into the efforts of how to reconcile cultural differences by transgressing ethnocentric elements in historical culture. The importance of cultural difference is by no means ignored but specifically addressed. Humanism could be an answer to the question of what the chances are of transgressing cultural limits and finding a common ground for intercultural discussion.

This volume doesn't claim to cover all essentials of Chinese historical thinking, nor does it bring all the alternatives to the fore which are actually disputed within the international dimension of doing and understanding history. It picks up some important elements for forming historical thinking in general, and it looks for their manifestation in China with a special respect to its first (classical) paradigmatic representation. It does not intend to explicate the details of the history of Chinese historiography, but rather concentrates on logical issues. In this volume, we try to address fundamental criteria for making sense of the past by its historical presentation and investigates the specific manifestation and constellation of these 'logical' elements in bringing about the specific feature of Chinese historiography.

In so doing the humanistic impact of Chinese historiography is elaborated. Although the impressive continuity of historical thinking throughout the course of Chinese history is stressed, the change it underwent is not neglected by which it answered the challenges of modernization and the domination since the nineteenth century by the West.

The two texts by *Huang Chun-chieh* elaborate the classical origins of Chinese historiography with special respect to Sima Qian. He stresses its synthesis of historical narration with philosophical reflection on its normative impact. Additionally, he gives an insight into its humanistic essence and the continuity of this essence through the *longue durée* of Chinese historical culture. *Wong Young-tsu* confirms this interpretation of the main feature of Chinese historical thinking seen in the light of its origin in the work of Sima Qian.

In contrast to these demonstrations of a long lasting tradition, *Hu Chang-Tse* stresses the complex process of modernization which has led to present-day historical studies in East Asia. He establishes the influence of modern historical thinking in the West, but makes clear at the same time, that China followed its own path through a tensional relationship to its historiographical tradition.

Therefore, in its first part the book presents Chinese historical thinking in a perspective which may suggest a discussion of its cultural particularity regarding principles and not details, structural continuity and change, and not detailed development.

With this intention this volume may be read as a plea for an intercultural discussion which refers to principles in the light of which concrete findings acquire an understanding of its place in the historical variety of doing history as an essential part of human culture.

The comments in Part Two represent a broad variety of strategies in intercultural discussion. It ranges from an internal critique of the presentation of Chinese historical thinking through referring to a higher degree of complexity within the Chinese tradition (Mittag and Schmidt-Glintzer), to a limited comparison with ancient Western and Chinese historiography (Mutschler), and on to the wider horizons of intercultural comparison (Burke, Schmidt-Glintzer, and Berger). And finally to the principal questions of the logic of historical thinking, either by traversing cultural differences (Rüsen) or even constituting these differences as given facts, thus making simple comparisons impossible (Kragh).

Achim Mittag problematizes the concepts of the Chinese and the Western mode of doing and speaking about historical thinking as it is strongly maintained in the papers by Huang Chun-chieh. Nevertheless, Mittag follows Huang's argument in intending to raise the level of complexity of our understanding of the tradition of Chinese historical thinking. He enumerates several details which may modify clear-cut ideas in the comparative studies of historiography. To use the example of fine art: he replaces the concept of the historiographical tradition in China in imagery from a woodcarving to that of a copper engraving. In this way, the features of Chinese historical thinking become much more versatile and enriched; one can even say more 'historical' without losing their uniqueness in an intercultural context. This is realized in several respects: in analyzing the changes during the Song period, which strengthened the pragmatic character of historiography by conceptualizing the comparative approach when distinguishing two different strategies; a strictly systematic or theoretical/logical one and a time-indexed/historical approach limited to a certain epoch. For both perspectives Mittag gives strikingly instructive examples. Furthermore, he enlarges the feature of Chinese historiography by taking its formal (literary) character more systematically into account than has been done by Huang. Poetry and history do not contradict, but complement each other.

Referring to the contribution by Wong Young-tsu, Mittag qualifies his interpretation of the role of super-natural factors in Sima Qian's work and its importance for the further development of historiography. As to Hu Chang-Tze's presentation of the structural change in the logic of historical sense generation, Mittag confirms his identifying of the importance of Zhang Xuecheng as a paradigmatic turning point. His only other addition is of another historian of similar importance, namely Liang Qichao and his work "The New Historiography" of 1902.

With these suggestions Mittag definitely enhances and sharpens the historical character of Chinese historical thinking and initiates new approaches to its understanding in an intercultural analogy.

Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer's comment criticizes the general approach to pre-modern Chinese historical thinking as too optimistic. Additionally, he misses a reference to the results of encounters with neighboring countries before the nineteenth century. He demands more attention to the changes within the context of historiography, in the intellectual attitudes of the historians and in historical thinking itself, which may allow appear in a higher degree of complexity. This more complex quality as well as some 'darker' sides and approaches to doing history – owed to the close connection to politics – can be detected, which might problematize its inbuilt humanism.

Fritz-Heiner Mutschler limits the scope of his commentary to Chinese and Western antiquity. He does not deny the differences between both ways of doing history as they are described in the four texts he is referring to. However, he stresses the common ground upon which these differences are based. Still, he concedes one rather fundamental difference, pointed out by Wong, namely that Western ancient historiography is more engaged in dealing with wars than its Chinese counterpart. Concerning the form of history writing, he detects another difference, namely that between a strictly narrative line and that of a 'mosaic-like' presentation which combines different subjects (e.g. dynasties, individual biographies) in a non-narrative way.

Peter Burke starts his commentary out by stressing the similarities between China and the West. He consents to the exemplary character of pre-modern historical thinking in both cultures, but he hints at critical approaches that can be found in both traditions before the modern changes in the logic of historical sense generation took over, though it is a fact that even in modern times exemplary logic is still effective. As to the issue of humanism, Burke distinguishes between two kinds, the philosophical and the philological humanism. He supports the prominent role philosophical humanism has played in both traditions and inquires about the philological one in China. He also hints at the fact, that in contrast to China, Western historians come from much more divergent social backgrounds and positions i. e. monks, politicians, and soldiers. Additionally, he

proposes an extended comparison as to widening the horizon by social aspects and the reception of modern historical thinking similar to that of Ranke, Marx and the Chinese Annales School.

Stefan Berger stresses the issue of humanism in historical thinking and the approach to intercultural comparison by introducing a new aspect: the challenge of nationalism as one of the most powerful forces in politics. Humanism and nationalism are opposites, but nevertheless they are intertwined. There are now opportunities, through international relations, for promoting the humanistic values of the dignity and individuality of all peoples against any attempts to subdue it under the constraints of collective social units like that of a nation state. But by closely looking into the structure of nationality or nationalism as done by *Berger*, there is not much space for optimism. The power of nationalism, with its capacity for inflicting exceptionally inhuman practices, vs. humanistic philosophies, which are usually ineffective against human rights abuses are historical facts. Nevertheless, the world of today demands an intercultural framework of orientation, and humanism is seen as a promising attempt toward developing such an orientation. But without a critical reconstruction of its development as it is normally, but not exclusively done in the West, such an orientation will not be possible. The concept of nation and nationalism as a cultural power in politics has to be systematically taken into account if the task of critique is to lead to a new historical perspective whereby the present-day processes of globalization can be understood and may open up a promising future perspective.

Jörn Rüsen stresses mainly the logical problem of intercultural comparison, pointing at the variety of combinations of different varieties historical sense-making. He underlines the importance of making structural changes within this logic for the process of modernization. For him the differences between China and the West can easily be placed into a transculturally valid frame of reference, which is formed by basic principles of sense and meaning. They can be attributed to the past as history for the purposes of orienting the present and giving it a solid future perspective.

Ulrich Timme Kragh's comment presents a fundamental criticism of the comprehensive intentions of these four texts. He follows the strategy of a radical ideological critique of the intention to identify a long-standing Chinese humanism and the comparison of clearly presupposed concepts of 'China' and 'the West'. He is committed to a postmodern and post-colonial line of reasoning which insists on a much higher degree of historicity in dealing with traditions of historical thinking. For *Kragh*, *Huang's*, *Wong's* and *Hu's* texts are bound up in awkward presuppositions concerning intercultural exchange, cultural continuity and un-ambiguous meanings of key concepts (like 'humanism') used to understand the similarities, differences and exchanges between China and the West.

Kragh does not deny the usefulness of intercultural comparison, but he places it under very strong methodical rules which may prevent comparing cultures using traditional methods. He problematizes the underlying idea of 'culture' by pointing at the ideological, cultural, semantical and syntactical difficulties inherent in comparison. He adds empirical findings in the context of Chinese historical thinking which we might lose sight of when we advance a strict East-West perspective of approach. In short: He criticizes the four papers as depending too much upon the Western-style of thinking in the humanities so that the distinctiveness of Chinese historical thinking is not sufficiently appreciated. He thus provokes the fundamental questions of how to come to terms with intercultural communication, avoid cultural relativism and bring about a transculturally valid new way of reflecting the work of historians.

The third part of the book presents 'second thoughts' – comments on the first two parts in their interrelationship. The editors have added this section in order to increase the discursive character of the book as a whole and to indicate new perspectives for understanding Chinese historical thinking in the present-day context – of intercultural communication.

Q. Edward Wang attempts a first summary of this discussion. He very much emphasizes the humanistic character of Chinese historical thinking and underlines Confucius' importance for the 'humanistic turn' in ancient China. He supports the most of the commentaries' observations that Western historiography followed the same path in its centering of history around human agency, but that it did so to a lesser degree (since Christianity kept alive the interrelationship between worldly historical doings and the realm of the divine). In his general perspective, Chinese historiography can be seen as an eminent paradigm of a kind of historical thinking, the logic of which is expressed by Cicero's famous dictum "historia vitae magistra". This logic is shared by Chinese and Western historiography alike (and, as we may add, by other cultural traditions as well).¹ Wang understands it as essentially humanistic, since it centers history around human agency and gives to past events a super-temporal moral meaning which has validity for the present as well.

East and West have been moving apart since the end of the eighteenth century. The main reason for this is not the new role that source critique has played in Western historiography – China and the West shared an emphasis on 'philological humanism' –, but the dissolution of the concept of a super-temporal morality as residing in historical events. Instead, Western historical thinking followed a new logic of temporalization with its genetic differentiation between past and future. Whereas the academic standards of historical research have become accepted worldwide, the new logic still is disputed. Wang makes an

1 A well-known example is the most important Arabian historian Ibn Khaldun.

important contribution to this dispute: Through temporalization cultural differentiation gains a new ethnocentric power: some civilizations (originally in the West, though today there are indications that the oriental side is catching up to western hubris) behold in themselves a 'higher development' than in those of others. Therefore, in this context the element of humanism within exemplary historical thinking is fast shrinking away to nothing. One can read Wang's comment as a plea for the re-establishing of humanism in a new context within the modernized societies of East and West.

Ns *On-cho*'s comment is not so much interested in the diverse and articulate voices presented in our commentaries. Instead, he looks for an encompassing perspective which might synthesize the diversity of perspectives within the Chinese tradition as well as in the intercultural comparison of China and the West. In so contending, he turns to the fundamentals of historical thinking, to the philosophy of history. He explicates this philosophy by generalizing or 'fundamentalizing' the exemplary mode of traditional Chinese historiography. These fundamentals can be found in the Western tradition as well (and additionally in most other 'advanced' cultures or civilizations).

So Ng lays the ground for a perspective on intercultural communication which stems from the Chinese tradition, but which is, nevertheless, universalistic. His philosophical clarification of the main intellectual operations of historical thinking attributes to them a universal validity: the search for facts, interpretation using a narrative combining them with other facts, and by doing so using normative values to advance the relevance of the past for the present.

There yet remains a divergence, other than that between China and the West; and this is the divergence between traditional exemplary and modern genetic historical thinking. This modern technique endangers the solid reliability of the exemplary tradition which has been valid (not only in China) for more than a thousand years. Similar to Wang, Ng sees the problems rather than the advantages of modernized historical thinking, though mainly in respect to its normative quality which is situated in the past's relevance for the present and future. He does not deny the reasons for this logical substitution and therefore does not simply revoke it in favor of a simple return to tradition. Instead, his line of argument concludes that the exemplary mode has not lost its value, but has to be mediated with the later (modern) one. His presentation of the Chinese tradition serves as a strong argument in favor of the necessity of this re-integration of the traditional view into the newer forms of historical thinking developed in the last few centuries. This is addressed to all historical thinking in the present, Western and Chinese alike.

Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik welcomes this volume's intent to introduce a comparative perspective and also of the systematic interrelationship between Chinese and Western historical thinking. China and the West are in competition

to understand the man-made world within a historical context. This applies especially to the present, when the different traditions meet and demand a bridge of understanding. She rightly understands the issue of humanism in the different texts as a proposal for such a bridge.

Sharing the common intention of taking further steps toward a mutually enriching understanding of each other, Prof. Weigelin-Schwiedrzik is also well aware of the difficulties in so doing. In a close reading of the texts, she makes these difficulties credible, thus marking off the limits of the discourse among our authors. She points out that the special difficulty, if not the limits, lie in our unavoidable lack of knowledge regarding the concrete contexts presented in the comparison between our historians' views. The Western commentators cannot see some important implications present in Chinese historiography (even more so than the other way round). The whole argument over the fundamental features of historical thinking is based on a *pars-pro-toto* representation, leaving out a lot of alternatives. Since the Chinese authors are quite well immersed in Western historical thinking, their presentations have been previously shaped by Western concepts of understanding Chinese singularity. This implicit concession implies a still effectively unbalanced relationship between the two traditions which lean in favor of the Western tradition in its modern form. In this respect, a more normative reflection on the principles of historical thinking should have been useful, but was intentionally avoided because it might have overlapped and disturbed the intention of mutual understanding and recognition.

Besides specifically concrete hints about further questions (for example, a more complex relationship between historical thinking, religion and politics), Prof. Weigelin-Schwiedrzik adds a fundamental proposal for further work in intercultural communication (not only between China and the West). The temporal dimension of the scale of comparison, normally used is that from the past (even from the very beginning) to the present. A different perspective with fascinating findings and insights will be opened up if the comparison starts with the present and moves back into the past. Such an analysis of historiography from both aspects – past and present – would clearly show the urgent necessity of bridging the gap between contemporary knowledge and emergent forms of mutual criticism, understanding and recognition. Unless we can come together in a historically relevant and systematic way, both sides could fail in their task of contributing to an understanding of the world we live and share and thereby to come to terms with each other.

The fourth part of the book contains the responses by Huang, Wong, and Hu to the comments on their articles and the “second thoughts” of Ng, Wang, and Weigelin-Schwiedrzik. Since the space for these answers was very limited, not all arguments in the commentaries could be included, therefore a selection was inevitable.

Huang Chun-chieh answers the critical comments by a summarizing explanation of his main thesis that classical Chinese historiography is characterized by an inbuilt morality. He underlines Sima Qian's importance for this normative function for Chinese historical thinking. His work remains paradigmatic for the commitment of historiography to present moral and political values to its readers and make them plausible by the events of the past referred to. Huang is convinced that this morality is still valid, thus confirming its universal (super-temporal) validity. He defends it against the counter-argument that it only serves national (istic) purposes. Chinese nationalism, as he sees it represented by Qian Mu, has for him only a defensive character and quality when applied against the Western domination of modern historical studies.

It is this high-minded legacy of Chinese historiography which defines its humanistic character. Huang holds that this should be recognized as a permanent challenge to current historical thinking. This can be seen as Huang's main thesis: The Chinese historiographical tradition can still make an important, even essential contribution to the worldwide discourse of history as well as to the cultural orientation of modern practical life through its fundamental logic of normative deliberation coupled with historical experience.

Wong Young-tsu's response defends his estimation of Sima Qian as a fixed model of traditional Chinese historical thinking. Therefore, for him (as for a fair number of others), he insists, as a starting point that an origin should be acknowledged as the foundation of history and thereby as a genuine approach to cultural orientation. His defense of a demanding tradition includes an inbuilt humanistic value-system which should be respected and taken as such. Against wide-spread epistemological opinion, Prof. Wong's strongly held view that there is no contradiction between history and morality, that historization – which took place over the course of the long evolution of Chinese historical thinking – does not mean de-moralization. Therefore, any attempt to make history a science (as was the goal adopted as the most effective way of modernizing history in the West) is futile. In the West, historians and philosophers have given up this objective and are now promoting its postmodern juxtaposition, whereby history is losing its claim of universal truth and for methodical strategies used to realize it. In this situation, it is, according to Prof. Wong, worthwhile for East and West together to look back at the Chinese tradition in order to know what unadulterated standards of doing history are like. Intercultural discourse, in which Chinese historical thinking is liberated from the constraints of adjusting to the Western tradition of modernity, is therefore necessary to gain a promising future perspective for historical studies and contemporary historical culture.

Hu Chang-Tze answers the criticism of his text on rather different levels of debate. One is a detailed anti-critique dealing with his concrete historiographical examples, mainly with those of Qian Mu and Zhang Xuecheng. In close con-

nection to this historiographical interpretation, he spells out its theoretical context and presuppositions. He extrapolates his concept of transformation from an exemplary mode of historical thinking into a genetic one as an attempt to combine Koselleck's historical thesis of the emergence of genetic thinking with Rüsén's typology of making sense of history with its logical and anthropological impacts. He rejects any idea of a comprehensive transcultural historical teleology the Chinese historians had to follow (as historians in the West did before them) – be it a universal process of nation-building or – more fundamentally – that of modernization. Instead, he places the Chinese case into an open field of authentic endeavor to meet and answer the challenges of modernity in politics as well as academia. Thus he gives back to the development of Chinese historical thinking in recent centuries, its own historicity. In so doing, he proposes a way to compare and communicate between different modes and ways of doing history whereby the issue of domination is avoided.

At the end of this volume are a few final remarks which attempt to characterize the intention of the authors and the results they hoped to achieve: it is an attempt to treat cultural differences in a way that it is bridged by an understanding which at the same time recognizes uniqueness and common features.

I. Presentations

1. Historical Discourses in Traditional Chinese Historical Writings: Historiography as Philosophy

1. Introduction

Traditional Chinese culture was especially imbued with a profound sense of time;¹ hence time consciousness there was highly developed. Many of the classical texts of the Western Zhou (1045–771 BCE) such as the books of *Odes* and *Documents*, served as mirrors for reflecting on the historical events of the Yin/Shang periods (?–1045 BCE). Even more so, Confucius (551–479 BCE), who considered himself a “transmitter and not a creator, who trusts in and enjoys antiquity”, held the historical cultural tradition in profound respect. In the political struggles throughout Chinese history, historical interpreters were often in conflict with the court authorities. History often became an Armageddon of ideological war in the transfer of political power or outbreaks of political conflict. For instance, after the establishment of the Han empire (206 BCE–220 CE), Han rulers and ministers always deliberated over such conundrums as the decline of the Qin and the rise of the Han.² The rulers and their ministers always paid attention to the rise and fall of their predecessors in order to draw insights and wisdom therefrom. For them, history served as a guide to the strategy and tactics of rule. The Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) from its beginnings inaugurated the tradition of official historiography.³ Since that time, the official historian would stay near the emperor and keep a journal of his every movement, referred to as the *Diary of Activity and Repose*. Chinese official historians regarded safe-

1 Chun-chieh Huang and Erik Zürcher (eds.), *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995.

2 Chun-chieh Huang, “The Ch’in Unification in Chinese Historiography”, in: Q. Edward Wang and Georg Iggers (eds.), *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002, pp. 35–44.

3 Lien-sheng Yang, “The Organization of Chinese of Chinese Official Historiography: Principles and Methods of the Standard Histories from T’ang through the Ming Dynasty”, in: W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleyblank (eds.), *Historians of China and Japan*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961, pp. 44–59.

guarding historical truth as their sacred mission. Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596–658) went so far as to reject the emperor Tang Taizong's 唐太宗 (r. 626–649) request to read his *Diary of Activity and Repose*. During the Great Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) in twentieth-century China, the Anti-Confucius Campaign was launched superficially to denounce Confucius, it was in fact aimed at the political target Lin Biao 林彪 (1908–1971). In Postwar Taiwan, the interpretation of the February 28 Incident has been an ongoing bone of contention between historians of different political camps. Throughout the development of Chinese politics from antiquity on, struggles have broken out between historians and the authorities over the interpretation of history down to the present day; in fact, one could claim with authority that the Chinese have always possessed a highly developed historical consciousness.

Because of this deeply engraved sense of time, the study of history was especially well-developed among the traditional Chinese humanities.⁴ While Chinese historians stressed establishing knowledge of the facts of past experience, they also always kept a watchful eye on present and future trends. They continually glorified past golden ages, such as the Three Dynasties, and exemplary personages, sages and worthies such as emperors Yao 堯 and Shun 舜, in order to critique the present and to chart a better course for the future.⁵ We could say that Chinese historiography had a sort of didactic bent, as Chinese historians had a marked penchant for drawing moral or philosophical lessons from their narratives to serve as lessons and warnings to their readers, rulers in particular.⁶ Because traditional Chinese historians used historical narrative as a means to advance other ends, and ultimately aimed at drawing moral lessons or philosophical themes after narrating a historical event or describing a historical personage, they would append a critical discourse. Such appended critical historical discourses can be seen in the “the Gentleman says” remarks of the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, the “his honor the Grand Scribe says” remarks of the *Historian's Records* (*Shi ji* 史記), the “in eulogy we say” remarks of *History of the Han* (*Han*

4 For an earlier account of Chinese historians, see Beasley/Pulleyblank, *Historians of China and Japan*. For a recent study of Chinese historiography, see On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: the Writing and Use of History in Imperial China*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.

5 Chun-chieh Huang, “Historical Thinking in Classical Confucianism: Historical Argumentation from the Three Dynasties”, in: Huang/Zürcher, *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*, pp. 72–79.

6 Chun-chieh Huang, “The Philosophical Argumentation by Historical Narration in Sung China: The Case of Chu Hsi”, in: Thomas H. C. Lee (ed.), *The New and the Multiple: Sung Senses of the Past*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2004, pp. 107–124. Cf. Conrad Schirokauer, “Chu Hsi's Sense of History”, in: Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer (eds.), *Ordering the World: Approaches to State and Society in Sung China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 193–220.

shu 漢書), the “comments” of the *Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi* 三國志), Sima Guang’s 司馬光 (1019–1086) “your servant Guang remarks” of the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑), Wang Fuzhi’s 王夫之 (1619–1692) “in eulogy we say” remarks on *Reading the General Mirror of Historical Discourses* (*Du Tongjian lun* 讀通鑑論) and *Discourses on Song History* (*Song lun* 宋論), and the remarks of Northern Song literati like Su Xun 蘇洵 (1009–1066) and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) critiquing historical events and personages. All of them seized upon events in order to expound on principle, and they all followed the traces to seek the root; they travelled upstream to trace the well-spring, thus producing a the rich synthesis of history and philosophy that runs through traditional Chinese scholarship. The present paper focuses on the complex relationship between events and principles in tradition Chinese historical discourses. It also explores how these discourses produced such a rich synthesis between history and philosophy, with history operating as a function of philosophy.

2. The Evolution of the Relationship between Events and Principle in Traditional Chinese Historical Writing

In traditional Chinese historical discourses, the historians set up a bridge between fact or event, on the one hand, and principle or norm, on the other. The historians quietly observed the main trends of history – the rise and fall of dynasties and the heights and depths of humanity – extrapolating and distilling the principles and/or norms implicit in historical facts and events. Consequently, the historical discourses expressed from the writing brushes of traditional historians were not mummy-like and frozen but more like a living library. People of later generations could enter this historical library and engage in dialogue with the personages of the past in order to access the insights and wisdom garnered by those sage/historians from the experience of the ancients.

Generally speaking, prior to the Northern Song dynasty, which arose in the tenth century CE, the principles and/or ethical norms appealed to in historical discourses were presented as embedded in historical facts. The writings of the Grand Historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–86 BCE) are most representative in this respect. Unlike the Greek historians Herodotus (ca. 484–425 BCE), and Thucydides (ca. 460?–400? BCE), who placed stress on the outstanding heroes of important battles, Sima Qian in the *Historian’s Records* stressed personages who had vanished in the tide of history, such as Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊, and cultural heroes, such as Confucius (551–479 BCE) and Mencius (371–289? BCE) etc. In his *Historian’s Records*, Sima Qian included the biographies of Boyi and

Shuqi as the first chapter of the division of biographies in narrating the transfer of power after the fall of the Shang dynasty in 1045 BCE. He stressed the historical fact that Boyi and Shuqi had rejected the new Zhou authority and for this starved to death atop Shouyang 首陽 Mountain. Regarding this event, Sima Qian reflected that, “Heaven’s way favors none, but always sides with the good man”. This adage reflected the ancient Chinese faith in principle or ethical norms in the world. In Sima Qian’s historical writings, the intimate relationship between heaven and humanity was to be discerned and discovered only in historical facts, such as in the fate of Boyi and Shuqi.

However, after the tenth and eleventh centuries that witnessed the rise of Neo-Confucianism, Confucian values penetrated the historians’ perceptions of and reflections on history. Therefore, historical principle or ethical norms began to drive and then transcend historical fact, ultimately becoming inherent in the historian’s interpretations of historical movement and change.

The Northern Song historian Sima Guang (1019–1086) applied strict historical methodology and the careful application of critical techniques⁷ in compiling the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*, which covered 1,392 years of Chinese history. He meticulously narrated the chronology of historical events from 403 BCE to 959 CE but at the same time used the theory of “titles and duties” as a standard for critically assessing the events and personages of history.

In the Southern Song dynasty, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) began using the idea of “principle” (*li* 理) at the core of his philosophy as a completely transcendent foundation and standard for interpreting history. As I have argued elsewhere,⁸ traditional historians’ moral interpretations of history were based on principle (*li*) or the Way (*Dao* 道). They regarded principle at once as a cosmic norm and a standard of human conduct – which was ultimately one and the same in both contexts and roles. For this reason, Zhu Xi is a representative figure who read and interpreted history from the perspective of his philosophy of principle under which factual judgment and moral judgment were integrated as one and the same. In this way, history came under the control of abstract transcendental principles to such an extent that human affairs also came under its power, and all of the concrete facts of history came to be judged as positive or negative according to this eternal paradigm of principle. In this way, the philosophy of principle gave critical historians a sort of spiritual leverage in wielding their craft of writing history.

Zhu Xi, as a representative Song Confucian interpreter of history, adopted a sort of supra-temporal moral stance when observing the events of history. In this

7 E. G. Pulleyblank, “Chinese Historical Criticism: Liu Chin-chi and Ssu-ma Kuang”, in: Beasley/Pulleyblank, *Historians of China and Japan*, pp. 135–166.

8 See supra note 6.

respect, we could say that he brought an ahistorical or even anti-historical attitude to his discourses on history.⁹ This is not to say that this was Zhu Xi's purpose; it simply characterizes his methodology and approach to history. This way of viewing history assumes that historical knowledge serves as morality under which the autonomy of historical knowledge becomes blurred and enslaved by the rigid template of ethics and morality.

After the eleventh century two problems emerged from the Neo-Confucian subversions of historical fact to moral principle:

- 1) in the Neo-Confucian historical writings, the term “principle” (*li*) covered both objective principle and ethical norms. So, how could this eternal, unchanging principle be deployed to interpret, say, the dark side of politics or culture? How could principle be made relevant and brought to bear on evil in history? We must respond that their moral approach to interpretation had no way to face and account for the problem of evil in history.
- 2) In light of principle, Zhu Xi and the other Song Neo-Confucians tended to praise and to extend the heavy responsibility placed on the shoulders of the sages, worthies and heroes of history. This tendency resulted in the focus of history turning to the character and feats in the biographies of a few outstanding personages to the exclusion of records about the contributions of the nameless, faceless people who actually lived and drove history. This sort of history must face one deeply serious problem: if the sages worthies and heroes had not appeared, how could these historians affirm that history would still have been consistent with “principle” or progress on track with the Way (*Dao*)? As a matter of fact, the Neo-Confucian “principle” tended to serve as a sort of “Procrustean bed” in some interpretations of history proposed by Song Neo-Confucian thinkers.

In short, Chinese historical discourses reached a high water mark in the eleventh century with Song Neo-Confucianism, when principle became viewed as inherent in historical events rather than just extrapolated and distilled. The relationship between event or fact and “principle” or norm seemed to be confirmed and provided a complete platform for integrating history and philosophy in the tradition the Chinese learning.

9 Cf. Benjamin I. Schwartz, “History in Chinese Culture: Some Comparative Reflections”, in: *History and Theory* 35.4 (December, 1996), pp. 23–33.

3. The Use of History (1): From Particular to Universal

Traditional Chinese historical discourses took many forms. As to their objects of critique, they assessed the good and evil of historical personages and weighed the factors contributing to the rise and fall of dynasties. As to their contents, they sometimes sought and analyzed a certain meaning in history, sometimes they inquired more broadly into the larger meaning of history. The different forms of historical discourse were used to play different roles. Nonetheless, all of them provided bridges or platforms which brought history and philosophy together, thus producing the traditional Chinese humanities' synthesis of history and philosophy.

The first major use of historical discourse was to extrapolate and distill universals from particulars. The traditional historians never regarded collecting historical data or revisioning historical facts as history's highest objective.¹⁰ Rather, their reworking of the concrete, discrete facts of history was for the purpose of extrapolating and distilling the abstract, general principles they assumed to be latent within history. The Grand Historian Sima Qian gives a paradigmatic expression of this mission:¹¹

"I studied the events of history and set them down in significant order; I have written 130 chapters in which appears the record of the past – its periods of greatness and decline, of achievement and failure. Further, it was my hope, by a thorough comprehension of the workings of affairs divine and human, and a knowledge of the historical process, to create a philosophy of my own".

Starting with Sima Qian, traditional Chinese historians regarded the achievement of comprehensiveness as their highest goal. This ideal is exhibited particularly well in the Tang dynasty historian Du You's 杜佑 (735–812) *Comprehensive Statutes* (*Tongdian* 通典; 801), Southern Song historian Zheng Qiao's 鄭樵 (1104–1162) *Comprehensive Treatises* (*Tongzhi* 通志; 1161), and Ma Duanlin's 馬端臨 (1254–1324/5) *Comprehensive Survey of Literary Remains* (*Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考). These three institutional encyclopedias best exemplify the trend of writing "comprehensive" histories of the concrete facts or institutional material.¹²

10 For example, Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801) insisted that historiography aimed at statecraft, not at collecting data; see his "Zhedong xueshu 浙東學術", in: *Wenshi tongyi* 文史通義 (*Comprehensive Discussions of Literary Writings and Historiography*), edn. *Wenshi tongyi jiaozhu* 文史通義校注, by Ye Ying 葉瑛, 2 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1st edn. 1985, rpt. 1994, *neipian* V 內篇五, pp. 523–4.

11 Ssu-ma Ch'ien, "Letter to Jen An", in: Cyril Birch (comp. and ed.), *Anthology of Chinese Literature: From Early Times to the Fourteen Century*, New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967, p. 101.

12 Hok-lam Chan, "'Comprehensiveness' (Tung) and 'Change' (Pien) in Ma Tuan-lin's Historical

However, it is also noteworthy that the ideal of “comprehensiveness” in traditional historical narratives was, in essence, the extrapolation and distillation of abstract, universal principles or norms out of complex, changing concrete events, particularity of historical events and personages, thus combining historical narrative with philosophical reflection.

An early example of the kind of historical discourse which proceeds from the particular to the universal is found in the *Mencius* 6B.15:¹³

“Mencius said, ‘Shun rose from the fields; Fu Yüeh [Fu Yue] was raised to office from amongst the builders; Chiao Ke [Jiao Ke] from amidst the fish and salt; Kuan Chung [Guan Zhong] from the hands of the prison officer; Sun Shu-ao [Sun Shu’ao] from the sea and Po-li Hsi [Boli Xi] from the market. That is why Heaven, when it is about to place a great burden on a man, always first tests his resolution, exhausts his frame and makes him suffer starvation and hardship, frustrates his efforts so as to shake him from his mental lassitude, toughen his nature and make good his deficiencies. As a rule, a man can mend his ways only after he has made mistakes. It is only when a man is frustrated in mind and in his deliberations that he is able to innovate. It is only when his intentions become visible on his countenance and audible in his tone of voice that others can understand him. As a rule, a state without law-abiding families and reliable Gentlemen on the one hand, and, on the other, without the threat of foreign invasion, will perish. Only then do we learn the lesson that we survive in adversity and perish in ease and comfort”.

Mencius extrapolates and distills a principle of universal necessity from the particularity of historical personages, i.e., the thesis that people thrive in adversity, but weaken and perish in ease and comfort. This form typifies the style of historical reflection adopted by most traditional historians.

When Chinese historians pointed out the universals they had derived from the particulars of their historical narrations, what concerned them most was the drawing of valid overviews and the establishing of general laws. Besides the Grand Historian Sima Qian’s indicated many of the general laws and viewpoints in *Histoian’s Records*, the same practice is exhibited in Wang Fuzhi’s *Discourses on Song History* of the seventeenth century, Zhao Yi’s 趙翼 (1727–1814) *Notes on the Twenty-two Standard Histories* (*Nian’er shi zhaji* 廿二史札記) of the eighteenth century and even Chen Yinke’s 陳寅恪 (1890–1969) *A Draft Political History of the Tang Dynasty* (*Tangdai zhengzhi shishu lüegao* 唐代政治史述略稿) of the twentieth century. They all draw attention to the general laws and

Thought”, in: Hok-lam Chan and Wm. Theodore de Bary (eds.), *Yüan Thought: Chinese Thought and Religion under the Mongols*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, pp. 27–88.

13 D. C. Lau (tr.), *Mencius*, 2 vols., Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1984, vol. 2, pp. 260–262.

viewpoints they had derived from the particulars of their narratives of Chinese history.

Interestingly, Nakamura Hajime 中村元 (1912–1999) did not register traditional Chinese historians' tendency of drawing universals from particulars in his analysis of the patterns of Chinese thinking. In his study, he said the traditional Chinese had placed emphasis on the perception of the concrete. They had not developed abstract thought but instead laid special stress on the particular.¹⁴ Nakamura further claimed that the Chinese “were concerned with particular instances”. This meant that they showed little interest in universals which comprehend or transcend individual or particular instances, thus seldom creating universals out of particular”.¹⁵ I am afraid to say so, but Nakamura's view is somewhat one-sided and requires reconsideration.

Naturally, I am not making the claim that the traditional historians had a model of inference along the lines of Carl Hempel's (1905–1997) idea of a deductive-nomological explanation, for the reason that the explanandum used in traditional historical discourses did not necessarily trace the steps of inference and thus lacked a Hempelian “covering law”.¹⁶ Perhaps the traditional historians would have agreed with Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997) who asserted that while scientists place stress on similarity and universality, historians emphasize dissimilarity and particularity.¹⁷ For this reason, traditional historians established an interpretive philosophy of history, not an analytic philosophy of history, and that the general laws they drew attention to were not a sort of logical compact but were more like heuristic principles. By learning and pondering such heuristic principles, the readers of the historical discourses could take the hand of the ancients and walk together with them.

The narratives of the traditional Chinese historical discourses bear another theoretical problem that warrants our attention. We might characterize the universals that the traditional historians derived from the particulars of history as “concrete universals”, as defined by the philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831).¹⁸ Still, does such a “concrete universal” as philosophical or ethical theses

14 Hajime Nakamura, ed. by Philip P. Wiener, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984, pp. 175–203.

15 Hajime Nakamura, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

16 Carl Hempel, “The Function of General Laws in History”, in: Patrick Gardiner (ed.), *Theories of History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 344–355.

17 Isaiah Berlin, “History and Theory: The Concept of Scientific History”, in: Alexander V. Riasanovsky and Barnes Rizrik (eds.), *Generalizations in Historical Writing*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963, pp. 60–113.

18 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, translated and edited by George Di Giovanni, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 537 and p. 585. Hegel takes the idea of “five elements” in ancient China as the “concrete universals”, see Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*

still have unconditional universality and necessity? I would argue that because the principles derived by traditional Chinese historians from particularity are concrete and tempo-spatially-determined substance, it follows that while they have the autonomy of historical knowledge, they are not universally applicable abstract principles. This issue is worth further consideration.

4. The Use of History (2): Synthesizing Factual Judgment with Moral Judgment

The second use of Chinese historical discourses is to synthesize the factual judgment of historical events and personages with moral judgments. This process involved uniting the historians' goal of establishing truth with the philosopher's goal of establishing goodness, and is a characteristic of the craft of traditional historical narrative.

This uniting of factual judgment and moral judgment in traditional Chinese historiography began very early. It can be seen in the "Gentleman says" sections of the *Zuo zhuan*. In an entry for the 11th year of Duke Yin's 隱公 reign (712 BCE) of Lu 魯 state, after narrating the process whereby Duke Zhuang 莊公 of Zheng 鄭 state had handled a political dispute between the states of Zheng and Xu 許, the author of the *Zuo zhuan* critiques this matter as follows:¹⁹

"The Gentleman may say that in this matter duke Zhuang of Zheng behaved with propriety. It is propriety which governs State and clans, gives settlement to the tutelary altars, secures the order of the people, and provides for the good of one's future heirs. Because Xu transgressed the law, the earl punished it, and on its submission he left it. His arrangement of affairs was according to his measurement of his virtue; his action proceeded on the estimate of his strength; his movements were according to the exigency of the times: so as not to embarrass those who should follow him. He may be pronounced one who knew propriety".

There are two points to notice in this comment by the author of the *Zuo zhuan*. First, the historian's account of this political dispute between the states of Zheng and Xu is a sort of tool for distilling the historical discourse in a way to pass off moral judgment as the ultimate purpose of historical wisdom. Second, historical fact is placed in the context of moral value so that it may be weighed and judged appropriately. The author of *Zuo zhuan* selected the most morally significant

1825–6, vol. 1, in: Robert F. Brown (ed.), translated by R. F. Brown and J. M. Stewart with the assistance of H. S. Harris, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 110.

19 English translation is slightly adapted from James Legge (tr.), *The Chinese Classics*. Vol. V: *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*, 2nd revised edn. 1893–95, rpt. Hongkong: Hongkong University Press, 1960, p. 33.

and enlightening historical events and personages from among a wide range of cases so that after presenting his account of the facts he could investigate, develop and discuss the positive and negative moral lessons involved. This sort of tradition in historical commentary is consistent with the principle adopted by Confucius in compiling and editing the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋). As *Mencius* 4B.21 states:

“Mencius said, ‘After the influence of the true King came to an end, songs were no longer collected. When songs were no longer collected, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* were written. The Sheng of Chin [Jin], the T’ao U [Taowu] of *Ch’u* [Chu] and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* of Lu are the same kind of work. The events recorded concern Duke Huan of Ch’i [Qi] and Duke Wen of Chin [Jin], and the style is that of the official historian’. Confucius said, ‘I have appropriated the didactic principles therein’.”²⁰

Confucius’ “appropriation” mentioned in this quotation is precisely the extrapolating and distilling of historical principle whereby the narration of historical facts becomes a tool of moral reasoning, and consequently the craft of writing history and ethics become one and the same. As Yü Ying-shih 余英時 (born 1930) said, “History writing in the Chinese tradition is an act of political and moral criticism.”²¹

Examples of this tendency to extrapolate and distill moral principles from the narration of historical facts abound throughout the history of traditional Chinese historiography. At the beginning of the Former Han dynasty, Jia Yi 賈誼 (ca. 200–168 BCE) wrote *The Faults of Qin* (*Guo Qin lun* 過秦論) in which he narrated the process whereby the state of Qin grew from a minor state on the western frontier into the power that formed the first fully united Chinese empire (221–207 BCE), followed by the decline and destruction that concluded from the violent fifteen years of *Sturm und Drang* Qin imperial rule. Jia Yi then proceeded to extrapolate and distill important moral lessons from the story of the rise and fall of the Qin Empire. For example, he wrote:²²

“Ch’in [Qin], beginning with an insignificant amount of territory, reached the power of a great state and for a hundred years made all the other great lords pay homage to it. Yet after it had become master of the whole empire and established itself within the fastness of the pass, a single commoner opposed it and its ancestral temple toppled, its ruler died by the hands of men, and it became the laughingstock of the world. Why? Because it failed to rule with humanity and righteousness and to realize that the power to attack and the power to retain what one has thereby won are not the same”.

20 D. C. Lau, *Mencius*, 4 B:21, vol. 1, p. 165.

21 Yü Ying-shih, “Reflections on Chinese Historical Thinking”, in: Jörn Rüsen (ed.), *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate*, New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002, pp. 152–172, p. 161.

22 Chia Yi, “The Faults of Ch’in”, in: Cyril Birch (comp. and ed.), *Anthology of Chinese Literature*, p. 48.

Thus, according to Jia Yi's interpretation of history, it was Qin Shihuang's (r. 221–210 BCE) 秦始皇 inability to rule by humanity (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 義) that caused the collapse of the Qin Empire. This sort of historical interpretation is based on a theoretical assumption, i. e., the *modus operandi* of the outer realm is tantamount to the *modus operandi* of the inner realm such that the one is nothing but the extension of the other.

This type of logical argument also appears in the *Historian's Records*. After Sima Qian narrated an event involving Xiang Yu 項羽 (232–202 BCE), he criticized Xiang Yu, saying,²³

“All power was delegated by Hsiang Yü [Xiang Yu], who proclaimed himself Hegemon King. Even though his reign did not come to a natural end, since ancient times there has never been such a person. By the time Hsiang Yü [Xiang Yu] turned his back on the land within the Pass to embrace Ch'u [Chu] and banished Emperor Ti [Di] to enthrone himself, it is difficult to see how he could resent the feudal lords rebelling against him. He boasted of achievements, asserted his own mind, but never learned from the ancients. He called his enterprise that of a Hegemon King, intending to manage the world by means of mighty campaigns. After five years, he finally lost his state and died himself at Tung-ch'eng [Dongcheng], yet even then he did not come to his senses and blame himself. What error! To excuse himself by claiming 'Heaven destroyed me, it was not any fault of mine in using troops!' How absurd!”

In Sima Qian's eyes, the cause of Xiang Yu's downfall and defeat was that Xiang Yu hadn't understood self-criticism and lacked the ability to reflect on himself and his deeds.

The first event included in Northern Song historian Sima Guang's *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* took place in 403 BCE. It concerned the entitling of the great officials Wei Si 魏斯, Zhao Ji 趙籍 and Han Qian 韓虔 as “feudal lords” for the first time in history. Concerning this singular event, Sima Guang wrote a comment starting with, “your servant Guang says”, maintaining that the rise and fall of dynasties was determined by the moral conduct of the ruling authority. For example, he wrote:²⁴

“Ever since antiquity, there are many wicked ministers and delinquent sons of families perished with surplus talent and a deficit of morality. [...] The solution is that if those who lead countries and clans were able to judge the difference between talent and morality and know their priority, then how could the loss of a person be enough to create calamity?”

23 William H. Nienhauser, Jr. (ed.), *The Grand Scribe's Records*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 208.

24 Sima Guang, *Zizhi Tongjian* 資治通鑑, Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1970, 1/15.

Moreover, Sima Guang wrote another clear passage describing the function of historical narrative as to instruct and transform. He wrote:²⁵

“Now your servant in his narrative has sought only to trace the rise and fall of the various states and make clear the people’s time of joy and sorrow so that the reader may select for himself what is good and what is bad, what profitable and what unprofitable, for his own encouragement and warning”.

The reason why Sima Guang strongly emphasized that factual judgment was for the sake of seeking truth was because moral judgment becomes clear. In line with Sima Guang, Zhu Xi formulated a set of general rules for writing the outline and digest of Sima Guang’s *Comprehensive Mirror*. Zhu Xi firmly believed that the moral implications and lessons of history might become clear only if the historical facts were reported accurately through a careful use of terminology.²⁶

In ancient China, the tradition of combining factual narrative and moral judgment in the writing of history was made possible by the presupposition that the agents of action in history, the movers and shakers, had volition and free will and were responsible for their actions. The most classical expression of this assent occurs in the entry for the second year of Duke Xuan’s 宣公 reign (607 BCE) in the *Zuo zhuan*, which reads:²⁷

“Chaou Ch’uen [Zhao Chuan 趙穿] attacked (and killed) duke Ling in the peach garden, and Seuen [Xuan 宣, i. e. Zhao Dun 趙盾], who was flying from the State, but had not yet left its hills behind him, returned to the capital. The grand historiographer [Dong Hu 董狐] wrote this entry, – ‘Chaou Tun [Zhao Dun] murdered his ruler’, and showed it in the court. Seuen [Xuan, i. e. Zhao Dun] said to him, ‘It was not so;’ but he replied, ‘You are the highest minister. Flying from the State, you did not cross its borders; since you returned, you have not punished the villain. If it was not you who murdered the marquis, who was it?’ [...] Confucius said ‘Tung Hoo [Dong Hu] was a good historiographer of old time: – his rule for writing was not to conceal. Chaou Seuen [Zhao Hsuan] was a great officer of old time: in accordance with that law he accepted the charge of such wickedness. Alas! If he had crossed the border, he would have escaped it”.

The reason why Confucius praised the historian Dong Hu as “this ancient good historiographer” was because Confucius and Dong Hu agreed that the conduct of Zhao Dun was an expression of his free will, and because of this conduct he had to be charged with the final historical responsibility and accept the record of the historian’s judgment that “Zhao Dun murdered his lord”. Regarding the use of moral judgment in the traditional Chinese historical writing, we could maintain that historical judgment in Chinese civilization replaced the role of final judg-

25 Wm. Theodore de Bary et al. (comp.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1960, vol. 1, p. 449.

26 Wm. Theodore de Bary et al. (comp.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, pp. 452–454.

27 Legge (tr.), *The Chinese Classics*, vol. V: *The Ch’un Ts’ew with the Tso Chuen*, pp. 290–291.

ment in Judeo-Christian civilization. The concept of final judgment in Western civilization was established on the idea of a covenant between humanity and God; however, the idea of historical judgment in Chinese civilization was based on a sort of tacit moral duty among human beings. As Yü Ying-shih has said, "The notion that human history is an irreversible process guided by some trans-human forces, such as Providence or natural laws is wholly alien to indigenous Chinese historiography".²⁸ Traditional historians kept their hearts set on the long and winding road of the people's blood, sweat and tears in this mundane world; they did not establish the notion of an ideal Heavenly City or view some vague notion of collective agency as the driving force in history.²⁹ From Sima Qian's expressed sympathy for the defeated hero Xiang Yu, pity for the cultural heroes Boyi and Shuqi, and concern for the suffering, toiling masses in his writings, we could describe his book *Historian's Records* as branding the style of traditional Chinese historical writings as *Historia Calamitatum*.

The question of whether or not historical research should engage in moral judgment was a leading question in twentieth century historiography. The renowned British historian Herbert Butterfield (1900–1979) made a strong case that the historian's primary responsibility was to describe historical facts, not to prescribe, that is, not to make moral judgments. He supported this view by observing that when the historical researcher engages in moral judgment, he muddies historical understanding.³⁰ The British philosopher and man of letters, Isaiah Berlin opposed Butterfield's view. He argued that it was difficult to demarcate the spheres of the objective and the subjective and, moreover, that every historical subject is an individual and every individual should know that he or she is responsible for his or her actions.³¹

Traditional Chinese historians would have tended to agree with Berlin's position and to oppose Butterfield's position. Sima Qian declared his purpose in conducting historical inquiry in saying, "by a thorough comprehension of the workings of affairs divine and human, and a knowledge of the historical process, to create a philosophy of my own".³² Sima Qian was convinced that his own philosophy could comprehend the objective changes from past to present. In the historical world presented in *Historian's Records*, subjectivity and objectivity

28 Yü Ying-shih, *op. cit.*, p. 153. Still, Chinese historians must have accepted the irreversibility of time, which is the fundamental justification of all history writing in the first place.

29 Peter Burke has indicated that the collective agency or collective agents are given unusual stress in Western historiography, see Peter Burke, "Western Historical Thinking in a Global Perspective: 10 Theses", in: Jörn Rüsen (eds.), *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate*, pp. 15–32.

30 Herbert Butterfield, "Moral Judgments in History", in: Hans Meyerhoff (ed.), *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959, pp. 228–248.

31 Isaiah Berlin, "Historical Inevitability", in: Meyerhoff (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 249–272.

32 Burton Watson tr., *op. cit.*, p. 101.

were fused, and past and present were regarded as intimately interactive. The notion of objectivity in historical research indeed matches the subjectivity of Sima Qian's historical mind-heart when it is engaged in reflection.

To sum up, in traditional Chinese historical discourses the facts are contextualized in morality such that the facts are not reduced to cold and empty physical phenomena but are viewed as vivid and reflective of the devotion, blood and sweat of genuine human endeavor. In the world of traditional Chinese historiography, history is presented as the vivid, engaging, existential experience of human beings. In such a world, factual judgment and moral judgment are inseparable and subjectivity and objectivity fused. Traditional Chinese historians would completely agree with R. G. Collingwood's (1889–1943) position that, "History is nothing but the re-enactment of the past thought in the historian's mind".³³

The uses to which the works of Chinese history were put led to the formation of the special characteristic of the Chinese intellectual tradition: history and philosophy were united as a single endeavor. Traditional historians and philosophers both sought as their purpose to ameliorate human suffering by improving human life. Therefore, they ramified the quest for truth with the quest for goodness, thus making Chinese history develop as a sort of "philosophy taught by example", and making Chinese philosophy stress "temporality and spatiality", and still remain imbued with the spirit of historical concreteness.

5. Conclusion

Drawing upon many highly representative examples of traditional Chinese historical discourses, we discuss the two main uses of discourses. First, they were used to infer universals from the particulars of history in a manner that placed fact or event and principle or norm in a dynamic dialectical relationship. Second, they were used to place fact within the context of morality in their narratives, assessments and judgments, thus infusing Chinese historical writing with a manifest unity of subjectivity and objectivity. In the circulation of the spirit of historical discourses, the people and events in the world constructed by the Chinese historians were not like rigid, silent mummies in a museum. Rather, they were like the open books and documents in a library. Readers of today can enter into the embodied experience of ancient peoples, taking these ancients by the hand and walking together with them, offering up the questions of their own time for the ancients to answer. The world described by traditional Chinese historians was not the world of cold intellectual games. Rather, it was filled with the virtuous

33 R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946, p. 228.

rule of sagacious leaders, the loyal sincerity of worthy ministers strategizing for the state, the wickedness of the autocratic, the sarcastic tongues of oppressive officials and above all the blood, sweat and tears of the common people.

The spirit of statecraft flowed in the traditional works of Chinese history so that their historiographies were full of moral lessons on the meaning and value of human life. These features also influenced Chinese philosophy into taking on the characteristics of assessment based on models derived from history. Indeed, most Chinese philosophers were also historians of philosophy. Their modes of deliberation strongly stressed the temporality and spatiality of history, thus completing the fusion of history and philosophy within traditional Chinese humanities.

2. Historical Thinking as Humanistic Thinking in Traditional China

1. Introduction

This article sets out to argue that historical thinking in traditional China is humanistic thinking with Chinese characteristics. Traditional Chinese historical thinking centered upon Mankind as the agent of change in history. Both the strengths and weaknesses of Chinese historical thinking are rooted in this strongly humanistic orientation. In the following, I “unpack” this thesis.

However, before discussing Humanism as the foundation of Chinese historical thinking, an overview of Humanism in China and the West is in order.

Humanism in the Chinese context underwent a different development than in the West. As pointed out by the anthropologist Zhang Guangzhi 張光直 (1931–2001), Chinese civilization is a civilization of continuity.¹ Moreover, after the philosophical breakthrough of the axial period pointed out by Karl Jaspers (1883–1969),² while major changes occurred in the relations between people and between the ruler and his subjects in China, the relations between humanity and nature and between humanity and the supernatural were not ruptured but continued as before. As the poem, “Teeming Multitude” (“Cheng min” 烝民), from the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) reads:³

“Heaven produces the teeming multitude;
As there are things, there are their specific principles (ci).
When the people keep to their normal nature,
They will love excellent virtue.

天生烝民，
有物有則。
民之秉彝，
好是懿德。”

1 Zhang Guangzhi 張光直, “Lianxu yu polie: yige wenming qi yuan xinshuo de caogao” 連續與破裂：一個文明起源新說的草稿 (“Continuity and Splintering: A New Account of the Origin of Civilization”), in his *Zhongguo qingtong shidai di'er ji* 中國青銅時代第二集 (*The Chinese Bronze Age*, vol. 2), Taipei: Lianjing chubanshiye gongsi, 1990, pp. 131–143.

2 Karl Jaspers, tr. by Michael Bullock, *The Origin and Goal of History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953.

3 Wing-tsit Chan (tr. and comp.), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963, rpt. 1973, p. 5.

This ode expresses the archaic Chinese view that people inherit the will of Heaven at birth, stressing that each person's mind-heart is fully interactive with the so-called mind-heart of Heaven. Chinese Humanism flows from this sentiment of the teeming people's life journey at the intersection of heaven and earth, uplifted by limitless regard for the benign Mandate of Heaven. Oriented on this sort of humanistic stance, traditional Chinese historians paid scant attention to colorful, rebellious heroes, but rather had the utmost concern for the weak and down-trodden. For example, the first of the seventy biographies in the Grand Historian Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (c.145–86 BCE) *Shi ji* 史記 (*Historian's Records*), discusses Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊, who were unknown to society, and the first chapter of the "Eminent Clans" ("Shi jia 世家"), opens with the story of the humble Wu Taibo 吳太伯.

In contrast to archaic China, the axial breakthroughs in the ancient western world were associated with technological breakthroughs and trade activities which led to their civilization of rupture, in which humanity and nature, as well as humanity and the supernatural, were trapped in eternal conflict. For this reason, Western Humanism differs in orientation from traditional Chinese civilization's quest for harmony between nature and humanity. This can be witnessed in ancient Greek Humanism's emphasis that human beings must struggle to free themselves from the shackles of the fate decreed by the gods. The ancient Greek playwright Sophocles (ca. 496–406 BCE) provides a vivid example of this in his tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, the fascinating depiction of a courageous hero of the western mythic tradition who's fate is to challenge the Fates.

2. Humanism as Manifested in Chinese Historical Thinking (1): Anthropo-centric Explanation / Interpretation of History

The first humanistic feature displayed by Chinese historical thinking is that it regards human beings as the leading actors in all sorts of historical events. Since early antiquity, Chinese historians focused on depicting historical personalities. The Grand Historian Sima Qian in particular took "good and the lofty while blaming the bad and vulgar people" as the operant principles of historical writing. The most colorful part of his *Historian's Records* is the seventy biographies. Although the added treatises, chronologies and tables contribute to our understanding of pre-and-early dynastic China, the most vital contents surely are Sima's descriptions of key individuals.

In marked contrast to the Chinese historians, Western historians describe overall historical events. For instance, the celebrated "Father of History", the Greek Herodotus (ca. 484–425 BCE) objectively narrates the whole process of the

Persian War (490–480 BCE), giving a balanced account of the advantages and breakthroughs of the opposing armies of the East and the West. Moreover, in *The Histories*, Polybius (203?–ca. 120 BCE) describes broadly how Rome expanded from a city state to become the world's greatest empire, how the Aegean Sea became a Roman lake, stressing the impact of collective agency in historical developments.⁴ This linear sort of account, constructed on impersonal chains of causes and effects contrasts sharply with the mosaic approach taken by Chinese historians.

3. Humanism as Manifested in Chinese Historical Thinking (2): Affirmation of the Free Will of Man in History

The second humanistic feature of traditional Chinese historical thinking is the affirmation of the free will of human beings exercised throughout history. In explaining the causal relationship of historical events, traditional Chinese historians always emphasized human ingenuity, considering that thought and will are determining factors in the production of historical events. This feature is closely related to the above-mentioned feature that human beings are the agents of action in history. A vivid example appears in the *Zuo Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu Zuo zhuan* 春秋左傳), which reports an intrigue which occurred in 607 BCE:⁵

“Chaou Ch’uen [Zhao Chuan 趙穿] attacked <and killed> duke Ling in the peach garden, and Seuen 宣 [Xuan, i. e. Zhao Dun 趙盾], who was flying from the State, but had not yet left its hills behind him, returned to the capital. The grand historiographer [Dong Hu 董狐] wrote this entry, – ‘Chaou Tun [Zhao Dun] murdered his ruler’, and showed it in the court. Seuen [Xuan, i. e. Zhao Dun] said to him, ‘It was not so’, but he replied, ‘You are the highest minister. Flying from the State, you did not cross its borders; since you returned, you have not punished the villain. If it was not you who murdered the marquis, who was it?’ [...] Confucius said ‘Tung Hoo [Dong Hu] was a good historiographer of old time – his rule for writing was not to conceal. Chaou Seuen [Zhao Xuan] was a great officer of old time: in accordance with that law he accepted the charge of such wickedness. Alas! If he had crossed the border, he would have escaped it’”.

From a contemporary viewpoint, Confucius’ comment on Dong Hu’s chronicle is simply his value judgment and not a factual judgment. However, Confucius considered that Zhao Xuan’s not mentioning the son’s murder of his lord was

4 Peter Burke, “Western Historical Thinking in a Global Perspective: 10 Theses”, in: Jörn Rüsen (ed.), *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2002, p. 22.

5 James Legge (tr.), *The Chinese Classics*. Vol. V: *The Ch’un Ts’ew with the Tso Chuen*, 2nd revised edn. 1893–95, rpt. Hongkong: Hongkong University Press, 1960, pp. 290–291.

determined completely by his own will; so he had to take the final responsibility for this murder of the ruler of the state. The sorts of explanations given in Western historical studies differ from those given in traditional Chinese historiography. For example, Herodotus thought that the breakout of the Persian War was inescapable when in fact it arose from the tension between Greek (Occidental) democracy and Persian (Oriental) despotism. Thucydides (ca. 460?-400? BCE) analyzed the problems between Sparta and Athens and concluded that the two sides' trade and economic interests were decisive factors triggering the Peloponnesian war. As a rule, Western historians generally stress non-human factors such as political life, economic interests, etc. in explaining historical events. In contrast, the twentieth century Chinese historian Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990) maintained that Chinese history arose from “the vicissitudes of the trends of the world” and “the goodness or wickedness of man”.⁶ That the vicissitudes of the trends of the world should be considered in the context of the goodness and wickedness of man is clearly illustrated in Chinese historians' emphasis on the free will exercised by the movers and shakers of historical events.

Because traditional Chinese historians affirmed human autonomy and human free will, they always passed moral judgment on historical personages. Ever since Confucius, traditional historians have followed the principle of praising the good while blaming the wicked, upholding the worthy while condemning the unworthy in their writings. Traditional authoritative dynastic histories always classified historical personages as loyal ministers, wicked ministers, unsullied ladies, and so on. After the passing away of the dynastic emperors of China, later readers would examine their achievements and bestow them with posthumous titles, such as literary (cultural), martial, benevolent, harsh. While the Judeo-Christian tradition has God's “final judgment” of people's achievements and sins, we could say that the Chinese cultural tradition has the “judgments of history” to weigh people's lifetime conduct.

4. Humanism as Manifested in Chinese Historical Thinking (3): Historiography as Statecraft

The third humanistic feature of traditional Chinese historical thought is its taking on of historiography as statecraft and of saving the world as its goal. These traditional historians not only aspired to explain the world, even more, they aspired to change the world. For this reason, traditional Chinese historiography tended to develop more in times of chaos and suffering in Chinese history. For

6 Qian Mu 錢穆, *Shixue daoyan* 史學導言, Taipei: Zhongyang ribaoshe, 1970, pp. 32 and 33. Cf. my *Humanism in East Asian Contexts*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2010, Chapter 5, pp. 81–96.

example, in the seventeenth century, when the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) was being overthrown and replaced by the Qing (1644–1912), described by historian Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682) as “a chaotic age” when “Heaven collapsed and Earth eroded” was precisely a time when historiography developed and flourished. On the contrary, peaceful times witnessed declines not only in historiography but in the indices of humanism. In his preface to *Historian’s Records*, the great historian Sima Qian cited Dong Zhongshu’s 董仲舒 (ca. 179–104 BCE) remark that in writing the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) Confucius had endeavored to “praise or blame what happened in the 242 years so as to set up a model for the world”. Later, Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) of Northern Song (960–1126) wrote a “memorial for submitting the book”, i.e. *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑), which reads: “This book just concerns the principles of rise and fall of the empire, the keys of the people’s ease and woe. The good can be managed by models, the bad must be held in check by prohibitions”.⁷ Both of these illustrate the historians’ concern with statecraft. In *Comprehensive Discussions of Literary Writings and Historiography* (*Wenshi tongyi* 文史通義), Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801) exclaimed that, “Statecraft is the purpose of history. It is certainly not just empty accounts of events”,⁸ considering that the collecting and arranging of data does not measure up to solid historiography. Traditional Chinese historians all believed that authentic history and historiography certainly must dovetail with the pulse of human affairs. Consequently, the traditional historical discourses of historians – from the “Gentleman says” of the *Zuo zhuan*, the “Grand Historian says” of the *Historian’s Records*, the “in eulogy we say” remarks of the *Han History* (*Han shu*) and the “comment” of the *Annals of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi* 三國志), to “your servant Sima Guang observes” in the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* all manifested the traditional historian’s passing moral judgment on historical events and personages.⁹ In sharp contrast to Herodotus’ writing of history to win the cash prize and manifesting a sort of hedonistic attitude toward the writing of historical narratives, Chinese historians held a more rigorous attitude toward their life work.

Because traditional Chinese historians took statecraft as their mission in writing history, they created a collective memory¹⁰ of never being able to avoid the

7 Sima Guang, “Jinshubiao 進書表”, in: id., *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1970, p. 9607.

8 Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠, “Zhedong xueshu 浙東學術”, in: *Wenshi tongyi* 文史通義, edn. *Wenshi tongyi jiaozhu* 文史通義校注, by Ye Ying 葉瑛, 2 vols., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1st edn. 1985, rpt. 1994, p. 524.

9 For a discussion of this point, see Chapter 1 of this book.

10 Maurice Halbwachs, tr. and with an introduction by Louis A. Coses, *On Collective Memory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

interference of political authority. Traditional Chinese historians also always served as imperial officials. Sima Qian and his father held the position of “grand historian”. In the Tang dynasty, the system of compiling official history was established under which historians became even more subject to the imperial power structure, serving no longer as individuals but as group members in the writing of history. The relationship between their narrating of history and the imperial power structure became inseparable, but it was also always characterized by mutual tensions. How to maintain a dynamic equilibrium between writing history and imperial power had been, in striving to carry out their writing of history with integrity, a highly formidable challenge for historians in traditional China.

5. Humanism as Manifested in Chinese Historical Thinking (4): Preserving Factuality

The fourth eminent humanistic feature of traditional Chinese historical thinking is its strict adherence to the facts as they actually occurred. Throughout Chinese history, historians maintained the tradition of writing history as it really was, about which they would then add their own moral judgments. Consider, for example, the record for 548 BCE in the *Zuo Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*. The Grand Historian commented, “Cui Zhu 崔杼 killed his lord”,¹¹ Cui’s son had the Grand Historian killed. The Grand Historian’s younger brother then wrote the same fact, and was also killed. His younger brother again recorded the fact. In the end Cui Zhu had to give up on twisting the historical record of his deed. Tang Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 626–649) intended to read the imperial historian’s record of the emperor’s activities in *Diary of Arising and Repose* (*qijuzhu* 起居注), but was sternly rejected by the imperial historian. The historian’s purpose was to preserve the tradition of authentic documentation. Because traditional historians had statecraft as their mission, they regarded themselves as guardians of truth, and so developed a tradition which combined factual judgment and value judgment in their tradition, particularly in their passing of historical judgment. Consequently, historians were very much mindful of accuracy in the wordings of their writings.

Naturally, the historians of traditional China were not aware of the post-modernist challenge to the ‘factuality’ of history of the 1980s. Sima Qian wrote in a letter to his friend Ren An 任安:¹²

11 James Legge (tr.), *The Chinese Classics*, vol. V: *The Ch’un Ts’ew with the Tso Chuen*, p. 513.

12 In: Cyril Birch (comp. and ed.), *Anthology of Chinese Literature: From Early Times to the Fourteen Century*, New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967, p. 101.

“I have gathered up and brought together the old traditions of the world which were scattered and lost. I have examined the deeds and events of the past and investigated the principles behind their successes and failure, their rise and decay, in one hundred and thirty chapters”.

Sima Qian leaned toward the belief that once sufficient historical data had been gathered, in the words of Lord Acton (1834–1902), “definitive history” could be written. He would have been hard pressed to accept Hayden White’s position that, “the historical text is [simply] a literary artifact”.

6. Conclusion

The reason why traditional Chinese historians were able to embrace Humanism was established on the supposition that in narrating the facts they could extrapolate from the principles therein. Traditional historians considered that the eternal Way was inherent in the events of history, hence they endeavored to narrate history so as to draw conclusions from the existence and content of this eternal Way. For example, the Grand Historian narrated the story of Boyi and Shuqi to express his own perplexity of the value that “Heaven’s way favors none, but always sides with good men”.¹³ He disproved this value in reflecting on the perplexities of the problems of human life. He hoped that by analyzing the specific features of this case he could seek general answers to the eternal problems of human existence. This sort of supposition shows that, in the eyes of Chinese historians, truth was static and not dynamic. Peering into the specific complexities of concrete human affairs, the historian sought to achieve deeper understanding. Holding this sort of supposition, historians regarded history as a mechanism for deducing eternal truth, which gave Chinese history a sort of ahistorical import.¹⁴ This trend has become even more evident since the time of the Song dynasty.

From the eleventh century, Neo-Confucianism dominated and deeply influenced Chinese historiography. From that time, Chinese historians explicitly narrated historical events or deeds of historical actors in order to extrapolate moral or philosophical theses. This practice is eminently humanistic, for their historical narratives come very close to what Jörn Rüsen calls “exemplary narrative”.¹⁵ This sort of exemplary narrative differs from other sorts of narrative,

13 Ssu-ma Ch’ien, *The Grand Scribe’s Records*. Vol. 7: *The Memoirs of Pre-Han China*, William H. Nienhauser (ed.), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 4.

14 Benjamin I. Schwartz, “History in Chinese Culture: Some Comparative Reflections”, in: *History and Theory* 35.4 (1996), pp. 23–33.

15 Jörn Rüsen, “Historical Narration: Foundation, Types, Reason”, in his *History: Narration, Interpretation, Orientation*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005, pp. 9–20.

such as traditional, evolutionary, and critical narrative, in that in exemplary narrative natural time is transformed into a sort of humanistic time. Its special characteristic is the drawing of universal, abstract principles or norms of conduct from concrete historical events or cases, which introduces the general necessity of putting such regulations on conduct. On this basis, we could say that the sort of humanistic thinking involved in the thought processes of traditional Chinese historians reflects a universality planted deep in the midst of historical particularity and an “abstraction” established in concreteness. However, some tensions remain between universality and particularity and between abstraction and concreteness because, more often than not, the “particular and concrete” cannot become “universal and abstract”. The way to resolve this sort of tension is precisely the core problem for reflection on traditional Chinese historiography.

A final question remains: does historical thought in traditional China have the potential of developing the new humanism envisioned by Jörn Rüsen as defining culture “as something more open, something that goes beyond this mutual exclusion”?¹⁶ My answer is positive. Traditional Chinese historians combined moral judgments with factual judgments. They all upheld the notion of free will in man. They agreed that men are morally autonomous when taking any action in history. Traditional Chinese historians’ affirmation of the dignity of man that transcends the boundaries of states and races has the potential to develop some varieties of an open-minded, inclusive new humanism for our age of globalization.

16 Jörn Rüsen, “Towards a New Idea of Humankind: Unity and Difference of Cultures at the Crossroads of Our Time”, in: Zhang Longxi (ed.), *The Concept of Humanity in an Age of Globalization*, Göttingen: V&R unipress; Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2012, pp. 41–54, esp. 46.

3. Humanism in Traditional Chinese Historiography – With Special Reference to the Grand Historian Sima Qian

1. Introduction

In the West, humanism was the Renaissance rediscovery of, or reborn from, classical ideas and learning, especially the humane studies as opposed to theology.¹ Renaissance humanism thus turned man's eyes from Heaven back to earth. In China, humanism is deep-rooted in her cultural tradition. Archaeological evidence shows that ancestral worship appeared prominently in religious belief early in Neolithic China. By the late Neolithic period ancestor worship became the supreme ceremony of tribal clans during this period. At the beginning of Chinese history, the patriarchal clan systems of Shang and Zhou were taking shape. In Zhou's royal family, together with noble clans of various rank, when worshipping ancestors it was the descendants, either son or grandson, who would stand in for the "body" (*shi* 尸) of the dead ancestor when receiving worship and sacrifices. There were, in addition, interactions between those who gave sacrificial offerings and the receiver. As the research of late Professor Ping-ti Ho shows, no religion in history is as humanistic as that of ancient China. No one indeed, could discuss Zhou religion without mentioning the ancestral temple system of the ruling house. During the classical Zhou China in fact, virtually everything, including religious, political, and social institutions rested within the patriarchal clan system. Then came the "Son of Heaven" (*tianzi* 天子) to ascertain the Zhou system. The king represented the "grand clan" (*dazong* 大宗) to receive the absolute loyalty from various "small clans" (*xiaozong* 小宗). By the same token, a feudal lord was his own "grand clan" in relation to his loyal "small clans". The evolution of this kinship-based patriarchal clan system as well as ancestral worship, as Ho put it, was the most fundamental feature of Chinese humanistic culture, and its focal value was to perpetuate clans in an unbroken line.²

1 See Stephen Davis, *Empiricism and History*, New York: Palgrave, 2003, p. 134.

2 Cf. He Bingdi 何炳棣, "HuaXia renbenzhuyi wenhua: yuanyuan, tezheng ji yi yi (shang) 華夏人本主義文化：淵源、特徵、及意義 (shang 上)" (The Chinese humanistic culture: origin,

The Duke of Zhou (Zhougong 周公) invented the “Mandate of Heaven” (*tianming* 天命) theory, though as he did, he never fully trusted Heaven. The Duke’s personal experiences of hard struggle made him well aware that the key lay in men, not Heaven. He helped reduce the religious flavor of the theory, thus elevating its humanistic flavor. Confucius further made Heaven the supreme arbitrator of moral judgment. He revered Heaven but it served man. He did not really object to religion, but he made it serve the ethical education of men. Following the Duke of Zhou, Confucius established the theory of human relationship and its value. The notion of “*ren*” 仁 (benevolence, love), the confluence of all moral forces, as the philosopher Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 saw it, forms Confucius’ “spiritual world”.³ Xunzi 荀子, a distinguished disciple of Confucius, “interpreted all the ancient sacrificial rites of the Chinese as mere aesthetic exercises intended not for the benefit of the spirits but for the edification of the living”.⁴ In a sense, Confucianism helped Chinese culture move toward rationalism and humanism.

These dazzling classical ideas which appreciated human life in its secular setting had never been interrupted; hence, there is in China no question of a humanistic rebirth. One prominent figure who inherited this ancient humanism was the historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 135–93 BCE),⁵ the Chinese counterpart of Herodotus. As the modern historian Qian Mu 錢穆 pointed out, the concept that man is the center of historical forces began with Sima Qian, who creatively set the standard of human-dominated history. Thus, in Chinese history, men take precedence over events. Many made their marks in history without taking part in any events.⁶ His vision of life, in which men stood in the center, is quite clear. He has been honored as the Grand Historian, who not only set the example of the “biographical style of historical writing” (*jizhuanti* 紀傳體) followed by later Chinese historians for more than two thousand years, but also set the tone of the humanist proclivity for virtually the entire period of traditional Chinese historiography.

features, and meaning, Part One”), in: *Ershishiji shuangyuekan* 二十世紀雙月刊 33 (Feb., 1996), pp. 95–99.

3 See Feng Youlan, *Zhongguo zhexueshi* 中國哲學史 (*A History of Chinese Philosophy*), Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1940, vol. 1. Cf. He Bingdi, “HuaXia renbenzhuyi wenhua: yuanyuan, tezhenq ji yiyi (xia) 華夏人本主義文化：淵源、特徵、及意義 (下)” (“The Chinese Humanistic Culture: Origin, Features, and Meaning, Part Two”), in: *Ershishiji shuangyuekan* 二十世紀雙月刊 34 (April, 1996), pp. 88–96.

4 Cited in Burton Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch’ien. Grand Historian of China*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1958, p. 15.

5 Cf. Wang Rongzu 汪榮祖, *Shizhuan tongshuo* 史傳通說 (*General Studies in Historiography*), Taipei: Linking Press, 1988, pp. 70–71.

6 See Qian Mu 錢穆, *Zhongguo shixue mingzhu* 中國史學名著 (*The Famous Chinese Historical Works*), 2 vols., Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1973, vol. 1, pp. 72–73.

The Grand Historian Sima Qian, however, was not the first who discovered the importance of man. The discovery of man, as the philosopher Feng Youlan rightly pointed out, began from the pre-Qin Spring and Autumn period (770–476 B.C.) during which humanistic rather than divine interpretation of institutions prevailed, comparable to “man is the measure of all things”.⁷ Confucius in particular, showed solicitude for the eternal value of the self, including meritorious achievements as well as immortal deeds and masterpieces. With the discovery of the self, much attention was paid to the individual’s function in society. In reality, it was men who made the difference in events. An individual, as Mencius put it, is the root of the family, of the kingdom, and of the state.⁸ The historian Sima Qian realized the importance of individuals in historical writing, as he saw men of various sorts playing the central role in the making of history. As he remarked, good and honest men caused a state to rise, while a state invited collapse when good men disappeared and bad ones prevailed.⁹ The “biographical approach to history” is his creation.

There are an immense number of studies on Sima Qian and his work, dealing mostly with the historian’s life and thought, as well as the structure and style of his monumental work, namely, *Records of the Historian* (*Shi ji* 史記).¹⁰ In this paper, I shall focus on the issue of humanism, trying to explore the Grand Historian’s vision of history in which men stood at the center of history. Indeed, his work showed that men rather than gods retained the most prominent position. What he tried to do was reveal the secret of history through men. I shall point out how his historical writings pronounced that it was what people had done rather than divine influence that determined the rise or fall of a state. He made it clear that man created history, and history was humanistic. He amply demonstrated his judgment of what the value of man was, for which I shall provide with as many examples as possible. In addition, based on his humanistic perspective, shows how Sima Qian viewed brutal wars and inhumanity imposed on people. More importantly, the Grand Historian’s biographical approach and humanist proclivity fundamentally shaped and influenced traditional Chinese historiography down to modern times.¹¹

7 See Feng Youlan, *Zhongguo zhhexueshi*, vol. 1, pp. 58–59.

8 *Mengzi* 孟子 4 A.4; see James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*. Vol. 2: *The Works of Mencius*, 2nd revised edn. 1893–95, rpt. Taipei: Wenxing shudian, 1966, p. 295.

9 See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shi ji* 史記 (*Records of the Historian*), Zhonghua edition, 6/1990.

10 See, for example, Yang Yanqi 楊燕起, Chen Keqing 陳可青, Lai Changyang 賴長揚 (comp.) *Lidai mingjia ping shiji* 歷代名家評史記 (*Noted Scholars’ Comments on Records of the Historian Dynasty after Dynasty*), Taipei: Boyuan chuban youxian gongsi, 1990.

11 As the Qing dynasty historian Zhao Yi 趙翼 said so confidently, Sima Qian set the rule that later historians would not be able to go beyond. See Zhao Yi, *Nian'er shi zhaji* 廿二史劄記 (*Notes on the Twenty-two Histories*), with annotations by Du Weiyun 杜維運, Taipei: Huashi chubanshe, 1977, p. 3.

2. A Biographical Approach to History

In his letter to his friend Ren An 任安, Sima Qian made crystal clear the aims of history writing. They were summarized as (1) “to inquire into the different roles of man and Heaven” (*jiu tian ren zhi ji* 究天人之際), (2) “to understand the changes from past to present” (*tong gu jin zhi bian* 通古今之變), and (3) “to complete an authoritative history of my own” (*cheng yijia zhi yan* 成一家之言).¹²

To be sure, given the time in which he lived, Sima Qian was unable to wipe the slate clean of mythology and predestination. He took more or less for granted the traditional concept of rule by the Mandate of Heaven. The ruler, known as Son of Heaven, was somehow predestined by Heaven. It was also the time which witnessed the rise of an apocryphal or omenistic Confucianism. The influential Confucian master Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, in particular, advocated the theory of “correspondence between man and Heaven” (*tianren ganying* 天人感應), and Sima Qian was Dong’s student. Under the circumstances, Sima seemed unable to avoid in his work from mentioning apotheosis from time to time. He began his *History* with Huangdi 黃帝 (the Yellow Emperor) whom he considered unreliable as legend simply because the latter was widely revered at the outset of the Han dynasty.¹³ He recorded that the woman Liu 劉 became pregnant after having an encounter with a dragon and then gave birth to the founder of the Han dynasty;¹⁴ ostensibly, he tried to keep the legend in order to convey the supernatural character of the Son of Heaven (*tianzi*). He tended as well to believe “it is natural for Heaven to return kindness to well-doers and punish evil-doers”.¹⁵ Even more frequently, he attributed some unexplainable events to Heaven; for instance, the attribution of the rise of the Qin, which enjoyed no particular advantage in comparison to other states, as if accomplished with the assistance of Heaven.¹⁶ He remarked additionally that the destruction of the consort family of Empress Lü 呂 and the successful ascendancy of Emperor Wen 文 of Han were destined by the Mandate of Heaven.¹⁷ Nevertheless, overall, Sima Qian’s prudence to in differentiating between facts and fantasy, as Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 put it, was unprecedented.¹⁸ In fact, Sima’s conception of Heaven, as the modern scholar Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 noted, was not the same as Dong Zhongshu’s. The

12 Quoted in Ban Gu’s 班固 biography of Sima Qian, in *Han Shu* 漢書 (*History of Former Han Dynasty*), Zhonghua edition, 62/2735.

13 See Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書, *Guanzhui bian* 管錐編 (*Limited Views*), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979, vol. 1, p. 250.

14 *Shi ji* 8/341.

15 *Shi ji* 24/1235.

16 *Shi ji* 15/685.

17 *Shi ji* 49/1969–70.

18 Qian Zhongshu, *Guanzhui bian*, vol. 1, p. 253.

latter's cosmological theories assigning particular influences on men could be explained, while the former regarded Heaven as an unreliable, unexplainable mysterious force, thus exerting no real effects on human beings.¹⁹ Dong's theories, indeed, never appeared in Sima's work.²⁰

Sima Qian never denied man's link to nature, but it is important to point out that he was the historian who started trying to remove the divine from nature. He held "necromancers" (*fangshi* 方士), however popular and active at the time, in contempt. He found it disgusting "to serve ghosts and deities", ridiculing those who prayed to deities for help which never came. The rulers, though tired of the absurdity of the necromancers' claims to have found the immortals overseas, continued to send impossible missions so as to keep wishful thinking alive. Consequently, the necromancers and alchemists, instead of disappearing, became ever more numerous and active, but the longed-for miracles never happened.²¹

In his biography of Meng Tian 蒙恬, the general in supervision of constructing the Great Wall, the Grand Historian rejected the superstition that Meng deserved death because the construction under his supervision "disturbed the arteries of the earth". Instead, he blamed Meng for placing terrible burdens upon the people in completing the enormous project.²² Clearly, he began casting serious doubts about mysterious forces, while Master Dong remained fully committed to the belief that "good has its reward and evil has its recompense". Sima Qian unquestionably doubted his mentor's theory that "Heaven is the Lord of the universe which determines the fate of men". First and foremost he pronounced that man and Heaven each had their own roles to play and that they had no cause/effect relationship to speak of. In other words, Heaven is not the supernatural force that governs the destiny of man. It has nothing to do with the fate of man. As Sima Qian wrote in the biography of Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊, two ancient personalities known for their charitable natures, the fact that such virtuous men both died from starvation was evidence enough that Heaven was merciless and had no control of the destiny of men. As did Yan Hui 顏回, arguably Confucius' most-favorite student, who died prematurely from the effects of poverty while on the contrary, the notorious blood-thirsty bandit chief Dao Zhi 盜跖, who's

19 See Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, "Lun Shi ji 論史記" ("On the *Records of the Historian*"), in: Du Weiyun 杜維運, Chen Jingzhong 陳錦忠 (eds.) *Zhongguo shixueshi lunwen xuanji* 中國史學史論文選集 (*Selected Essays on the History of Chinese Historiography*), Taipei: Huashi chubanshe, 1980, p. 88.

20 See Stephen W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writing of Sima Qian*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 65.

21 *Shi ji* 26/1401.

22 *Shi ji* 88/2570. Cf. Burton Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien: Grand Historian of China*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1958, pp. 148–49.

outrages included killing innocent people on a daily basis, lived out his full lifespan. Needless to say, the historian's own acquiescence to castration as the punishment for his defense of his friend Li Ling 李陵 was as undeserved as it was unjust. He asked where the divine intervention, if any, was for him. It is important to note that living in a time when an omnipotent Heaven was taken for granted, he was still able to call into question the belief in omnipotence and laid the foundations for a more secular and humanistic approach to historical writing. He set the example of telling the stories of individual lives and handed them down to later generations. This new style of writing had profound influence upon Chinese historiographers yet to come.

His criticism of the emperors of Qin and Han worshiping gods at Mount Tai (Taishan 泰山), where they performed sacrifices symbolic of the divine election of the ruler, also demonstrated his rational approach to thinking. Honoring Confucius as he did, he disapproved of the *Yin-Yang* 陰陽 or Omenistic Confucianism advocated by Zou Yin 騶衍, which he termed as "impervious to reason". Those necromancers who followed Zou's talks of gods and ghosts made ridiculous claims of seeking immortality to curry favor with their ruler, but which went nowhere.²³ Rather than being determined by fate or any supernatural forces, Sima Qian believed the rise or fall of a state was a result of many decades of human efforts, whether positive or negative. The success of the ancient states, such as Yu 虞 and Xia 夏, was because their leaders, throughout their long histories, had accumulated reputations for immense kindness and charity. Likewise, over a century of hard work culminated in the rise of great states like the Zhou and the Qin.²⁴ Indeed, Sima Qian most often referred to Heaven as the "trend of the time" (*shishi* 時勢). When he said "Heaven made the Qin unify the country", for example, he meant the Qin's unification of the country was "to follow the trend of the time".

In fact, the Qin that followed this trend, apart from its strategically important geographical location, the advice and assistance of a long list of able men to thank. In Li Si 李斯's words, Duke Mu 穆公 (659–620 BCE) first sought five talented men from elsewhere, and they helped him dominate the country's western territories. Duke Xiao's 孝公 (361–338 BCE) trust of Lord Shang 商 made the Qin realm a rich country with a powerful army within a single decade. King Huiwen 惠文王 (337–311 BCE) used Zhang Yi's 張儀 strategy to expand the country vastly, broke the alliance of the other six states, and laid the foundation for the First Emperor's conquest in 221 BCE.²⁵

23 *Shi ji* 74/2344;28/1368–69.

24 *Shi ji* 16/759.

25 *Shi ji* 87/2542.

How then did the great conqueror, that is to say Qin Shihuangdi 秦始皇帝, lose his firm grasp on his empire in such a short period of time? The Grand Historian fully concurred with Jia Yi's 賈誼 assertions that the emperor "had an insatiable desire, relied on his own intelligence, mistrusted creditable officials, alienated the common people and brutalized the country from the outset".²⁶ Ostensibly, the leader's personal faults were capable of bringing down a powerful regime in a mere fifteen years. In the Grand Historian's view, man had to gain initiative in the process of history. Hence, he attributed success or failure, rise or fall, fortune or misfortune to a man's quality, character, virtue, and efforts. He had no hesitation in generalizing that "good guys contribute to a thriving state, while bad guys are responsible for its destruction".²⁷ Good talented men, in other words, determined their country's safety or precariousness.

After the fall of the Qin, the mighty Xiang Yu 項羽 was defeated by the underdog Liu Bang 劉邦, as Sima Qian put it, precisely because of the difference between the two in personality. Sympathetic with Xiang though Sima Qian was, he found Xiang obstinate, conceited, and dependent upon mere physical force, resulting in many strategic mistakes which ended in total defeat in a mere five years.²⁸ Hence, the grave tragedy of Xiang Yu did not happen at all by accident. Liu Bang had with him the whole assembly of the most distinguished and able men of the time, such as Minister Xiao He 蕭何, Advisor Zhang Liang 張良, and General Han Xin 韓信, to name a few. The rise of the Han dynasty founded by Liu Bang, so far as the Grand Historian could see, was due to the collective wisdom and joint efforts of numerous able personalities. The historian endorsed the extended metaphor that a precious fur robe was made of countless fox pelts, and the magnificent pavilion could not be built by a single limb of a tree.²⁹ Here he implied that the combined wisdom and efforts of men meant a formidable power. Liu's judicious leadership, full of astuteness and resourcefulness, was also highly significant. He read the minds of people who tired of the rigid, even cruel, Qin policies, and determined to make changes. When first entering Xianyang 咸陽, the Qin capital, as Sima Qian wrote, Liu promised that the officials and people would not be disturbed, in addition to the announcing of the abolishment of all the Qin laws which were deemed cruel.³⁰ He met the wishes of the people and "followed the trend" (*shunliu* 順流)³¹ to success. Hence Liu became the successful founder of the Han Empire because of his personal qualities as well as his

26 *Shi ji* 6/283.

27 *Shi ji* 50/1990.

28 *Shi ji* 7/339.

29 *Shi ji* 99/2726.

30 *Shi ji* 8/362. Cf. Burton Watson, *Chapters from the Shih chi: Records of the Historian*, New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1969, p. 118.

31 The term appears in *Shi ji* 53/2020.

ingenious use of human talent. When the Grand Historian exclaimed repeatedly: “is this not the will of Heaven”,³² he in effect referred Liu’s success to human efforts by the grace of Heaven, or simply thanked the Heavens! The exclamation, in other words, was an instant response to the unexplainable effect. Unsurprisingly, he found it ridiculous when the strong man Xiang Yu, before committing suicide for his tragic defeat at Wujiang 烏江, blamed Heaven for his debacle.³³ For Sima Qian, the fall of Xiang Yu, like other prominent disgraced leaders, was the price paid for his inappropriate conduct: to be forsaken by his followers.

For Sima Qian, it was not just great men like rulers and ministers, but also various commoners, such as scholars, merchants, physicians, traveling swordsmen, assassins, peasant rebels, the deferential and obedient, fortune-tellers, craftsmen, and comedians all made history. The biographies of “traveling swordsmen” in particular, told of a unique group of people who took the law into their own hands in order to uphold the social order and maintain justice which the government had been unable to uphold. As the distinguished Japanese scholar Naitō Torajirō 内藤虎次郎 pointed out, Sima Qian “recognized the social function of the individuals”.³⁴ It was impossible for him to include all the individuals he wished to include; although he did cover in his work a wide range of individuals. All of these categories of common people he found were deserving of being written into history. The selection shows his criteria for historical persons worthy to record. He chose those who possessed extraordinary moral characters or had rendered distinguished service to the time in which they lived, not necessarily those who occupied high political or social positions. In fact, he did not write biographies for quite a few prime ministers because they appeared to have made no significant contributions during their tenure in office.³⁵ It was very clear in the mind of the Grand Historian that man rather than the divine was the real driving force behind history. The support or opposition of the people, he believed, really determined the rise or fall of a state. In brief, man creates history, so that history is that of man’s history.

According to Sima Qian, man in his temporal setting was not a passive actor waiting for his opportunity to come. On the contrary, those who succeeded seized the opportune moment and strove forward by means of will and courage. The able lobbyists like Fan Sui 范雎 and Cai Ze 蔡澤 who had been unable to enlist support from any lord for a long time were accepted by the Lord of Qin and successively became prime minister when the opportunity arrived.³⁶ Both Liu Jing

32 *Shi ji* 16/760.

33 *Shi ji*, vol. 1, p. 7/339.

34 See Naitō Konan 内藤湖南, *Zhongguo shixueshi* 中國史學史 (A History of Chinese Historiography), translated by Ma Biao 馬彪, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008, p. 97.

35 *Shi ji* 96/2686.

36 *Shi ji* 79/2425.

劉敬 and Shusun Tong 叔孫通 assured the security and order of the Han Empire for a very long time owing to their wise suggestions.³⁷

What followed for Sima Qian was: how to interpret the various sorts of men who made history? His lively portraits of historical personalities are well-known; so lively in fact that they border on fiction. For instance, the remark Xiang Yu and Liu Bang each made in the field when watching the passage of the First Emperor's (Qin Shihuangdi's) impressively dignified entourage appeared to be the historian's invention. But the historian invented these remarks to project the contrasts of the two different personalities. The awe-struck Liu Bang said "A great personage should be like him" (*da zhangfu dang ru shi ye* 大丈夫當如是也), while the much more audacious Xiang Yu said "He should be replaced by me" (*bi ke qu er dai zhi* 彼可取而代之).³⁸ Elsewhere these two major figures were described just as vividly. The historian depicted Liu Bang, later the founder of the Han Empire, as a successful political leader without concealing his rough character. Likewise, he confirmed Xiang Yu's foolishness without sparing Xiang's gallantry.

By choosing a biographical approach to history, the Grand Historian judiciously illustrated major events through relevant individuals. The portrait of Shang Yang 商鞅, known also as Lord of Shang, epitomized the Legalist reform and its consequences in the state of Qin. He gave prominent mention of the mediocre peasant leader Chen Sheng 陳勝 or Chen She 陳涉 simply because the latter led the uprising which triggered the wide-spread rebellion marking the beginning of the end of the Qin Empire.³⁹ The life of Li Si 李斯 illustrated the rise and fall of the Qin; the biography of Han Xin 韓信 told of how a great general ended tragically because he failed to lie low. A scholar named Lu Jia 陸賈 played a central role in history by persuading the founding emperor of Han to enter into a civilized rule after his military conquests. Lu's remark that "conquering on horseback as you did, you could not manage the empire on horseback"⁴⁰ convinced the founding emperor to lead a more relaxed and stable China for many years to come.

Remarkably in his work, the Grand Historian took man's mortal existence very seriously. He quoted Guan Zhong 管仲 as saying "the full-house granaries make people know courtesy, and enough food and clothing make people aware of shame".⁴¹ He found fundamental importance in meeting people's basic needs. "Morality is born of plenty", as he pronounced, "and abandoned in time of

37 *Shi ji*, vol. 8, pp. 99/2715–26. Cf. Watson, *Chapters from the Shih chi*, pp. 216–29.

38 *Shi ji* 7/296 (Xiang's remark); 8/344 (Liu's remark). Cf. Wang Mingsheng 王鳴盛, *Shiqishi shangque* 十七史商榷 (*Studies in the Seventeen Histories*), Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1971, vol. 1, p. 66.

39 *Shi ji* 48/1964.

40 *Shi ji* 97/2699.

41 *Shi ji*, vol. 10, p. 129/3255.

want". He justified wealth-seeking, as he believed "benevolence and righteousness attach themselves to a man of wealth".⁴²

Sima Qian was arguably the first Chinese historian to take note of "change" in history. He wanted to understand the changes in men and events from the past to the present. His writing of the past for the present was to afford the present the lesson that merited attention, even though there were discrepancies between past and present. To record the past, in other words, is to serve the present, thus making a thorough inquiry into human-led events and their changes. Sima Qian's metaphor of "mirror", alluding to self-reflection, had since become the standard for the Chinese use of history for thousands of years.

3. A Humanistic View of War

Nearly a quarter of Sima Qian's *Records of the Historian* deals with war. But the historian saw war as "the sage's last resort to end violence, to pacify turmoil, to eliminate peril, and to prevent disaster".⁴³ The sages he referred to were none but those of Confucian-like persuasion, who deplored unjust wars, such as scrambling for territorial acquisition or supremacy while regarding war as the final alternative to restore the benevolent ritual order. The Grand Historian's narration of war likewise made manifest these Confucian values. By upholding the Confucian ethical view of war, he honored the Yellow Emperor's war against Chiyou 蚩尤, King Tang's 湯 war against Xia 夏, and King Wu's 武王 war against Shang as "just" because the wars were waged by sage-like leaders in order to oppose corrupt and brutal rulers.⁴⁴ With the collapse of the Zhou system which Confucius admired, wars became senselessly violent and waged by self-serving feudal lords. In the end, the most vicious Qin won the war of conquest. How this unjust war prevailed puzzled Sima Qian, and he had no way to explain it except to attribute the outcome to Heaven.⁴⁵ In any event, the "Mandate of Heaven" was used to justify the legitimacy of a ruler so that it was located more in the political realm than the divine.

During the Grand Historian's own time, Emperor Wu repeatedly launched massive expeditions against the Huns (Xiongnu 匈奴). The great military campaigns and territorial expansion were seen by many as the emperor's most re-

42 Ibid. Cf. Watson, *Chapters from the Shih chi*, p. 336.

43 *Shi ji* 25/1240.

44 This argument, however, is subject to controversy. One may also argue the overthrow of an old regime is after all guilty of regicide, see *Shi ji* 121/3122–23. Cf. Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien. Grand Historian of China*, p. 145.

45 See Han Zhaoqi 韓兆琦, *Shi ji jianzheng 史記箋證 (A Critical Study of the Shi ji)*, Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 2004, pp. 1279–80.

markable achievements. From a humanistic perspective, however, Sima Qian disapproved of the war. He deplored the astronomical cost of maintaining a huge force, usually from 100,000 to 300,000 strong, plus the even greater number of logistic suppliers who exhausted state finances and caused unbearable pain to the people in general. The historian felt duty-bound to record the terrible casualties of war, the impoverished treasury, the sufferings of the people, and the agitation of the whole empire. As a recent writer put it, Sima Qian sharply criticized Emperor Wu's adventures, and he himself witnessed the gradual decline of the empire.⁴⁶

Sima Qian's description of battle, instead of providing the reader with bloody details, emphasized human spirit and determination. He cherished spiritual values such as courage, wisdom, and justice. Take the famous battle of Julu 鉅鹿 for example: the Grand Historian told of how Xiang Yu sank all his own boats after crossing in order to register his resolve to not turn back. Xiang resolutely launched attacks when all others dared not to send forth their troops, and he won decisively despite fighting against heavy odds.⁴⁷ Here the single individual, Xiang Yu, won the decisive battle due to his courage, bravery, and personal strength.

The military heroes in *Records of the Historian*, Xiang Yu included, are almost exclusively tragic figures. Despite his supreme physical strength, Xiang suffered final defeat at Gaixia 垓下 and committed suicide. Han Xin's supreme strategy was vital for Liu Bang to win the war over Xiang Yu, and yet once Liu successfully founded his dynasty, Han Xin was put to death simply because he had acquired too much honor and power so that it made the sovereign tremble.⁴⁸ Regardless of his numerous successful engagements with Xiongnu 匈奴 on the northern frontiers, the brilliant general Li Guang 李廣 was in the end being blamed for himself and his troops losing their way in a battle. The general took the full responsibility and killed himself, refusing to answer the "petty clerks' list of charges".⁴⁹

The tragedies of the Chinese generals Sima Qian tried to convey represent what the modern historian Lei Haizong 雷海宗 termed the "a-military culture" of traditional China.⁵⁰ For many thousands of years, from the classical Zhou era onward, the Chinese have continuously regarded scholars as superior to soldiers. The tradition neither set great store by martial qualities nor emphasized military achievements. Victorious generals rarely received enthusiastic receptions, and

46 Chen Qitai 陳其泰, *Shixue yu Zhongguo wenhua chuantong* 史學與中國文化傳統 (*History and Chinese Cultural Tradition*), Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 1999, p. 137.

47 *Shi ji* 7/307; cf. Watson, Chapters from the *Shih chi*, p. 77.

48 *Shi ji* 92/2625; Watson, Chapters from the *Shih chi*, p. 194–95.

49 *Shi ji* 109/2876; Watson, Chapters from the *Shih chi*, p. 270.

50 Lei Haizong 雷海宗, *Zhongguo wenhua yu Zhongguo de bing* 中國文化與中國的兵 (*Chinese Culture and Chinese Military*), Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1986, p. 170.

the social standing of military persons was comparatively low. By the tenth century, virtually no men of honorable families would be willing to serve in the army.

4. The Exposition of Inhumanity

Sima Qian's *Records of the Historian* faithfully recorded the cruelty of Empress Lü, the wife of Liu Bang, the founding emperor of the Han Dynasty. Out of jealousy she brutally cut off Lady Qi's 戚夫人 hands, feet, eyes, ears, and had her placed in a lavatory in addition to the poisoning death of Qi's son, King Zhao 趙. Such atrocities caused Empress Lü's own son, Emperor Hui 惠, to conclude that there were some things that "a human being should not possibly do".⁵¹ Before long, the young emperor died of dissipation.

Additionally, the Grand Historian created "the biographies of harsh officials" in order to deplore a government that depended upon harshness rather than virtue. For him virtue and a sense of humility, not law and punishment, would make people genuinely good. When the Han replaced the Qin, the mazes and entrapments of the atrocious Qin legal system were eased up a bit. Callous officials however, did not disappear; in fact, they arose in succession. Their inhumanity in dealing with the common people was something akin to letting wolves be sheep dogs. During Empress Lü's time, Hou Feng 侯封 outraged even members of the royal family and humiliated the most praiseworthy officials.⁵²

Sima Qian specifically listed a number of harsh officials for commentary. He found Zhi Du 郅都, though controversial, straightforward and still strove for the general good. Zhang Tang 張湯 was a double dealer and influence peddler. Whether or not Zhang's arguments were right or wrong, he ran the state as he saw fit. Zhao Yu 趙禹, though upright and law abiding as he was, was also decidedly ruthless. Du Zhou 杜周 liked adulation but was otherwise seldom heard from. The situation turned increasingly harsh and rigid after the death of Zhang Tang, so much so that it hampered the proper functioning of the government. Worse still was Governor Feng Dang 馮當 who brutalized his people in the province of Sichuan. Officials like Li Zhen 李貞 considered it acceptable practice to tear his subjects apart – using carts to do so. Mi Pu 彌僕 sawed his subjects' heads off. Luo Bi 駱璧 was in the habit of falsely accusing people and throwing into prison. Chu Guang 褚廣 committed wanton killings; Wu Ji 無忌 and Yin Zhou 殷周 were as vicious as vipers and raptors, while Yan Feng 閻奉 was fond of beating people and only let them go if they paid him

51 *Shi ji* 9/397.

52 *Shi ji* 120/3132.

bribes. All this cruelty and corruption made the Grand Historian feel too ashamed to enumerate.⁵³

Sima Qian lived in an emerging empire, yet the existence of these extremely “harsh officials”, most of them of his own time (Emperor Wu’s reign), told him that neither Daoism nor Confucianism had done much to soften the merciless snares of Legalism. Needless to say, that these brutal officials were able to do what they did was really due to the acquiescence and even support of the emperor.⁵⁴ But, as the Qing historian Wang Mingsheng 王鳴盛 pointed out, “the more harsh officials you have, the worse the government you get”.⁵⁵ The Grand Historian implicitly criticized his emperor for treating people too harshly while rarely offering generosity, despite verbal claims of benevolence. He was especially troubled by those officials who murdered people under any and all sorts of pretexts. Many generations of Chinese scholars sometimes took Sima Qian’s criticism as slander, accusing him of vilifying Emperor Wu for personal reasons. The distinguished Qing historian Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠, however, effectively rebutted such accusations. In retrospect, as Zhang put it, the blighted government of Emperor Wu had been known by many, not just by the Grand Historian alone.⁵⁶ We may quickly add that the historian’s criticism was driven by his deep concern for humanity.

After the realm had been restored to order, the founder of the Han Empire still prohibited merchants from wearing silk clothes and from riding in carts, besides imposing heavy taxes on them. Later, though relaxing the restrictions a little, their sons and grandsons were still not allowed to serve in the government.⁵⁷ The Grand Historian frankly recorded that moderation and peace brought enormous wealth to the empire; however, the rich and powerful would arbitrarily annex lands while members of royal families as well as high-ranking officials lived in limitless luxury. All this, plus the costs of constructing public works, grain transport and frontier wars exhausted state finances and made life unendurable for tens of thousand people, throwing the empire into tumult. The repeated large-scale wars against the Huns, besides the unbearably huge expenditure on armaments and supplies, inflicted heavy casualties on both sides. In the end all the farmers laboring in the fields were unable to feed the country, and all the spinning and weaving women were not enough to clothe everyone.⁵⁸ To Qian’s deep

53 *Shi ji* 122/3154.

54 See Wu Jiansi 吳見思, *Shi ji lunwen* 史記論文 (*Studies in the Records of the Historian*), Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2008, p. 73.

55 Wang Mingsheng, *Shiqishi shangque*, vol. 1, p. 83.

56 Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠, *Wenshi tongyi* 文史通議 (*Comprehensive Discussions of Literary Writings and Historiography*), edn. Taipei: Guoshi yanjiushi, 1973), p. 146.

57 *Shi ji* 30/1418.

58 *Shi ji* 30/1442–43; cf. 30/1420–41.

regret, his ruler, Emperor Wu, who had proclaimed Confucianism the state-doctrine, was in effect following the old, harsh Legalist code which resulted in severe punishments and a traumatized populace.

5. Conclusion

Humanism is an ostensible theme throughout the Grand Historian Sima Qian's great work. Having inherited China's classical humanist tradition, he developed the theme in his monumental work *Records of the Historian*, and this creative work set the example of Chinese historical writing for the next two thousand and five hundred years. As he took the individual as the core in his historical writing, he was the first to make use of the biographical approach to history. His History consists of a wide range of individuals from emperors and ministers to elites and commoners. He told numerous tales of individual lives, and narrated events through them. Those whom he deemed deserving of a place in history were not chosen because of high office or distinguished social standing but because of significant achievements or having set high moral standards. His "man-centered" historical narrative passed on the qualities of emotion, sympathy, and humanity.

Given the time in which he lived, Sima Qian did not have a clean slate of factual accuracy; occasionally he recorded legends and mysteries, but no one before him had tried so hard to resist superstitions or any divine influence in writing history. The greatest events in his *History* were solely the rise and fall of the Qin dynasty and its transition to the Han dynasty. Rather than sticking to the Mandate of Heaven theory, he interpreted events in terms of human efforts. In the dramatic transition from the Qin to the Han, he found three key figures: The peasant rebel Chen Sheng, who shook the foundations of the Qin; Xiang Yu, who toppled the Empire of Qin, and Liu Bang, who won the war with Xiang and founded the Han dynasty. For him, the success or failure of a leader had almost exclusively to do with their personal qualities.

The general history Sima Qian produced bequeathed to later generations an invaluable history of ancient China; however, he brought history to his own time with substantial contemporary concerns. He lived in the supposedly great era of Emperor Wu, and yet his humanist proclivities helped him notice the dark side of his time. The massive military campaigns and expansionism, glorious though they appeared, spelt out enormous expenditure and human cost, both of which caused suffering to people. Perhaps even more disturbing to the Grand Historian, this emperor who avowed and declared Confucianism as state doctrine in effect continued the Legalist practices of oppression. As a genuine admirer of Confucius, Sima Qian upheld his stand for humanity by exposing the officially sanctioned brutality of his time.

4. On the Transformation of Historical Thinking in Modern China

1. Exemplary Historical Thinking¹ and Plural Semantics

Wang Huizu 汪輝祖, advisor during the Qing Qianlong 乾隆 period (1736–1796), once said that those responsible for governmental organization ought to read more history books, because “whenever you need to plan something and cannot come to a solution, for instance, to solve an unsettled case at court or decide the verdict in a major crime, history never [= in not a single case] leaves you unprepared”.² When Yan Ruyu 嚴如煜 (1759–1826) released his *Summary Record on Ocean Defense* (*Yang fang jiyao* 洋防輯要) about maritime warfare during the Ming Jiajing (1522–1566) period, he emphasized that the military records from predecessors, which provided numerous accounts of how to deal with pirates, were “a forest of all gains and losses”. In order to learn important lessons, he advised later generations: “Look at established history and you cannot make mistakes”.³ During the Ming and Qing dynasties, historical works were regarded as a treasure trove filled with countless examples which provided officials with guidance for their work, and gave the average person direction to their life. These ordinary examples illustrate two things: firstly, people believed that history functioned as an admonisher, but more importantly, in both examples history was perceived as pluralistic. If we look at words or phrases from before the mid-nineteenth century concerned with historical written records, we discover that the concept of *history* was almost always presented with a plural meaning. And again, these words or phrases all directly or indirectly carried a practical lesson. Historical compilations were often called *collections of miscellaneous*

1 The concept of exemplary historical thinking comes from Jörn Rüsen. Id., *Zeit und Sinn. Strategien historischen Denkens*, Frankfurt/M. 1990: Fischer, pp. 153–230.

2 Wang Huizu 汪輝祖, “*Xue zhi yishuo, juan xia* 學治臆說 卷下”, Part 2, in: id., *Longzhuang yishu* 龍莊遺書, Taipei: Huawen Shuju 華文書局, 1970年, 影印光緒十五年 (1889)本, p. 16. 凡意計不到之處, 剖大疑、決大獄, 史無不備。

3 Yan Ruyu 嚴如煜, *Summary Record on Ocean Defense* 洋防輯要, Jiaqing Nian (ed.), 嘉慶年刊本, preface. “皆得失之林也”, “鑑於成憲, 其罔有衍”。

accounts from the past (*zhanggu congbian* 掌故叢編)⁴ and those historical materials were seen as *precedents* (*panli* 判例). They were also sometimes called *forests of historical matters* (*shi shi zhi lin* 史事之林). The study of historical works was equated with “gaining extensive knowledge of past words and deeds” (*duo shi qianyan wangxing* 多識前言往行).⁵ At the same time, the highest principle related to right conduct, the *Dao* 道, was believed to be “scattered in between these events” (*san zai shi wei zhi jian*) 散在事為之間.⁶

History provided a collection of precedents which could be used either to face daily life or to deal with public affairs. In Zhang Xuecheng's works, written at the beginning of the nineteenth century, this widespread and common exemplary historical thinking presented itself in a systematic and theoretically founded way.

2. The Theory of Exemplary Historical Thinking – Zhang Xuecheng

Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801) continued the academic tradition of historical research emphasized by the Zhedong School (*Zhedong xueshu* 浙東學術). As part of a maturation process, at one time he found himself confronted with the question of the meaning of life. He started worrying: was his devotion to historical research nothing more than a purposeless plaything which kept him occupied with irrelevant fragments? Was it only the textual criticism and interpretation of the Confucian classics, known as “classical,” or “canonical learning” (*jingxue* 經學), that gave one's life value and made one realize the universal truth? Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777), a Neo-Confucian scholar, had put him under incomparable mental pressure. Zhang Xuecheng felt challenged by Dai Zhen and after a time of constant debating he became convinced that “the Six Canonical Books are all history” (*liujing jie shi* 六經皆史). With this belief he left his existential crisis behind and developed his theory of historical knowledge.⁷

4 Miao Quanji 繆全吉 very appropriately translated ‘stories of the past’ 掌故 as ‘customary law’ 習慣法. Miao Quanji, “A Statecraft Ideological Exploration of Zhang Xuecheng's Determination for a ‘History’ Branch 章學誠議立志（乘）科的經世思想探索” published in: *Proceedings of the Conference on the Theory of Statecraft in Modern China* 近世中國經世思想研討會論文集, Taipei: Academia Sinica Press, 1984, pp. 157–175.

5 Song Shenzong's “Preface” 宋神宗資治通鑑序, in: *Zizhi Tongjian* 資治通鑑, Tainan: Cuiwentang 粹文堂, p. 33.

6 Hu Sansheng's “Preface” 胡三省新註資治通鑑序, in: *Zizhi Tongjian* 資治通鑑, Tainan: Cuiwentang 粹文堂, p. 28.

7 Compare Yu Yingshi 余英時, *On Dai Zheng and Zhang Xuecheng – A Study on the History of Academic Thought in Mid-Qing Dynasty* 論戴震與章學誠—清代中期學術思想史研究, Hong Kong 香港: Longmen Shudian 龍門書店, 1976.

In the tradition of Confucian studies it was generally believed that the Six Canonical Books (*liu jing* 六經), composed by Confucius himself, were the materialized *Dao* 道. Zhang Xuecheng stressed that the Six Canonical Books presented facets of the *Dao* that had emerged during a particular period, but – concerning the message of the *Dao* supposedly inherent in events that had taken place after Confucius' death – this message could only be a part of human relations, institutions or business affairs from after the period of the Six Canonical Books. Zhang Xuecheng's belief that "the Six Canonical Books are all history" liberated the Six Canonical Books from their divine and absolute position and gave them a place in ancient history, where they possessed historical importance; they were *temporalized*. As a result, the barrier that had once separated the study of Confucian writings and historiography was broken and historiographical research no longer merely served the purpose of interpreting examples from the doctrines of the Confucian classics. The Neo-Confucian tradition of regarding "historiography as a maidservant for the Confucian classics" was completely abandoned in favor of Zhang Xuecheng's belief that "the Six Canonical Books are all history." However, I should emphasize that Zhang Xuecheng still believed that the Six Canonical Books possessed a sublime position and that it was the duty of historiography to supply the people with examples in order to understand the *Dao*. This responsibility had not only *not* disappeared, but it had instead become even greater and more urgent.

2.1. Zhang Xuecheng's Comments on the History of Historiography

The Six Canonical Books deserved their sublime position, because, for one thing, they had recorded events from times of peace and prosperity: the three dynasties Xia, Shang and Zhou, which were often considered the golden age of ancient times. The idea behind this so-called "time of peace and prosperity" (*zhishi* 治世) or "golden age" was: "if the *Dao* is realized in all affairs, this is called good governing" (*Dao xing yu shi wei zhi zhi* 道行於事謂之治). Consequently, the records of the Confucian classics were the ones best in accord with the human relations, institutions and etiquette of the three dynasties; they revealed distinct features of the *Dao*. Another pivotal reason for the sublime position of the Six Canonical Books lies in the way how Confucius committed the era's accomplishments and their meaning to writing: his style was agile, his judgment fair and his writing reduced. The sublime position of the Six Canonical Books therefore did not lie in the fact that *they* exclusively contained doctrines of the *Dao*, but in the fact that they served as distinguished historiographical pieces of work. Their composition was what gave them their superiority. To Zhang Xuecheng, Confucius' style and writing only reinforced the adequacy of historical examples, i. e. were they right or wrong, good

or bad, worthy or unworthy etc.? In the biographies of the *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shi ji* 史記), Sima Qian 司馬遷 writes that when Confucius compiled the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), his warnings were always accurate. For Zhang Xuecheng, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* can undoubtedly be considered the paragon of all historical works.⁸

In his magnum opus *Comprehensive Discussions of Literary Writings and Historiography* (*Wenshi tongyi* 文史通義), Zhang Xuecheng commented on the styles of different historiographical works. In his commentary characteristics of his historical thinking become quite obvious. In his book, Zhang Xuecheng innovatively placed his idea of how to set up records somewhere in between “history that happened” (*fasheng de lishi* 發生的歷史) and “history that was told” (*zhuan shu de lishi* 撰述的歷史). The work of creating records, especially of every place nationwide, meant that one had to set up and preserve large quantities of historical material; this he called “documentation” (*jizhu* 記注).⁹ He believed that this process of “documentation” needed a strict and regulated form and a comprehensive system. He used the expression “fair and square and intelligent” (*fang yi zhi* 方以智) to describe the nature of this work. In contrast, while creating a piece of work that gave meaning to historical incidents, one ought “not to confine oneself to established rules” (*bu ju chengfa* 不拘成法) and “not to use a standard pattern” (*bu wei changge* 不為常格). Here, the principle was to be “round and witty” (*yuan er shen* 圓而神). Zhang Xuecheng believed that Confucius’ Six Canonical Books provided a great source for learning and obtaining these writing principles. His comment on the *Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑), a work representative of the “chronological style” (*biannianti* 編年體) in traditional historiographical writings, was: the examples are unpolished and verbose.¹⁰ His criticism of the “biographical style” (*jizhuanti* 紀傳體) of the official dynastic histories was: all historians after Sima Qian seemed to cling obstinately to the style of writing used in his *Records of the Grand Historian* and have disregarded Sima Qian’s in-

8 Zhang Xuecheng agreed with Sima Qian’s praise of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋, see Sima Qian’s “The Biography of Confucius” 孔子世家, in: *The Records of the Grand Historian* 史記, Taipei: Huashi, 1976. Sima Qian wrote: “Above, the Spring and Autumn makes clear the Way of the Three Kings, and below it discusses the regulation of human affairs. It distinguishes what is suspicious and doubtful, clarifies right and wrong, and settles points which are uncertain. It calls good good and bad bad, honors the worthy, and condemns the unworthy. It preserves states which are lost and restores the perishing family. It brings to light what was neglected and restores what was abandoned. In it are embodied the most important elements of the Kingly Way.” (Transl. by Burton Watson, 1958).

9 Zhang Xuecheng, “Shujiao” (On the Teachings of the Documents) 書教上, in: *Wenshi Tongyi*, Taipei: Huashi Chubanshe, 1980, p. 9.

10 Zhang Xuecheng, “Discussing the Editing of History Books during Song-Dynasty with Shao Eryun” 與邵二雲論修宋史書, in: *Comprehensive Discussions of Literary Writings and Historiography* 文史通義, Taipei 臺北: Huashi Chubanshe, 1980, pp. 315–317.

tention, which had been to illustrate meaning and significance via the use of distinct classifications. He even went a step further and said that the “biographical style” in these official dynastic histories had sunk to an embarrassing position somewhere between mere recording of historical material and work composition. They were neither as thorough and systematic in their documentation as they ought to be, nor was their presentation of essential principles as simple and distinct as historical writing ought to be.¹¹ In the “event-based style” (*jishi benmo ti* 紀事本末體) in the Chinese historiography came closest to the development concept. Zhang Xuecheng praised its superior narrative technique, however just because it “avoids overlaps” (*mian chongfu* 免重複), “uses a wide variety of examples” (*jun leili* 均類例), “facilitates the classification of facts” (*bian quanpei* 便銓配), “balances rights and wrongs” (*ping shifei* 平是非), “ends contradictions” (去牴牾 and “gives detailed accounts of neighboring countries” (*xiang linguo zhi shi* 詳鄰國之事).¹² Obviously his historical thinking was led by the wish to arrange and simplify the meaning of plural examples. Although this style, which presents events in an order from beginning to end, was useful to relating the change process of an event along a main axis, this was not a point that interested him. He never grew tired of saying that “the ideal composition ought to be economical of words which increase the clarity of an event, to use simple examples which increase the density of their meaning” (*wen sheng er shi yi jia ming, li jian er yi yi jia jing* 文省而事益加明, 例簡而義益加精) – and the Six Canonical Books were a manifestation of these characteristics. Consequently, Zhang Xuecheng demanded from scholars that they grasp the fundamental principle from the composition of the Six Canonical Books: to show *Dao* in all its facets. In his words: “the fundamental principle (of the composition) of the Six Canonical Books must be understood and applied in frequent writing to show the great *Dao*” 貴約六經之旨, 而隨時撰述以究大道也.

Zhang Xuecheng left his crisis over the meaning of life behind and decided against the idea that “the *Dao* is completely laid out in the Six Canonical Books” (*Dao jin zai liujing* 道盡在六經). He let historical incidents confront the *Dao* directly. Furthermore, he believed that later events contained new facets of the *Dao*. Therefore, he had to show later generations how to create records that were even larger in number and yet systematic; and he also had to show how an effective style of historical writing could transform those documents into meaningful stories. Without doubt, his historical awareness was unprecedentedly

11 Zhang Xuecheng, “On the Teachings of the Documents I” 書教上, *Comprehensive Discussions of Literary Writings and Historiography*, Taipei: Huashi Chubanshe, 1980, p. 13–4.

12 Zhang Xuecheng, “Shi Tong” 釋通, *Comprehensive Discussions of Literary Writings and Historiography*, Taipei: Huashi Chubanshe, 1980, p. 133.

strong and of a groundbreaking nature. But his historical thinking was still plural and exemplary.

2.2. Objectivity Theory and Agency

When Zhang Xuecheng debated over the relationship between a historian and a historical corpus, he continued a line of thought already expressed by Tang dynasty historian Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721). Liu Zhiji had emphasized that apart from the importance of obtaining extensive historical data (*xue* 學) and possessing the ability to organize and express one's writing (*cai* 才), a historian had to be capable of using dynamic arguments (*jidian* 擊斷) on the rights and wrongs (*shifei* 是非) of historical events (*shi* 識). And the latter was even more important. Furthermore, he said that the most important task for a historian should be the ability to "[...] write down the good and the bad and to cause arrogant rulers and evil subjects to know fear. This belongs to the highest abilities of a historian".¹³ This ability – to give meaning to historical events – he called "historical insight" 史識 – the ability to understand history. Liu Zhiji's innovative concept of "historical insight" undoubtedly shows his exemplary historical thinking. Zhang Xuecheng, a thousand years after Liu Zhiji and influenced by Neo-Confucian thought, expanded Liu Zhiji's concept of "historical insight". He believed that the morality of the historian had to be at the core of this "historical insight". This morality he called "historian's moral integrity" (*shi de* 史德).¹⁴ He stressed that the two elements – "historical insight" and "a historian's moral integrity" – were actually two sides of one coin: "One who possesses historical insight must already have a historian's moral integrity" (*neng ju shi shi zhe bi ju shi de* 能具史識者必具史德).¹⁵ The additions Zhang Xuecheng made to the concept of "historical insight" are significant, as I understand, for two reasons: firstly, by means of "historian's moral integrity", he explained the method of objectivity concerning historical knowledge. Secondly, his idea of "historian's moral integrity" enables him to explain the interrelatedness of historical

13 In: *The History of Later Tang Dynasty Biography of Liu Zixuan* 新唐書-劉子玄傳, Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1982. Liu Zhiji (styled Liu Zixuan 劉子玄) elaborates on the skills of a good historian.

14 Achim Mittag explores the origin of the concept "moral integrity". Achim Mittag, "What Makes a Good Historian: Zhang Xuecheng's Postulate of 'Moral Integrity (Shi De 史德)'" , in: Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (ed.), *Historical truth, historical criticism and ideology*, Leiden: Brill 2004, pp. 365–397.

15 Zhang Xuecheng, "Shide" (On Historian's moral integrity), in: *Wenshi Tongyi*, Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1962, pp. 45–47.

knowledge and agency in people's real lives. These are, again, two sides of the same coin.

If a historian was objective, i.e. if the meaning he attached to a historical incident was able to present the *Dao* correctly, depended for Zhang Xuecheng on how the historian treated himself as a human being, in other words, how he treated his naturally equipped "emotions" (*qing* 情) and "temperament" (*qi* 氣). To be objective, they should be made to conform to reason and be in accordance with human nature. This he called the "nourishment" (*yang* 養) of the "moral constitution of the heart-and-mind" (*xinshu* 心術); and nourishment could only be achieved by gradual accumulation. Zhang Xuecheng said: "moral constitution of the heart-and-mind [...] should be nourished a little every day".¹⁶ And here lies the main difference with the Neo-Confucian School: morality and "nourishment" of the "moral constitution of the heart-and-mind" could neither be achieved by speculation nor by interpretation and textual criticism of the Six Canonical Books. "Nourishment" of the "moral constitution of the heart-and-mind", he believed, could only be acquired through practical work. That is to say, a person could only acquire and develop it by studying history: "one has to study history in order to accumulate morality" (*du shi yi xu de* 讀史以蓄德). Historical impartiality, for Zhang Xuecheng, was established in a circular process: study historical examples, understand the universal truth of *Dao*, after a period of accumulation once more return to the interpretation of history, and furthermore, ensure the objectivity of historical writing. Similarly, the ability to act in daily life was also established in this circular process. In the chapter "On the Origin of Learning" ("Yuan xue 原學") in his book *Comprehensive Discussions of Literary Writings and Historiography*, Zhang Xuecheng stresses that examples from history books help us to learn, but that we are unable to apply any example directly, because external circumstances and we ourselves are in a continuous state of flux. Reading examples from history helps us to accumulate powers of imitation, but, he says, "[...] read the *Book of Songs* and the *Book of Documents* aloud in order to use their repertoire of examples, and do not apply them directly". In reality, both agency and the facility for impartial historical knowledge derive their origin from the same procedure; they are accumulated through the understanding of *Dao*. I stress the concept of "accumulation" (*xu* 蓄), because its action implies reading *one* historical example *after the other*.

In his theory on historical knowledge as well as in the practicable part, Zhang Xuecheng extended Liu Zhiji's concept of "historical insight". His theory was extremely systematic, but he never left the pattern of *exemplary* historical thinking. The concept of "a historian's moral integrity" merged completely with the concept of assessing historical examples – "historical insight". It was only

16 Zhang Xuecheng, "Shide", in: *Wenshi Tongyi*, Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1962, pp. 45–47.

with Liu Xianxin 劉咸炘 (1896–1932), who came 120 years after Zhang Xuecheng and who took the notion of “historical insight” and re-interpreted it as “observing trends in history” (*du shiji zhi fengshi* 觀史蹟之風勢) and who stressed that a historian had to be able to grasp the underlying fabric in the historical development (*fazhan mailuo* 發展脈絡),¹⁷ and with his contemporary Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), who believed that “historical insight” was nothing else but “capability of observation” (*guancha nengli* 觀察能力), namely to “look at a matter and examine thoroughly its source and further development” (*kan yijian shiqing, ba lai yuan qumai dou yao guancha qingchu* 看一件事情，把來源去脈都要觀察清楚) and who took the concept of “a historian’s moral integrity” – which now only involved the question whether historical material was authentic – and separated it from the concept of “historical insight”, so that now these two concepts had become independent from one another,¹⁸ that people turned their backs on exemplary historical thinking. But China only experienced these changes after a period of unprecedented upheaval.

3. The Loss of Historical Significance and the Emergence of a New Historical Thinking

In traditional China people never doubted the significance of historical incidents. The late-Ming historian Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682) stressed this by saying: “[...] texts which should never disappear from between heaven and earth, I say, are: the ones that elucidate the Dao, the ones that record political events, those which investigate the people’s hidden wishes, those which take delight in talking about people’s virtuousness; these texts are beneficial for the country and for the future; one article more means one more article to profit from”.¹⁹ This optimistic view that historical writing had an applicatory function changed rapidly during the later stage of the nineteenth century. When China and the Western world came into intense contact at the end of the nineteenth century, for Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901), chancellor during the late Qing dynasty, the resulting change was no longer “a ball moving on a plate” (*wan zhi zoupan* 丸之走盤): incidents no longer collided horizontally, vertically, obliquely or straight inside

17 Liu Xianxin 劉咸炘, *Zhishi Xulun* (An Introduction Into Historical Research) 治史緒論, Taipei: Huashi Chubun 1980, p. 12.

18 Liang Qichao adopts the idea of the four specialties of a historian 史家四長 – four essential abilities – discussed by Liu Zhiji as well as Zhang Xuecheng, in: Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Chinese History Research Methodology* 中國歷史研究法, Taipei: Zhonghua Shuju, 1977. Appendix, pp. 13–28.

19 See article headed “Writing must be profitable for the whole world” 文須有益於天下, in: Gu Yanwu, *Record of Daily Study* 日知錄, Taipei 世界書局: Shijie Shuju, 1975, vol. 19.

of one eternal frame of values. Li Hongzhang felt that the change experienced by himself and his contemporaries had burst the entire frame: the belief that “Heaven does not change and the *Dao* likewise does not change” (*tianxia bu bian, Dao yi bu bian* 天不變道亦不變) wavered; the concept of China as the “land under heaven” (*tianxia* 天下) was challenged by a new world view. Modern scholars believed that during the final years of the Qing dynasty the “implementation of Confucian values through statecraft” (*jingshi sixiang* 經世思想) had arrived at an end.²⁰ at times of conflict between China and the West, the values that history books on the traditional Classics contained had lost their practical function. The plight that intellectual circles from late Qing and early Republic found themselves in has also been described as a full-on “crisis of meaning” (*yi yi de weiji* 意義的危機).²¹

3.1. Kang Youwei’s Philosophization of History – the Concept of a Holistic History Emerges

The drastic changes of the era had the effect that people started to question whether the examples from history books and the universal truths they were supposed to contain could still be used to deal with any problems whatsoever. Liao Ping 廖平 (1851–1932) who had fallen in love with the European-American concept of a “flourishing political and legal system, which enacted laws according to (the needs of) times” (*zhengfa changming, yin shi li fa* 政法昌明, 因時立法) on the one hand stressed the urgency with which a change in real politics and society was needed, but at the same time he also wanted to preserve the Confucian elements of his identity. Historical works could not resolve this contradiction, because in his words “all relics connected to historical matters are like straw dogs (thrown away after their use in sacrificial offerings) or dregs of wine” (*fan shu shishi chenji, chugou zaopo* 凡屬史事陳跡, 芻狗糟粕).²² When he was 38 years old, he proposed a means to solve this predicament. In his article “Knowing Confucius” (“Zhi sheng pian 知聖篇”), he interpreted Confucius as a prophet who understood that the essence of the “eternal *Dao*” (*chang Dao* 常道) was

20 See: Liu Guangjing 劉廣京, preface to *The Thesis Collection From the Conference on Statecraft Ideology in Early Modern China*, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica. See footnote 4 of this paper.

21 Zhang Hao, “New Confucianism and the Intellectual Crisis of Contemporary China”, in: Charlotte Furth (ed.), *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976, pp. 42–89.

22 Liao Ping, “Ten Disadvantages of the Old Saying ‘Regard Classics as History’” 舊說以經為史之弊十條, in: *Siyiguan Miscellany* 四益館雜著. Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1972, pp.142–146. See also: Qian Mu 錢穆, *The Chinese Intellectual History in the Last Three Hundred Years*, part II 中國近三百年學術史, Taipei: Lianjing, 1998, p. 653.

nothing but “change” (*bian* 變). With this interpretation his two hopes – longing for political change and conserving Confucian identity – had been harmoniously combined in one stroke. During the fifteenth and sixteenth of the Guangxu 光緒 reign (1875–1908), Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) came into contact with “Knowing Confucius”, which Liao Ping had only just finished writing. In the following year he published his *A Study of the New Text Classics Forgeries* (*Xinxue weijing kao* 新學偽經考) and went on to write *A Study of the Reforms of Confucius* (*Kongzi gaizhi kao* 孔子改制考). In these books, Kang Youwei again used his own words to present Liao Ping’s ideas, but at the same time he intended to popularize them even further. This rather unusual phenomenon – the rapid succession of book publication and writing – indicates, firstly, that Kang Youwei clearly had the same identity conflict as Liao Ping, wishing for change in real politics and society on the one hand and being a Confucian on the other, and secondly that Liao Ping’s interpretation of Confucius had suddenly solved this conflict.²³ Kang Youwei, leader of the Royal Reformist Party (*Baohuang gaige pai* 保皇改革派), shared Liao Ping’s opinion as to seeing Confucius as an ancient reformer. In his view, Confucius had composed the Six Canonical Books because he had wanted to establish a historical basis for his own political reform. Kang Youwei interpreted Confucius and the Six Canonical Books in this way precisely to give his Reformist Party a divine justification.

With regard to historical understanding, the descriptions of his student Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) were extremely accurate. According to Liang Qichao’s observations, Kang Youwei – after the doubts in his heart had dissipated after a flash of insight – had immediately opposed his earlier attitude. He had officially negated the historical significance of Chinese history after the Han dynasty,²⁴ whereas in his early years he had taught that it “historical accounts to discuss good government and chaos” (*jiang zhiluan zhanggu* 講治亂掌故). In Kang Youwei’s words, post-Han Confucians were not familiar with the true historical face of Confucius’ reforms and initiatives, because of Liu Xin’s 劉歆 (50 BCE–23 AD) incorrect versions and interpretations of the Six Canonical Books.²⁵ About traditional Confucians he said that “for two thousand years (now) they have revered forged scriptures as a sacred code of law” (*yue liangqian nian, xian feng weijing wei shengfa* 閱兩千年, 咸奉偽經為聖法). Ever since the Han Dy-

23 See Qian Mu, *The Chinese Intellectual History in the Last Three Hundred Years*, Part II 中國近三百年學術史, Taipei: Lianjing, 1998, p. 852.

24 Liang Qichao, “Biography of Mr. Kang from Nanhai” 南海康先生傳, in: *Collected Works from Yinbing Studio*, vol. 6 飲冰室合集, Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua Shuju, 1960. pp. 62–84.

25 Young-tsu Wong, “Philosophical Hermeneutics and Political Reform: A Study of Kang Youwei’s Use of Gongyang Confucianism”, in: *Classics and Interpretations: the Hermeneutic Traditions in Chinese Culture*, New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publisher, 2000, pp. 383–407.

nasty, he believed, Confucians had followed ethical norms formulated in a false version of the Six Canonical Books, but they had not learned of Confucius' reforming vigor. For those 2,000 years between the Han Dynasty and his epoch, Chinese history had been led astray from the correct reading of Confucius' holy path, and was thus stuck within static rules which were always repeating. Kang Youwei was quite immodestly convinced of his own historically important task. He believed that this traditional history of procrastination and backwardness had been waiting for his personal appearance; that he could re-manifest the divine principle of "reform" (*biange* 變革) and furthermore that he would put Chinese history back on track. He said: "These holy ideas of reform, flaming in the nighttime, surely must have been waiting for someone special?" (*qi shengzhi he'an, you suo dai ye* 豈聖制赫闇, 有所待耶?)²⁶ He sent his *Study of the Reforms of Confucius* (1898) to Emperor Guangxu 光緒, while at the same time leading reforms for the set-up of a constitution as well as reforms of traffic, education and practices in industry and commerce. In his opinion – the opinion of one who continued the Gongyang School's 公羊學派 interpretation of the canonical *Spring and Autumn Annals*, he believed that the development of world history had a fixed procedure. Supposedly, three main stages of world historical development existed, namely "basic chaos" (*ju luanshi* 據亂世), "rising world of peace" (*sheng pingshi* 升平世) and "ultimate world of peace" (*taipingshi* 太平世); and each of these stages was again subdivided into three modes. At that time each and every nation had a fixed development stage in this system, and the China of the past 2,000 years – in his opinion – was still at the very low developmental stage of "basic chaos".²⁷ But a constitutional monarchy and practical economic innovations could promote China from the first to the second stage.

Kang Youwei's philosophy of history included past and future and also all the space in the entire world. His system was a-historical, but as the first philosopher of history in modern China, he moulded Chinese history into one entity during a process of philosophisation. Chinese history became one entity and was thereby singularized. This transformation towards a holistic Chinese history was linked to a negative understanding of history – but there also emerged the hope for a better future. In contrast to the period before these radical changes, where history had been seen as a cornucopia of examples, Kang Youwei's *A Study of the Reforms of Confucius*, which was extremely controversial and influential, undoubtedly marked a huge changing point with regard to historical thinking. His under-

26 See Qian Mu, *The Chinese Intellectual History in the Last Three Hundred Years*, Part II, Taipei: Lianjing, 1998, p. 847.

27 Based on Xu Guansan's formulations; Xu Guansan 許冠三, "Kang Nanhai's Concept of Three Phases of Development" 康南海的三世進化觀, in: Zhang Hao et. *Contemporary Chinese Thinkers: Late-Qing Ideology* 近代中國思想人物論：晚清思想, Taipei: Shibao Wenhua 時報文化, 1982, pp. 535–75.

standing of history changed throughout his lifetime. In his early years, he perceived history as a means of “historical accounts to discuss good government and chaos”. Later he viewed national history as one entity. This development reflects the changing perception of history of that time: from plural to singular form.

3.2. “Impure” Exemplary Historical Thinking

Liang Qichao was a pupil of Kang Youwei. Shortly after China had lost the Sino-Japanese war in 1895, he followed Kang Youwei and presented his first petition to the Guangxu Emperor. In 1898 they collaborated in carrying out political reforms, but it was their fate to last only for 103 days. In 1896 he established his first magazine in Shanghai, *Chinese Progress* (*Shiwubao* 時務報); when he took charge as editor-in-chief, he proclaimed that he would reform the Chinese *Zeitgeist*. In the preface to *Chinese Progress* he stressed the necessity for political reforms and used examples from changes in political institutions of every dynasty in order to support his claim: at the beginning of the Tang dynasty (618–907), household registers, the military system and the tax system had arrived at an impasse, which had left the people no other choice but to reform and establish a new system; Emperor Han Wendi 漢文帝 (r. 180–157 BCE) had had no other choice but to change the harsh punishments from pre-Han period to light flogging; the migration policy also had had to be altered during the reign of Emperor Sui Wendi 隋文帝 (r. 581–604) etc. Similar arguments had already been made by Kang Youwei when he addressed a petition for reform to the Guangxu Emperor.²⁸ Neither analyzed the reasons behind these historical reforms, but merely pointed out that throughout history countless reforms had been made in order to adapt to new conditions. It becomes clear from their treatises that their historical thinking is exemplary. When we look at *A Study of the Reforms of Confucius* and take his way of thinking a step further, we have to realize that Kang Youwei sees Confucius as an historical example charged with positive meaning, but also as his personal role model. The exemplary historical thinking presented in *A Study of the Reforms of Confucius* is rather extreme. This is most obvious in the implicit religious nature: Confucius is seen as the sole precedent throughout history and the significance of this precedent had been discovered by no less a figure than Kang Youwei himself, who aspired to follow in his footsteps.

Kang Youwei's and Liang Qichao's historical thinking was different in two particulars: firstly, if they perceived Chinese history generally as negative, then why did they use historical examples as positive evidence? And secondly, they

28 Kang Youwei, *A Record of Mr. Nanhai Submitting His Memorials Four Times* 南海先生四上書記, Shanghai: Shenji Shuzhuang 慎記書莊, 1987, p. 7.

continued using traditionalist historical discourse, which was exemplary, only to promote the transformation of tradition.

As we have seen, in classical Chinese discourse exemplary historical thinking was construed out of differing beliefs: the absoluteness of *Dao*, the universality of human nature, the significance of historical incidents for real life, the inter-relatedness of virtues and a historical truth, the plural character of history etc. At the same time these beliefs had a logical consistency, as was shown by Zhang Xuecheng's historical theory. But the historical thinking of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao had clearly deflected from this traditional path. Their notion "change is a heavenly law" (*bian zhe tiandao ye* 變者天道也) differed widely from the basic assumption of exemplary historical thinking that "Heaven does not change and the *Dao* likewise does not change".²⁹ In the light of traditionalist exemplary historiography which had a logical consistency and presented pure characteristics, the historical thinking of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao at the end of the nineteenth century was distinctly impure. I believe that their adulterated version of exemplary historical thinking is a significant indicator of the disintegration of this kind of historical thinking in modern China.

3.3. An Anti-Critique of the May Fourth Movement and of Traditionalist Criticism

The political reforms in China at the turn of the twentieth century had failed. Immediately afterwards the Boxer Rebellion took place, and another ten years later, the Qing dynasty was overthrown by the Revolutionary Party. In the twenty years that followed the publication of Kang Youwei's *A Study of the Reforms of Confucius*, traditionalist criticism was abandoned in favor of cultural criticism, which peaked during the May Fourth Movement. In 1918, Lu Xun 鲁迅 employed the fictional character of a madman to voice his thoughts: "I started leafing through a history book. There were no dates in this history, but someone had scrawled the words 'Benevolence, Righteousness and Morality' across every single page".³⁰ The message that Lu Xun was trying to pass on to the reader was this: Chinese history is one whole entity and it contains a singular, crucial factor: Confucian ethics. Lin Yusheng's 林毓生 research operated with this ideology and

29 "Change is a heavenly law" 變者天道也 and "Change is a universal truth." 變者天下之公理也 both taken from preface and postscript of Kang Youwei, "Submitting the Preface of the 'History of Political Reform of the Russian Peter the Great'" 進呈俄羅斯大使彼得政變記序 (1898), in: *Collected Works of Kang Nanhai*, vol. 5 康南海文集: 卷五, Shanghai: Gonghe Bianyiju 共和編譯局, 1914, p. 18.

30 Lu Xun, "Kuangren Riji" (Diary of a Madman) 狂人日記, in: *New Youth* 新青年 4.2 (1918), pp. 14–26.

he claimed that traditionalist critics of this time were reductionist and used the Confucian code of ethics as their sole factor of criticism. He emphasized that the tradition-based criticism of the May Fourth Movement was totalistic.³¹ Borrowing his argument, we can say that the form with which this traditionalist criticism presented itself during the crisis of meaning in pre-1949 China, strengthened the view of history as one whole entity. Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, a leading figure in the May Fourth Movement and one of the founders of the Communist Party of China, used the “New Youth” periodical (*Xin qingnian* 新青年) to defend the value of democracy and science – Mr. De (*De xiansheng* 德先生) and Mr. Sai (*Sai xiansheng* 賽先生). He also criticized the view that everything in history moved along an axis of Confucian thinking: “We must support Mr. De and have no other option but to fight against the Confucian code of ethics, its rites, its concept of moral integrity outmolded ethics and outmoded politics. We must support Mr. Sai and have no other option but to fight against old art and old religion. We must support Mr. De and we must support Mr. Sai, and we have no other option but to fight against national cultural heritage and old literature”.³² The dichotomy of “new” (*xin* 新) and “old” (*jiu* 舊) which Chen Duxiu employed during his criticism, was quite popular during that time. The entire history of China was characterized as “old”. The difference between “new” and “old” was not just one of value, but also of time. These terms did not only stand for the future and past of Chinese society, but more importantly for the discrepancy between Confucian China and the Western culture.

In connection with the New Culture Movement (*Xin wenhuayundong* 新文化運動) represented by the Peking University and the overall criticism of traditionalism, Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 published *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* (*Dong xi wenhua ji qi zhexue* 東西文化及其哲學) in 1921.³³ His reply to the methods of traditionalist criticism was: he questioned if there was only one universal way of improving one’s way of life. He believed a priori that humanity had the choice between three ways of living, three “paths” (*luxiang* 路向): Chinese culture, Indian culture and European culture. The fundamental essence of Chinese culture was “balance between personal wishes, self-being and adjustment” 以意欲自為調和持中; and it ought to have a similar relation to-

31 Lin Yusheng, “Radical Iconoclasm in the May Fourth Period and the Future of Chinese Liberalism”, in: Benjamin Schwartz (ed.), *Reflections on the May Fourth Movement: A Symposium*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972, pp. 23–58.

32 In: *New Youth* 6.1 (1919). “要擁護那德先生，便不得不反對禮教、禮法、貞節、舊倫理、舊政治。要擁護那賽先生，便不得不反對那舊藝術、舊宗教。要擁護德先生又要擁護賽先生，便不得不反對國粹和舊文學。”

33 See Chen Ruoshui 陳弱水, “Liang Shuming and Eastern and Western Cultures and Philosophies” 梁漱溟與‘東西文化及其哲學’, in: Fu Yueshi 傅樂詩 et al., *Contemporary Chinese Thinkers: Conservatism* 近代中國思想人物論：保守主義, Taipei: Shibao Wenhua, 1982, pp. 311–21.

wards Indian and Western culture. Although history had changed into one whole entity around the time of Kang Youwei, there still was no noun to represent this entity. As we have seen, subsuming Chinese history under a single term meant using expressions like “in the two thousand years that followed Liu Xin” (*Liu Xin yixia liangqian nian* 劉歆以下兩千年, “old ethics” (*jiu lunli* 舊倫理), “old politics” (*jiu zhengzhi* 舊政治) etc. Liang Shuming’s *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* brought out the concept of “Chinese culture” (*Zhongguo wenhua* 中國文化);³⁴ and its emergence undoubtedly marks a milestone in the changes that have taken place over the course of the last hundred years and that have altered Chinese historical thinking.

In 1922, the *Critical Review* (*Xueheng zazhi* 學衡雜誌) was founded. The magazine was centered around Nanjing University professors, and its main aim was to offer anti-criticism to those within the May Fourth Rebellion who were criticizing Confucian tradition.³⁵ The publication of *Critical Review* led to an intellectual north-south confrontation. Authors from *Critical Review* frequently used the term “Chinese culture”. They clearly accepted Liang Shuming’s fundamental view of a pluralistic global culture. In his article “On Criticism of the New Culture Movement” (“Lun xin wenhua yundong 論新文化運動”), Wu Mi 吳宓, one of the magazine’s founders, explained the term “Chinese culture” by relating Confucianism to Buddhism. Li Sichun 李思純 also used Liang Shuming’s concept of “Chinese culture”, and his article “Discussing Culture” 論文化 adopts the same view of a pluralistic global culture. Lu Maode 陸懋德 wrote two papers on ancient history, which he considered part of “Chinese cultural history” (*Zhongguo wenhuashi* 中國文化史). From 1925 onwards, Liu Yizheng 柳詒徵, founder and preface writer of the *Critical Review*, published a series of articles which covered two thousand years of Chinese history. He also called them “Chinese Cultural History” (“Zhongguo wenhuashi 中國文化史”).

In its preface he explains the motivation behind “Chinese Cultural History”: “What is Chinese culture? Where is Chinese culture? In how far is it different from Indian and European culture? These were exactly the kind of questions on which the readers were supposed to focus their attention and I wrote this book precisely to answer them”. Liu Yizheng differs from the philosopher Liang

34 Lu Xun did not use the term “Chinese culture” 中國文化 until six years later (1927); see: Zhou Cezong, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960. Chinese transl. by Yang Mofu 楊默夫, *Wusi Yundong shi* 五四運動史, Taipei: Longtian 龍田, 1981, p. 449.

35 See Shen Songqiao 沈松橋, “Xuehengpai yu wusi shiqi de fanxinwenhua yundong” (The *Critical Review* Group and the Anti New Culture Movement During the May Fourth Period). 學衡派與五四時期的反新文化運動, in: *National Taiwan University Journal of Chinese Literature and History*, no. 68, 國立台灣大學文史叢刊, Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 1981.

Shuming: for him Chinese culture no longer possessed a timeless and particular essence. He used examples from history to explain what he considered to be three different periods of development: in the first period “tribes and established nations had constituted independent cultures”, in the second period “cultural elements from India had been adopted, which had resulted in a phase of conflict and amalgamation inside our country”; and in the third period “Western academic thinking on religion and politics had been imported”. A single constant lifeline (*mingmai* 命脈) runs through all three phases: “the lifeline of our national evolution and nation building”. He used the biological and metaphorical concept of a “lifeline”, which undoubtedly proves that he regarded history as a single organism. In his opinion, “ethics and morals” or “rule-by-virtue” were part of this “lifeline”. With regards to value orientation, Liu Yizheng clearly followed traditional Confucian ethics. But Confucian ethics were no longer static norms, but possessed a positive connotation: the strength necessary for continuation and development.

4. Evolutionary Historical Thinking: Qian Mu's Outline of National History

In 1928, Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990) was working as a teacher in Suzhou Middle School (*Suzhou zhongxue* 蘇州中學), less than 200 km away from Nanjing Central University. Three years later he was recommended by Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 for a teaching position at the History Department of Peking University. At one point he wanted to teach a course on the *History of Political Systems in China*, but he was refused. The Republic of China had replaced the Qing dynasty, autocratic monarchy had ended and knowledge of obsolete political systems was no longer needed; so went the reasons given by the faculty.³⁶ At Peking University, Qian Mu had infrequent contact with one of the leaders of the New Culture Movement, Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), who was at that time head of the Liberal Arts Department. But just as before, their contact had not resonated positively.³⁷ With this fundamental experience in mind, we easily understand why he said in retrospect: “In 1931, I was also allowed to teach at Peking University, but in my general opinions I felt much more closely connected to the group around the *Critical Review*”.³⁸

36 The refusal had come from inside the faculty (系裡), see Qian Mu, *Bashi Yishuangqin Shiyou zayi hekan* (Commemorative Double Issue for Parents and Friends in Celebration of the 80th Birthday) 八十憶雙親師友雜憶合刊, in: *The Complete Works of Mr. Qian Binsi* 錢賓四先生全集, Taipei: Lianjing, 1994, vol. 51, p. 173.

37 Ibid., p. 171.

38 On Qian Mu's approval of Liu Yizheng's *Chinese Cultural History* 中國文化史, see: Luo Shishi 羅時實, “Mr. Liu Yimou and his friends from the *Critical Review*” 柳翼謀先生及其學

In the context of historical thinking, I believe that this intellectual affinity with the *Critical Review* can further be explained by looking at two aspects.

Firstly, the group affirmed the ethical values of the Confucian tradition; this point is self-explanatory. One common feature was that they both used a dynamic concept of historical development to explain traditional Confucian ethics. They internalized evolutionary thinking, which had previously been stressed by their counterparty – tradition critics. Qian Mu also used the concept of a *lifeline of national history* (*guoshi mingmai* 國史命脈), introduced by Liu Yizheng, but even more often he used the term ‘spirit’ (*jingshen* 精神). In his introduction, he says: “History is in a constant state of change in which there is a clear progress. Regarding its propulsive motion, we called it ‘national spirit’; it is the source of [all] national life.”³⁹ The term “spirit” not only contains the meaning of “power”, but also stands for a particular uniqueness and *directionality* in Confucian ethics.

Secondly, they both continued the traditional Confucian conviction of *implementation of Confucian values through statecraft* (*jingshi sixiang* 經世思想). They believed that historical knowledge was inextricably linked with real life and historical knowledge must have a practical function. They challenged “science” as the ideal, which was a line pursued by Hu Shi and Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896–1950), who stressed that historical science and real politics ought to be separated. Qian Mu and the group around the *Critical Review* argued the contrary point of view.⁴⁰ In the 1930s, Qian Mu made a conscious move away from *research* (*yanjiu* 研究) and towards *composition* (*zhuan shu* 撰述), thereby putting his belief into concrete action: the belief that one had to let the practical significance of historical knowledge unfold. Naturally, the usefulness of historical knowledge was no longer characterized by searching for lessons and wisdom within individual examples. For Liu Yizheng and Qian Mu, the practical usefulness of historical knowledge lay in the acknowledgment of historical compatriots. In *Outline of National History* (*Guoshi dagang* 國史大綱), Qian Mu emphasized that his fellow countrymen should have “tender” (*wen qing* 溫情) and “respectful” (*jing yi* 敬意) feelings towards their own past.⁴¹ On the one hand, this statement shows bluntly that Qian Mu’s compatriots urgently needed a historical identity. On the other hand, he strongly believed that historical knowledge could help people

衡諸友, publ. in: *Shanghai Miscellany* 7.6 (1970) 中外雜誌, pp. 12–18. “民國二十年余亦得進入北京大學史學系任教,但余之大體意見與「學衡」派較接近”。

39 “自其推動向前而言,是謂民族精神,為其民族生命之泉源”。Qian Mu, *Outline of National History* 國史大綱, in: *The Complete Works of Mr. Qian Binsi* 錢賓四先生全集, Taipei: Lianjing, 1994, vol. 27, Introduction, pp. 21–59.

40 *Commemorative Double Issue for Parents and Friends in Celebration of his 80th Birthday*, Taipei: Lianjing, 1994, pp. 218–221.

41 Qian Mu notes that affection towards collective history is the foundation of historical identity and a prerequisite for reading *Outline of National History*. Qian Mu, *Outline of National History*, Taipei: Shangwu Yinshuguan, p. 19.

understand where the “spirit” and power behind national developments lay. When he started his *Outline of National History*, he had set for himself high standards: “[...] the key task of researching national history is to look for and obtain the location of its unique spirit from deep within the nation and its people”, and “[...] to locate the unique personality of a nation and its people”.⁴²

In *Outline of National History*, as the result of his statecraft ideology and of his demand for a historical identity, Qian Mu interpreted national history as evolutionary. The new method he proposed (for giving historical events a meaning) was intrinsic, authentic and innovative. In his historical interpretation, Qian Mu was undoubtedly inspired by Liu Yizheng. But it was Qian Mu who developed an interpretation of national history as evolutionary, and on the basis of traditional material and a traditional style of historiography. With regard to this transformation, Qian Mu’s *Outline of National History* is irreplaceable in its representativeness. At the same time, the singular and holistic character of national history and the strength of its development were also elaborated in his book. In the following, I will use Qian Mu’s method of arguing in order to explain how evolutionary historical thinking was manifested in *Outline of National History*. Furthermore I will demonstrate how he used old material and an archaic style of writing to imbue history with a new meaning.

4.1. The Driving Force behind the Development of National History

Without a doubt, the course on *The History of Political Systems in China* – which he taught not in the History Department, but in the Department of Political Science at Peking University – can be considered the proverbial backbone of Qian Mu’s *Outline of National History*.⁴³ Changes in the political systems and the accompanying changes in political order run like a common thread through the whole book, but the role they play is a passive one: they are the object and thereby the explained. Qian Mu uses “academic thinking” (*xueshu sixiang* 學術思想) as a means to explain these social changes. For example, he uses the political unification of China during Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE) as an important historical occurrence. In the chapter “The emergence of the first unified government and its destruction”, he emphasizes that pre-Qin academic thought had already sown

42 Ibid. p. 32: 治國史的第一要務，在能於國家民族之內部自身，求得其獨特精神之所在，[...] 求得國家民族獨特個性。

43 The narrative of Qian Mu’s *Outline of National History* is based on a course on *The Comprehensive History of China* which he taught at Peking University in between the years 1933 and 1937. Basic historical facts were taken from *The Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* 資治通鑑, *A Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* 續資治通鑑, *Comprehensive Mirror of the Ming* 明通鑑 etc.

the seeds for the country's unification. After the Han dynasty had been established, it prospered until its decay, which he attributes to the undulating influence of Huang-Lao Daoism, the Legalist School of the Warring States Period and Confucian academic thought. At the same time, "academic thinking" was also a precursor for the rise in power of the Tang dynasty. Up to his discussion of the two political reforms in the Song dynasty, without exception, he describes at great length "the new dawn of academic thinking". In *Outline of National History*, it becomes very clear that Qian Mu has given academic thinking the role of explainer, with which he explains political order and institutional development.

Obviously, academic thinking contains many different orientations and Qian Mu makes precise distinctions. What he wants to show is that the political system of China always pursues a path of "reason" (*he* 合理). This so-called reasonable direction of development means: firstly, a unified stable regime which wants to protect its people, and secondly, institutionalization of political participation for ordinary people. Therefore, the criteria with which academic trends could be distinguished: were their thoughts on political unity or their concept of "propriety" (*li* 禮) and the group concept mutually compatible? Were the concepts from these academic trends "humane" (*ren* 仁) towards individuals, especially towards the lowest rung of society? He believed that the Daoist School sought to liberate the individual which would "[...] result in the disappearance of the community"; the Mohist School "[...] stressed the fostering of big communities [...] but this had the disadvantage that individuals were again of low significance"; the Legalist School paid special attention to the monarch's methods of governing and also devalued the individual. This led him to the conclusion that it had undoubtedly been Confucian academic thinking that had guided Chinese history into a sensible direction. In his interpretation of history in *Outline of National History*, he analyzes the relationship between various kinds of ideological forces on the one hand and changes in the system and political order on the other: after the Qin dynasty, the Han immediately reunited China and under the influence of early Confucian thinking, they moved towards a *literati government* (*wenren zhengfu* 文人政府). When nomadic tribes entered China from the north, non-Han people and Han Chinese started to mix; and many states opposed the ensuing political chaos. Under the extremely difficult conditions of the Northern Dynasties Confucianism continued and was not only *not* interrupted, but continuously renewed until it finally matured under the political scope of the great Tang Empire. A fair examination system was established, which selected the most talented among the populace to participate in politics. Initiated by the people, a system for official disciplinary punishment was established where high officials and even the emperor could be impeached. Around one thousand years after Buddhism had entered China during the Han dynasty, the Zen Buddhist teaching of the Heart Sutra (*daqun xin jiao* 大群心教), which was

suitable for the masses, was harmonized with the group-oriented Confucianism. At the same time, certain elements promoted by Buddhist teachings were also integrated into Confucianism, for example “the cultivation of one’s individual nature” and “showing respect for individual subjectivity”; and their integration strengthened the force with which history moved toward the direction of reasonable politics.

In *Outline of National History*, Qian Mu has subdivided Chinese history into two layers: a layer of ideological context that lies directly below political order and institutional transition. Ideological context promotes historical development, but it also gives it uniqueness. He says: “The place where change occurs, that is exactly the place where the historical spirit lies” (*bian zhi suozai ji qi lishi jingshen zhi suozai* 變之所在即其歷史精神之所在).⁴⁴ When described using traditional terminology, the essence of this network is the central Confucian idea of “humaneness” (*ren* 仁) and “propriety” (*li*); using modern words it could be called “political awareness”. Qian Mu believed that this “political awareness” gave direction to Chinese historical development and that it stimulated the strength of that development. With regard to political awareness, its developmental context and its influence on politics and society were not merely a part of history, but could give his fellow countrymen the direction and strength necessary in the real world.

4.2. A Qualitative Change in Style

The style adopted by Qian Mu in his *Outline of National History* was the “string and mesh style” (*gangmuti*) typically used for traditional exemplary historiographical works. Its founder Zhu Xi believed that the chronological style used by Sima Guang in *The Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government*, written down on 294 scrolls and recording historical events spanning over 1,362 years, was too cumbersome and unsuitable for presenting “the Way of Heaven” (*tiandao* 天道) and “the Way of Man” (*rendao* 人道), which is why he condensed these 294 scrolls of material into 59 scrolls. At the same time he established a legitimate ancestral line of the royal house, which he used as a timeline and as an axis for moral judgment. He used large-scale characters to indicate the ancestral line and important events. These words – charged with praising or censuring meaning, formed the main narrative – the so-called “string” (*gang* 綱). Furthermore, he used a small-styled font to indicate additional narrative: two rows placed under the “string” formed the “mesh” (*mu* 目). During a time of prosperity for the Neo-Confucian Rationalistic School, Zhu Xi produced his *String and Mesh of the*

⁴⁴ Qian Mu, *Outline of National History*, p. 34.

Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government (*Tongjian gangmu* 通鑑綱目), 59 scrolls written in “string and mesh style” (*gangmuti*). He wanted to distinguish clearly between “norms of conduct” (*gangchang* 綱常) and “ethics” (*lunli* 倫理), but the main aim of his work was to bestow historical incidents from the *Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* still more clearly with a moral sense; the study of history was subordinated and now even more effectively served the Neo-Confucian cause.

Qian Mu’s *Outline of National History* copied the “string and mesh style” from Zhu Xi, but he filled this old shell with a completely new historical thinking. For one thing, the “string” no longer explicitly or implicitly judged individual historical events, and at the same time, the individual “strings” were no longer connected by a legitimate ancestral line, but a causal one. In the “string” of *Outline of National History*, the words that most frequently appear serve as causal conjunctions: “consequently” (*yinci* 因此), “since then” (*zici* 自此), “as a result” (*yushi* 於是), “thereupon” (*sui* 遂), “the reason being” (*yuanyin shi* 原因是) etc. For example, he says, “Ultimately, the regressive politics pursued by the Mongols could not succeed, *which is why* they resulted in one hundred years of social upheaval”.⁴⁵ “[...] *Consequently*, the eunuchs gradually started to become overbearing and domineering”,⁴⁶ “[...] a time was reached where the Imperial Hanlin Academy could no longer cultivate the talented people, [...] and *therefore* you could no longer ask for the selection of talents by national examination”.⁴⁷ “String” words only account for one fifth of the entire volume, but they have a larger font size and “mesh” words are shifted one row down, both of which highlights the logical and causal character of the entire book. *Outline of National History* stresses the narrative character of history as a whole via the effective use of conjunctions. At the time the “string and mesh style” was created, it was used for the type of historical narrative that contained exemplary historical thinking. But Qian Mu completely transformed the style’s original characteristics.

Qian Mu’s *Outline of National History* fundamentally changed the characteristics of string and mesh style. This can be further observed by looking at his use of historical material. In the same way as Zhu Xi had based his moral lessons on the materials from *The Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government*, Qian Mu’s *Outline of National History* focused on the interpretation of the given facts. He adopted the historical narrations of traditional history books, but established causal links between separate events, thereby endowing them with meaning in a developmental context. One example would be the phenomena described in Zhao Yi’s 趙翼 (1727–1814) “On the Generous Salary of Song Officials”, part of his

45 Ibid. p. 742. 蒙古人的倒退政治，到底不能成功，因此社會變亂百出。

46 Ibid. p. 758. 因此宦官逐漸驕橫跋扈。

47 Ibid. p. 781. 及翰林院不能培養人才，[...] 而選舉遂不可問。

Reading Notes of Twenty-two Histories 廿二史劄記, in which he had noted down knowledge he had acquired by reading the official dynastic histories. Zhao Yi had simply stressed this as a lesson in “one thing that we should not copy from the Song system”; but in *Outline of National History*, Qian Mu established the causal link that the financial difficulties caused by excessive personnel and hefty salaries had resulted in a process of political reforms. Apart from *The Reading Notes of Twenty-two Historical Books* (*Nian'er shi zhaji* 廿二史劄記), Qian Mu also often used historical phenomena from two further sources: Gu Yanwu's 顧炎武 (1613–1682) *Record of Daily Study* (*Rizhi lu* 日知錄) as well as Wang Fuzhi's 王夫之 (1619–1692) *On the Song Dynasty* (*Song lun* 宋論). In *Outline of National History*, the exemplary historical descriptions from both books were placed in a developmental context and they were all given a certain meaning.⁴⁸ Qian Mu added conjunctions to the “string” and he also placed the historical descriptions into a developmental process; these two grammatical features changed the traditional string and mesh style into something completely new; and with Confucian ideology as the developing power, the grammatical features mentioned above and Qian Mu's historical narrative supported each other.

5. Closing Words

In this paper I assert that the change in historical thinking in modern China is rooted in the profound social changes that people experienced from the end of the nineteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century; and this change reveals itself mainly in key terms. In some cases the meaning of a term changed, in other cases neologisms were introduced, which I believe shows that a basic change in historical thinking was taking place in the context of radical societal changes. In this regard, I understand this paper as a work on conceptual history.⁴⁹ The guiding questions were: How does the relevancy of a term for historical thinking manifest itself? How is the meaning of a term understood with regard to historical thinking? The answer becomes apparent if one takes the typologization of historical thinking as a starting point and distinguishes logically and carefully between ‘exemplary historical thinking’ and ‘genetic historical

48 Another characteristic of the writings in the ‘string’ in *Outline of National History* is that Qian Mu often uses combinations of verbs and adverbs which imply change, such as 漸漸變成 (“gradually changing”), “日盛” (“flourishing by the day”), “日繁” (“get more complicated by the day”), “萌芽” (“are sprouting”), “逐漸腐化” (“gradually decaying”), “日漸萌茁” (“growing and thriving with each day”). As a result, a sense of development is added to the historical facts.

49 The approach of this article is inspired mainly by: Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Frankfurt/ M.: Suhrkamp, 1979.

thinking'. I used this differentiation as the main instrument for my concept analysis and it is the heuristic basis of my entire argument.⁵⁰

In conclusion I would like to emphasize that my deliberations over the question of a change in historical thinking in modern China stem from personal intercultural experience. One question that emerged from this experience was: What does Chinese historical thinking actually mean?⁵¹ With this paper I want to show that the change in historical thinking in modern China was not so much a specific one, but one of universal relevance – the transition from 'exemplary' to 'genetic' can be seen as a general and logical meeting point for historical thinking.

50 About the typologization of historical thinking, see: Jörn Rüsen, *Zeit und Sinn. Strategien historischen Denkens*, p. 1.

51 This question was first introduced to me through Du Weiyun's book. Du Weiyun 杜維運, *Discussing Chinese Historiography with Western Historians 與西方史家論中國史學*, Taipei: Shangwu Yinshuguan 商務印書館, 1966.

II. Comments

5. Cultural Differences as an Inspirational Source of Historical Knowledge – Random Notes on Three Approaches to Chinese Comparative Historiography

Cultural differences should be emphasized as an inspirational source of obtaining historical knowledge, not as its limit.

Jörn Rüsen¹

“This is all useless”, he said. “You are not even recognizing me, although I am standing directly in front of you. How will you proceed since I’m standing in front of you and you are not even recognizing me?” – “You are right”, I said. “I keep telling me the same thing aloud, but since I’m receiving no answer, I will keep staying here”. – “So I will”, he said. – “And I will do so no less than you are doing”, I said. “And therefore it also goes for you as well that this is all useless”.

Franz Kafka²

Comparative approaches need a certain degree of theoretization and generalization which always bears the risk of oversimplification. A milestone in the comparative study of Chinese and East Asian historiography was set by a series of conferences held by the School of Oriental and Asian Studies, University of London, between 1956 and 1958.³ More than half a century has elapsed since and some significant steps forward have been made.⁴ Is it not so that we are today much more reluctant to speak of *the* Western, or *the* Chinese tradition of historical writing and thinking?

This reluctance is less pronounced in Professor Huang Chun-chieh’s two opening articles than in the articles by Professor Wong Young-tsu and Dr. Hu Chang-Tze,

1 Jörn Rüsen, *Historik. Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2013, p. 20 (my own translation). – It is apposite to acknowledge Jörn Rüsen’s tremendous efforts in the field of intercultural comparative historiography for more than twenty years. And with immense gratitude I acknowledge Jörn Rüsen’s friendship, which developed over this time.

2 Franz Kafka, *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande und andere Prosa aus dem Nachlaß*, edited by Max Brod, Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980, p. 277.

3 W. G. Beasley / E. G. Pulleyblank (eds.), *Historians of China and Japan*, London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1961.

4 The finest outcome of comparative historiography is the five-volume survey edited by Daniel Woolf, *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, 5 vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011/12. Mention should also be made of Georg G. Iggers / Q. Edward Wang (with contributions from Supriya Mukherjee), *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, Harlow, England [et al.]: Pearson Education Ltd., 2008.

which deal with the characteristics of humanism in Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 85 BCE) monumental *Shi ji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*) and the transformation of Chinese historical thinking from the 'exemplary' to the 'genetic' mode in modern times, respectively. Accordingly, four of the following six sections are addressed to Professor Huang, one each to Professor Wong and Dr. Hu.

(1)

In his two articles, while pertaining to a generalized picture of Chinese historiography, Professor Huang Chun-chieh sees a major turning point in the tenth and eleventh centuries, i.e. during the Northern Song 北宋 dynasty (960–1126). From then on, he contends, "Neo-Confucianism dominated and deeply influenced Chinese historiography" (Thinking, p. 47).

This point is especially well-taken. Indeed, we should perceive the Song 宋 period (960–1279) as a watershed of Chinese historical thinking and writing.⁵ However, it is perhaps not enough to reduce it to a change of the coordinate system of norms and values induced by the rise of Song Confucian thought. This is only one among other major currents that must be taken into account. The following four seem to be of greatest significance:

- (1) the expansion of non-official and private historiography (*yeshi* 野史);
- (2) the growth of a culture of reviewing, discussing, and reflecting on the past, paired with the unfolding of historical criticism (*shiping* 史評);
- (3) an enormous increase of 'gazetteers', i.e. historical works with a local or regional focus (*fangzhi* 方志), and
- (4) the development of new forms of historical narration such as the 'historical novel' (*yanyi* 演義).

Yet what really sets Song and post-Song historiography apart from early Chinese historiography was a new relationship between history writing and the state, which is indicated by Sima Guang's 司馬光 (1019–1086) monumental *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒 (*Comprehensive Mirror of Aid in Government*; 1064–84). Although imperially commissioned, it was compiled at Sima Guang's private mansion at Luoyang 洛陽, and not by the official Bureau of Historiography (*shiguan* 史館). This inaugurated a new era of history writing beyond the narrow confines of official historiography; it saw the emergence of a growingly vibrant historical discourse, a development which culminated in the late Ming 明 period (ca. 1580–1650). Yet, after the founding of the Manchu-Qing 清 dynasty in 1636

5 See Thomas H. C. Lee, "Introduction", in: id. (ed.), *The New and the Multiple. Sung Senses of the Past*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2004, pp. vii–xxxii.

and its subsequent conquest of Ming China, the pendulum swung back again into the direction of official historiography.⁶

Professor Huang views the entire Song and post-Song tradition of historiography as being marred by “the Neo-Confucian subversions of historical fact to moral principle” (Discourses, p. 29): “the Neo-Confucian ‘principle’ tended to serve as a sort of ‘Procrustean bed’ in some interpretations of history proposed by Song Neo-Confucian thinkers” (ibid., p. 29). Unfortunately, Professor Huang fails to give any examples to illustrate this rather general observation.

In my view, the key notion of Song and post-Song historiography was not “Principle” (*li* 理), as Professor Huang asserts, but rather the notion of “moral constitution of the heart-and-mind” (*xinshu* 心術), or simply “motivation” (*xin* 心).⁷ How this notion was used as a yardstick to evaluate historical figures and historical events is well illustrated by the eminent essayist Tang Shunzhi 唐順之 (1507–1560). Tang offered a new discussion of the famous Warring States (475–221 BCE) episode of Prince Xinling 信陵君, who stole the King of Wei’s 魏王 tally to attack Qin’s 秦 army during its siege of the capital of Zhao 趙. Brushing aside earlier discussions, Tang surmises that the crucial point is not the judicial question whether Prince Xinling committed a crime or not by stealing the tally, but rather the question of his motivation. As Tang argues, Prince Xinling was motivated by the cry for help of Zhao’s prime minister, the Prince’s own brother-in-law, thereby neglecting his primary obligation toward his own ruler, the King of Wei. Hence, Tang concludes, “What I cannot help is reproaching Prince Xinling for his (ignoble) motivation (*xin*)”.⁸

Orientated toward searching for the motivation behind, and the proper moral attitude about, a chosen action, Ming historical thinking grew in moral rigorism. This is also reflected in an increasingly narrow interpretation of the concept of “legitimate dynastic rule” (*zhengtong* 正統), which had become the subject of an intense debate since the Northern Song period.⁹ Toward the end of Ming dynasty, however, the “moralist” stance began to lose ground, being slowly superseded by what may be termed the “pragmatist” stance. The eminent Ming loyalist Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–92), referred to both by Professor Huang (Discourses, p. 27,

6 Achim Mittag, “Chinese Official Historiography under the Ming and Qing”, in: José Rabasa / Masayuki Sato / Edoardo Tortarolo / Daniel Woolf (eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, Part Three: New Worlds and New Histories: Asia, Africa, the Americas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 24–42, here pp. 30–32, 36–38.

7 For the appearance of the notion of *xinshu* in the historical discourse during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), see ibid., p. 26.

8 Siu Kit Wong (tr.), *An Anthology of Ancient Chinese Prose*, Hong Kong: Asia Education Times, 2007, p. 708.

9 Thomas Göller / Achim Mittag, *Geschichtsdenken in Europa und China: Selbstdeutung und Deutung des Fremden in historischen Kontexten. Ein Essay*, Sankt Augustin: Akademia Verlag, 2008, pp. 80–85.

31) and Dr. Hu (p. 84), may be seen as a paragon of this “pragmatist” turn: Wang Fuzhi not only criticized the concept of “legitimate dynastic rule” as an ideological construct, but also argued that a person’s “motivation” (*xin*) is not the ultimate criterion for the historian’s evaluation and judgment, but only one among four criteria; the other three being the prevailing circumstances in which a person lived (*shi* 時); the options and opportunities that this person perceived and responded to (*shi** 勢); and last but not least the effects prompted by his or her actions (*xiao* 效).¹⁰

With necessary caution, one can generalize that from the end of the Ming dynasty onward the “pragmatist” stance dominated historical thinking and writing until the latter half of Emperor Qianlong’s 乾隆 reign (r. 1736–96) when unexpectedly yet another reversal occurred, bringing back the “moralist” stance with a vengeance.¹¹

In short, Song and post-Song historiography did not follow along one straight path, but rather developed in a zig-zag movement. Oscillating between a “moralist” and a “pragmatist” outlook, or, in Weberian terms, between a *Gesinnungsethik* (an ethics of conviction) and a *Verantwortungsethik* (an ethics of responsibility), historical criticism became part and parcel of a flourishing historical culture. To speak of a “Procrustean bed” cannot do justice to this truly fascinating development.

If we want to draw a deduction from the random remarks above, I shall make an emphatic plea for making a step forward in comparative historiography beyond the “grand picture” of across-the-board generalizations, either by a strictly systematic or a time-indexed approach limited to a certain epoch. From the remarks above, it is obvious that I would favor the Ming period, not only because, in terms of historiography, it has been an understudied period until recently,¹² but also because of the encounter with Western historical thought via the Jesuits.¹³

Moreover, by pursuing such a focused, time-indexed approach, we will also get a deeper insight into the reception, adoption, and modification of ideas and notions of Chinese historical thinking across time; to give an example, we will become aware that Sima Qian’s ideal of “comprehensiveness” (*tong* 通), in the sense of a veritable world history, was not at all regarded as the highest goal of Chinese historians, as Professor Huang claims (Discourses, p. 30), at least not

10 See *ibid.*, pp. 86–93.

11 See Mittag “Chinese Official Historiography under the Ming and Qing”, in: Rabasa et.al., *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, Part Three*, pp. 36–37.

12 See Yang Yanqiu 楊艷秋, *Mingdai shixue tanyan* 明代史學探研, Peking: Renmin chubanshe, 2005.

13 Nicolas Standaert, “Jesuit Accounts of Chinese History and Chronology and their Chinese Sources”, in: *East Asian Science Technology and Medicine* 35 (2012), pp. 11–87.

until Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1104–1162), a maverick during his own lifetime, but also beyond.¹⁴

(2)

In this section, I will critically review Prof. Huang's main theme that Chinese historical thinking always implied a synthesis of factual and moral judgment. To illustrate, Professor Huang cites twice "the most classical expression" of this synthesis, a comment by Confucius attached to an episode recorded in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 under the year 607 BCE (Discourses p. 36; Thinking, pp. 43–44). In his comment, Confucius – if we want to believe historical tradition – lauds the historian Dong Hu 董狐 for his incorruptible "diction that does not conceal anything" (*shufa bu yin* 書法不隱).¹⁵ Dong Hu's record in question reads, "Zhao Dun 趙盾 murdered his prince [i. e. Duke Ling of Jin 晉靈公 (r. 620–607 BCE)]".

For Professor Huang, Confucius' remark seems to be self-evident without any further explanations. To the Western reader, this is as puzzling as is Confucius' remark itself.¹⁶ The perplexity over Confucius' comment derives from the fact that it actually was Zhao Chuan 趙穿 who assassinated Duke Ling, not Zhao Dun, the chief minister, who himself barely escaped two assassination plots by the tyrannical Duke Ling. At the time when the murder occurs, Zhao Dun had escaped from the capital of Zhao. On receiving the message of Duke Ling's death, he returned to the capital, yet refrained from pursuing the true murderer, who was a relative of his. In the eyes of the historian Dong Hu, this neglect justified

14 See Zhang Xuecheng's 章學誠 inquiry into the concept of *tong* and his defense of Zheng Qiao: "Shi tong 釋通", "Shen Zheng 申鄭", and "Da ke wen, shang 答客問上", in: *Wenshi tongyi* 文史通義, edn. [Xinbian ben] *Wenshi tongyi* [新編本] 文史通義, Taipei: Huashi chubanshe, 1980, neipian 內篇 IV, pp. 130–139.

15 *Zuo zhuan*, Xuan 2nd year, 21/1867b, *hang* 28. – The *Thirteen Classics* with their commentaries and subcommentaries are cited according to the 1816 standard edition prepared by Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849), *Shisanjing zhushu* (*fu jiaokanji*) 十三經注疏 (附校勘記), reprinted in 2 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980.

16 This puzzlement has also been given vivid expression by Burton Watson, *The Tso chuan. Selections from China's Oldest Narrative Historiography*, New York/Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1989, p. 80: "It is [...] highly disquieting to discover that the *t'ai-shih* [*taishi*] or grand historian of Chin [Jin], rather than recording the facts as they occurred, is actually shown falsifying the record in order to make a moral point concerning the ultimate responsibilities of government. And it is further disturbing to find that Confucius, if the remarks attributed to him here are to be credited, fully approved of this type of falsification. [...] If the Gospels have their dark sayings, we must perhaps admit that this remark of Confucius represents one of the dark sayings of the *Tso chuan* [*Zuo zhuan*], an utterance that will never be completely comprehensible to the modern reader".

putting the blame for the murder on Zhao Dun, although the latter clearly did not commit it.

There is something disturbing about this record, apart from its questionable truthfulness. This is the fact that it was *not* taken down *sine ira et studio*, but in a politicized environment, read out publicly in court. On hearing it, Zhao Dun cried out enraged, “For Heaven’s sake, I am not guilty. Who can imagine that I could bear to murder my lord!”¹⁷ We can reasonably assume that Dong Hu acted on behalf of the actual murderer Zhao Chuan, who continued to pull the strings. On Zhao Chuan’s command, an uncle of the murdered Duke Ling, who temporarily resided at the Zhou 周 court, was brought back to Jin 晉 to enthrone him as Duke Ling’s successor (posthumously known as Duke Cheng 成公, r. 607–600 BCE).¹⁸ It is clear that if the guilt had not been squarely placed on Zhao Dun, it would have been unthinkable for this prince to accept the throne from the hands of his own nephew’s murderer.

However, the pernicious ramifications of Dong Hu’s record became manifest not until after the deaths of Zhao Dun and Duke Cheng. In 597 BC, a former favorite of Duke Ling availed himself of the historical records which stigmatized Zhao Dun as Duke Ling’s murderer, set in motion the military and saw to the complete annihilation of the Zhao clan, of which only a later-born orphan, raised by a friend in secrecy, survived.¹⁹ These events are the plot of Voltaire’s and other Enlightenment authors’ plays, known to students of world literature by their general title of “The Orphan of Zhao”. In variation of Dai Zhen’s 戴震 (1724–1777) famous dictum on Neo-Confucian philosophy, we thus may call Dong Hu’s poisoned record a foremost example of “killing people through history writing”.

Was Confucius not aware of all that? Or, did he even approve of it? Be it as it may, the splendid tradition of Chinese historical criticism offers a number of insightful observations and bright judgments; Confucius’ remark on Dong Hu’s “diction that does not conceal anything” certainly cannot be counted among these. As long as it is not clarified where exactly its alleged wisdom lies, I am rather alarmed than enlightened by Professor Huang’s conclusion that “[i]n the world of traditional Chinese historiography [...] factual judgment and moral judgment are inseparable and subjectivity and objectivity fused” (Discourses, p. 38).

17 *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳, Xuan 2nd Year, 12/2412b, *hang* 14–15.

18 *Shi ji* 43/1782 (edition Zhonghua shuju 中華書局).

19 *Shi ji* 43/1782–1785.

(3)

According to Professor Huang, in view of Sima Qian's sympathy for those historical figures and heroes who ultimately suffer defeat, and his expressed "concern for the suffering, toiling masses", the *Shi ji* may well be depicted as a foremost example of *historia calamitatum* (Discourses, p. 37). I totally agree with this characterization as far as the first part about individual subjects is concerned. Mostly audacious and strong-willed characters, who in the end failed or were subdued, they all lived out what Ivan Morris has propitiously termed "the nobility of failure".

However, my readings of the *Shi ji* fail to provide any evidence for Sima Qian's alleged "concern for the suffering, toiling masses". The Grand Historian is moved to tears on reading Jia Yi's 賈誼 (ca. 200–168 BCE) "Lament of Qu Yuan",²⁰ yet when it comes to the ceaseless warfare in the one-hundred years preceding the unification in 221 BC, the staggering figures of the body count are reported without the slightest emotions and all the blood spilled on the battlefields is not worth musing about.

As Sima Qian pointed out in his autobiographical letter to Ren An 任安, it is always the individual character with huge aspirations (*zhi* 志 or *yi* 意) that has attracted his attention. "Each human being – he contemplates – has but one death, but whether it weighs as heavy as Mount Tai or as light as a feather, alone depends upon one's aspirations".²¹ Sima Qian's exaltation of the individual subject is unique and contrasts with later historical works as, for example, Ban Gu's 班固 (AD 32–92) *Han shu* 漢書 (*History of the [Western] Han Dynasty*). This can be seen, among others, from the fact that Sima Qian perceived some of the *Feng* 風 and *Xiao Ya* 小雅 Odes of the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*) as progenitors of Qu Yuan's 屈原 (ca. 340–278 BCE) elegy "Li sao 離騷" ("Encountering Sorrow"), implying that these songs were composed by individual, yet anonymous poets responding to the existential situations of their own time, while Ban Gu perpetuated the opposite view that the Odes originated from among the people and were later being collected by specially appointed officials (*cai shi zhi guan* 采詩之官).²²

20 *Shi ji* 84/2503.

21 *Han shu* 漢書 62/2732 (edn. Zhonghua shuju 中華書局).

22 See *Shi ji* 84/2482 and *Han shu* 30/1708.

(4)

The reference to the *Odes* brings me finally to Professor Huang's remark that Sima Qian "would have been hard pressed to accept Hayden White's position that 'the historical text is [simply] a literary artifact'" (Thinking, p. 47). I feel incited to respond that Sima Qian might have been equally hard pressed to accept a position that would negate the literary traits of the *Shi ji* and, hence, would deny its classification as a literary artifact.

The *Shi ji*'s formidable literary qualities are nowhere more visibly exhibited than in those passages where songs, elegies, and other poetical items are inserted. These insertions are done with accomplished skill and produced finely textured narratives that make up perfect wholes and hence have often been included in anthologies of Chinese literature. To give just two examples, I refer to the scene staging a deeply moving couplet sung by Xiang Yu 項羽 and his mistress Yu 虞 in the army camp of Gaixia 垓下 in the night before Xiang Yu's final defeat and the passage depicting the parting of Jing Ke 荊軻 setting out on his journey to Qin 秦 to carry out his plan of Qin Shihuangdi's 秦始皇帝 assassination, being bidden farewell by Prince Dan of Yan 燕太子丹 at the Yi River 易水.²³

These passages seem to be utterly Sima Qian's own, as if compounded of his very life-blood. Yet we shall err grievously if we are to reduce them to mere literary embellishments. To the contrary, we need to perceive them as perfect paradigms of the Chinese idea of poetry and historical narration completing each other in their genuine function of retaining and representing the historical memory. This very idea underlies the widely employed technique in Chinese narrative texts, i. e. the technique of fusing prose and poetry; it has also led to the view that the *Book of Odes*, together with the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書) and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), forms one of the "Three Histories" (*san shi* 三史) from high antiquity.

Paired with this idea of the complementary function of poetry and history – the former giving expression to "emotions" (*qing* 情), the latter recording "events" (*shi* 事) – is the conception that, by the inner feelings expressed in poetry, the things that have happened and are recorded by the historians can be authenticated.²⁴ Considered in this light, it seems reasonable to estimate the

²³ See *Shi ji* 7/333 and 86/2534.

²⁴ The most prominent voice who advocated the mutual complementary function of historical record and poetry was the famous literary critic Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆 (d. 1661) with the following two texts: "Guanhuatang pi di wu caizishu *Shuihu zhuan*: xu yi 貫華堂批第五才子書「水滸傳」" and "Guanhuatang pi di wu [sic!] caizishu *Xixiangji* II: Du di liu caizishu *Xixiangji*' fa 貫華堂批第五才子書「西廂記」卷之二：讀第六才子「西廂記」法", in: *Jin Shengtan wenji* 金聖嘆文集, compiled by Ai Shuren 艾舒仁 and punctuated by Ran Ran 冉苒, Chengdu: Ba-Shu shushe, 1997, pp. 221–226 and 341–351.

eminence of the *Shi ji*, not purely by standards of factuality, nor purely by standards of literary raffinesse.

(5)

I now proceed to Professor Wong Young-tsu's magisterial outline of Sima Qian's historical thinking and writing. Setting out to explore "the Grand Historian's vision of history in which men stood in the center of history" – "men rather than gods retained the most prominent position" (p. 51) –, Professor Wong argues that "[h]is 'man-center[ed]' historical narrative passed on the qualities of emotion, sympathy, and humanity" (p. 62) and "fundamentally shaped and influenced traditional Chinese historiography down to modern times" (p. 51).

I want to limit my remarks to two points; the first relates to Sima Qian's conception of "Heaven" (*tian* 天), while the second briefly reviews the *Shi ji*'s influence on Chinese medieval historiography.

Firstly, Professor Wong begins his exploration with referring to the first of three aims of history writing set forth by Sima Qian in his autobiographical letter to his friend Ren An: "to inquire into the boundary line between (the spheres of) Heaven and man" (*jiu tian ren zhi ji* 究天人之際).²⁵ Professor Wong proceeds with giving concrete examples of Sima Qian's contemplating Heaven's will (p. 51 ff.). To be sure, these cases are few and Professor Wong's observation is certainly apposite that "[f]or him [Sima Qian], the success or failure of a leader had almost exclusively to do with their personal qualities" (p. 62).

And yet, these few and seemingly random contemplations about Heaven's influence on the course of the recent history reveal hidden depths on closer inspection, conceiving two contrary forms; one is concerned with the rise of the state of Qin from its early origins to the founding of the first imperial dynasty under Qin Shihuangdi in 221 BC, perceived as an extraordinarily long-termed process that evolved over several centuries before ultimately leading to the bestowal of the Heavenly Mandate (*tianming* 天命).²⁶ The reverse form is seen in the recent past when Heaven had intervened in form of three abrupt changes of the Mandate within the extremely short period of only five years from Qin's downfall to Liu Bang's 劉邦 enthronement as King of Han 漢王 (i.e. 210–206 BCE).²⁷

25 Prof. Wong's translation is somewhat less literally: "to inquire[e] into the different roles of man and Heaven".

26 See *Shi ji* 15/685; for an extensive discussion of this mini-essay, see Yuri Pines, "Biases and Their Sources: Qin History in the *Shiji*", in: *Oriens Extremus* 45 (2005/06), pp. 10–34.

27 See *Shi ji* 16/759. The notion of the three changes of the Mandate refer to the successive seizure of power of Chen She 陳涉, Xiang Yu, and Liu Bang; see *ibid.*, n. 1.

These supra-historical reflections focused on Heaven's interventions had two significant implications: Firstly, the Qin dynasty is recognized as a serious dynastic enterprise and hence as a legitimate successor of the Zhou dynasty; secondly, Liu Bang's seizure of the Mandate is unimpassionately viewed as the outcome of the latter's shrewdness and unscrupulousness. As Professor Wong notes, even Liu Bang's "rough character" is not concealed (p. 57). The same is true of his humble ancestry.²⁸ Is it then to be wondered that already during the Han 漢 dynasty the *Shi ji* was held liable for denigrating the house of Han and hence being denounced as a 'book full of slander' (*bang shu* 謗書)?²⁹

In short, a discussion about "the real driving force behind history" (p. 56), human or divine, may not stop with the *Shi ji*'s predominantly man-centered narratives in general, but we also should take into consideration these supra-historical reflections on Heaven's interventions and dynastic changes. Touching on the precarious questions of the legitimacy of the Qin and Han dynasties and the legitimate succession of the Zhou dynasty, they carried a high importance for the early reception and evaluation of the *Shi ji*.

This brings me directly to my second point: The one who set out to revise those supra-historical observations made by Sima Qian was Ban Biao 班表 (AD 3–54), father of Ban Gu, who began the *Han shu*, although its authorship is generally attributed to his son.³⁰ In contrast to the *Shi ji*, the *Han shu* does not only deny the legitimacy of the Qin dynasty, but also attaches great emphasis on bolstering the Han dynasty's claim to the Heavenly Mandate and on validating its historical role as the legitimate successor of the Zhou dynasty. This is achieved by various means such as the mystification of Liu Bang, i.e. the Han founding emperor Gaozu 高祖, to whom an alleged descendancy from the sage emperor Yao 堯 is attributed and whose rise to power is presented as being surrounded by prodigious omens and a powerful prophecy.³¹

28 *Shi ji* 16/760.

29 Li Wai-ye, "The Idea of Authority in the *Shih chi* (*Records of the Historian*)", in: *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 54 (1994), pp. 345–405, here p. 368.

30 Ban Biao's highly acclaimed essay entitled "On the Kingly Mandate" ("Wang ming lun 王命論") contains in nuce all the main forms under which the universal order is pictured in the *Han shu*, notably the elevation of the monarch to the nodal position that links the body politic to the cosmic order; for a discussion, see Michael Loewe, "The Concept of Sovereignty", in: Denis Twitchett / Michael Loewe (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1: *The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 726–746, pp. 735–737.

31 Achim Mittag, "Forging Legacy: The Pact between Empire and Historiography in Ancient China", in: Fritz-Heiner Mutschler / Achim Mittag (eds.), *Conceiving the "Empire". China and Rome Compared*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 138–160, here pp. 159–160. – Notice must be given of the *opus magnum* by my esteemed colleague Hans van Ess (Munich University), *Politik und Geschichtsschreibung im alten China. Pan-ma i-t'ung*. 2 vols.,

Even more importantly, the *Han shu* adopted the conception of ubiquitous correlations between Heaven's will, the various processes of nature, and the good or evil conduct of man, which is usually associated with the late Western Han 西漢 scholar Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 179–104 BCE). Part and parcel of this universal system of correspondences was the Five Elements (*wuxing* 五行) theory, which provided an explanation of dynastic change as a movement in large cycles.³² The *Han shu* made use of this powerful theory to explain that the house of Han ruled under the patron element Fire, as had the sage emperor Yao, and that it directly succeeded the glorified Zhou dynasty. As a result of the Five Elements theory's adoption, the *Han shu* abounds with records of omina and portents, unusual phenomena and strange events, which are given a systematic account in the "Treatise of the Five Elements". It may well be argued that this "Treatise" occupies a central place in the *Han shu*.³³

At this point, important for the following development of Chinese historiography is the fact that in the post-Han period, the *Han shu*, and not the *Shi ji*, came to be regarded as the model of history writing, and Ban Gu, and not Sima Qian, was seen as the master-historian *par excellence*. Concurrently, the theory of the Five Elements became pervasive throughout the Chinese medieval period (ca. AD 200–750), providing a sort of superstructure for the writing and understanding of history as flowing in large cycles. Hence, the monographic treatises on astronomy, the Five Elements, and miraculous occurrences in which the inner workings of this superstructure are laid bare, played an enormous role in Chinese medieval historiography.³⁴ It was not prior to the Song dynasty that this schematic approach was subjected to severe criticism and eventually abandoned, and it was not prior to the aforementioned Zheng Qiao that the mutual evaluation of Sima Qian and Ban Gu – the former being compared by Zheng Qiao to a dragon, the latter to a pig – was turned upside down.³⁵

Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014, which could not be taken into account for the present article, however.

32 It is generally acknowledged, however, that those chapters on the Five Elements, which are contained in the *Chunqiu fanlu* attributed to Dong Zhongshu, were certainly added later; see Michael Loewe, *The Men who Governed Han China: Companion to A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods*, Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2004, pp. 472–477.

33 Ibid., pp. 487–490.

34 The foremost examples are the *Hou-Han shu*'s 後漢書 treatises on the Heavens and on the Five Elements (juan 10–12, 13–18; cf. B. J. Mansvelt Beck, *The Treatises of Later Han: Their Author, Sources, Contents and Place in Chinese Historiography*, Leiden: Brill, 1990, pp. 111–155) by Sima Biao 司馬彪 (ca. 240–ca. 306) and Shen Yue's 沈約 (441–512) "Treatise on Auspicious Omens as Tokens" ("Furui zhi 福瑞志", juan 卷 27–29) in: *Song shu* (cf. Tiziana Lipiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles in Ancient China: Han, Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties*, Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 2001).

35 See *Tongzhi* 通志, by Zheng Qiao (1104–1162), reprinted in 4 vols., Taipei: Xinxing, 1965, "Zongxu 總序", p. 1b, *hang* 20.

To conclude, the category of Heaven as the cornerstone of the Five Elements theory played a much greater role in the first millennium of Chinese imperial historiography than Professor Wong is willing to concede. The crucial point is the *Han shu*, through which the concept of ubiquitous correspondences was firmly established in post-Han historiography. Moreover, as Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801) pointed out, it was the *Han shu*, rather than the *Shi ji*, which established the ultimate model for later historiography, turning Sima Qian into a “forefather who was not sacrificed by later generations”.³⁶ In the light of this insightful remark, Professor Wong’s notion that “this creative work [the *Shi ji*] set the example of Chinese historical writing for the next two thousand and five hundred years” (p. 62) needs to be reformulated.³⁷

(6)

The reference to Zhang Xuecheng takes us directly to Hu Chang-Tze’s inspiring exploration of the transformation of Chinese historical thinking from the ‘exemplary’ to the ‘genetic’ mode in modern China. It begins with Zhang’s famous dictum “The Six Canonical Books are all histories” (*liujing jie shi ye* 六經皆史也), which is widely regarded as the apex of Chinese historical thinking in pre-modern times. As Dr. Hu explains, Zhang’s historical thinking, encapsulated in this dictum, “liberated the Six Canonical Books from their divine and absolute position and gave them a place in ancient history, where they possessed historical importance; they were *temporalized*” (p. 65).

With this explanation, Dr. Hu joins in a chorus of various interpretations of how we are to understand this main theme of Zhang’s historical thinking.³⁸ In my

36 “*Shu jiao, xia 書教下*”, in: *Wenshi tongyi, neipian* I, p. 13: “(Sima) Qian’s *Records* could not develop into a set pattern so that, after (Ban) Gu in his *History* had followed the structure of (Sima) Qian’s work and thereby had achieved an all-pervading organizational framework (for writing history), he [Sima Qian] in later ages became a forefather who was not sacrificed [*tiao 祧*; literally: an ancestor who did not have a place in the ancestral shrine]” 遷《史》不可為定法, 固《書》因遷之體, 而為一成之義例, 遂為後世不祧之宗焉。

37 Another minor error that needs to be corrected concerns Prof. Wong’s assertion that Sima Qian’s metaphor of “mirror” “had since become the standard Chinese use of history for thousands of years to come”. As is well known, the earliest occurrence of the mirror as a metaphor of the past that gives guidance to the present is found in Ode no. 255 “Dang 蕩”: “The beacon of Yin [the Shang dynasty] is not far-distant 殷鑒不遠”. By Han times, this metaphor seems to have been quite widely used, which e.g. is indicated by *Han Shi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (juan 5 and 7). At the only instance where the metaphor occurs in *Shi ji* (18/878), Sima Qian actually distances himself from the commonplace wisdom expressed by this metaphor. Therefore I suspect that Prof. Wong has just mistaken Sima Qian for Sima Guang, author of the *Zizhi tongjian* (see above).

38 There are four major interpretations; see Göller / Mittag, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

view, it loses half its meaning unless Zhang's notion of "empty talk" (*kongyan* 空言) is understood. As Zhang asserts with regard to the *Book of Changes* (*Zhou Yi* 周易, or *Yijing* 易經), the compilation of the Six Classical Books (*liujing* 六經) was motivated by "an acute awareness of the needs of the common people and hence do not constitute the self-centered empty talk of one single author" (*qie yu minyong er fei yi ji kongyan* 切於民用而非一己空言).³⁹

For Zhang Xuecheng, the practical import and the exclusive orientation toward the common good was a hallmark of the Six Canonical Books. To illuminate their practical purpose in relationship to the *Dao* 道, Zhang Xuecheng uses the metaphor of a "vessel" (*qi* 器) from the *Book of Changes* (*Zhou Yi*, "Xici zhuan 繫辭傳", A.12). We understand this metaphor properly by imagining a vessel in its daily usage, for example a cooking pot or a pitcher to fetch water from the well, rather than a vessel for storing food or wine.⁴⁰

According to Zhang Xuecheng, the problem of the post-Confucian age just arose from the very fact that scholars straightly took the Six Canonical Books as a repository of the imminent *Dao*, thereby disregarding their original intention of guiding a societal practice during a certain historical age in high antiquity. With the rise of competing interpretations among the Hundred Schools (*baijia* 百家; Warring States period, 475–221 BCE), each intent to prevail over the others by asserting oneself as holding the single one set of true teachings, "empty talk" became pervasive.

Hence, it needed to pursue a strictly history-bound approach to studying the Six Canonical Books, which abstains from making any truth claims of "private" (*si* 私) doctrines. Doing history in this way does not mean to give up on the practical use of historical studies. As Zhang declared, "The rationale of historical studies lies in the ordering of the world, not in the producing of empty talk in writing" (*shixue suo yi jingshi, gu fei kongyan zhushu ye* 史學所以經世, 固非空言著書也).⁴¹ Here as in other instances, Zhang's use of the term "empty talk" has clearly a negative ring.

More importantly, Zhang Xuecheng's separation of the study of history from the pursuit of all other knowledge denounced as "empty talk", in fact anticipated the defining outline of the sphere of historical studies, which is found in the second of six sections of Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 (1873–1929) famous treatise "The New Historiography" ("Xin shixue 新史學") from 1902. In this section, Liang follows Dilthey, albeit indirectly and without an explicit reference, distinguishing two realms of knowledge; one is what Liang terms the "natural

39 "Yi jiao, shang 易教上", in: *Wenshi tongyi, neipian* I, p. 2.

40 See "Yuan Dao 原道", in: *Wenshi tongyi, neipian* II, pp. 35–45; for an inquiry into this main essay of Zhang Xuecheng, see Göller / Mittag, *op. cit.*, pp. 106–112.

41 "Zhedong Xueshu 浙東學術", in: *Wenshi tongyi, neipian* II, p. 54.

sciences” (*tianranxue* 天然學), which are concerned with the study of all phenomena that follow a repetitive pattern. The other realm of the “historical sciences” (*lishixue* 歷史學) encompass the study of all phenomena of “progress” or “evolutionary process” (*jinhua* 進化), defined by Liang as that what “proceeds without returning, advances without reaching an ultimate point of halting” (*wang er bu fan* 往而不返; *jin er bu ji* 進而不極).⁴²

It is interesting to note that Liang Qichao’s earlier defining outline of the sphere of history, published only one year earlier, i.e. 1901, as part of his essay “Introductory Discussion on Chinese History” (“Zhongguoshi xulun 中國史敍論”),⁴³ this notion of “progress” is still glaringly absent. It must have been within the first year of Liang’s return to Japan in April 1901,⁴⁴ that he came to look into the matter of “progress” in greater depth, one source obviously being his reading of Benjamin Kidd’s *Social Evolution* (translated as *Renqun jinhua* 人群進化; originally published in 1894), to which he devoted a substantial review article in October 1902.⁴⁵ Small wonder then that, in his defining outline of history in “The New Historiography” of 1902, Liang defined the task of history as “narrating the phenomena of social evolution” (*lishi zhe xushu renqun jinhua zhi xianxiang ye* 歷史者敘述人群進化志現象也).⁴⁶

To my best knowledge, there is no other Chinese text than this outline in which the “genetic” mode of historical thinking is introduced in such succinct form and imposing manner. It should not be left out in an inquiry of the transformation of historical thinking in modern China.

42 “Xin shixue 新史學, [Sec. 3]: Shixue zhi jieshuo 史學之界說”, in: *Yinbingshi wenji* 飲冰室文集, 45 chapters in 16 vols., Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua, 1960, 3rd rpnt. 1983, vol. 4, pp. 7–12, here p. 7.

43 “Zhongguoshi xulun, I: Shi zhi jieshuo 中國史敍論, 第一節：史之界說”, in: *Yinbingshi wenji*, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 1–2.

44 See Ding Wenjiang 丁文江 (original author) / Zhao Fengtian 趙豐田 (ed.), *Liang Qichao nianpu changpian* 梁啟超年譜長篇, Shanghai: Shiji chubansh, 2009, p. 171.

45 “Jinhualun gemingzhe Jiede [Kidd] zhi xueshuo 進化論革命者頡德之學說”, in: Li Huaxing 李華興 / Wu Jiaxun 吳嘉勛 (eds.), *Liang Qichao xuanji* 梁啟超選集, Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1984, pp. 340–348. In the same year (1902), Liang Qichao published as one section of the series of *On the New Citizen* (*Xinmin lun* 新民論) an inquiry of China’s backwardness under the title of “On Progress” (“Lun jinbu 論進步”), see *ibid.*, pp. 234–248.

46 “Xin shixue, [Sec. 3]: Shixue zhi jieshuo”, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

6. Ancient Historiographies Compared

1. Introduction

These four articles describe important characteristics of Chinese historiography.* They do so by taking their starting point from ancient historiography and they attempt to characterize Chinese historiography by comparing it explicitly or implicitly with its Western counterpart. Here I will look critically at these comparative statements as far as *ancient* historiography is concerned. My thesis is that though there are differences between Greco-Roman and ancient Chinese historiography, there are also important parallels and that these latter point to a common basis of fundamental human needs and aspirations.

* Once again I have to thank my friend John Drinkwater for correcting my English and helping me to clarify my ideas. To those to whom the original texts are linguistically not accessible the following translations may be of help: Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian*, 3 vols. (Qin, Han I, Han II), transl. by B. Watson, revised edition, Hong Kong/New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993; *The Grand Scribe's Records*, transl. by W.N. Nienhauser et al., vols. I, II, V, I, VII, VIII, IX, Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994–2011; Herodotus, *The Histories*. (Penguin Classics). Translated by A. de Selincourt. Revised with Introduction and Notes by J. Marincola, London etc.: Penguin Books 1996, 2003; Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*. Translated by M. Hammond. With an Introduction and Notes by P.J. Rhodes, (Oxford World's Classics), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009; Polybius. *The Histories*. Translated by R. Waterfield. With an Introduction and Notes by B. McGing, (Oxford World's Classics), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010; Sallust, *Catiline's War, The Jugurthine War, Histories*, (Penguin Classics), transl. by A.J. Woodman, London: Penguin Books, 2007; Livy, *The Rise of Rome*. Books 1–5. A new translation by T.J. Luce, (Oxford World's Classics), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; Tacitus, *The Annals and The Histories*, transl. by A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb, ed. by M. Hadas, (Modern Library), New York: Encyclopaedia Britannica 2003.

2. Preserving Factuality

I start with the point with which Huang Chun-chieh ends his second paper, on “Historical Thinking as Humanistic Thinking in Traditional China”, because it gives us a first opportunity to see that the situation is not as plain as it may appear at first sight. Huang states that an “eminent humanistic feature of traditional Chinese historical thinking is its strict adherence to the facts as they actually occurred”, and that “throughout Chinese history, historians maintained the tradition of writing history as it really was”.¹ He adds that someone like Sima Qian 司馬遷 “would have been hard pressed to accept Hayden White’s position that, ‘the historical text is [simply] a literary artifact’”.²

This is, of course, perfectly correct. The problem is that Hayden White, influential as he has been in the last decades, cannot be taken as representative of Western historiography and Western historical thinking in general; and he is certainly not representative of ancient Western historiography.

Sima Qian’s efforts concerning the comprehensive collection and study of both written sources and oral traditions, like his extensive travels to many theatres of major historical events, are impressive and bear witness to his conviction that the historian’s fundamental task consists in reconstructing or, as Huang prefers to put it, “preserving” factuality. However, it cannot be denied that the Western historians show the same commitment to factual reliability. Herodotus presents his work as “display of his *historia*”.³ As is well known, in this passage the very word *historia* (from *historein*: “to enquire”) refers to the efforts of “research”, and throughout his work the father of Western historiography allows us to participate in his tireless endeavor of investigating the written (epigraphical and literary) sources and tracing the local oral traditions available. Thucydides, in his famous chapter on method,⁴ claims that he has made every effort to clarify what in reality was said and done by the historical agents, and we have no reason to doubt the truthfulness of this assertion. Polybius, finally, in the numerous passages in which he takes issue with his less conscientious predecessors⁵ makes the same claim of factual reliability for his account, which modern scholarship for the most part happily accepts.

Thus, all in all, we can state that, independently of each other, ancient Chinese and ancient Western historians developed and put into practice the idea that the first and fundamental task of their activity as historians consists in the ascertainment of factuality, because without it no historical insight can be gained. In

1 In this volume, Thinking, p. 46.

2 Thinking, p. 47.

3 Herodotus 1, proem.

4 Thucydides 1,22.

5 Cf. in particular Book 12.

other words, already in classical antiquity both Chinese and Western historiography made a decisive step in the direction of what we now understand by “wissenschaftliche Geschichtsforschung” = “the scientific study of history”.

3. Role of Man in History – Narrative Form

Another point Huang Chun-chieh makes in the aforementioned paper is that Chinese historiography sees “human beings as the leading actors in all sorts of historical events” and considers “human ingenuity” and human “thought and will” as “determining factors in the production of historical events”.⁶ Huang connects this with the biographical approach which characterizes Chinese historiography since Sima Qian’s *Shi ji* 史記. Wong Young-tsu develops similar ideas with particular reference to Sima Qian and his *Shi ji*. According to Wong, Sima Qian “laid the foundation for a more secular and humanistic approach to historical writing” and “set the example of telling the stories of individual lives” as he “believed the rise or fall of a state was a result of many decades of human efforts, whether positive or negative”.⁷

The features which the two contributors point up are without doubt characteristic of Chinese historiography. The question is to what extent they distinguish it from its Western counterpart. Here differentiation seems necessary. Huang claims that in contrast to the Chinese historians “Western historians describe overall historical events” and he points to Herodotus’ narrative of the Persian War and to Polybius’ description of the rise of Rome: “This linear sort of account, constructed on impersonal chains of causes and effects contrasts sharply with the mosaic approach taken by Chinese historians”.⁸ Accordingly, the Western historians (this time Huang points to Herodotus and Thucydides as examples), “generally stress non-human factors such as political life, economic interests, etc. in explaining historical events”,⁹ and thus – this is the implication – do not look very much for the responsibility of individuals.

Here misconception and correct observation go hand in hand. The statement that Western historians stress non-human factors is incorrect and contradicted by Huang’s own concretizations “political life” and “economic interests”, which are certainly “human factors”. In general, one can say that the concentration on human history and the concern to explain it by reference primarily to human desires, needs, hopes, fears etc., with divine or supernatural forces staying to a

6 Thinking, p. 42f.

7 Humanism, p. 54.

8 Thinking, p. 43.

9 Thinking, p. 44.

large extent out of consideration, is the common ground of ancient Chinese and Greco-Roman historiography. As to Chinese historiography, key passages are quoted by Huang. As to Greco-Roman historiography, it suffices to point to Herodotus' proem in which he states that he is going to present "what has come about through men", the "great works and deeds of Greeks and barbarians", and "why they have waged war against each other". In the same vein are Thucydides' explanation of the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War and Polybius' analysis of the reasons for Rome's rise to world dominion, which are both purely immanent, i. e. refer exclusively to "human factors".

What Huang verges on saying is that the Western historians in their analysis of the causal nexus of events give more weight to – not non-*human* but – non-*individual* or, better, supra-*individual* factors than their Chinese counterparts. This is correct, as is the assumption that the difference between the narrative structures characteristic of Chinese and Western historiography – 'mosaic approach' as opposed to 'linear sort of account' – is not unrelated to the difference in evaluating individual and supra-individual factors of history.

However, it must be stressed that this difference is only one of *degree* or *emphasis*. It should not be overlooked that Sima Qian, too, makes reference to supra-individual forces in explaining historical events. His ideas concerning the specific characteristics and the pattern of succession of the great dynasties¹⁰ can be adduced, as well as his remarkable identification of supply and demand as decisive factors in economic developments.¹¹ On the other hand, there can be no doubt that in spite of the fact that for Herodotus the opposition of Greek freedom and Persian autocracy, for Thucydides Spartan fear of the growing power of Athens, and for Polybius the Roman constitution and Roman values, represent important general factors in the development of events, these historians – and their Roman successors – consider the physical, intellectual and moral qualities of individuals as not less important and treat them with corresponding attention. Even though the works of the Greek and Roman historians, in contrast with Sima Qian's *Shi ji* and the dynastic histories of China, do not include sections with independent biographies, they certainly offer character-sketches and summary evaluations of important individuals, and give due weight to their achievements or failures.¹²

In summary, the concentration on human history and its presentation, explanation and evaluation in human terms is an important common feature of

10 Cf. e.g. the remarks in the "Grand Historian's comment" at the end of chapter 8.

11 In the "Grand Historian's comment" at the end of chapter 129.

12 Cf. Herodotus' development of the characters of Croesus in Book 1 and Xerxes in Books 7–9, but in particular the comprehensive character sketches of Pericles by Thucydides (2,65), Hannibal by Polybius (9,22–26), Caesar and Cato by Sallust (*Catiline* 54), Scipio the Elder by Livy (38,53,8–11), Tiberius by Tacitus (*Annals* 6,51), to give only some examples.

Chinese and Western classical historiography. Chinese historiography pays more attention to the individual agents of history whereas Western historians take into account supra-individual factors as well, but this difference is not one of total opposition, but of degree and emphasis.

4. The Integration of Historical Insight and Moral Evaluation

Two of our three contributors consider the integration of historical insight and moral evaluation as an important achievement and a specific feature of Chinese historiography. Huang Chun-chieh devotes more than one third of his first paper to this phenomenon.¹³ According to him this “uniting of factual judgment and moral judgment” (p. 33) began very early. Already “[t]he author of the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 selected the most morally significant and enlightening historical events and personages from among a wide range of cases so that after presenting his account of the facts he could investigate, develop and discuss the positive and negative moral lessons involved”.¹⁴ Subsequently, too, “[e]xamples of this tendency to extrapolate and distill moral principles from the narration of historical facts abound”.¹⁵ Jia Yi’s 賈誼 analysis of the “Faults of Qin” 過秦論, Sima Qian’s explanation of the defeat of Xiang Yu 項羽, Sima Guang’s 司馬光 theory concerning the rise and fall of dynasties are for Huang cases in point.¹⁶ Finally, he states that “[r]egarding the use of moral judgment in traditional Chinese historical writing, we could maintain that historical judgment in Chinese civilization replaced the role of final judgment in Judeo-Christian civilization”.¹⁷ Hu Chang-Tse, likewise, sees moral evaluation as characteristic of Chinese historiography, and notes its reflection in Chinese historical theory, as in Liu Zhiji’s 劉知幾 and Zhang Xuecheng’s 章學成 concept of “historical insight”.¹⁸ For the latter “historical insight” is so closely connected to the “historian’s moral integrity” that the “two elements” are actually “two sides of one coin”.¹⁹

These statements clearly concern a central feature of traditional Chinese historiography. The problem is that its precise description and the exact analysis of its ideological context are not easy. Thus it is, for example, evident that the theory of the *Dao* 道 as the principle which underlies the course of history, and which can therefore be extracted from it by proper study, constitutes the phil-

13 Discourses, p. 33–37.

14 Discourses, p. 33f.

15 Discourses, p. 34.

16 Discourses, p. 34–36.

17 Discourses, p. 36f.

18 Transformation, p. 68–70.

19 Transformation, p. 68.

osophical basis of the integration of historical insight and moral evaluation. However, for someone like me who is not a specialist in Chinese philosophy it is difficult to pursue this connection. Therefore, instead of trying to do what I am not competent to do, I will look more closely at some of the concrete instantiations of that “synthesis of factual and moral judgment” in order to see how it actually works and to investigate the extent to which it sets Chinese historiography apart from Western historiography.

What is meant by “synthesis of factual and moral judgment” can probably best be understood if one looks at cases in which historians present success and failure as the result of morally good and bad conduct. The rise and fall of the great dynasties are regularly cited, with the fall of Qin perhaps being the most extensively analyzed.²⁰ But there are also individuals whose fates are presented in the same way. Sima Qian’s treatments of Lord Shang 商君²¹ and of Xiang Yu²² are cases in point. In all these instances the historians can casually be said to “extrapolate and distill moral principles from the narration of historical facts”.²³ On the other hand, one has to observe that, strictly speaking, extrapolation of moral principles, i. e. “Sollen”, from historical facts, i. e. “Sein”, is logically impossible, and what historians actually do is to reconstruct a nexus of a certain kind of conduct and a certain kind of outcome, while independently giving the former a moral evaluation.

In any case, disregarding for the moment dynasties and polities, it seems *prima facie* obvious that not every individual’s fate can be fitted into this pattern. The question is what in those other cases, where conduct and outcome are not connected in a morally satisfying way, “synthesis of factual and moral judgment” is supposed to mean. The important point for the two contributors seems to be that in these cases too the Chinese historians characteristically combine factual account and moral verdict. Thus, as Huang Chun-chieh²⁴ and Wong Yong-tsu²⁵ both mention, the very first biographical chapter of Sima Qian’s *Shi ji* is devoted to Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊, the most charitable personalities of their time, who after the fall of their ruling house, the Shang, prefer dying from starvation to cooperating with the new dynasty, the Zhou. They exemplify good men who meet with misfortune but whose goodness – as a kind of compensation, if we want – is recorded by the historian in spite of their lack of success. There are many cases of this kind, and Huang may have them in mind when he repeatedly formulates the idea that “while the Judeo-Christian tradition has God’s ‘final judgment’ of

20 Cf. Huang, Discourses 34f., and Wong, Humanism, p. 54.

21 *Shi ji* 68.

22 *Shi ji* 7; cf. Huang, Discourses, p. 35, and Wong, Humanism, p. 55f.

23 Huang, Discourses, p. 36.

24 Discourses, p. 27.

25 Humanism, p. 53.

peoples achievements and sins, we could say that the Chinese cultural tradition has the ‘judgments of history’ to weigh people’s lifetime conduct”.²⁶ (This is at least suggested by the fact that it is a decisive characteristic of both the Judeo-Christian ‘final judgment’ of God and the Chinese judgment of history to be unimpressed by worldly success or failure.)

If we look at Western ancient historiography, the first thing we note is that an historian like Thucydides seems to take a different approach indeed in his historical analysis. His interest is in the causal explanation of the sequence of events and, in connection with this, in revealing the underlying regularities of the human psyche: he restrains almost totally from moral evaluation. Thucydides, however, is not representative of all Western historiography, and already in the case of his equally illustrious predecessor, Herodotus, things are not as clear cut. As one sees from the final clause of the work’s proem, he too is interested in causal explanation – to answer the question “why they, i.e. the Greeks and the barbarians, waged war against each other”.²⁷ However, his explanation in many cases implies moral considerations, and frequently can be said to coincide with moral evaluation, with the idea of *hybris*, playing a decisive role.²⁸

However it is in Roman historiography that parallels to the Chinese situation are particularly close. The Roman historians’ view of the course of Roman history assumes the same connection between conduct and outcome, between doing and faring which the Chinese historians see at work with respect to the rise and fall of their dynasties. Sallust, Livy and, to some extent, Tacitus, attribute Rome’s rise to world rule primarily to her superior morals: to the fact that the conduct of the Romans had been for a long time determined by manliness and fairness in their dealings with the outside world, and by piety and communal spirit in those with each other, and all three historians see a degeneration of morals as liable to bring about the decline and, eventually, the collapse of Roman power.²⁹ In this context, just like the Chinese historians, they take it as their historiographical duty to convey both historical insight and – coinciding with it – moral orientation, with Livy being the most outspoken (translation T. J. Luce).³⁰

“My wish is that each reader will pay the closest attention to the following: how men lived, what their moral principles were, under what leaders and by what measures at home and abroad our empire was one and extended; then let him follow in his mind how, as discipline broke down bit by bit, morality at first foundered; how it next subsided in ever greater collapse and then began to topple headlong in ruin – until the advent of our own age. In which we can endure neither our vices nor the remedies

26 Thinking, p. 44. Cf. also Discourses, p. 36f.

27 Herodotus 1, proem.

28 Cf. e.g. the historian’s treatment of Croesus in Book 1 and Xerxes in Books 7–9.

29 Cf. in particular Sallust, *Catiline* 6–13; Livy, preface; Tacitus, *Histories* 2,1–3, *Annals* 4,32–35.

30 Preface 9–10. Cf. also Sallust, *Catiline* 4, *Jugurtha* 4.

needed to cure them. The special and salutary effect of the study of history is to behold evidence of every sort of behavior set forth as on a splendid memorial; from it you may select for yourself and for your country what to emulate, what to avoid, whether basely begun or basely concluded.”

Another parallel concerns the treatment of individual agents. From the beginning of Roman historiography the authors present individual agents as *exempla* which can inspire good conduct and deter from bad conduct. Accordingly, evaluative statements throughout play an important role, and often “factual judgment coincides with moral judgment”; namely when moral conduct leads to success, immoral conduct to failure. However, in Rome as in China this is not always the case, and it is more and more often *not* the case in the imperial period. Thus it is no surprise but important to note that the closest correspondence with Sima Qian’s way of compensating the injustice of history through the justice of historiography is to be found in Tacitus. Having – very much like Sima Qian (Wudi) – experienced the rule of an autocratic emperor (Domitian) and therefore being well aware that not every individual received the fate he or she deserved, the Roman historian explicitly stresses the importance of moral evaluation in historiography:³¹ “This I regard as history’s highest function, to let no worthy action be uncommemorated, and to hold out the reprobation of posterity as a terror to evil words and deeds”. Sima Qian would not have hesitated to subscribe to this principle.

Thus, in summary, both the combination of factual and moral judgment, and the stress on the latter when the synthesis of both is not to be realized, seem to connect Chinese and Roman historiography, rather than to set them apart.

5. War and Peace

Wong Young-tse devotes one section of his paper on Sima Qian to the topic of “A Humanistic View of War”. Taking up Lei Haizong’s 雷海宗 idea of the “‘a-military culture’ of traditional China”, he points out that Sima Qian was puzzled by unjust wars, especially if they were successful like Qin’s successive conquest of China, disapproved of Wudi’s 武帝 expansionist policy against the Xiongnu, and, in general, presented battles with restraint and military heroes such as Xiang Yu and Li Guang 李廣 almost exclusively as tragic ones.³²

Wong does not look at Greco-Roman historiography, but if one does, one encounters a fundamental difference between the two historiographical traditions. Just like its predecessor, epic poetry, Greco-Roman historiography has in

³¹ *Annals* 3,65,1.

³² Humanism, p. 59.

war its most preferred subject matter. The orientation towards war can already be observed in Herodotus. Although his concept of history is far-reaching and includes many aspects of civilization – aspects, so to speak, of the history of peace – the connecting thread of his work is the military dispute between Greeks and Barbarians. Accordingly, he begins with the history of the Lydian Empire, the first Eastern power the Greeks found themselves confronted with, and ends in the broad description of the Persian Wars. The fascination that the sheer size of military undertakings exerts on Herodotus becomes particularly clear when, at the beginning of his description of Xerxes' Greek campaign, he proves that it had been the biggest military endeavor ever undertaken.³³ Thucydides uses the first twenty chapters of his work to demonstrate the same for the Peloponnesian War. Turning to Rome, one is struck by the fact that even a man of such unmilitary nature as Livy, when it comes to the description of the Second Punic War (to which he devotes ten books!), explains in great detail that the war he is about to narrate was by far the largest one ever fought.³⁴ Finally, just as characteristic is the well-known passage in Tacitus, in which the historian of the early Imperial Age deplores the changed political conditions that have deprived historiography of its only really worthy material (translation A. J. Church / W. J. Brodribb):³⁵

“Much of what I have related and shall have to relate, may perhaps, I am aware, seem petty trifles to record. But no one must compare my annals with the writings of those who have described Rome in old days. They told of great wars, of the storming of cities, of the defeat and capture of kings, or whenever they turned by preference to home affairs, they related, with a free scope for digression, the strivings of consuls with tribunes, land and corn-laws, and the struggles between the commons and the aristocracy. My labors are circumscribed inglorious; peace wholly unbroken or but slightly disturbed, dismal misery in the capital, an emperor careless about the enlargement of the empire, such is my theme”.

Thus, there can be no doubt that the Greco-Roman historians are more appreciative of war as the object of their activity than Sima Qian and his Chinese colleagues.

6. Conclusion

If one compares ancient Chinese and Greco-Roman historiography one tends to look immediately for differences, and differences there undoubtedly are. Our contributors are therefore correct in pointing up the following. First, Chinese

³³ Herodotus 7,20–21.

³⁴ Livy 21,1.

³⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 4,32.

historians concentrate more on the individual as a decisive factor in history than their Western counterparts. The latter do not underestimate the importance of individual agents, but make more room for supra-individual trends and factors. Formal expression of this difference is the fact that, starting with Sima Qian's *Shi ji*, the most representative historical works in China contains large sections of independent biographies, whereas Western histories confine themselves to short comprehensive appraisals of significant individuals within the main narrative. Second, related to the preceding, moral evaluation seems to have more importance in Chinese than in Western historiography. There is a strong tendency to see a connection between moral conduct and success or failure, and the moral evaluation of individuals is a constant concern of historians. Finally, there is a difference between Western and Chinese historians in terms of their principal subject matter. For Western historians the most important and impressive topic seems to be war. For Chinese historians the peaceful administration of the realm is just as or even more important a topic. Cultural achievements are more appreciated than military ones.

Having accepted these points, it is important to realize that these differences are founded on common ground, i. e. appear against the background of fundamental common features. The first is the very development of an interest in history, of the belief that occupation with the past is worthwhile, and can help us cope with the present and the future. The second is the conviction that such occupation can be useful only if appropriate attention is paid to factuality, i. e. to what really happened, or, to quote Ranke, "wie es eigentlich gewesen ist", since otherwise no valid lessons for present and future can be drawn. Third, both Chinese and Western historians understand history as human history, i. e. history made and suffered by men, with divine or supernatural forces staying to a large extent out of consideration. Finally, both Chinese historiography and Western historiography strive for intellectual insight as well as for moral orientation. They do so with different emphasis, but at least in Roman historiography the will to convey a moral message beside imparting intellectual understanding is as distinct as in its Chinese counterpart, and the idea that in cases where moral conduct and factual outcome are not appropriately matched the justice of historiography has to compensate for the injustice of history seems to be a guiding principle for Tacitus as well as for Sima Qian.

On the whole, it is most remarkable that, quite independently of each other, Chinese and Greco-Roman culture developed a comparable historical consciousness and comparable forms of writing history. They thus provide us with another example of humankind's experiencing common needs and finding common ways of satisfying them. Against this backdrop differences appear not so much as dividing lines which prevent mutual understanding but rather as variations which enrich and enliven human life and human culture.

7. Two Traditions of Historiography

I should like to welcome most warmly this initiative for an ‘intercultural discussion’ of problems of historiography. I should also like to thank the three Chinese participants for their contributions, for two reasons in particular; in the first place, for extending our knowledge of Chinese historiography. As the three contributors are no doubt well aware, Western historians (Sinologists apart) have rarely heard of more than half a dozen Chinese historians at most, while between them the four articles cite the work of about twenty scholars. In the second place, the four articles try to meet Western historians half-way, or more than half-way, by offering comparisons between the Chinese tradition and the Western tradition, from Herodotus and Thucydides via Hegel and Lord Acton to Isaiah Berlin, Carl Hempel and Herbert Butterfield.

In what follows, attempting to move on from the position I adopted in an essay that Jörn Rüsen asked me to write nearly twenty years ago, I should like to compare the two historiographical traditions, the Western one that I have studied at first hand and the Chinese one as presented by professors Huang, Wong and Hu.¹ I shall examine both similarities and differences between the two traditions; discuss what the term ‘humanist history’ might mean in these two contexts; consider the social situations in which history was written in the two traditions; and finally suggest how deeper comparisons might be made from both sides in the future.

The limitations of this enterprise should be made clear right from the start. The phrase ‘Western historiography’, as I (and doubtless my Western colleagues as well) shall be using the term, is a kind of shorthand for several hundred individuals, while ‘Chinese historiography’ will refer to the twenty-odd historians mentioned by Professors Huang, Wong and Hu, together with a few names that I should like to introduce into the discussion later. Comparison, always risky, becomes particularly rash in a situation like this. However, there can be no progress without taking risks.

¹ Peter Burke, “Western Historical Thinking in a Global Perspective – 10 Theses”, in: Jörn Rüsen (ed.), *Western Historical Thinking*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002, pp. 15–30.

I

As presented by the three Chinese scholars, Chinese historians over many centuries presented their narratives about the past as a storehouse of examples for their readers. However, far from being a peculiarity of the Chinese tradition, exemplarity was for a long time central to the Western tradition as well.² The famous claim made by Cicero (106–43 BCE) that history (that is, the past, as interpreted in books about the past) teaches how to live (*historia magistra vitae*) was quoted for centuries by western historians in order to justify their activity, famously described by Lord Bolingbroke (1678–1751) as ‘philosophy teaching by example’. Like the *exempla* so often found in medieval sermons, these examples were primarily moral.³ Readers and listeners were urged to follow the good examples and avoid the bad ones. However, again as in China, there was also a tradition of offering examples that taught wisdom rather than virtue, especially political advice for rulers: Thucydides (ca. 460?–400? BCE) and Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) stand out in this respect.

The concern with exemplarity underlies what might be called the allegorical approach to history, by which I mean speaking about one period to convey a message about another (usually the present).⁴ In the West, the tradition of allegorical history is a long one. In Elizabethan England, for instance, the concern with Elizabeth’s possible successor and the danger of civil war underlay an interest in the reign of Richard II, who was deposed by Henry IV, leading to the Wars of the Roses. The publication in 1599 of a history of the reign of Henry IV led to the imprisonment of its author. Shakespeare was more fortunate, but his play *Richard II* was interpreted at the time as a reference to his own time. The queen herself is recorded to have remarked, ‘I am Richard II, know you not that?’⁵

In the case of China, Westerners of my generation remember that during the Cultural Revolution, a major stir was caused by the historian Wu Han’s 吳晗 play, set in the sixteenth century, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* (*Hai Rui ba guan* 海瑞罷官).⁶ Was this relatively recent example of allegorical history unusual, or does it belong to a tradition?

It has been argued, notably by Reinhart Koselleck (1923–2006), that the tradition of exemplarity was dominant in the early modern period but that it was

2 Peter Burke, “Exemplarity and Anti-exemplarity in Early Modern Europe”, in: A. Lianeri (ed.) *The Western Time of Ancient History: historiographical encounters with the Greek and Roman pasts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 48–59.

3 Jean-Claude Schmitt (ed.), *Prêcher d'exemples*, Paris: Stock, 1985.

4 Peter Burke, “History as Allegory”, in: *Inti* 45 (1997), pp. 337–51.

5 J. E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (1934), Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1960, p. 387.

6 Clive Ansley, *The Heresy of Wu Han: his play Hai Rui's Dismissal and its Role in China's Cultural Revolution*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971.

broken in the late eighteenth century, the famous turning-point or *Sattelzeit* in Western culture.⁷ However, it may be worth making two points that qualify Koselleck's generalization without destroying it. In the first place, the value of exemplarity was sometimes challenged in the sixteenth century, notably by Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540) and Michel de Montaigne (1533–92). As the American critic Timothy Hampton has claimed in a perceptive essay on this topic, 'Humanism needs and promotes exemplarity even as it subverts it'.⁸

Guicciardini criticized the generalizations of his friend Machiavelli on the grounds that they were 'put forward too absolutely' (*posto troppo assolutamente*), whereas 'cases are different' (*i casi sono vari*), and human affairs 'differ according to the times and the other events' (*si varia secondo la condizione de' tempi ed altre occorrenze che girano*).⁹ As for Montaigne, he claimed that no two men judge the same thing in the same way, that 'every *exemplum* limps' [*tout exemple cloche*] and that it 'simply foolish to chase after foreign *exempla*' [*c'est pure sottise qui nous fait courir après les exemples étrangers*].¹⁰ It seems that Zhang Xuecheng 章學成, a leading figure in Professor Hu's essay, took up a similar position in the eighteenth century.

In the second place, despite criticisms, exemplarity long survived. In nineteenth-century French schools, history was expected to teach virtue as well as patriotism.¹¹ In the English-speaking world, the best-selling early twentieth-century *Children's Encyclopaedia* included 'the child's book of golden deeds'. These deeds offered what modern psychologists call role models – a phrase that implies that, even today, exemplarity has not completely lost its appeal.¹²

The term 'humanism' has already occurred in this comment and it is time to try to define it, or more exactly to distinguish two different meanings of the word in the Western tradition. We might call these two meanings the 'philosophical' and the 'philological' (or 'antiquarian'). Philosophical humanism makes 'man', in the sense of humanity, 'the measure of all things'. It is concerned with the human world rather than the divine or natural worlds. Humanists often claimed to be concerned with what they called 'the human condition' (Poggio Bracciolini, 1380–1459), or 'anthropology', in its original sense of the study of man.

7 Reinhart Koselleck, "Historia Magistra Vitae" (1967), rpt. in: *Futures Past* (1979): English translation, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985, pp. 21–38.

8 Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 16.

9 Francesco Guicciardini, *Considerazioni intorno ai Discorsi del Machiavelli*, ed. Roberto Palamarocchi, Bari: Laterza, 1933, p. 8, 19, 41.

10 Montaigne, *Essays*, Book 3 (1588), chapter 13.

11 Pim den Boer, *History as a Profession: the study of history in France, 1818–1914* (English translation, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 165.

12 Cf. Borge Bakker, *The Exemplary Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Humanism in this sense seems to be rather similar in Europe and East Asia. For example, the Chinese slogan of ‘the cultivation of the self’ (*xiushen* 修身) would have made very good sense to leading Western humanists from Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca, 1304–1374) to Montaigne. It is this form of humanism that underlies the interest in exemplary history.

On the other hand, many so-called humanists were more interested in philology, in grammar and in rhetoric. Montaigne made fun of a philological humanist who sat up at night to study: “do you think he is searching in his books for a way to become better, happier or wiser? Nothing of the kind. He will teach posterity the metre of Plautus’s verses, and the correct spelling of a Latin word, or he will die in the attempt”.¹³

No less than their philosophical colleagues, the philological humanists were concerned with history. Their interest in the history of language, especially of Latin, made them acutely aware of anachronism, leading them to expose documents that were ‘forged’ in the sense of claiming to be older than the period in which they were written. It was above all his awareness of changes in language that led Lorenzo Valla (c.1407–1457) to claim that the so-called ‘Donation of Constantine’, a document conveying land to the Church, was a forgery. Other humanists known as ‘antiquarians’ studied changes in the material culture of the past especially the ancient Roman past.

I have no wish to claim that philological or antiquarian humanism was absent from China. It is not mentioned by Professors Huang, Wong and Hu but westerners have learned of *kaozhengxue* from the American scholar Benjamin Elman, who has noted the use of both philological and antiquarian methods by individuals such as Yan Ruojia 閻若璩 (1636–1704), Wang Mingsheng 王鳴聲 (1722–1797) or Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777) in order to date objects and expose forgeries.¹⁴ The parallel between Western and Chinese scholars might be pursued a little further. Zhang Xuecheng, discussed by Professor Hu, argued that the Six Canonical Books (*liujing* 六經) were historical artefacts, belonging to a particular epoch. In similar fashion, some western scholars, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, gradually developed an approach to the Bible as a historical document or an anthology of historical documents, each needing to be replaced in its original context.

Turning now from the work of individual historians to the institutional support for the writing of history, at least one parallel between China and the West deserves to be noted. The Chinese tradition of an official history supported by emperors is well known and is discussed in the articles of Professors Huang,

13 Montaigne, *Essais*, Book 1 (1580), chapter 39.

14 Benjamin A. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology* (1984), 2nd edn. Los Angeles: Asian-Pacific Institute, 2001.

Wong and Hu as well as in specialized monographs.¹⁵ Official history in the West is a later development, with most examples coming from the last five hundred years. All the same, its importance should not be forgotten.

In Renaissance Italy, for instance, there was a “rise of official historiography of a humanist stamp” by the 1450s, thanks in particular to new princes in need of legitimation such as Alfonso of Aragon in Naples or Francesco Sforza in Milan.¹⁶ At the court of Burgundy, Philip the Good was “one of the first European rulers to appoint an official court chronicler, in the shape of Georges Chastellain”.¹⁷ The rulers of Portugal and Hungary, more new princes, appointed official historians in the fifteenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century more than a hundred such appointments had been made, from Britain to Russia, including figures of the importance of Leibniz (who received a pension from the Duke of Hanover), Vico (appointed by the King of the Two Sicilies) and Voltaire (appointed by the King of France).

II

It is time to consider the differences between the two historiographical traditions. The Chinese tradition appears to reveal a high degree of continuity (until c. 1900, at least) and a considerable degree of homogeneity (unless this is an optical illusion resulting from the small sample of historians discussed by our Chinese colleagues). By contrast, the Western tradition is marked by great variety and also by discontinuities, including the gap of some 1500 years between Herodotus and Thucydides and their rediscovery at the Renaissance. Some scholars have questioned whether the ancient Greeks belong to our European tradition at all, although they were adopted into it at the Renaissance and more thoroughly in the early 19th century.

Variety is only to be expected, given that the ‘West’ is an umbrella term to refer to both Europe and the New World. Europe was and is various enough by itself, with its fifty or so languages, a great diversity of ideas, and political regimes ranging from absolute monarchies via constitutional monarchies to republics. By contrast China, given so many centuries of the dominance of mandarins, the imperial system and the philosophy of Confucius might have been expected to produce a relatively homogeneous historical tradition.

15 Denis Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History Under the T'ang*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

16 Gary Ianziti, *Humanist Historiography under the Sforzas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

17 Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Good*, Harlow: Longmans, 1970, p. 157.

Turning to more specific points, we find contrasts in genre, in forms of explanation, in periodization, and in the kind of person who wrote history. Western historiography may be divided into genres such as the chronicle or annals, organized year by year; narrative histories that escape from these confines; biographies; local histories; and monographs on particular institutions, such as the Church, or even artefacts such as lamps or shoes (the topic of some antiquarian studies produced in the seventeenth century). In China, by contrast, although local history was a separate genre, biographies formed part of general histories, thanks perhaps to the example of Sima Qian.

Turning to explanation, the long western tradition of stressing divine intervention in the course of history contrasts with the secular approach of the Chinese. I have suggested elsewhere that the notion of collective agency is a distinctive feature of western historiography and was glad to see that our Chinese colleagues agree. Even when similar trends can be identified in both the West and China, as in the case of antiquarian and philological research, the timing seems to be different, with the sixteenth century as a high point in the first case and the eighteenth century in the second.

Finally, there is a major contrast between the kinds of people who wrote history. Where Chinese history was mainly written by scholar-officials, in the West between 400 and 1800 or even beyond, in the West the importance of the clergy (monks, bishops, etc) as historians is difficult to deny. Military history was written by soldiers, from medieval knights to retired army officers. Political history was sometimes written by former ministers, counsellors or administrators, among them Machiavelli, Guicciardini, and Edward Hyde Lord Clarendon, the historian of the English Civil War. There is also a long tradition of history written by teachers in universities and schools.

III

To end this comment I should like to suggest some ways in which this intercultural discussion might be continued, and in particular what western historians might like their Chinese colleagues to tell them. Three points spring to mind, to my mind at any rate.

1. It would be useful, to say the least, to know something about a much larger group of Chinese historians.
2. It would be good to see a social history of Chinese historiography. Was it all written by mandarins for mandarins? Did merchants either produce or consume works of history? Did women read history? Many have done so in the West from the seventeenth century, if not before, to the present. And finally: when did the professionalization of historical writing in China begin?

Finally, so far as recent centuries are concerned, Western historians would like to learn about the reception in China of foreign models such as those of Ranke, Marx, and the *Annales* School. How far have these models been welcomed, how far condemned (and by whom)? How faithfully, or on the other hand, how freely have they been followed? In this respect, Professor Hu's remarks about Qian Mu 錢穆 were at once fascinating and tantalizing. Does his adoption of the 'string and mesh style' show that he was fundamentally conservative, or was he consciously pouring his new wine into old bottles so that he would not shock his readers?

8. Humanistic Tradition and the Concept of a “National History” in China

Turning towards a new century and facing a new role for China in the global context, one should welcome all endeavors to shed new light on the historiographical tradition of China from antiquity until the present, when China was confronted with western cultures which at first sight seemed fundamentally different from that of China. The papers point out humanistic tendencies and the inner-worldly outlook of traditional Chinese historiography. Starting with the prominent examples of Sima Qian 司馬遷 and Zhang Xuezheng 章學成, they throw an optimistic light on traditional Chinese historiography. What is missing and intrigues me is the reluctance to ask how historiography meant to legitimate dynastic power without reflecting upon the dark sides of traditional imperial actions. Only in the last paper by Chang-Tze Hu is there a reference to the debates on traditional China and its historiography since the late 19th century. Yet, before dealing with the impact of the modern West we know of other periods when China was confronted with neighboring cultures and different political systems. It would have been interesting to look more deeply at such earlier encounters. To confine the impact from the outside on Chinese historical thinking and philosophy to the confrontation with Japan and the West since the end of the nineteenth century is understandable, but there have been challenges from other sides throughout history. In addition, it would have broadened our picture of “Chinese historical thinking” if we would have learnt more about, to give just one example, millenaristic movements or apocalyptic concepts and how they were dealt with in historiography.

Huang in the first paper (*Historical Discourses*) underlines the commentarial character of Chinese historiography aiming at the “root causes”. In examining the “complex relationship” between “events” and “principles” he intends to show that traditional Chinese historiography is “a rich synthesis between history and philosophy, with history operating as a function of philosophy” (*Discourses*, p. 27). Speaking of the unity of literature, history, and philosophy in traditional Chinese learning it seems that he does not differentiate various spheres of value and meaning. Although it is generally accepted that historical interpretation was

usually intertwined with political conflicts, one might ask whether there could not be possibly another description of the role of historiography. There is no doubt that since antiquity “struggles have broken out between historians and the authorities over the interpretation of history” (Discourses, p. 26). But what was the character of the struggle and did it not change over time? Furthermore, was there no change in the self-conception of the literati class? To this Huang gives one answer in his second paper when he takes Song China as a turning point thus distinguishing between pre-Northern Song on the one side and the historiography under the so-called Neo-Confucianism with the discourse on *li* 理 (“principle”); since it is common knowledge that the Chinese literati, in spite of all continuities, changed in its character over time. This stands in some contrast to the statement “from antiquity on, struggles have broken out between historians and the authorities [...] down to the present day” (Discourses, p. 26).

I also would like to question another statement. Addressing the observation of the main trends of history by the historian, how did the historians interrelate “the rise and fall of dynasties” on the one hand and the “heights and depths of humanity” on the other? (Discourses, p. 27) It is very charming to describe the historical discourses as resembling a “living library” but what were the hermeneutical means used by the visitors of this library and how was this library maintained? The spheres of knowledge and how there was interaction between them needs further investigation. Regarding the relationship between objective principle and historical fact Huang speaks of the tendency of the Neo-Confucian “Principle” to serve as a sort of “Procrustean bed”.

On the other hand Huang points out the ideal of comprehensiveness in traditional Chinese historical writings as a means to distill a principle of universal necessity and by thus finding out general laws of history. On the other hand he stresses the fact that Chinese historians were interested in an “interpretive philosophy of history” and not an “analytic philosophy of history”. (Discourses, p. 32) He ends up with the statement that the principles derived by traditional Chinese historians are concrete and were not aiming at universally applicable abstract principles. Thus “the craft of writing history and ethics become one and the same”. (Discourses, p. 34) What does it imply, however, when Huang states that the use of moral judgment in Chinese civilization replaced the role of final judgment in Judeo-Christian civilization? He explains: “The concept of final judgment in Western civilization was established on the idea of a covenant between humanity and God; however, the idea of historical judgment in Chinese civilization was based on a sort of tacit moral duty among human beings.” (Discourses, p. 37) This statement reiterates the confrontation of a monotheistic world-conception on the one side and an inner-worldly one on the other.

In his second paper Huang emphasizes that “historical thinking in traditional China is humanistic thinking with Chinese characteristics”. (Thinking, p. 41)

This is in no way astonishing; what Huang wants to underline is the fact that man is regarded as "the agent of change in history" (ibid.). I am, however, not prepared to easily accept the idealization of Chinese Humanism in contrast to the Western one. That "human beings must struggle to free themselves of the shackles of the fate" is not confined to the Western world in the Greek tradition, although I admit that the role of the gods or the supernatural is differently conceived of in the Chinese and the Western world respectively. Furthermore, how will he provide arguments for the assumption that in China "historical thinking is the affirmation of the free will" (p. 43); is the contingency in history not depending on a multiplicity of causes?

I would also doubt the following proposition: "Throughout Chinese history historians maintained the tradition of writing history as it really was" (p. 46). What does "history as it really was" and what does "strict adherence to the facts as they actually occurred" mean? Nevertheless I would admit that we do find in many instances in China "historian's affirmation of the dignity of man that transcends the boundaries of states and races" (p. 48) which can be taken as an excellent preparation to develop an "open-minded, inclusive new humanism for our age of globalization" (p. 48). But since there still are boundaries and national as well as regional interests, it would have been helpful if the subject of the scope of historiography would have been subject to some reflection. What about the status of non-Chinese cultures inside the Chinese realm – not to mention the historiography on pacification campaigns?

Similarly to Huang's approach, Wong contrasts China and the West. He starts by defining Renaissance humanism as turning "man's eyes from Heaven back to earth" (p. 49) whereas in China humanism was rooted from earliest times in ancestor worship. He quotes Ping-ti Ho's statement that "no religion in history is as humanistic as that of ancient China". (p. 49) Thus he concludes that the Duke of Zhou (Zhougong 周公) never fully entrusted Heaven but regarded the key as residing "in men". Starting from these assumptions Wong turns Sima Qian into an early representative of a Chinese enlightenment. The notion that the "biographical approach" in Chinese historiography is in my opinion the strongest argument to attribute to Chinese historiography at least since Han times a humanistic and men-centered approach. In this context the criticism of the "necromancers" (*fangshi* 方士) is as crucial as the conviction of the difference or at least distant relationship between heaven and men. Other concepts which count here are that the pursuit of happiness is seen as an integral part of a peaceful society. Complementarily, the disapproval of the waging of war by some Han emperors, especially by Han Wudi 漢武帝, is seen as one aspect of Sima Qian's humanistic attitude which gained ground in the progressing Confucianization of China that reached its peak in twelfth century Song China. Thus Sima Qian is regarded as having "set the example of Chinese historical writing for the next two

thousand and five hundred years". (p. 62) This holds especially true since he, besides recording successes and glorious deeds of all sorts, also noticed "the dark side of his time".

Hu starts his presentation with a report on late eighteenth century advisors' rhetoric; emphasizing that history was not only regarded as functioning as an admonisher, but that it at the same time had a "plural meaning" in the sense that history is providing "precedents" (盤裏判例). An exponent of such "exemplary historical thinking" is, in his view, Zhang Xuecheng, who – challenged by Dai Zhen 戴震 – developed a "theory of historical knowledge" of his own. Apparently Zhang favored the so-called 'annalistic style' and regarded the event-oriented recordings based on this style as coming "closest to the development concept". (p. 62) The "Six Canonical Books" of the classical tradition he regarded as showing the *Dao* 道 in all its facets but not exhausting the *Dao*. By this he propagated that the future could offer new facets of the *Dao*. The author then turns to the concepts of "historical insight" (*shishi* 史識) and "a historian's moral integrity" (*shide* 史德), which after having been originally intertwined became later "independent from one another". Thus, historical records and political events remained essentially bound to texts which are "beneficial for the country and for the future". (p. 70) This concept, however, was challenged by the insight that China was not the "land under heaven" any more. This threat brought about new concepts as conceived of by Kang Youwei 康有為 and others and leading to a concept of a "national history" as it was propagated by Qian Mu 錢穆, e.g. in his *Guoshi dagang* 國史大綱, with a statecraft ideology at its center. By this the "national history" of China from its beginnings was reconceived. When Hu states in his concluding remarks that in his view change in historical thinking in modern China was of "universal relevance", representing "the transition from 'exemplary' to 'genetic'" (p. 85), I am inclined to consent. I am convinced, however, that the record of China's past give us the opportunity to study a historical development in the areas we now call China which is certainly much different from the story of Europe. It is still open to question which side could learn more from the other. It is at the same time open which "statecraft" would become the structural underpinning of a new humanistic historiography aiming at finding out routes to a just and peaceful world.

9. National History and Humanism: Reflections on a Difficult Relationship

The four articles in this book amount to a thorough and thought-provoking exploration of humanism in Chinese historiography and historical thinking. Huang Chun-chieh argues that traditional historical thinking in China is akin to humanism in its focus on the individual as agent in history – a theme that also reappears in some of the other articles. Chinese civilization is seen very much as a civilization of continuity in the sense of a stable relationship of, on the one hand, humanity to nature and, on the other hand, humanity to the supernatural. One might want to put a question mark behind such an idea of continuity and ask whether it might be an idea in need of historization. It seems also questionable to me, whether non-human explanatory factors in the West were necessarily weak; the turn to structural forms of history is something, after all, which appears very late in the day in the west and is certainly strongest in the twentieth century – without ever being able to eclipse a much more traditional history writing focused on human agency.¹ Yet I find extremely intriguing suggestions that linear forms of history writing were much more prevalent in the West, whereas a more mosaic approach dominated history writing in China. I am however, no expert at all on Chinese historical thinking, hence my ability to provide meaningful comments on those very interesting comparative points is limited.

This is also why I would like to focus my comments on some aspect of these articles that I know something about, namely the relationship between a national and state-centered historical thinking and national identity.² Huang Chun-chieh in his article argues very powerfully that Chinese historians as imperial officials were state-centered, i. e. centered on the imperial state. What is more, he argues that many of these historians had a strong self-perception as guardians of truth.

1 Lutz Raphael, *Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeitalter der Extreme: Theorien, Methoden, Tendenzen von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich: Beck, 2010; Daniel Woolf, *A Global History of History*, Cambridge: CUP, 2011; Georg G. Iggers / Q. Edward Wang, with Supriya Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, London: Longman, 2008.

2 Stefan Berger, with Christoph Conrad, *The Past as History – National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Europe*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014.

Both of these phenomena can also be observed in Europe.³ In his second article, Huang examines the didactic character of traditional Chinese historiography, arguing that it was informed by a desire to learn lessons from the past. Historians related events to moral norms and values that often followed Confucian teachings. Many were concerned with distilling universals from particulars. Once again one is reminded strongly of Enlightenment history in Europe which narrated the particular only so as to follow the universal progress of mankind through the ages.⁴ The concern with generalizations, laws and with a history that could provide the basis for moral judgment as well as political critique are all recognizable to the historian of historiography of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe.⁵ Both Chinese and European historiography derived a strong philosophical orientation from this tradition.

The strength of Confucianism in Chinese historical thinking is confirmed by Hu Chang-Tze, who argues that history in China was traditionally perceived as a collection of precedents that were capable of advising present-day actors. Of course, the tradition of *historia magistra vitae* is not entirely unknown in Europe.⁶ But it is the way in which Hu links Confucian ethics to the national principle in 1920s China that is truly intriguing for the historian of national history. Arguing that history had to be practically useful, many historians in China began to write national history in order to underpin national identity. According to Hu, this desire comes out of a Confucian tradition. Whilst I am in no position to doubt this, I do wonder whether, by the 1920s, some familiarity with European models of history writing, perhaps via Japan, were not also influential in moving Chinese historiography into a national direction.⁷ A nationalizing historiography, Hu argues powerfully, abandons the mosaic approach, where history consisted of a plurality of different examples that could be picked out of a wide and chaotic stream of history, and instead became more one-directional, resembling the linear process that had been part and parcel of Eu-

3 The classic study of Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History. The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present Day*, rev. edn, Middletown/CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012, analyzed a typically statist and truth-oriented German nineteenth and early twentieth-century historiography.

4 On Enlightenment historiography, see Hans-Peter Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.

5 Eckhardt Fuchs, "Conceptions of Scientific History in the Nineteenth-Century West", in: Georg G. Iggers / Q. Edward Wang (eds.), *Turning Points in Historiography: a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Rochester/NY: Rochester University Press, 2002, pp. 147–162.

6 Reinhart Koselleck, "Historia Magistra Vitae. The Dissolution of the Topos into the Perspective of a Modernized Historical Process", in: idem, *Futures Past: On the Historical Semantics of Time*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 26ff.

7 Edward Q. Wang, "Between Myth and History: the Construction of a National Past in Modern East Asia", in: Stefan Berger (ed.), *Writing National History: a Global Perspective*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, pp. 126–154.

ropean historical thinking for much longer. If Wong Young-tsu argues in his chapter that Confucian humanism helped China move towards rationalism, then, if we follow Hu, it also moved China towards nationalism. In Sima Qian 司馬遷, Wong argues, we find an impressive example of a historian whose biographical and humanist approach stayed true to Confucian principle, demasking corrupt and brutal officials, but one wonders what happened to that humanism under the impact of the practical nationalism that spread in Chinese historiography from the 1920s and was arguably only adopted and painted red by the Communist rulers of China.

In Western history, humanism arguably has had a complex relationship with national history or the principle of nationality. By common consent, humanistic ideas in Europe emerged with Roman philosophy (Stoa).⁸ They are then developed in controversial relationship to Christianity and got their modern feature in the Enlightenment of the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries humanists already engaged in transnational debates regarding the value and worth of particular nations in Europe showing that they themselves were early champions of nationalism in Europe.⁹ The development of the Western idea of science, the European Enlightenments, bourgeois humanism and its deadly opponent – socialist/communist humanism all built on this rediscovery. As we can see, humanist projects in the West have a long and distinguished pedigree.

Humanism traditionally put the individual and individual development or individuation at the center of attention: it was about protecting the individual and defining the individuality of human beings. The values of humanity included in particular the notion of human dignity. However, surprising as it may be, the humanistic discourse for a long time ignored terrible forms of social injustice in the West. Furthermore, by stressing the superiority of Western humanism vis-à-vis other cultures, humanistic ideas justified forms of Western imperialism and colonization.¹⁰ Reactions against these social and global injustices were prominent in Europe, from the Jacobinism of the French Revolution to the socialist and communist projects in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Socialist or communist humanism sought to balance social justice and individuation, but it

8 Hubert Cancik, *Europa – Antike – Humanismus. Humanistische Versuche und Vorarbeiten*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011; Jörn Rüsen, “Classical Humanism – a Historical Survey”, in: Jörn Rüsen (ed.), *Approaching Humankind. Towards an Intercultural Humanism*, Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2013, pp. 161–184.

9 Johannes Helmuth / Ulrich Muhlack / Gerrit Walther (eds.), *Diffusion des Humanismus. Studien zur nationalen Geschichtsschreibung europäischer Humanisten*, Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002; Caspar Hirschi, *Wettkampf der Nationen. Konstruktionen einer deutschen Ehrgemeinschaft an der Wende vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit*, Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005.

10 Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

resulted in some of the worst political crimes and mass murders of the twentieth century.¹¹ The record of the humanist project thus is hardly an unblemished one.

‘Humanism’ then belongs to those key Western concepts, which, according to Dipesh Chakrabarty, need to be provincialized and decentered, if they are to be made fruitful in a global discursive framework.¹² Western humanism needs to be adapted for a global discourse on humanity. This has been, for many years now, the project of Jörn Rüsen. Alongside other humanists, Rüsen has always been insisting on the universality of some of humanism’s key values, especially the value of human dignity. If we follow Jörn Rüsen, humanism can serve as that universal foundation in a truly intercultural dialogue.¹³ I admit that I find his promotion of intercultural humanism under conditions of a globalizing world very attractive. Especially as it seems difficult to deny that the search for a set of mutually recognized values today seems more vital than ever. It seems indeed relevant in so many everyday life situations in today’s world to invoke Immanuel Kant’s famous dictum that every human being is always more than a means to the purposes of others and indeed a purpose in him- or herself.¹⁴ Every human being deserves respect and each one has the right to live his life according to his own determination. It is, of course, a utopian project, in the sense that it opens up normative horizons rather than depict the situation as it is today. However, many publications from Rüsen’s big humanism project show that there are variants of humanism in many world cultures and that therefore humanism can be established in intercultural dialogue as possible normative basis of an emerging world society.¹⁵ The articles in this volume are another example of this. However, there remain a number of key problems still to be overcome, not the least the ongoing tension between the socio-cultural variety of humankind and the theoretical universalism of humanism.

What I would like to suggest in the following is that this normative horizon of expectation that is called intercultural humanism is incompatible with the national principle and that historical writing that is, first and foremost, oriented towards that national principle, i.e. national history writing, is unsuitable in fostering intercultural humanism. In that sense, the turn in China to national historiography in the 1920s is not a continuation but a disruption of forms of

11 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror. The Communist Problem*, Boston/ MA: Beacon Press, 1969.

12 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

13 Jörn Rüsen / Henner Laass (eds.), *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective. Experiences and Expectations*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2009.

14 Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, BA 65 (*Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*), 1st edition Riga: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1785, p. 65.

15 Christoph Antweiler, *Inclusive Humanism. Anthropological Basics for a Realistic Cosmopolitanism*, Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2012.

humanist history writing. In other words, intercultural humanism needs to move towards overcoming the methodological nationalism that still informs much history writing across the globe. It can link in productive ways with a variety of alternative conceptualizations of history writing, including comparative, transnational and international history writing that relativizes national frameworks.¹⁶ In other words, if we are serious about promoting the values of intercultural humanism, we should also seek to relativize our commitment to national history writing and open our horizons to other forms of conceptualizing the past. In at least six ways, the promotion of intercultural humanism clashes with the promotion of national master narratives:

Firstly, intercultural humanism clashes most obviously with the national principle in its deliberate attempt to move beyond ethnocentricity,¹⁷ which is, after all, still the basis of many nationality discourses. Ethnic understandings of the nation were arguably among the strongest and most durable ties constructed in nineteenth and early twentieth century national master narratives and although they were often intertwined with other political understandings of the nation, hardly any national master narrative in Europe, not even the French and British were constructed without such ethnocentric underpinnings.¹⁸

Secondly, intercultural humanism arguably also clashes with the national principle in its anthropocentrism. Nationality discourses put the collective of the nation above the value of the individual human being, whereas there is a distinguished tradition in humanism to focus on the individual and its process of individuation. The individualism of the humanistic project runs counter to the attempt of nationality discourses to subjugate the individual under the dictate of the nation. It belongs to the inner core of the nationality principle that the individual is smaller and less important than the national whole and that the individual has to make sacrifices, even the ultimate sacrifice of death, in the name of the nation. Historical national master narratives in Europe built whole canons of national heroes on such acts of sacrifice.¹⁹

Thirdly, an orientation towards national principles has often led to the denigration of human dignity as basic value of cultural orientation. In this way, the

16 Akira Iriye / Pierre-Yves Saunier (eds.), *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009; Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013; Heinz-Gerhard Haupt / Jürgen Kocka (eds.), *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009.

17 See Jörn Rüsen, "How to Overcome Ethnocentrism: Approaches to a Culture of Recognition by History in the 21st Century", in: *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* 1 (2004), pp. 59–74.

18 Stefan Berger / Chris Lorenz (eds.), *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008.

19 Linas Eriksonas, *National Heroes and National Identities: Scotland, Norway and Lithuania*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2004.

nationality principle in historical writing also is in strict opposition to the project of intercultural humanism. National identity, a wise aphorism goes, is built on misunderstandings of a common past and a common hatred of one's neighbors. It is precisely this need of national master narratives to construct 'the other' as enemy or as somehow inferior which lends itself to the denigration of individuals which do not belong to the nation. The denial of their subject status is precisely the precondition for the dehumanization of other human beings, who do not belong to one's own nation, which has justified in modern Europe cases of ethnic cleansing, of war, mass violence and genocide.²⁰

Fourthly, commitment to human dignity in intercultural humanism makes all human beings equal. It recognizes that such equality has religious, ethnic, social and political dimensions. Again, the nationality principle has been violating this commitment to equality and has persistently sought to highlight inequality as basis of national distinction. Whilst national master narratives tend to make all citizens of the nation equal (although there are many pre-democratic national master narratives which rely on the construction of and justification of internal national hierarchizations), they have excluded national minorities and those deemed not to belong both inside and outside the nation. These exclusions have in turn lent credence to forms of social inequality, as it did not give people living in the same nation state access to similar resources and did not provide for equality of opportunity. Inequalities were justified with reference to race, ethnicity, culture, religion and social status.²¹ The National Socialist racial state and its historical master narrative justified inequalities that ultimately led to genocide. But many Protestant and Catholic nation states used the national principle to exclude other Christian denominations from equal treatment with the nation state. Political definitions of the nation which tied notions of citizenship to notions of property and education excluded large sections of the population along social lines. The creation of distinctions is a vital part of national master narratives, and concepts of race, ethnicity, class and politics, not to speak of gender, were vital in introducing structural inequalities.

Fifthly, it is crucial to the intercultural humanist project that each individual can relate to the otherness of others and develop a dialogical relationship to this otherness. Historically, I would argue that the national principle has been the

20 Stefan Berger, "Denationalizing History Teaching and Nationalizing it Differently! Some Reflections on How to Defuse the Negative Potential of National(ist) History Teaching", in: Mario Carretero / Mikel Asensio / María Rodríguez-Moneo (eds.), *History Education and the Construction of National Identities*, Charlotte/NC: Information Age Publishing, 2012, pp. 33–48.

21 Many examples can be found in the microstudies contained in Stefan Berger / Chris Lorenz (eds.), *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.

greatest hurdle in allowing individuals to develop this dialogical relationship to otherness. Precisely by constituting nationality through the exclusion of dialogue oriented towards universal humanity and by concentrating instead on constituting nationality by means of exclusion of otherness, national history has been serving the enemies of intercultural humanism. Thus the nationalization of historical master narratives contributed to national tunnel visions which hid or made invisible transnational interactions and a *histoire croisée* in and beyond Europe that would have fostered such a dialogical relationship to otherness.²² Instead it constructed meaning through the guarding of national borders and attention only to what went on inside those national borders.²³ The non-national came into view only as other or not at all.

Sixthly, it would appear that one of the vital preconditions for the intercultural humanist project to succeed is a minimum degree of social justice within an emerging world society. So far, this social justice has only been guaranteed in a few, mostly western nation states through the nation state, and nation states have been defending their levels of social justice against all attempts to develop a more global sense of social justice.²⁴ Hence, on a global scale there is a strong tension today between the individual and social dimensions of human life. Arguably the national principle here serves as a conservative force preventing imaginative ways of thinking of how to arrive at a more equal global distribution of social justice. Once again, we would argue that national history serves the purposes of underpinning the national orientation of social justice struggles preventing a more transnational or international perspective on the problem.

And yet, despite what I would argue amounts to the ultimate incompatibility of the nationality principle and its accompanying national history with the project of intercultural humanism, one cannot deny that both Western humanism and the Western nationality principle share some commonalities. And yes, one can go further and speak about an interrelationship of the two. The nationality principle like humanism was a major Western export article in the course of colonialism and imperialism, and like humanism, the nationality principle met with and intermingled with various indigenous concepts of nationality, in particular in places such as China or India. Hence both concepts were

22 Michel Espagne, "Comparison and Transfer: a Question of Method", in: Matthias Middell / Lluís Roura y Aulinas (eds.), *Transnational Challenges to National History Writing*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, pp. 36–53.

23 On borders and the construction of national master narratives see Tibor Frank / Frank Hadler (eds.), *Disputed Territories and Shared Pasts: Overlapping National Histories in Modern Europe*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.

24 Colin Crouch, *Making Capitalism Fit For Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013; Wolfgang Streeck, *Gekaufte Zeit: die vertagte Krise des demokratischen Kapitalismus*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2013.

deeply interconnected to projects of appropriation in the context of colonialism/imperialism.²⁵

Both, one could go on, had deep Christian underpinnings. In humanist thinking Christ became the model for humaneness and humanity. And in national thinking, nations became thoughts of God; their history was one of suffering, death and resurrection; some describe themselves in terms of the 'Christ of nations' and in many places nations were sacralized and became sacred objects. And both socialism and communism merged their ideological concerns with those of humanism and nationalism, adapting and appropriating the humanist and national principles to the socialist/communist projects.

Both humanism and the nationality principle were characterized by a considerable amount of tension between their emancipatory promises and their gruesome consequences. They were in essence both extremely janus-faced. One big question to be addressed therefore, before we condemn the national principle to the dustbin of history, is whether the principle of nationality can be saved in a similar way that Jörn Rüsen has attempted to save the idea of humanism and transform it into an intercultural project. I guess this is what liberal nationalists have been attempting for some time now, and hence we need to turn to liberal nationalism to ask whether this idea provides any bases on which to link the national principle to the project of intercultural humanism.

A long succession of liberal nationalists have claimed that the universality of the national principle reinforces humanist values. Johann Gottfried Herder in fact can rightly be addressed as a key humanist and the father of the nationality principle. Many nineteenth-century proponents of the national idea, such as Guiseppe Mazzini and Thomas Babington Macaulay, were convinced of the symbiotic relationship between advances of nation states in Europe and advances of humanist ideas. National master narratives, they and subsequent liberal nationalists have argued, are vital in underpinning liberal democratic nation states which are at the same time the best guarantors of humanist values. The national narratives, they have argued, are, in Michael Walzer's formulation, 'thick languages' which Walzer counterposes to the 'thin languages' of postnationalism and constitutional patriotism.²⁶ Liberal nationalists have indeed argued that it is only the nation state which protects the integrity of the individual and individual rights against the potential terrorism of the majority. And, they argue, social solidarity, which is, after all, also vital to the project of intercultural humanism, would be impossible without the strong bonds provided by national collectives.

25 Many examples can be found in Stefan Berger (ed.), *Writing National Histories: a Global Perspective*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007.

26 Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*, Notre Dame/IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994. See also: Craig Calhoun, *Nations Matter: Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream*, London: Routledge, 2007.

How convincing are those attempts to merge the principles of humanism with the nationality principle? The historical record would suggest to be careful about all-too neat distinctions between good liberal nationalism and bad ethnic nationalism or between good patriotism and its nasty rival nationalism. Time and again we have seen that the nationality principle was invoked to counter the core values of intercultural humanism. The nationality principle, promoted, among other things, through national histories, have been used to foster ethnic cleansing, violence and war. Liberal and illiberal forms of nationalism were equally capable of unleashing the deadly force of nationalism on its victims. Although the historical record of humanism is hardly unblemished, as mentioned before, we have, in my view, an impressive attempt to rescue the idea of humanism. I am not sure the same can be done for the principle of nationality. All emancipatory Western concepts have a dark side, and it is important to recognize this dark side. It needs sustained reflection about what can be done to avoid the dangers of that dark side. Undoubtedly the promotion of greater self-reflexivity is an important step in the right direction. Allan Megill's suggestion to create solidarities below the level of identities may also be a good idea.²⁷ At least we need a recognition that histories have traditionally underpinned identities which in turn raises the question of, in Kwame Anthony Appiah's formulation, the 'ethics of identity'.²⁸

By way of conclusion, I want to underline that, in my view, national history as an identitarian concept and national master narratives cannot be the promoter of humanist values. Any commitment to humanist intercultural values will only be possible if we avoid forging collective national identities and make those identities more self-reflexive, permeable and playful. This will also allow for more attention to transnational, comparative and transfer histories and narratives to be developed and to emerge of their places of hiding. Rules for intercultural communication are best forged, through humanist values, where, thus my proposition, collective national identities are weak. If Huang's conclusion that traditional Chinese historical thinking is a good basis for a 'new humanism' in China, then, in my view, it should distance itself from the active promotion of national identity.

27 Allan Megill, "Historical Representation, Identity, Allegiance", in: Stefan Berger / Linas Eriksonas / Andrew Mycock (eds.), *Narrating the Nation: Representations of History, Media and the Arts*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008, pp. 19–34.

28 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

10. Commenting on Chinese Historical Thinking – a Multifaceted Approach

I am not an expert in Chinese historical thinking. My interest lies in the realm of intercultural communication about basic issues of cultural orientation (with an emphasis on historical thinking). In this respect nothing is more essential than to recognize different traditions in doing history. Today the usual way of doing this is pushing back Western dominance and asserting new intellectual attitudes which allow us to come to terms with efforts to make sense of the human past. My commentary is guided by the question: how can we identify the differences of approach and, at the same time, relate them to each other so that a real discourse with mutual understanding, critique, and enrichment can take place?

The four papers I would like to comment on can be read as answers to this question: they refer to some principles for making sense of the past and present historical paradigms of historiography. Huang's and Wong's texts emphasize traditional Chinese historiography as typically Chinese, even for today, whereas Hu stresses the transformation of this tradition into modern forms of historical thinking.

Whenever it comes to characterizing historical thinking as typical for a cultural tradition, first of all one has to refer to its paradigmatic manifestations. This usually is historiography, accompanied by philosophy (of history). The way of looking at them defines the perspective: either cultural practices or the specific work of more or less professional historians (at the imperial court in China there were highly qualified professionals of a defined social and political status). The phenomena of daily or religious life were scarcely taken into account.

Within this well-defined perspective the issue of particularity requires comparison with other cultures. This is usually identified as the West (if one would take India into account, the similarities between China and the West would be significant.) Since the question goes into fundamentals and not details, the distinctive features of history were identified by the fundamental sense criteria of historical thinking. They are used when the experience of the past is related to the situation of the present in order to understand its temporal dimension (including a future perspective). Only in such a relationship does the past become history. There are

very different approaches of identifying the constitutive principles of this relationship. I prefer a typology of fundamental sense criteria which renders the past meaningful for the present and its future perspective. I think that there are four of these principles effective in all forms of giving the past a historical meaning for the present: (1) The principle of tradition which emphasizes the continuity of a pre-given world-order throughout all changes; (2) the principle of exemplary meaning, which emphasizes the representation of general rules of human conduct in the events of the past; (3) the principle of critique which negates the pre-given order of human life by referring to a contradicting experience of the past; and, finally, (4) the genetic principle of temporalizing the obligatory order of the world, which attributes life orienting sense to temporal change.¹

In our case Huang and Wong emphasize the exemplary mode of historical sense generation in traditional Chinese historiography. They both refer to pre-modern examples with a preference to the first great Chinese historian Sima Qian 司馬遷. For them the origin has a decisive quality for identifying a culturally specific feature of historiography. Explicating the exemplary mode of this historiography they highlight the ethical impact and intention of representing the past. Here the events of what happened in the past get their historical importance and meaning as manifestations of ethical rules in human life. “History is philosophy told by examples”, as it was formulated by Lord Bolingbroke.² History stands for temporally concretized ethics with a clear political impact. The ethical rules are super-temporally valid. Their empirical manifestation in various temporal contexts of the past makes them applicable in various different contexts in the present and in the future. As supertemporal rules they are above changes in history.

This mode of historical thinking opens up a broad perspective of what happened in the past. It keeps the variety and distinctiveness of human life in time together within a framework of the human-centered code of behavior through a universalistic claim of validity. Huang correctly underlines that in this logic of history philosophy (in the form of ethics) is an integral part of historiography and can’t be separated from it. History itself is not seen (and addressed or even reflected) as a temporal unit, but consists of an unlimited variety of events in the past. We could speak of an ‘objective’ pluralism. There are only ‘histories’, but no history in the realm of practical human life.

1 An extended presentation of this typology can be found in Jörn Rüsen, “Die vier Typen des historischen Erzählens”, in: idem: *Zeit und Sinn. Strategien historischen Denkens*. 2nd ed. Frankfurt/M.: Humanities Online, 2012, pp. 148–217; for a shorter English description see: Jörn Rüsen, in: *History. Narration – Interpretation – Orientation*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2005, pp. 9–19.

2 Lord Bolingbroke: “Letters on the study and use of history” (1752), in: *The Works of Lord Bolingbroke*, vol. 2. London 1844 (reprt. London: Cass, 1967), p. 176.

The thus exemplarily shaped Chinese historiography can easily be understood as humanistic. Humanism, though, is not a clearly defined concept,³ but carries a broad variety of aspects and interpretations by placing the highest value on the human subject and through centering this subject as the key to understanding the world. This indeed is the case in traditional Chinese historiography with its foundation in Confucianism. It is Confucian ethics with its essentially humanistic character⁴ which gives traditional Chinese historiography its typological peculiarity. Indeed, compared with ancient Western historiography, this humanism is unique. Greek and Roman historiography share the emphasis on human agency and the exemplary mode of historical sense generation, but its ethics is political rather than humanistic. (Therefore Machiavelli could formulate his theory of politics by commenting the ancient Roman historian Livy).⁵

Both Chinese and Western historiography referred to human agency as the moving force of temporal change in human affairs, and both shared the structural limits of this reference: it was mainly male-oriented, ignoring the other half of humankind for all intent and purpose, completely, and was equally unconcerned about slavery.

It is not its exemplary character with its normative impact which renders traditional Chinese historiography unique, but the way of realizing the exemplary sense generation, of giving its logic an empirical manifestation. Western historical thinking has a strong exemplary tradition as well,⁶ but its ethics are different. One should not overlook that the exemplary form of making sense of the past is always interlinked with others, for instance with the traditional form.

3 See Jörn Rüsen / Henner Laass (eds.), *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective. Experiences and Expectations*. (= Being Human: Caught in the Web of Cultures – Humanism in the Age of Globalizations, vol. 1), Bielefeld: transcript, 2009; Michai I. Spariosu / Jörn Rüsen (eds.), *Exploring Humanity – Intercultural Perspectives on Humanism*, Göttingen: V&R unipress, Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2012; Stefan Reichmuth / Jörn Rüsen / Aladdin Sarhan (eds.), *Humanism and Muslim Culture. Historical Heritage and Contemporary Challenges*, Göttingen V&R unipress, 2012 (Introduction).

4 Heiner Roetz, "Konfuzianischer Humanismus", in: Jörn Rüsen / Henner Laass (eds.), *Interkultureller Humanismus*, Schwalbach/Taunus.: Wochenschau Verlag, 2009, pp. 89–114; Chun-Chieh Huang, *Humanism in East Asian Confucian Contexts* (= Being Human: Caught in the Web of Cultures – Humanism in the Age of Globalization, vol. 9). Bielefeld: transcript, 2010; Carmen Meinert (ed.), *Traces of Humanism in China. Tradition and Modernity* (= Being Human: Caught in the Web of Cultures – Humanism in the Age of Globalization, vol. 6). Bielefeld: transcript, 2010.

5 Nicolo Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio* (1531) (Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius), Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2009).

6 "Famous have become the words of Cicero: *Historia vero testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis*" (De oratore II,36). ["History is the witness of time, the light of truth, the life of memory, the teacher of life, the messenger of ancient time"]. See Hubert Cancik, "Light, Truth, Education: History in European Humanism", in: *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* 8.2 (Issue 16, Dec. 2011), pp. 1–16, esp. 4–6.

References to origins are a characteristic factor within this type, and it plays an important role in China more effectively than in the West. Sima Qian and many if not most of his followers refer to the origin of Chinese culture – as Confucius himself did – when critically judging his own time with the paradigm of a mythical origin, where the human world was in order by corresponding with the order of heaven. Only the loss or dimming of this order initiated historical thinking and its attempt to foster and strengthen ethical power in human life. This attitude can even be observed in our texts. Huang does not present Sima Qian's idea of a paradigmatic order of origin (since we know today that it is only a mythical idea), but presents Sima Qian's work itself as a still effective paradigm of doing history. He estimates this beginning of Chinese historiography as an ideal which we can follow even today: "Take the ancients by the hand and walk with them, raising the questions of their own time for the ancients to answer". (Cf. Huang in this volume p. 38.)

This very traditional reference to origins is not solely an attitude found in Chinese culture, but can be found elsewhere too, as in Western historical culture. Here we can find it as a highly effective agent in theology and as a powerful movement at the beginnings of early modern Humanism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Today however, professional historians have to struggle against the marginalization of classical antiquity in history teaching at school (at least in Germany). Antiquity has lost the power of a tradition which can lead into the future, as is the case with the ancients in East Asia. Here historical identity is stabilized by the idea of an unbroken continuity of the Confucian culture over more than two thousand years. This idea is indeed a powerful argument used by East Asian intellectuals in present day intercultural discussion about historical thinking. It uses the power of a strong non-Western tradition against the dominant Western habit of presenting modernity as a fundamental break in continuity within the general context of doing history today. Here lies a wide open field of discussion which we should plough together.

There is another highly important difference between Chinese and Western historical thinking: it is the very complex relationship between sacred and secular history, which characterizes Western historical culture from the rise of Christianity, and remains pertinent up till the period of enlightenment. I will not take into consideration the impact of Buddhism and Daoism here – to mention only the most important non-Confucian traditions, because they have not been explicitly addressed – but they do not seem to have generated such a difference between the basic dimensions of historical sense generation.

When it comes to the encounter with modernity both historical cultures meet on the same ground: here the secular character of historical thinking, which has always been very strong in China, has taken over in the West as well. At the same time, exemplary historical sense generation lost its dominance in the West. Ac-

according to Hu's elaboration similar tendencies can be observed in China as well. The logic has changed from an exemplary explanation to the genetic one. In this change humanism became an important factor in Western historical thinking: humanity served as a value-laden frame of reference by which the past got a new meaning as history.⁷ This humanism faded away during the nineteenth century, and despite several attempts to renew it, it has not yet got back the power of a future – directed tradition at the end of modernity. But nevertheless, Humanism is on the agenda of intercultural discussions about a convincing basis of mediating different traditions into an idea of history where difference and unity of human culture are mediated.

Hu's paper shows that Chinese historical thinking has found its own way into modernity.⁸ It was provoked by the bitter experience of Western supremacy, and it has found an answer to this provocation, in which the Chinese accentuation of their tradition was not given up, but transformed into a new genetic way of sense generation. Qian Mu's 錢穆 work serves as a convincing example. In a rather complicated argument Hu picks up on most issues of the logic of modern historical thinking: the concept of history as a comprehensive temporal unit of development from the past to the present with a future perspective. It gains new ways of getting solid historical knowledge by critical research, and by placing the accent on a genetic mode of sense generation. It is fascinating to realize how these issues have gained a Chinese feature far away from being a simple copy of the Western example.⁹

Concerning its pre-modern manifestations, Chinese historiography can only be understood as a special version of exemplary thinking besides other versions. (Here the great Arabian historian Ibn Khaldun may serve as an example of a different manifestation of the same logic.) The same is true for the mode of modern historical thinking. It had originated in the West, but its logic, epistemology and methodology have become essential factors which can be found wherever the life-form of modernity demands a historical orientation on the level of academic discourse. In intercultural communication these essentials should be identified, explicated and (critically) discussed.¹⁰ It would be misleading to stamp them against their claim for universality as being only Western and

7 See Jörn Rüsen, "Classical Humanism – a Historical Survey", in: Jörn Rüsen (ed.), *Approaching Humankind. Towards an Intercultural Humanism*, Göttingen: V&R unipress, Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2013, pp. 161–184.

8 See also Chang-Tse Hu, *Deutsche Ideologie und politische Kultur Chinas. Eine Studie zum Sonderwegsgedanken der chinesischen Bildungselite 1920–1940*, Bochum: Studienverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1983.

9 Speaking of 'the West', one should never forget that this concept may mislead, because it pretends a uniformity which contradicts its contentions.

10 See Georg G. Iggers / Q. Edward Wang, *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2008.

therefore deemed replaceable by something non-Western. This way of thinking is seductive, because it gives history an important role in identity politics (and a mind-warming closeness to political power). But these substitutes usually are ideology robbing the academic discourse of one of its most important factors: critical thinking with inbuilt universalistic truth claims.

What overall impressions of our texts dealing with Chinese historical thinking are prevailing? I would like to summarize them by five points:

- (1) A new awareness of the importance of exemplary historical thinking across all cultural differences and an insight into the variety of its realization according to different contexts.
- (2) A new awareness of humanistic elements in historical thinking as a chance to find a new ground for intercultural communication.
- (3) A new awareness of the Chinese way into modern historical thinking.
- (4) A new awareness that intercultural comparison needs a transculturally valid framework of basic principles and fundamental developments in doing history
- (5) An outlook on new perspectives in deepening the insight
 - of what it means to do history for the sake of orienting human life,
 - and of what principles we need to realize our common neighborhood in the historical culture of our time.

All five points indicate open problems:

- (1) Exemplary thinking has its limits:
 - its morality can't sufficiently confront the experience of evil,
 - it is static and therefore unable to articulate change on the level of meaning and sense.
- (2) Humanism has limits in its traditional manifestations: – here it ignores women as agents in the temporal changes of the human world;
 - it has not yet to be able to confront the experience of inhumanity.
- (3) Chinese modernity is very often constituted by an anti-Western bias, whereas Western modernity is not free of ethnocentric elements.
- (4) Interculturally valid frameworks of comparison have not yet been established.¹¹ Instead, intercultural communication is deeply influenced by relativistic tendencies and hidden ethnocentric attitudes.
- (5) Commonality in problems and attempts to solve them is less often addressed in intercultural communication than differences of traditions, concepts, and procedures.

¹¹ My proposal for such a frame can be found in: Jörn Rüsen, "Some Theoretical Approaches to Intercultural Comparison of Historiography", in: idem: *History. Narration – Interpretation – Orientation*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2005, pp. 109–128.

As a result I would like to emphasize that at a historical approach to intercultural communication in historical culture theoretical reflection should be strengthened. Criteria of making sense of the past should much more be unaffected and critically analyzed. A special respect should get much more attendance: the question for anthropological universals and universal trends of change and development. Difference should be discussed within such a framework and not as a matter of difference. If difference becomes visible and understandable as variations of these universals under different conditions, they can be recognized and mediated. A discourse which follows this strategy will overcome hitherto powerful ethnocentric tendencies in doing history in favor of a new integrative humanism. This humanism can pick up traditions in pre-given elements of a normative idea of humanity and mould them into a new idea of humankind where difference and unity are mediated and issues of inhumanity can be addressed and criticized. An intercultural discourse which is committed to this idea will be understood and realized by its participants as a contribution to a general humanization of human life by historical thinking.

11. Dogmas of Superficiality: The Episteme of Humanism in Writings by Taiwanese Historians Huang Chun-chieh, Wong Young-tsu, and Hu Chang-Tze

In his essay *On the Transformation of Historical Thinking in Modern China*,¹ the Taiwanese scholar Hu Chang-Tze (胡昌智 Hū Chāngzhì) identifies a series of conceptual developments that constitute cardinal nodes in the history of ideas of Chinese modernity. In essence, these include Zhāng Xuéchéng's (章學誠, 1738–1801)² new sense of 'historicism' with regard to the Confucian classics; Kāng Yǒuwéi's (康有為, 1858–1927) and Liáng Qǐchāo's (梁啟超, 1873–1929) progressivist theories of historical periodization; Liáng Shùmíng's (梁漱溟, 1893–1988) cultural 'pluralism' of contrasting Chinese culture against India and the West; and Qián Mù's (錢穆, 1895–1990) pioneering of a new Chinese historical writing style employing grand narrative.

These nodes reveal a growth of Chinese ideas that approximately resemble dominant concepts within the Occidental *episteme*³ of humanism, although this is not a topic that is directly discussed in Hu's essay. Zhāng Xuéchéng's historicism matches the secularism implicit in European classical and biblical philology. The progressivist vision espoused by Kāng Yǒuwéi and Liáng Qǐchāo mirrors Hegel's modernist historical teleology. Liáng Shùmíng's cultural pluralism brings to mind the global perspective of eighteenth-century European universal histories.⁴ Likewise, Qián Mù's use of grand narrative echoes the overarching historical causality embedded in much of Western nineteenth-century historiography.

1 Published in this volume.

2 In the present essay, traditional Chinese characters as used in Taiwan are listed first, given that the topic of discussion is a series of essays by Taiwanese scholars. For the sake of inclusivity and readability, simplified Chinese characters (abbreviated 'S') as used in the People's Republic of China are also supplied in those cases where the simplified characters differ from the traditional characters.

3 For the term *episteme* denoting a 'power-knowledge system', see Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris: Gallimard, 1966, p. 13.

4 For example, George Sale et alii, *An Universal History, from the Earliest Account of Time to the Present*, 65 vol. London: Edward Bate, 1747–1768.

The seeming correspondences between Western and Chinese thought raises the question of whether these conceptual developments in modern Chinese historical thinking resulted exclusively from internal factors rooted in the traditional, premodern Chinese power-knowledge system, coincidentally bearing a resemblance to similar Western ideas, or whether they emanated from the external agency of Occidental humanism as propagated through the growing sway of Western-style education. Although Hu briefly mentions the fascination with Western culture and political ideologies that fermented in China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the concrete extent to which early modern Chinese historians were exposed to and possibly influenced by Western historical thinking is left unexamined in his essay. The result is a characterization of modern Chinese historical thinking that to a certain degree visualizes the Chinese history of ideas as standing in relative isolation from the broader global context in general and from the epistemic force of the humanist history of ideas in particular.

Oppositely, two essays by the Taiwanese historians Huang Chun-chieh (黃俊傑, Huáng Jùnjié) and Wong Young-tsu (汪榮祖, Wāng Róngzǔ) concerned with identifying key features of classical Chinese history writing – respectively entitled *Historical Thinking as Humanistic Thinking in Traditional China* and *Humanism in Traditional Chinese Historiography with Special Reference to the Grand Historian Sima Qian*⁵ – opt to describe the ancient Chinese literary tradition of *shǐ* (史) comparatively in the language of humanism. While Huang does not qualify his use of the term ‘humanism’, Wong begins his article by recognizing that humanism signifies a specific historical mode in the European history of ideas that consists in seeking meaning in the study of human culture as opposed to the theological study of the divine.

It ought to be realized, however, that the word ‘humanism’ in general implies a distinct Western intellectual tradition that utilizes an academic epistemology of historicism and moreover involves an explicit political project of secular liberalism. Nonetheless, both Huang and Wong not only conceive of the age-old Chinese tradition of *shǐ* as ‘history’ in accordance with the dominant connotation of the English word instead of conforming to any indigenous Chinese definition of the term, but they also proceed at length to essentialize the writings of Sīmǎ Qiān (司馬遷, c. 145–86 BCE) and other classical Chinese *shǐ* writers as being works of ‘humanistic’ thinking. Hence, in an utterly *anatotipic* and *anachronistic* manner, i. e., entirely out of place and out of time, they lift humanism out of its historical context and raise it to the status of a universal, timeless *topos* constituting an idealized yardstick against which to measure the value of Chinese culture.

5 Both published in this volume.

There can be little doubt that the felt need for apologetically appraising the Chinese *shǐ* tradition in terms of Occidental humanism results from the now global hegemony of the higher educational system of the humanities, which humanism underpins as its episteme. The Western-style humanities, which are socially and politically anchored in the institution of the modern university, have everywhere become the preferred – indeed even the compulsory – dogma for studying culture and the human past.

Yet, it must be stressed that the current intellectual climate is a historical outcome of the colonial as well as postcolonial epochs of modernity. Humanism and the humanities, in their multiple variant forms worldwide, are systems of knowledge production that are founded on the exclusion not only of theology but also of the epistemologies of premodern non-Western power-knowledge systems as, e.g., attested by the debarment of traditional Indian *paṇḍit* scholars from newly founded Western-style universities in nineteenth-century India.⁶ From this global historical perspective of modern knowledge production, it therefore comes as little surprise that the Chinese *shǐ* tradition in the essays by Huang and Wong is measured against Western humanism, especially since intercultural communication is subject to the language in which it is expressed, in this case English. For all that, it may be worth bearing in mind that if China prior to the wave of European colonization had capitalized on its invention of gunpowder and its highly developed maritime seafaring abilities and had thereby exploited other nations as colonies, world history would have taken a different turn in the tenth to fifteenth centuries and it would today probably be Western scholars attempting to typecast the epistemic values of Chinese Confucianism onto the Occidental traditions of historiography rather than the other way around.

Hence, extolling humanism as a universal ideal is not merely a product of the colonial and post-colonial history of ideas entailing a certain geo-political agenda, but is a hermeneutical program that is closely tied in with current trends in the humanities worldwide. These trends include the disciplinary move from *world history* to *global history*,⁷ the institutional move from *humanities* to *global humanities*, and the epistemic move from *humanism* to *global humanism*. In short, Chinese ‘historiography’ itself as well as the contemporary descriptions of Chinese historical thinking given by Hu, Huang, and Wong are all instances of “meaning-production [engaged] in an interpretive treatment of the past”,⁸ and as

6 See Sheldon Pollock, “Crisis in the Classics”, in: *Social Research* 78.1 (2011), pp. 21–48, p. 30.

7 See Okamoto Michihiro (岡本充弘), “An Answer to the Question, ‘Is There a Global Approach to History?’”, in: *Tōyō Daigaku Ningenkagaku Sōgōkenkyūsho Purojekuto Hōkoku* (東洋大学人間科学総合研究所プロジェクト報告), vol. 1 (2011), pp. 67–73.

8 Jörn Rüsen, “Historik: Umriss einer Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft”, in: *Erwägen, Wissen, Ethik* 22.4 (2011), p. 478. The quotation is translated from German: “... Sinnbildung im deutenden Umgang mit der Vergangenheit ...”.

meaning-production (*Sinnbildung*)⁹ they are constructions of a past ruled by present hermeneutical horizons¹⁰ of regimes of historicity.¹¹

1. Dependency and the Interplay of Power-Knowledge Systems

Hu's description of key conceptual nodes in modern Chinese historical thinking that tacitly resemble ideas known from Western thought as well as Huang's and Wong's characterizations of classical Chinese historical thinking as being humanist in the Occidental sense of the word are fundamentally concerned with how ideas have flowed in and out of the Chinese power-knowledge system. The flow is either thought to have taken place in the past in Hu's sense of borrowing foreign ideas or interpretively through Huang's and Wong's contemporary adaptation of the Western concept of humanism in their portrayals of Chinese historiography.

Theoretically speaking, these in- and outflows of ideas may be designated as an *interplay* between different power-knowledge systems. The word interplay is here meant to suggest a process of intellectual appropriation,¹² where an idea derived from one episteme is adopted by a second episteme reigning on an equal or submissive cultural-political footing. That is to say, in the phrase "Chinese historical thinking" the label 'Chinese' singularizes a power-knowledge system in nationalist cultural terms, which sets this system apart from but also in contradistinction to foreign power-knowledge systems of other national cultural spheres.¹³

In some earlier scholarship,¹⁴ this interplay of ideas has been viewed as a dynamic of uneven dependency whereby new ideas invariably are obtained from

9 It should be noted that Rösen's own English translation for the German term *Sinnbildung* is "sense generation" or "historical sense generation". In the present essay, the English euphemism "meaning-production" shall be used instead, as a counterpart to the Foucaultian term "knowledge production", in order to indicate that semiotically-based 'meanings' of the past always remain ephemeral and unstable due to their perpetual production and reproduction through academic and non-academic discourses.

10 Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, New York: Crossroad, 1992, pp. 438–491.

11 Cf. François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: Présentisme et expériences du temps*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003.

12 For a theoretical discussion of the term 'appropriation' in terms of subjectivity but not, as here, between larger power-knowledge systems, see Ulrich Timme Kragh, "Appropriation and Assertion of the Female Self", in: *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 27.2 (2011), pp. 85–108.

13 For the singularity versus contradistinction of cultures with regard to literatures, see Haun Saussy, *Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China*, Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001, p. 16.

14 Roberto Schwarz, "Misplaced Ideas: Literature and Society in Late Nineteenth-Century Brazil", in: *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*, London: Verso, 1992, pp. 19–32.

a favored cultural core and are then displaced, or even misplaced, in a disfavored cultural periphery. The favored cultural core is said to be comprised of the economically more developed Western nation states, whereas the disfavored cultural periphery consists of economically dependent, less developed non-Western states.¹⁵ Accordingly, it would have to follow that use of the Occidental terms ‘humanism’ (人文主義 *rénwénzhǔyì* or 人本主義 *rénběnzhǔyì*), ‘academic thinking’ (學術思想 *xuéshù sīxiǎng*), and ‘history’ (i.e., modern Chinese 歷史 *lìshǐ* as opposed to classical Chinese 史 *shǐ*) in a discourse dealing with the Chinese history of ideas tacitly implies an inevitable predominance of a superior West as well as the episteme of the European history of ideas and the dogma of global humanism. Interplay would consequently have to be interpreted as a displacement that entails a certain degree of artificiality amounting to ‘kitsch’,¹⁶ since it involves a cultural imitation that places something outside its normal context, thereby producing a deformed false consciousness.¹⁷

However, construing interplay as dependency and misplacement must be criticized for remaining superficial and insufficient. While the dependency theory of ideas (依附思想理論 *yīfù sīxiǎng lǐlùn*) offers a suitable starting point for discussing the question of what role the Occidental history of ideas plays in Chinese historical thinking when Hu identifies developments in early modern Chinese history writing that seem to correspond to Western ideas and when Huang and Wong portray classical Chinese historiography using European terms, the theory at the same time overlooks four successively deeper layers of meaning-production, including the *ideological*, the *cultural*, the *semantical*, and the *syntactical*.

2. The Ideological

On the most general level, the dependency theory of ideas assumes that ideas from the dominant core episteme are consistently accepted outright by members of the alternative, so-called ‘peripheral’ power-knowledge systems. New Western ideas are thus thought invariably to be viewed as ‘progressive’ or even ‘revolutionary’ within non-Western societies. Nonetheless, even a cursory historical

15 Ibid., pp. 23–24. For a broader post-colonial critique of the supremacy of Western thought, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

16 For kitsch as one of the distinct forms of culture, see Ulrich Timme Kragh, “Of Pop, Kitsch, and Cultural Heritage”, in: *The Newsletter* 62 (International Institute for Asian Studies 2012), pp. 8–9, p. 9.

17 On false consciousness in the context of kitsch and musicological aesthetics, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 239.

examination reveals that this has far from always been the case. Alien ideas are regularly viewed with suspicion and met with resistance, and this also goes for the basic principles of historicism and secularism that lie at the heart of the humanities. In the Islamic world, for example, ‘Occidentalism’ – understood as the reverse of Western ‘Orientalism’ – has remained an enduring mode of ideological defiance against the rootlessness of *Garbhazadegi* (غرب‌زدگی, variously translated as ‘Westernization’, ‘Westoxification’, or ‘Occidentosis’), as, e.g., pointedly voiced by Iranian critic Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923–1969) and Indonesian philosopher Syed Muhammad al Naquib bin Ali al-Attas (السيد محمد نقيب العتاس, b. 1931).¹⁸

Opposition to Western ideas and a search for ideological alternatives were likewise witnessed in China during the epoch of early modernity. These were intellectual crosscurrents against the novel and possibly Western-derived Chinese ideas of historicity mentioned by Hu. One such counterculture arose from the ranks of Buddhist scholars who created a revivalism of Indian and Chinese Buddhist Yogācāra philosophy (唯識 *wéishì*) in order to set forth an advanced Asian phenomenological alternative to the epistemology of Western science and the humanities.¹⁹ It was as part of this broader trend in Buddhist studies that Chinese historian Zhāng Tàiyán (章太炎, 1868–1936) attempted to formulate a new Chinese theory of history in the early twentieth century based partly on the doctrinal principles of Buddhist Yogācāra thought.²⁰ Notably, resistance to the tacit secularist premises of the Western humanities is still subtly present today in much of the scholarship of Buddhist historians in South Korea and possibly in other parts of East Asia.²¹

18 For more on the critical views of Al-e Ahmad and al-Attas, see Carl W. Ernst, “The West and Islam? Rethinking Orientalism and Occidentalism”, in: *Ishraq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook* 1 (2010), pp. 23–34.

19 For detailed historical accounts, see Chen Bing (陳兵), “Reflections on the Revival of Yogācāra in Modern Chinese Buddhism” and Eyal Aviv, “The Root that Nourishes the Branches: The Role of the *Yogācārabhūmi* in 20th-Century Chinese Scholastic Buddhism” both published in: Ulrich Timme Kragh (ed.), *The Foundation for Yoga Practitioners: The Buddhist Yogācārabhūmi Treatise and Its Adaptation in India, East Asia, and Tibet*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013, pp. 1054–1076 and pp. 1078–1091.

20 For Zhāng Tàiyán’s contribution to Chinese historical theory, see Axel Schneider and Stefan Tanaka, “The Transformation of History in China and Japan”, in: *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, vol. 4, pp. 506–517, and further Viren Murthy, “Equalisation as Difference: Zhang Taiyan’s Buddhist-Daoist Response to Modern Politics” in: *The Newsletter* 44 (The International Institute for Asian Studies 2007), pp. 24–25.

21 Seongcheol Kim, “A Brief History of Studies on the Yogācāra School in Modern Korea”, in: *The Foundation for Yoga Practitioners: The Buddhist Yogācārabhūmi Treatise and Its Adaptation in India, East Asia, and Tibet*, p. 1265. For a more detailed discussion, see Jaekwan Shim (심재관), *Talsigminsidae uliui bulgyohag* (탈식민시대 우리의 불교학) [Korean Buddhism in the Postcolonial Period], Seoul: Chaeksesang, 2001.

Given the presence of dissent arising from deep within the non-Western power-knowledge systems against the influence of foreign ideas, it is evident that it is neither right to view the development of new ideas within these epistemes as simply being peripheral derivatives of Western core ideas, nor is it wholly appropriate to characterize premodern traditions of non-Western thought as conforming to or being included in a universal humanism, as it is for example done in a recent book on the worldwide history of the humanities.²²

3. The Cultural

On a slightly deeper level of analysis, the dependency theory of ideas presupposes that there exists a clear and discernible separation between disparate cultures, which would allow for the theory's fundamental distinction of a core and a periphery. The conception of such self-evident cultural rifts – whether assumed to exist based on linguistic, national, or racial differences – imposes on the theory a dogma of ethnocentrism. While it may be true, as argued by some, that every discourse set in a particular historical cultural circumstance is burdened by an inextricable sense of ethnocentrism,²³ it is conspicuous that the superimposition of said cultural boundaries erects a sinister imagination of the notorious, ever-impendent clash of civilizations.²⁴ Markedly, Huang's use of humanism as an epistemic category for characterizing traditional Chinese historical thinking leads him in some passages to introduce certain comparisons between Chinese and European cultures and religions which seem intended mainly to underscore China as being the superior, older civilization also with regard to the idealistic principles behind humanism.

Yet, strong belief in the disjunction between cultures proves mistaken. The absence of any absolute separation is not solely an ethical concern of “different skin colors, same suffering”. Rather, it is a matter of the fictionality of a homogeneous cultural identity, which the notion of a monoculture presupposes.²⁵

22 Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

23 Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy, and Steven G. Yao, “Sinographies: An Introduction”, in: *Sinographies: Writing China*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. vii, xx.

24 For the full assertion of a civilizational clash, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations: Remaking of a World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

25 On the problem of cultural homogeneity in the dependency theory of ideas, see Elías José Palti, “The Problem of ‘Misplaced Ideas’ Revisited: Beyond the ‘History of Ideas’ in Latin America”, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67.1 (2006), pp. 149–179, p. 175. Further, on the artificiality of the historical construction of the notion of nationality, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991.

The problem that lies in thinking along the lines of artificial cultural boundaries becomes apparent, when it is brought into consideration that many of the key arguments of resistance against Western culture that have been employed by contemporary non-Western critics have been derived from within Western culture itself, whether these arguments be nihilist, Marxist, existentialist, or postmodern.²⁶

4. The Semantical

A consequence of cultural disjunction is semantic conjunction, referring to the coexistence of two or more distinct elements within a single time and place. When the cultural-ideological dogmas ‘Occident’ and ‘Orient’ lose their absolute signification, the result is a fusion of ideas, where periphery and core, old and new, native and foreign meet and merge. Bhabha has argued that colonialism created a hybridity of cultures involving mimicry and bastardization, which led to the estrangement and ambivalence of original symbols and ideas.²⁷ Similarly, in her work on early modernity in Japan, Gluck has compared global conjunctural modernity to a universal grammar that takes on different inflections around the world resulting in particular local ‘historical blends’ that make up what she calls ‘blended modernity’.²⁸

However, with ‘hybridization’ and ‘blending’ there is, in fact, no longer any semantic basis for speaking of a distinct power-knowledge system of any given culture, neither Western nor non-Western, in the era after the onset of colonialism, modernity, post-colonialism, and the global information society. Although “China and the world” remains a literary trope that began to be negotiated already in early modernity,²⁹ the ultimate ramification of hybridization and blending is that it is just not possible to describe a “Chinese historical thinking” after the eighteenth century, because there no longer exists a distinct, inalienable entity that might be defined as being purely ‘Chinese’. With the vacancy of any stable feature definable as ‘Chinese’, the very topic in Hu’s essay of locating and describing Chinese historical thinking in modernity becomes an empty category (*śunya*, 空 *kōng*), and consequently the whole question of

26 For a convincing analysis thereof, see Ernst, “The West and Islam?”, p. 29.

27 Homi K. Bhabha, “Sign Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817”, in: *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 102–122, p. 112.

28 Carol Gluck, “The End of Elsewhere: Writing Modernity Now”, in: *American Historical Review* (June 2011), pp. 676–687.

29 For a detailed historical and literary analysis of the trope, see Haun Saussy, “China and the World: The Tale of a Topos”, in: *Modern Language Quarterly* 68.2 (2007), pp. 145–171.

whether modern Chinese historical ideas are native or imported vanishes along with the related problem of whether there exists a dependency of ideas between cultural cores and peripheries.

5. The Syntactical

Beneath the overall ideological, cultural, and semantical layers of analysis, there lies an even more rudimentary stratum of meaning-production, which pertains to the basic linguistic principles by which words come to be attributed with meaning. Linguistic signs are not reducible to positive terms possessing inherent meaning.³⁰ Rather, the assigned signification of a given word only remains stable for as long as the linguistic convention (*vyavahāra*, 世俗語言 *shìsú yǔyán*) associated with the word endures. Since linguistic conventions presuppose larger social contexts that are defined by traditions, education, and ideologies, meaning-production is always contextual. That is to say, ideas of historical thinking should not exclusively be viewed on the semantic level as enduring conceptual entities whose histories may be traced diachronically but must simultaneously be regarded on the syntactic level as contextually-defined notions whose meanings need to be understood synchronically. Hence, humanism may either be viewed as having a stable meaning derived from the European history of ideas or as being contextually defined, in which case the word, in fact, does not at all carry the same connotations when it is used in the three different contexts at hand: classical China, early modern Europe, and present-day Taiwan.

The need for moving beyond a strictly static view of enduring ideas as presupposed by the dependency theory and instead studying histories of ideas in a manner where ideas are variously understood according to their individual contexts is a critical point, as argued by Palti.³¹ Yet, Palti's solution does not afford a precise explanation of meaning-production that would account for the simultaneity of diachronic continuity and synchronic discontinuity. When a term is interpreted strictly according to its synchronic context, there is risk of losing the term's diachronic continuity of meaning. For instance, when Huang and Wong characterize classical Chinese historical thinking as being humanist, a purely contextual hermeneutics demands the word 'humanism' to be disassociated from its meanings in other power-knowledge systems, enforcing a signification specific to the modern Taiwanese context rather than European

30 On the absence of positive terms in language, see Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 1916, p. 166.

31 The need for contextualization in the dependency theory of ideas was raised by Palti, "The Problem of 'Misplaced Ideas' Revisited", pp. 169–173.

thought. The negative consequence thereof is a disjointed and too austere reading of humanism wholly devoid of diachronic dependency of the term on the Occidental history of ideas without allowing for any interplay across epistemes.

It is therefore exigent to suggest a different approach to the study of the history of ideas that equally emphasizes diachronic dependency and synchronic interdependency. What is needed is to operate with a sense of meaning-production that considers meaning as being ‘transformative’ (*pariṇāma*, 變異 *biànyì*). Transformative meaning-production implies that ideas are interpreted synchronically as possessing new meanings which are specific to their syntactic context, but their new meanings are diachronic transformations of earlier meanings of the terms which reach back to previous semantic instances forming a series of discursive prehistories.

For example, in case of Huang’s and Wong’s uses of the word ‘humanism’ to characterize classical Chinese historiography, the word humanism needs, on the one hand, to be read synchronically from within the specific context of twenty-first-century Taiwan, which ultimately is a meaning-production that only can be understood from the interior semiotic meaning-structures of Huang’s and Wong’s essays. On the other hand, the Taiwanese meaning of the English word ‘humanism’ is a transformation of an idea reaching back to a series of earlier instances of the term, including the premodern and later European senses of the term, the Chinese adaptations of the idea that evolved during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the new senses with which the word has come to be imbued on Taiwan in the post-1949 Republic of China. The principle of transformative logic allows for a reading that is sensitive to the individual hermeneutic parameters of Huang, Wong, and Hu while concurrently permitting each idea introduced in their essays to be viewed as standing in diachronic relationships to a history of past discourses, whether Chinese, Taiwanese, Western, or non-Western.

6. Transformative Meaning-Production in Chinese Historiography

Being a fundamental approach to studying cultural interplay, the principle of transformative meaning-production can be applied to forms of interplay occurring between different epistemes, as shown above in the dependency between Occident and Orient in Taiwanese discourses on humanism. Parallely, when applied to histories of ideas within a single power-knowledge system, the principle highlights how given ideas are contextualized transformations of earlier ideas and how these transformations entail dependencies on closely aligned

epistemes. Within Chinese historical thinking, transformative logic may thus not only reveal continuities of Chinese intellectual history but also connections to inter-Asian histories of ideas.

For instance, in the essay *Historical Discourses in Traditional Chinese Historical Writings: Historiography as Philosophy*,³² Huang draws attention to an important turn that Chinese historiography took in the twelfth century, when the Neo-Confucian thinker Zhū Xī (朱熹 1130–1200) introduced a new theory of “principle and event” (理事 *lǐshì*). In the ensuing centuries, Zhū Xī’s theory led Chinese historians to regard the moral principle behind a given historical event as being the driving force behind historiography, thereby rendering history writing into a form of moral critique. This remained the dominant interpretation of history in China until the onset of modern Chinese historical thinking in the eighteenth century, when Zhāng Xuéchéng rejected the view that the moral principles of the Confucian classics were guiding historical events and instead began to view the Confucian classics as historical events in and of themselves.

Nevertheless, while arguing for the importance of Zhū Xī’s theory in the Chinese history of ideas, Huang limits his analysis to the specific Neo-Confucian context of the twelfth century and thereby ignores the fact that Zhū Xī’s notions of “principle and event” are transformations of earlier ideas. In failing to account for the diachronic prehistory of Zhū Xī’s notions, Huang falls into the predicament of narrow synchronicity in the strict sense of Palti’s contextualized reading.

In fact, prior to Zhū Xī’s application of the “principle and event” theory (理事 *lǐshì*) to historiography, the binary pair already existed as a well-established analytical mode of “principle and phenomena” (理事 *lǐshì*) in the Buddhist thought of the Korean Yogācāra exegete Wonhyo (元曉, S: 元曉 617–686) and the Chinese Buddhist Huáyán (華嚴) and Tiāntāi (天台) schools.³³ More remotely, these Chinese ideas reach back to the West, albeit a different ‘West’; not the Occidental West (西方 *Xīfāng*) but another West (西域 *Xīyù*) that was historically important to China, namely India and Central Asia.³⁴ Accordingly, the Chinese Buddhist idea of ‘event’ or ‘phenomenon’ (事 *shì*) was ultimately derived from the Indian Buddhist notion of concrete phenomenon (*vastu*). In light thereof, Zhū Xī’s contribution to Chinese historical theory ought not to be seen as synchronically limited to its Neo-Confucian context but should additionally be

32 Published in this book.

33 For a detailed analysis of the Buddhist background to the Chinese theory of principle and event, see Brook Ziporyn, *Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought: Prolegomena to the Study of Li*, Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2012 and *Beyond Oneness and Difference: Li and Coherence in Chinese Buddhist Thought and Its Antecedents*, Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2013.

34 For a similar problem of ambiguity of the word ‘West’ in Arabic, see Ernst, “The West and Islam?”, p. 25, fn. 6.

viewed diachronically as a transformative meaning-production dependent on a series of earlier Indian and Chinese Buddhist ideas.

As maintained previously, dependencies elicit reactions of intentional or unintentional ideological resistance, and Zhū Xī is no exception in this regard, for by asserting a Confucian pedigree of his ideas, he circumspectly avoids acknowledging reliance on Buddhist sources. Notwithstanding that “principle and event” first became conjoined as a binary analytical pair in the Buddhist literature of the seventh to tenth centuries, his kowtow to the Confucian intellectual heritage, the *Book of Changes* (易經) in particular, intimates dependencies in Zhū Xī’s thought being transformations of even older layers of the Chinese history of ideas. These primordial strata in the knowledge archaeology of Chinese historical thinking have recently been excavated in Wai-yee Li’s thorough study of the *Zuǒ zhuàn* (左傳), one of the earliest Chinese historical chronicles dating to the fourth century BCE, traditionally regarded as a commentary on the Confucian classic the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (春秋 *Chūnqiū*).³⁵

Stepping back into the mindset of the earliest Chinese chronicles uncovers relics of an ancient Chinese historical consciousness that differs fundamentally from the emphasis on moral principles found in Neo-Confucian thought as exemplified by the writings of Zhū Xī as well as the historical analyses of Huang. Li’s study reveals the dominant principle for historical meaning-production in the *Zuǒ zhuàn* to be prognostication, given the text’s underlying concern with foreboding signs and omens, where small apparently inconsequential causes in the form of gestures, words, dreams, or actions were interpreted as giving rise to momentous and often ominous consequences.³⁶

Notably, the Chinese preoccupation with prognostication and divination dates right back to the very earliest extant sources of Chinese writing, i. e., the Bronze Age turtle shell oracle bones (甲骨 *jiǎgǔ*), and is likewise predominant in the *Book of Changes*, which Zhū Xī takes as the point of departure for his ideas of “principle and event”. Hence, unlike Huang’s and Wong’s suggestion of an everlasting spirit of humanism in Chinese historical thinking, what is at hand is a series of transformative meaning-productions starting with instances of viewing historical causality as ruled by prognostic laws, via Chinese Buddhist ideas of higher principles and concrete phenomena, over to Neo-Confucian ideologies of the driving force of morality.

A given idea, whether Huang’s and Wong’s humanism in Chinese historical thinking or Zhū Xī’s Neo-Confucian theory of “principle and event”, may thus be read synchronically within its own specific disjointed context as well as dia-

35 Wai-yee Li, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007.

36 See Li, *The Readability of the Past*, pp. 85–171.

chronically as being a transformation of meaning that stands as the continuation of multiple discursive prehistories. In conclusion, the meaning-production of Chinese historical thinking seems out of reach for any characterization that reduces it either to a mode of dependency on Occidental dogmas, such as the episteme of humanism, or to an isolationist mode of Oriental dogmas viewing it purely as an independent Chinese intellectual tradition that is perpetually endowed with originality.

III. Second Thoughts

12. Enshrining the Past in the Present: Moral Agency and Humanistic History

If our authors and commentators are right in their readings of the purport and nature of Chinese historical thinking and philosophy, and I think in the main they are, then we may say that Chinese historiography was doomed, or privileged, to be constantly writing mostly about the individual. In a typical, if not archetypal, way, every personage recorded was notable for his (and in some infrequent cases, her) death and life, which were most of the time heroic and virtuous, although there were necessary instances of infamy, perfidy and treachery. The subject matter and principal concern of all Chinese histories may seem to be as monotonous, predictable and consistent as obituaries, eulogies, dirges and elegies. But we know that such narrative foci and philosophical constraints in Chinese historiography do not starve and vitiate the imagination; in the case of a Sima Qian 司馬遷, for instance, they can nourish and sustain it. As Wong Young-tsu makes clear, for the Grand Historian, not only did illustrious men like rulers and ministers make history, but also a wide array of characters – scholars, merchants, physicians, swordsmen, assassins, peasants, rebels, fortune-tellers and artisans – played critical roles in the events of the past. Sima was thoroughly cognizant of the social functions of the individual, as the eminent Japanese scholar of Chinese historiography, Naitō Torajirō 内藤 虎二郎, was wont to stress.¹

According to Wang, and also, Huang Chun-chieh, this overt attention paid to the individual and his heroic deeds (or perfidious acts) should be gussied up into a sort of humanism, an anthropocentric or homocentric orientation, such that we must come to the conclusion that human beings create history, and history is humanity's history; no more, no less. There is indeed no gainsaying the splendor as moral as that of the actions of a Duke of Zhou (Zhougong 周公), as courageous as that of a Xiang Yu 項羽, as tragic as that of a Han Xin 韓信, as astute as that of a Guan Zhong 管仲, as brutal as that of an Empress Lü 呂后, or as egregious as that of a Feng Dan, of which all found purposeful, competent, dutiful and graphic recording in Sima

1 Naitō Konan 内藤湖南, *Zhongguo shixueshi* 中國史學史 (*A History of Chinese Historiography*), translated by Ma Biao 馬彪, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008, p. 97.

Qian's masterful magnum opus, the *Shi ji* 史記 (*Records of the Historian*), celebrating the pivotal and exemplary roles of people as agents of history. The abiding argument is that when you have read the *Shi ji* and the myriad other great Chinese historical works, all the angles of your imaginings of human possibilities and conditions will be covered. In that sense, history, being the mirror that clairvoyantly reflects things as they are – the world and the this-worldliness of human actions – instills virtues, inspires sagacity, inculcates morals, honors righteousness, teaches statecraft, condemns evil, disdains wickedness, and repulses treachery. It is our moral compass and practical guide.

Wang and Huang could have set greater store by the didactic historiographic principle of *baobian* 褒貶 (praise and blame) first used and sanctified in the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (*Spring and Autumn Annals*), which can be said to be the well-spring of the humanism that shot through the veins of Chinese historiography, and which Sima himself took to heart as the main function of writing about the past. Just as people in the past were masters of their destinies and agents of changes, so historians such as Sima used the writing of history, the language about the past, as the means to control the past, enabling history to gain supreme power over the world, insofar as history identified and understood the root causes of the rise and fall of dynasties, and the *Sturm und Drang* of human sentiments, adjudicating bluntly, seeing clearly and speaking harshly. Humanity, understood in terms of its history, never had to endure the cryptic and paradoxical old Jesuit definition of a person as “a being without a reasonable reason for being (*un être sans raisonnable raison d'être*)”. History, being the totality and aggregate of human actions undergirded by its reasonableness (but also at times perverted by its irrationality and immorality), mirrors the world (*shijian* 世金鑑!).

As such, history is the judge of the good and the bad as they are manifested in human actions. Thus, when our authors plausibly aver that humanism or humanistic thinking characterizes and defines Chinese historical thinking, they could have further posited that the actions pursued by the historical figures are fundamentally construed in ethico-moral terms. Thus, the bedrock of this humanism is moral intent and responsibility. A virtuous, moral, intelligent and determined historical actor tapped the resources of mind and body, and in the process created through one's individual efforts the conditions around which events pivoted. Their own moral will and sagely intelligence became catalytic agents of change and indeed, historical forces. Wong Young-tsu aptly commented on the humanistic orientation of Sima Qian's historical endeavors, “The peasant rebel Chen Sheng 陳勝, who shook the foundation of the Qin; Xiang Yu who toppled the Empire of Qin, and Liu Bang 劉邦 who won the way with Xiang and founded the Han dynasty. For him [Sima], success or failure of a leader had almost exclusively to do with their personal qualities”. (p. 62)

But Wong could have further said that the master-narrative and sub-text of any historical description of any such personage is governed by moral imperative and ethical injunction. Here it is helpful, and in fact necessary, to take a close look at the dominant notion of *tianming* 天命 (Mandate of Heaven), commonly used to explain and justify dynastic succession. This religio-politico-moral idea, an embryonic philosophy of history of sorts, was never merely espoused and summoned as a sort of purely religious argument that arrogates the cause of regime change to Heaven's pleasure and displeasure. It was always taken, so to speak, as a sort of proto-constitutional principle anchored on the ideal and reality of moral governance – the ultimate criterion of merit. A virtuous regime, led by a sagacious ruler, together with his able and loyal ministers, conscientiously and selflessly tended to the needs of the people. It would therefore thrive and survive, blessed by Heaven's mandate to rule. Conversely, a licentious regime misled by a dissolute ruler who, buoyed by the fawning of his conniving sycophants and spurning the judgment of his upright ministers, incurred the wrath of Heaven and lost its mandate as the legitimate authority.

This nascent philosophy of history, propounded by the Duke of Zhou to justify and explain the transfer of power from the Shang to the Zhou, was no doubt an expression of humanism, reference to Heaven's imperative notwithstanding. The Duke maintained that the rulers of the Xia held the Mandate until the dynasty's last kings proved themselves to be unfit leaders on account of their moral irresponsibility: "Heaven then sought a [new] lord for the people, and gradually sent down its bright favoring Mandate for the success of Tang 湯, punishing and destroying the [last] lord of Xia".² It was precisely for the same reason that the Shang failed to practice virtuous governance that it could not hold on to Heaven's Mandate. The Duke of Zhou pronounced the following to the conquered Shang people:

"Your last Shang king abandoned himself to indolence, disdained to apply himself to government, and did not bring pure sacrifices. Heaven thereupon sent down his ruin... Heaven waited for five years, so that his sons and grandsons might yet become lords of the people, but he could not become wise. Heaven then sought among your numerous regions, shaking you with its terrors to stimulate those who might have regard for Heaven, but in all your many regions there was none that was able to do so. But our King of Zhou treated well the multitudes of the people, was able to practice virtue, and fulfilled his duties to the spirits and Heaven. Heaven instructed us, favored us, selected us, and gave us the Mandate of Yin [a.k.a. Shang], to rule over your numerous regions".³

2 Quoted in Herrlee G. Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 83. I have substituted the original Wade-Giles Romanization with Pinyin.

3 Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 83–84.

In short, the rise and fall of dynasties, which constituted the bulk of Chinese historical writings, hinged on good government and meritorious rule, personified and realized by the virtuous rulers and would-be rulers who took their moral responsibilities seriously.

Indeed, humane, benevolent, and virtuous governance and rulership may be said to be the foremost founding myth of China. Hand in hand with the dictates of the Mandate of Heaven, the paradigm of the sage-king predominated in the early classical Chinese texts. Take the “Canon of Yao” (“Yao dian” 堯典) in the *Classic of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書), for instance:

“Examining into antiquity, we find that the Emperor Yao was named Fangxun 放勳. He was reverent, intelligent, accomplished, sincere and mild. He was genuinely respectful and capable of all modesty. His light spread over the four extremities of the world, extending to Heaven above and Earth below. He was able to make bright his great virtue and bring affection to the nine branches of the family. When the nine branches of the family had become harmonious, he distinguished and honored the great clans. When the hundred clans had become illustrious, he harmonized the myriad states. Thus the numerous peoples were amply nourished, prospered, and become harmonious”.⁴

Witness also this eulogy of King Wen (Wenwang 文王), the progenitor of the Zhou dynasty, in the *Classic of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經):

“King Wen is on high;
Oh, he shines in Heaven
... August was King Wen
Continuously bright and reverent.
Great indeed was his mandate from Heaven.”⁵

The greatest of men, the founding-fathers and cultural heroes of yore, the ones who began the history of China, were all inevitably moral characters who, in acting morally, cultivated the self, regulated the family, ruled the state, brought peace to the world, and ultimately, harmonized the universe, such that they became continuous and one with Heaven (*tian ren heyi* 天人合一). Later, when the notion of the Mandate of Heaven no longer pertained only to dynastic change, continuation or tenure, but became an ideal of an enlightening personal mission that sought the continuity of one’s self and Heaven, (as in the case of Confucius) moral imperative and commitment still stood firmly at the foreground. Whether it was a ruler or a *junzi* 君子 (a morally supreme and profound person), this figure would assert absolute moral claims in accordance with his inner conscience, imposing his moral stance and exerting his influence on an issue or event whose outcomes would have been profoundly different if he did

4 Quoted in Wm. Theodore de Bary, *The Trouble with Confucianism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 1. Original Wade-Giles Romanization is substituted with Pinyin.

5 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 2.

not act in the way he did. He was to be an event-making actor by dint of his moral resolution. If Chinese historicism is humanism, then this humanism is entirely suffused with moralism. To be specific, we may say categorically that the notion of the Mandate of Heaven and the paradigm of the sage-king, which presumed the ultimate self-transcendence of the moral agent, were the very wellspring from which Chinese historical humanism flowed.

This moral-humanistic historical sense compelled a Chinese historian such as a Sima Qian to write not merely with his own generation in mind, but with a feeling and conviction that the whole of the Chinese past from antiquity, and within it the whole of the writings of China, had a simultaneous existence and composed a simultaneous order, that is, *wen*, the totality of culture. This moral historical sense, which was first and foremost a sense of the timeless – that which is always morally correct – made the Chinese historical writer traditional or conservative. But this sense of timelessness at the same time made writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity; for he must be critically aware of the gap between the moral criteria already set by culture and history, and what actually did take place. The moral historical actors stemmed the tides of evil, righted the wrongs and created history; the immoral ones succumbed to the bad and wrought evil consequences. In that sense then, humanist historiography sought to speak to us across time, using people's lives and deeds as examples. But these people, the historical actors and their deeds, were social products. They did not come from some place outside the cultural system that was China, and they did not represent an independent alternative to the way things were, be they moral or immoral personages. Histories comprising their actions were reports of human experiences. More important, they were also a part of the cultural activity of making meaning. To the extent that this moral humanist historiography produced reportage and generated meanings, it was also didactic, as Huang Chun-chieh claims, in that it was deliberately used as a cultural, political and social instrument for educative and instructive purposes. As such, this historiography was also ideological, aiming to generate ideas and meanings that buttressed and nourished a system of imperial rule with its multifaceted dimensions.

This particular humanistic, moralistic and ideological approach to and conception of the past was inevitably underpinned by and embodied a philosophy in the broadest sense of the word – a worldview and a discriminating hypothesis about the world – which establishes the criteria of intelligibility. Such a philosophy, intrinsic in any act of interpreting and understanding, furnishes the standards of truths, the measures of the validity of truth-claims, and the ways in which such truths and claims about them can and should be made, although it is interesting to bear in mind that the subject of History, expunged from the body of knowledge proper by Descartes in part I of his *Discourse*, may still face skeptical questioning as to whether it can be philosophical, if by that we mean the formation of criteria of

intelligibility by reference to scientific models. Moreover, we must bear in mind the word “history” is Janus-headed – it refers to the totality of the human past with its actions, events, institutions and so on; it also means the narrative or account that we construct of the past in the present. The latter entails preoccupation with the processes, patterns and methodologies of historical thinking.

Accordingly, history as it was conceived, and as it was done and produced, in China was a branch of learning with its own methods and standards, and Huang Chun-chieh has made a salutary attempt to engage with them. But he merely scratches the surface. It behooves us to remind ourselves once more of the domain of the philosophy of history, which comprises at least two territories. The first is the propounding and solving of the problems of philosophical analysis, that is, questions and issues that are engendered when we reflect on the nature and conditions of the past, and how it can be retold and reconstructed so as to satisfy not only the intellectual but also the political, social and ideological needs of a community in a given space and time. The second is the espousing and construing of metaphysics, which is an attempt to design some overall conception of past experiences and events, such that all of them may be explained with reference to a unitary all-embracing system or schema. Huang, in his paper, by and large addresses the first dimension of the Chinese philosophy of history, and within it, he essentially pinpoints one major philosophical process, pattern and purport: the tendency on the part of Chinese writers of history to create an interactive and causal nexus between the particular and the universal, the latter of which served then to elucidate some grand, timeless truth. I believe Huang is right, but he could have said more. If his fine piece is written with the goal of, as the Chinese saying goes, “throwing out a stone so as to lure in the jade”, let me hurl some more stones and await the arrival of the real gem: a truly comprehensive treatment of the Chinese philosophy of history.

To do justice to Chinese philosophy, we need to address at least the following main groups of questions. First, we should ask what the very nature of historical thinking is, and in so doing, we will have to ask about its relations with other disciplines and branches of learning. History is first and foremost defined by perceptual knowledge, in that the historian excavates the past and discovers the facts about it – the data of perception about the reality that happened once upon a time. This initial discovery of the past then involves the effort to show why events happened, which demands the forging of a coherent and coordinated account that connects the apparently disparate events. A historian connects facts by viewing them as exemplifications and instances of some general pattern, just as a natural scientist or a social scientist appeals to some law of nature or law of society. But the fact remains that the historian’s connections and grand patterns are based on the keen appreciation of the detailed course of particular, individual events, and the awareness of the irreducibly infinite variety of human experiences

and their unrepeatability. Marx's famous proclamation that history repeats itself and its oft-repeated regurgitations by others, is rhetoric without factual substance – history does not repeat itself, as there cannot be laws of human behaviors. The past is not one damned thing after another, doomed to repetition. Events are *sui generis*, and therefore history is autonomous, and its philosophical autonomy can be demonstrated on its own ground.

The second philosophical issue in history is the conception of truth and fact. Unlike present facts, history deals with past ones that cannot be subject to direct inspection and perception. We cannot evaluate the precision of historical statements by determining if they corroborate or correspond to a reality that is independently known. We have to test them in accordance with the clues from historical evidence. But then the question of the evidentiary weight of the evidence used and marshaled comes into question. Assessment of the sources or evidence is thus an integral part of the philosophical question of what facts and truths are, and how they should be used and conceived in the historical enterprise. For this reason, Collingwood never stopped admonishing us that the process of writing history is never just a scissors-and-paste effort; historical facts, are never simply a given, and their veracity has to be vetted and established in every single case. Even where there is an apparently irrefragable fact and indisputable datum, such as the date of the death of the Qianlong emperor, say, or the establishment of the people's Republic of China, its "truth" can only be meaningful and significant if it is situated in a larger narrative fabric of other facts and data that are not so easily characterized as "true". Huang Chun-chieh does tackle this issue, but indirectly, absorbing the philosophical question of fact-and-truth into what he calls "factual judgment", which really deals with the question of the relation and tension between fact and value.

Third, this question of fact-and-truth, and the corollary of fact-and-value, are intimately related to the notion of objectivity in history. Every historian strives to be objective, impartial and unbiased, cognitively aware that there is this independent object, the past, which he or she seeks to investigate, piece together and lay bare. But at the same time, there are pluralities and multiplicities of readings and interpretations of any historical person or event. If there is some true objectivity that corresponds to an independent reality, then there must be some sort of general and universal historical consciousness that reflects this objectivity. But there is none! As we know, the response to this apparent contradiction is to maintain that historical objectivity is different from scientific objectivity. Subjective factors cannot be elided in any historian's reconstruction of the past. The historical situatedness, as it were, of the historian is a part of written history. The postmodernists and deconstructionists are fond of sermonizing that all histories are personal and contemporary, since our inescapably presentist stances and perspectives determine our point of view and thus our

eventual conclusions about events and personages. Without subscribing to the more extreme implications of such an epistemological position, which leads to radical relativism and nihilistic skepticism, we have to agree that when we look at the past, we invariably refashion it in our image, in spite of our astute (and in some important way objective) ideological awareness of our presentist use and manipulation of the past.

Thus, we must conclude that nothing we observe about the past can be authentic, because we unmistakably and purposely appeal to our very own present experiences and viewpoints. No historical narrative can truly and comprehensively represent reality because any history is an after-the-fact narrative, whereas an historical event is not. In reconstructing history, a historian has no choice but to value narrative and explanatory clarity over sheer temporality. Mere chronology – the mass of ephemeral past facts that emerge in temporal succession – must play second fiddle to causal connections that enable both coherent account and cogent explanation. Irrelevancies and redundancies must be pruned at the expense of coherence and clarity. Every so-called and self-touted unbiased historian, without any axe to grind and cause to serve, privy to perfect information and aware of presentist perspective, will end up penning a story that is not a “true” account of a particular event or life, even if that story is about and based on that event or life. If we adopt the viewpoint of the historians in traditional China, who saw stability in the essence of the human mind and continuity in basic human desires and sentiments, then in our historical reconstruction, we favor and recognize the familiar in the new. If we, following the logic of Enlightenment thinking, believe that the chasm between antiquity and modernity is unbridgeable, we spin a yarn of the irrecoverably lost and the newly gained. In each case, there is a “true” historical hypothesis as long as it is well written and therefore persuasive, provided that they both wrestle and come to grips with the questions of fact-and-truth and fact-and-value by engaging judiciously with the evidence. They are both “objective” in the sense that their accountability for the reality that is described and analyzed is mediated and tested by the pertinent use of evidence. In brief, to ask whether a historical account is true is hardly the point; instead, asking whether an account is good is the essence of history.

There is no denying that modern Chinese historiography points to the shedding of the old and the appropriating of the new, as Hu Chang-Tze’s essay aims to show. Whether we are talking about Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 – who, being a late imperial Chinese scholar, is somehow curiously and probably anachronistically placed among the ranks of some twentieth-century Chinese historical thinkers – Kang Youwei 康有為, Liang Qichao 梁啟超, Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 or Qian Mu 錢穆, in their works and thoughts, we get a distinct sense of the new. But Hu does not deal with the historical contexts of their understanding of history, especially the crucial interrelations between their conception of tra-

dition and their reception of modernity. This brings us back to the historiographic and philosophical question of historical situatedness as a sort of ontological condition of a historian's epistemological engagement with the past – the historical interpreter's present influences – which leaves indelible marks on the past that is interpreted. The thinkers Hu studies unquestionably unleashed a new kind of historical awareness, loosening and destabilizing the fundamental assumptions of the Confucian worldview, as China was drawn into the maelstrom of world history. Via Japan, China encountered European historiography. Liang Qichao initiated a "historiographical revolution" (*shixue geming* 史學革命) that argued on behalf of a "New History" (新史學). Parting ways with traditional dynastic histories built on rulers, officials and other characters as ethico-moral personifications and exemplifications, history would be pursued as scientific knowledge that investigated the whole of the past. This also meant that the past, studied and understood differently, should be used in a different way. The ultimate purpose of writing New History would be to build a New People and a New Nation. Such a New History would simultaneously be new scientific learning as well as the mirror of a new reality of the new citizenry of China.⁶ Regardless of the intellectual sea-change that New History ushered in, we should remind ourselves that even though Kang and Liang and others that Hu's essay explores were intellectuals who felt let down by hoary tradition, nevertheless they excavated the past in hopes of finding a new present. Historical didacticism of the kind that a Sima Qian wielded was no means absent in the historical references that modern historical thinkers have made. While modern Chinese historiography was no doubt different, what with its new conceptual horizons and new ideologies, the new historiographic enterprise still sought to forge an intellectual revolution by plumbing the depths of the past.

It is also noteworthy that in the early twentieth century, Chinese thinkers, in critically reflecting on the native tradition by championing New History, sought to redefine Chinese national identity and reestablish China as the site of ecumenism, where China's past might be studied in concert with the West, guided by modern Western conceptual wherewithal such as ideas of nationalism, evolution and ethics. Chinese history could now be shown to be not static but continually modified throughout the ages. While historical thinkers such as Kang and Liang recharted the course of Chinese history in terms of the Spencerian theory of

6 Q. Edward Wang, "Historical Writings in Twentieth Century China: Methodological Innovation and Ideological Influence", in: Rolf Torstendahl (ed.), *Assessment of 20th Century Historiography*, Stockholm: The Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, 2000; Q. Edward Wang, *Inventing China through History: The May Fourth Approach to Historiography*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001, and Brian Moloughney, "From Biographical History to Historical Biography: A Transformation in Chinese Historical Writing", *East Asian History* 4 (1992), pp. 1–30.

cultural evolution, they discerned and established parallels between China and the West. For instance, the ancient Confucians (*ru* 儒) of the Zhou dynasty were the counterparts of the Greek intellectuals; Confucius and Jesus, with their messianic visions, both broke the trammels of outmoded customs and ossified religious authority. In effect, many of the twentieth-century proponents and practitioners ultimately imagined a commonality between China and the West through history and historiography, thereby imbuing historical China with transcultural and universal significance.⁷ Thus, modern Chinese historiography served as the cultural means with which Chinese intellectuals repositioned China in what they correctly saw as a vastly different world, where the traditional Chinese sense of the local and the universal no longer applied. The cultural needs of the erstwhile Chinese political imperium were well served by traditional historiography, but the new geo-political landscape no longer matched the one described and ensconced within the old books. If China increasingly became the periphery of the new world, then it must reestablish its universal significance. To them, refashioning its history while paying proper homage to its ancient history and epic literature on which cultural values and imagination fed, would be one important way to overcome the growing sense of marginalization and alienation.

Over the past two or three centuries, first in the West and then in China, history finally had to surrender its former eminent position as the *magister vitae*, the teacher of life. History no longer persuasively supplies lessons, answers, models and precedents according to which the present should act. We have come to take for granted the vast gulf between the people of yore and ourselves, and we do not see ourselves as the same as our ancient forebears. Past knowledge is not readily translated and transported to our current world as something that is readily valuable. Past challenges and answers do not yield with ease and alacrity their current utility. Historical narratives are not the master narratives of the contemporary world, nor are they the almanacs of our times. The world can no longer be remade with historical knowledge. But this melancholic litany about the modern decline of history as life's counselor, while certainly true, does not refer to the vitiation of history as a scholarly discipline and branch of learning. As Peter Fritzsche argues,

“Modern history is no longer the single, identifiable comprehensive process as understood by the Enlightenment thinkers, invested as they were in the ideas of civilization and refinement. By contrast, modern history created a huge stage, enrolled more and more people in its drama, and found that more and more people took an interest in historical developments... Moreover, the disconnection between the past and present made the past an object of intense scrutiny... More aware of the distinctiveness of their

7 Lionel Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, pp. 151–264.

own contemporary present, men and women came to invest the past with its own historicity and to understand it in terms of 'time' and 'place'".⁸

In other words, history remains relevant, albeit in different ways. That the authors and commentators of this volume make a point to explore not only Chinese historical thinking but also to address it interculturally suggests that historical hermeneutics remains a pertinent if not dominant mode of human ruminations on the self, state, society and world. The historiography of imperial China, given its moral humanism and didacticism, and its insistence on enshrining the venerable past experiences in the present, may be too triumphalist for our contemporary historical sensibilities and tastes. It may even be ridiculed as an outdated mode of expression. But the Chinese assertion of historical learning as pragmatic knowledge should not be taken and cast aside lightly. The human quest for meaning and guidance, short of appealing to religious transcendence, continues to rely on how the past is conceived and used. The past has to be always remade and retold to suit our current needs and wants. Chinese historical thinking is a constant reminder of that human need.

Novalis famously declared, "Novels arise out of the shortcomings of history", by which he meant that fiction redeems from history many of the intimate moments that history will not and cannot record. That may well be the case, but that those minutiae escape the grasp of history is an instance of the merits, not shortcomings, of history. Good and effective history proffers the past as a story, in the words of Lionel Trilling, "told by a rational consciousness which perceives in things the processes that are their reason".⁹ History is a rational search for meaning, in other words. As such, the historical view breeds and yields imaginative possibilities for the casting and recasting of selfhood and self-identity, both in terms of the nation and the individual, and public and private space. Walter Benjamin, in his essay "The Storyteller", contends that the classic way of telling stories is to set up death as the center. One wonders, then, if history, told as a story, being about the past, does not structure itself around death after all. History is past, and therefore, dead. But history, being the rational quest for meaning, gives us insight and information on the shape of events and lives. We see their beginning and end in history, even though they are already complete. What then gives past events and lives relevancy? Why then retell that which is already past, gone and dead? Chinese historical humanism offers a clue. By instituting history as the acknowledged storehouse of moral lessons, it annuls the destructive aspects of the historical process, that is, the passage of time, as a process external to human beings. Time is transformed into history by virtue of human

8 Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 6–7.

9 *Sincerity and Authenticity*, London: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 136.

action and consciousness; humanity is the master of time. Unlike Joyce's Stephen Dedalus who petulantly pronounced that history is the nightmare from which Western man must awake, a Sima Qian or a Zhu Xi 朱熹 would earnestly say that history is a sweet dream that people relive as inspiration.¹⁰ History poses tormenting questions that are more often than not universal at the human level, but in answering them, the two historical traditions, Chinese and Western, appeal to accustomed themes that allow for endless, divergent improvisations.

10 Cf. Hayden V. White, "The Burden of History", *History and Theory* 5 (1966): 111–134, p. 115.

13. The Great Divergence in Historiography – Reflections on Chinese and Western Historiographical Developments

In the following, I shall discuss some of the key points raised by this distinguished group of scholars and critique and expand the stimulating discussions wherever I can. The papers and comments have covered many broad issues emerging in the historical practices in China and beyond, past and present. They have also touched upon a variety of general questions regarding the tradition of historical writing in China and provided explanations by citing specific cases. Hu Chang-Tze, for instance, focuses his attention on Qian Mu 錢穆, one of the most prominent historians in twentieth century China whereas Wong Young-tsu centers his study on Sima Qian 司馬遷, undoubtedly the most well-known Chinese historian both in and outside China. In his philosophical discussions of the part history played in advancing Chinese civilization, Huang Chen-chieh also refers to the ideas and works of important Chinese intellectual personalities for illustration. What they are doing, in fact, is to carry on the enduring practice, which is argued persuasively by Huang, among Chinese historians in exploring “the universal” through “the particulars”, or as Confucius remarked: “If I want to make a point, I would not engage in empty talk; instead I would like to explain it clearly with specific examples”.¹ In Achim Mittag’s comments, we see that this practice of eschewing and even despising “empty talk” had persisted in Chinese scholarly writings through the ages.

It is worth noting that Confucius’ remark quoted above was from Sima Qian’s Self-Preface to his magisterial *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shi ji* 史記), which was written some four centuries after the age of Confucius. When Sima embarked on his writing, he was clearly inspired by the work of Confucius. Indeed, few would dispute that if Sima Qian was China’s greatest historian, he was most indebted to Confucius. This intellectual indebtedness became interesting in that in Sima’s time, Confucius’ teaching was just being endorsed as a form of learning

1 Sima Qian, “Taishigong zixu” (Self-preface), *Shi ji-liezhuan*, Chinese Text Project, <http://ctext.org/pre-qin-and-han?searchu=載之空言>.

by imperial fiat. Insofar as his intellectual upbringing was concerned, Sima Qian was hardly qualified as a Confucianist.

What, then, had Confucius accomplished that appealed Sima Qian? I would like to reiterate a point, which I have made elsewhere,² that it was Confucius who injected a “humanistic turn” to the historiographical practice in ancient China. In their comments, Stefan Berger and Ulrich Kragh have shed some doubt on whether the concept of “humanism” could be readily applied to analyzing historiographical practice in China. I share their concerns to a degree. Yet at the same time, I do not think that the discussion on Chinese humanism has been a derivative discourse, nor is it a result of a “dependency” theoretical endeavor as Kragh assumes. As I shall explain more below, I see the need to contemplate and consider different perspectives on both the ideas and practices of humanism. If the core of humanism is to figure the realm of humans centrally in constructing a belief and/or knowledge system, the practices of this idea have been long and diverse through the course of human history.

The humanism I refer to in ancient China was nurtured by the study of history. More precisely, it was promoted by the consideration of how past events should be recorded so that the records would have their intended meaning for human life. According to common wisdom, Confucius helped preserve some of the texts passed from the earlier ages and also tried editing some of them. One such text was believed to be the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋). Mencius, who lived about two centuries after Confucius, praised Confucius’ work on the *Annals*. One could reasonably suspect that Mencius’ knowledge of what Confucius did to the *Annals* was also passed on to Sima Qian when he began his endeavor a century or so later. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* was an early form of historical writing whose main purpose was to record certain important and/or unusual phenomena in both the natural and human worlds. This job was performed by the *shi* 史, or scribe/astrologer/historian, in government. That the *shi* recorded both celestial and human affairs in their annals suggested that the early Chinese had contemplated a certain correlation between what happened in the realm of Heaven, or the cosmos and nature, and the realm of humans. This idea of a Heaven-human correlation could be construed as a philosophy of history, for it aimed to explore the causes behind various events happening around the world. But if one believed that everything occurring in the human world could well be attributed to its supposedly corresponding change in Heaven, then this belief was hardly humanistic – a concept which I will discuss in more detail below. In fact, according to Mencius, Confucius was quite unsatisfied with the existing form of

2 On-cho Ng / Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005, pp. 1–30. In coauthoring the book, I drafted the first four chapters that deal with Chinese historiography from its origin to the Tang period.

the *Annals* he inherited. He went on to modify some of its records through rephrasing the text, or by “discriminating use of terminology”, so that the recorded events could contain not only the information of what had happened but also what they meant to the society as a whole, either morally or politically or both. In so doing, Confucius accomplished two goals at once, or killed two birds with one stone. One is that he injected and established a principle by which one could leave aside, however temporarily, the idea of possible heavenly intervention and appreciate the impact of certain human behaviors within the scope of the human world. The other is to explain the principle, which he believed was universal and should be followed by not only the society of his own time but also those of the future, through those that had already happened and therefore were real and concrete historical events. In other words, Confucius implemented his own idea that whenever he would like to make a point, he “would not engage in empty talk”, but would “explain it clearly with specific examples”. He achieved his goal by working on the existent historical records in the *Annals*.

Confucius’ experiment with the *Annals*, I contend, was the first humanistic exercise in Chinese historiography. To be sure, Confucius was not immune to the idea of Heaven-human correlation, nor was Sima Qian. Yet for those familiar with the Confucian tradition, the following quotes are proverbial: “The subjects on which the Master [Confucius] did not talk, were: extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings”. And, “The Master said, to give one’s self earnestly to the duties due to men, and, while respecting spiritual beings, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom”.³ The latter quote means that when one strives to understand and interpret human actions, it is wise to disregard the possible interfering force of “spiritual beings”.

That the early Chinese had believed in the Heaven-human correlation was hardly surprising; similar beliefs were also found and recorded in ancient Greece, India and elsewhere, where human actions were not only intertwined with the gods but also described and interpreted as a foil to reflect the omnipotence and omnipresence of the supernatural being(s). To follow this belief in writing history, one tended to see, and interpret as such, an evil act committed by a person or an outright evil man simply as a divine tool of reprimand of all humans, rather than condemn it/him and examine their detrimental societal impact. In the Chinese historiographic context, Confucius departed from this age-old belief system and intended to exercise moral censure of the wickedness he witnessed in his time. In ancient Greece, we saw a similar attempt in both Herodotus and Thucydides; the former hailed the Greeks’ heroic achievement in fending off the

3 Confucius, *The Analects*, Shuer, Chinese Text Project, <http://ctext.org/pre-qin-and-han?searchu=怪力亂神>, and Yongye, Chinese Text Project, <http://ctext.org/pre-qin-and-han?searchu=敬鬼神>.

Persians whereas the latter attributed the catastrophe of the Peloponnesian War to the hubris and miscalculations of the Athenians. In both cases, the humans were accounted for their actions, for better or for worse.

But temptation remained among historians, particularly when they saw certain uncanny occurrences in both the human and the natural realms. In Medieval Europe, records of “miracles” were commonplace in historical texts where extraordinary phenomena were conveniently, as well as convincingly to the contemporaries, explained away by citing divine intervention. In the writing of Sima Qian, one finds several cases where the historian painstakingly resisted the seemingly easier alternative – to regard and explain some events simply as heavenly intercession – than to consider and analyze them as human acts. Actually, Sima Qian did not succeed in every instance. In his famous biography of Xiang Yu 項羽, a proud prince with superb military skills who nevertheless failed to capture the throne in the demise of the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE), Sima ended the chapter with an interesting comment in which he refuted Xiang’s own explanation for his failure as a reflection of Heaven’s will. Sima instead remarked, quoted by Huang Chun-chieh in his “Historical Discourse in Traditional Chinese Historical Writings”, that it was both “absurd” and “erroneous”. Yet in describing the early life of Liu Bang 劉邦, who had had a humbler background but ultimately defeated Xiang in their power struggle, Sima could not help himself recording several “miracles” happening to Liu when young (beginning from how he was conceived by his mother), implying that Liu was destined to triumph over Xiang. At the end of that chapter, Sima again offers his comment, which essentially reiterated the point, being that Liu became the founding emperor of the Han dynasty through nothing but a Heavenly arrangement.⁴

These contradictions hardly marred Sima Qian’s reputation as a humanistic historian – though born and raised as a *shi* because of family tradition – Sima Qian devoted his *Records of the Grand Historian* to describing a wide array of human behaviors and accomplishments. His interest in his fellow humans was quite unmatched, not only among his contemporaries but also among those of subsequent ages. To note Sima Qian’s contradictions, however, helps us to see the successes and limits of humanistic practice in traditional Chinese historiography, for, to my knowledge, as late as the nineteenth century, Chinese historians, both official and private ones alike, still tended to record certain “miraculous” events in the life of a highly accomplished person, such as a founding emperor like Liu Bang. For example, the biography of Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 – who established the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) – in the *Ming History* (明史 *Ming shi*), compiled by court historians in the early years of the succeeding Qing dynasty (1644–1911), described the “divine birth” of Zhu – his mother conceived him in a dream while taking a pill from an immortal, and

4 Sima Qian, *Shi ji* – Xiangyu benji and Gaozu benji.

when she went to labor “the room was filled and glowed in red light” (*hongguang manshi* 紅光滿室).⁵ Yet by this time such practice had almost become a cliché for the historians – they perhaps had to find something peculiar to accentuate and extol the feat of the founding emperor in order to set him apart from others, including his successors. Flipping through the numerous pages of the *Ming History*, one hardly finds a similar case recorded about anyone else. Instead, the Qing court historians worked hard to explain and evaluate historical occurrences as the sole acts of humans.

These Qing official historians, as well as those before them, also had one standard to follow in their narration and evaluation, which was the moral principle set up by Confucius. When describing historical events, historians in imperial China generally desired to search for the possible moral meaning and implication in them. They tried to establish right and wrong by recording historical events and, like Confucius before them, believed that such moral standard is accepted universally, constant and immanent across time. To borrow Jörn Rüsen’s term, it was “supertemporal”. In other words, as Huang Chun-chieh puts it, Chinese historians sought to manifest the universal through the particulars recorded in their works. I agree with both Rüsen and Huang and like to add that this attempt has indeed been the main humanistic characteristic of Chinese historiography, more significant than whether or not the historian was able to cleanse any divine instances from his texts. There are several reasons for this. First is that by finding moral implications in past human actions, Chinese historians described and evaluated the course of human history on its own terms. They believed that it was humans themselves who are utterly and ultimately responsible for their deeds, for better or for worse. Secondly, they searched for causal relations in historical events. In general, they showed that good deeds would be well compensated whereas evil behavior would not go unpunished. In the meantime, they were not so naïve as to consider it an unbroken rule; instead they also seemed willing to take in exceptions and went on to offer more explanations. Third, their belief in the unfailing moral consequence of human behavior helped make history writing and recording an important and integrated part in charting and guiding the development of Chinese civilization. That is, Chinese historians, and the Chinese in general, truly believed that history is *magistra vitae*, as did the Roman politicians and historians. I agree with Fritz-Heiner Mutschler’s observation that the historical practice in imperial China bore more similarities with that of the Romans. Yet Chinese historians, it seems to me, were more convinced about the “supertemporality”, or universality, of the moral principle. In Jörn Rüsen’s analysis, for the Chinese, “The ethical rules are super-temporally valid. Their empirical manifestation in various temporal contexts of the

5 Zhang Tingyu et al, *Mingshi – Taizu benji*, Xin Hanji wenxian ziliaoku, <http://hanchi.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/ihpc/hanjiquery?@19349773980807602020240001000100011@1274180108>.

past makes them applicable in various different contexts in the present and in the future. As supertemporal rules they are above changes in history” (p. 136). The word “manifestation” is crucial here because while the moral principle is constant, it does take on various forms. In the Song period, notes Achim Mittag, Chinese historians seemed to have pursued a different set of ethical rules in their writings. But in fact, Song scholars never shook their fundamental belief in the universality of Confucian ethics. It was they who coined the well-known statement that “principle is one whereas its manifestations many” (*liyi fenshu* 理一分殊).

There are several maxims in Chinese, well known to most educated Chinese to this day, that underscore the importance of historical knowledge for every human being, because embedded in history was unfailing morality. One of these being *jianwang zhilai* 鑒往知來, or “to know the future by looking into the mirror of the past”. It derived from a phrase in the *Classic of Odes*, another ancient text supposedly edited by Confucius: “The beacon of Yin is not remote, it is in the time of the (last) sovereign of Xia”.⁶ As the Shang succeeded Xia in ruling China proper, this pithy statement summarized the historical wisdom held dearly from Confucius (who reiterated it in one of his conversations according to Mencius) to historians throughout the ages of imperial China. It delivers the strong message that corrupt government would lead to its downfall. When the Chinese turned to history to search for valuable lessons, as Sima Guang 司馬光, another great historian after Sima Qian, exemplified it in compiling his masterpiece *The Comprehensive Mirror of Aid for Government* (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑) in the eleventh century, their main purpose was none other than to expound and teach this moral conviction, or philosophy, by examples.

Jianwang zhilai, or *historia magistra vitae*, presupposes that past lessons could be readily applied to solving present problems or, at least, serve as a mirror to reflect what might happen after a certain event or act. That is, there is no essential difference between the past and the present; hence history is crucial for anyone living in the present and preparing for the future. Before modern times this was how historians around the world justified the use of history and promoted its status as a form of learning. This idea, it seems to me, is utterly humanistic, in that it assumes the sameness of the human mind despite the changes in time and space. It ran up against the deformations in modern thinking which gave rise to racism and imperialism, that pit one race and/or culture against another, or claim one’s supremacy over and at the expense of others, contributing to the many horrible crimes such as genocides seen occurring around the world. (Berger acknowledges that the modern Western form of humanism at times not only ignored but also justified social injustice done to other

6 Mencius, *Mencius*, Lilou I, Chinese Text Project, <http://ctext.org/pre-qin-and-han?searchu=股鑒不遠>.

fellow human beings.) By contrast, *jianwang zhilai* and *historia magistra vitae* are forms of humanism because both phrases emphasize the importance for humans to respect those who came before and those around them because all human humans in their multiplicity are also the same, both the deceased and the living. The past is *not* a foreign country, so to speak.

Like Stefan Berger, Peter Burke also traces the Western tradition of humanism. Burke identifies two forms of humanism – “philosophical humanism” vis-à-vis “philological humanism”. The Chinese humanism I have discussed above, perhaps, is a “philosophical humanism”, regarding the human as the center and measure of things. Burke also acknowledges that with respect to “philosophical humanism”, there are many similarities between the East and the West, or between China and Europe. Meanwhile, by citing the work of Benjamin Elman, he notes that “philological humanism” also emerged in China in the 18th century.⁷ Burke’s observation leads and helps me to make my final point – I would like to make a case that since the 18th century, a “great divergence” occurred in worldwide historiography, characterized by the emergence of a new outlook and expectations in historical writing in Europe. This new attitude toward history and historical writing departed from the tradition, or *ars historica*, in the Western cultural context and came to refashion not only how history is written but also what it is written for.

There is not enough space, or perhaps necessity, for me to explain in detail the *ars historica* tradition in Europe. In their well-written works, Donald Kelley, Anthony Grafton and others have discussed in detail what it was and how it went through a process of transformation from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that led to its demise.⁸ With regard to the goal and use of history, *ars historica* stood for a tradition that emphasized *historia magistra vitae*, namely the idea of drawing on past experiences for guiding the present. It maintained that all humans are alike throughout time and space – one could understand as well as benefit from history because it is a repository of similar – hence valuable – lessons from the past. To this end, history ought to be written, as well as told, effectively in order to reach the general public, teaching the latter about moral ethics and political wisdom among others. Over many centuries in the West, therefore, historical writing was an integrated part of rhetoric – it was an effective rhetorical tool to explain and teach ideas by examples. When Lord Bolingbroke declared that “history is philosophy teaching by example” in the eighteenth

7 See Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.

8 See Anthony Grafton, *What Was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 and Donald R. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law and History in the French Renaissance*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1964, among others.

century, he was essentially recalling the chief characteristic of this *ars historica* tradition. Incidentally, Bolingbroke's remark is astoundingly similar to what Confucius said several millennia previously, quoted earlier in this paper – "If I want to make a point, I would not engage in empty talk; instead I would like to explain it clearly with specific examples".

Besides making the statement, Bolingbroke also contemplated various aspects of history and historical writing because, at his time, the idea and practice of history had already experienced a sea change in Europe.⁹ One major cause for such a change was the rebirth of humanism, in both philosophical and philological terms, after the long Middle Ages. That is, I see an intrinsic and historical connection between the two forms of humanism: the later was essentially a means to and for the former. Renaissance humanists developed a host of techniques and continuously honed their skills to recover ancient texts, which by and large characterized their endeavor in the area of "philological humanism". Their hope, however, was to revive "philosophical humanism", sharing in spirit with the Greek and Roman authors of those ancient texts about the meaning of life and how to present and expound it through various writings, historical writing included. Over time, their interest in and efforts for recovering the humanism of the classical ages was also aided by the work and methodology of antiquarians who shared their enthusiasm for classical culture, aiming to collect and preserve anything from the past.¹⁰

For a notably different reason and in a largely different cultural context, Chinese scholars made a similar attempt at cultural revivalism from the late seventeenth century.¹¹ Disheartened by the downfall of the Ming dynasty, Chinese intellectuals in the Qing period made critical reflections on the Neo-Confucian cultural enterprise during the Song and Ming periods, deeming it a deviation from, if not a downright betrayal of, the classical form of Confucian teaching. In order to recover and revive classical Confucianism, they searched for pre-Song Confucian texts and improved methods in phonology, etymology, philology and phraseology, hoping to engage in a better understanding of the authentic teaching of Confucius. Since their work focused on textual criticism for verifying evidence, these Qing scholars' endeavor have been termed as "evidential scholarship", which also subsequently spread to Korea and Japan. Methodologically speaking, Qing evidential scholarship bore many similarities to

9 Bolingbroke wrote *Letters on the Study and Use of History* in the mid 18th century, discussing the importance of making history accessible to present needs.

10 In this regard, the best work in my opinion, remains Arnaldo Momigliano's *Studies in Historiography*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966 and *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

11 See Q. Edward Wang, "Beyond East and West: Antiquarianism, Evidential Learning and Global Trends in Historical Study", in: *Journal of World History* 19.4 (Dec. 2008), pp. 489–519.

the “philological humanism” of Renaissance Europe. As their research progressed, Qing scholars also came to historicize the Confucian Classics, examining them in their apposite historical context and considering them on a par with histories or records of the deeds and words of ancient personalities. For this purpose, they promoted and elevated the status of history, or historical texts, within the edifice of Chinese culture and scholarship. Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801), whose scholarly interest was not so congruent with that of his contemporary peers, but who nonetheless was reared in the same intellectual ethos, went as far as to declare that the Six Classics were anything but histories – *liujing jieshi* 六經皆史. To many, Zhang’s declaration, whose goal had been to historicize, so to better appreciate the nature of the Classics, amounted to a downgrade of the importance of the Classics. Indeed, if the wisdom contained in the Classics was regarded simply as from and about a long gone era, then it no longer could serve as *magistra vitae* for those living in the present, much less the future. However, all this, or the historicization of Chinese classical texts, might be the farthest that Qing scholars of the eighteenth century could have gone.¹² Although appreciated greatly by modern scholars for his insights, Zhang Xuecheng had literally no influence in his time. In other words, the advancement of evidential scholarship during the period did not shake the fundamental belief held by most Chinese, including many of the evidential scholars, in the inherent value and relevance of past experiences to the present. In fact, as an intellectual movement, evidential learning declined in nineteenth century China, giving rise to the New Text School of Confucianism whose chief motivation was to re-emphasize and reiterate the constancy of Confucian teaching through less rigid, more creative interpretations of the ancient Classics.

By stark contrast, philological humanism in Europe progressed much farther; from the late eighteenth century, it headed in a new direction that departed irrevocably from its original goal of reviving the philosophical humanism of ancient Greece and Rome. Thanks to the remarkable advances in science and technology at the time, more and more people in the West, which now also included North America, became convinced that the era they lived in had ushered human history in a new age, or the age of the modern, written as *Neuzeit* in German, which was not only on a par with but also superior to any great ages in the past. To be sure, their interest in ancient history did not subside; in fact, the Europeans had begun to extend their interest in the past to other archaic old civilizations around the world. But their purpose for studying the past had changed; it was less to seek to absorb wisdom from those past cultures but more

12 Cf. Benjamin Elman, “The Historicization of Classical Learning in Ming-Ch’ing China”, in: *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Q. Edward Wang / Georg G. Iggers (eds.), Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002, pp. 101–146.

to use them as case studies for adumbrating the course of progress in human history. That is, they were eager to find out as well as to prove how all the past ages prepared the Europeans, *not* others, to arrive at the unprecedented level of civilizational development in the nineteenth century.

The works of two nineteenth century Germans were epitomic of such confidence. In the *Philosophy of History* by G. W. F. Hegel, we saw a valiant attempt (by no means the only one of the time) to chart the ascending course of Spirit in human history, from the East to the West, ending with the rising of Prussia as its final and highest stage. In the writings of Leopold von Ranke, we see not only the same level of confidence in the rise of nation-states in Europe as opening a new page in human history, but also their effort to rewrite past histories in a new fashion, by conducting rigorous *Quellenkritik*. For Ranke, all past historians, including Machiavelli, Guicciardini and their Renaissance cohorts apparently had had too much zeal for the wisdom from the past, whereas Ranke's aim was simply *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, or to tell what actually happened. Thus to Ranke, and to nineteenth century European historians in general, the human past had become an object of study, or an area where they could exercise their art of criticism – *ars critica* – and demonstrate their acute analytical powers.

Ars critica had arisen in Europe as early as the early eighteenth century.¹³ So Ranke had had his predecessors. Emboldened and empowered by their confidence in the superiority of their age and the advancement of intellectual tools in source criticism and logical reasoning, 19th century European historians, beginning perhaps with Barthold Niebuhr, went ahead with rewriting the histories of previous ages, including those already covered and described by respected ancient authors. In the end, what these historians accomplished essentially rendered the past into a subject of study, though no longer a reserve of valuable lessons for the present. In other words, the marked development of “philological humanism” from the Renaissance onward, with *Quellenkritik* as its representative offspring in the nineteenth century, arrived at a paradoxical outcome; it started to search for the value of the “philosophical humanism” of the classical age yet ended with an unprecedentedly high regard for their own period, or the modern era. Moreover, as modern Western culture marched across the world, similar outcomes also occurred to other civilizations. In the case of India, after past knowledge was objectified and compartmentalized into academic disciplines according to the Western model, aptly observed by Dipesh Chakrabarty, “the intellectual traditions once unbroken and alive in Sanskrit or Persian or Arabic are now truly dead.”¹⁴ Invariably, Chinese civilization encountered the same fate – the annals-biographic

13 Grafton, *What Was History?*, pp. 1–33.

14 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 5–6.

style (*jizhuanti* 紀傳體) invented by Sima Qian, which persisted throughout imperial China fashioning no less than twenty voluminous official dynastic histories, for example, was irreversibly abandoned by the early 20th century. No Chinese historian has used Sima Qian's style of writing history ever since, in spite of their continuing reverence for the great Han historian.

There can be no gainsaying that there are many benefits for historians to pay close attention to what sources they are using and how valid these sources are. For one thing, it helps establish and ascertain factuality and candor in historical writing, one goal that is held as crucial for assessing the work of the historian around the world and across many ages. Meanwhile, at almost the same time when this critical historiography, exemplified by Rankean historiography, was hailed as the canon in modern historiography, it also faced challenges and criticisms. These critics, ranging from Friedrich Nietzsche and Oswald Spengler to Benedetto Croce and Hayden White, all helped reveal how unexciting and lifeless, even stifling and repressive, history as a form of knowledge would be if the historian's only interest were source criticism. Meanwhile, historiographers like Georg Iggers expresses keen concerns for modern, professionalized historians to write only for their peers rather than for the general reading public because their products have little impact on the life of real people. In Iggers' words, these works failed to "bring about cooperation between professional historians and common people who were to dig for their roots." Moreover, despite their interest and endeavors, professional historians, argues Iggers, remain subjected to political and ideological influences.¹⁵ A good example of these influences has been nationalism. In other words, modern professional historians often regard the past as consisting of several temporal stages that outlined the development of a nation. In contrast to the humanist emphasis on the "super-temporal" nature of human values, nationalist historians see the past as not only temporal but also culturally and even racially specific. This understanding and its practice have received criticisms in recent years but retains much of its influence to this day. In sumation, approximately from the mid 18th century, a "great divergence" occurred in the worldwide development of history and historiography. Thanks to the seminal work of Kenneth Pomeranz and others, ample attention has been paid to studying the former.¹⁶ Here I suggest that we also need to examine the significance of the "great divergence" in historical writing, by

15 Georg Iggers, "The Professionalization of Historical Studies and the Guiding Assumption of Modern Historical Thought", in: *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, (eds.) Lloyd Kramer & Sarah Maza, Malden MA: Blackwell, 2002, pp. 225–242, quote in 239.

16 See Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the World Economy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, and R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

which the European historians departed from the classical tradition of humanism and embraced scientism and modernism, among other “isms”. Since the Western model of historiography has been largely adopted throughout the world from the 19th century, much more needs to be done to examine its successes and limits.¹⁷ The ambitious and meaningful project initiated by Jörn Rüsen, Huang Chun-chieh and others to celebrate as well as critique the humanist traditions globally also helps us to reevaluate both the pros and cons of the modern departure from past cultural traditions in varied ways. Such work, I believe, will help reshape not only the future of historical writing, but ultimately also how we view and appreciate the relevance of history to our lives.

17 One such work worth mentioning is *Beyond the Canon: History for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Maria Grever / Siep Stuurman, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

14. Some Comments on the Difficulty of Engaging in Intercultural Dialogue

The four articles dealing with Chinese historiography from the time of the Grand Historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 to Qian Mu 錢穆 as a representative of twentieth-century Chinese history writing are the point of departure for what the editors of this book want to evolve into an intercultural dialogue between historians from the Chinese speaking world and those speaking European languages as their mother tongues. The first step in this scenario is the interpretation of ancient and modern Chinese historiography provided by three eminent scholars from Taiwan. Through these interpretations, “we” as non-Chinese scholars access the realm of present-day sinophone discourse on Chinese culture and history and simultaneously gain an understanding of Chinese history writing both ancient and modern. The close reading of these texts presented by seven scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds and representing different levels of research into Chinese history and culture form the second step. Their comments mirror interestingly how difficult intercultural exchange still is and how diverse the reaction to one and the same text can be especially when it comes to reading a text outside one’s own disciplinary or cultural boundaries. It will be extremely interesting to see to what degree the authors of the original texts will be able to recognize the meaning of what they want to express in the interpretations of their “Western” colleagues.

In the third step of the scenario, I regard as my duty to look at both the original texts and their interpretations so as to find out how the two steps of the reading scenario relate to each other. I do this based on my expertise on 20th century Chinese historiography and my deep interest in understanding how history is being written in the Chinese world. I regard the exercise of analyzing the way history is being written as the “kingly royal way” to a culture which positions the discourse on history at its very center¹; and it is in this context that I would like to

1 For a thought-provoking view on history as a center of Chinese culture see: Yves Chevrier, “La servante-maîtresse: condition de la référence à l’histoire dans l’espace intellectuel chinois”, in: *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident, Cahiers de recherches comparatives* 9 (1987), pp. 117–144.

express my sincere appreciation to the editors of this volume for providing scholars from the “East” and the “West” with the opportunity to engage in this kind of intercultural dialogue.

On the selectivity of what we know and what we want to show, Achim Mittag mentions in his text that the idea of Chinese historiography propounded by the authors of the original texts does, in fact, not relate to the textual evidence we know as history writing in the Chinese world. With this remark he draws our attention to the fact that historians who are not specialists of Chinese culture or history tend to rely for their understanding of Chinese historiography on a very small number of texts which happen to have been translated into a European language complemented by yet another set of texts written in European languages by Chinese or non-Chinese authors and often spread over a multitude of different disciplines. On the basis of their readings, they create an image of “Chinese historiography” which is shaped by their ability to relate with their understanding of history writing as it developed in their respective disciplinary and cultural contexts to what they find in the translations of Chinese language texts and their interpretations presented in European languages. However, most of the time these readers do not have an understanding of the discursive environment, neither of those texts they read as “primary sources” nor of those they read as “secondary sources”. This is a situation no historian among us would accept if the sources under discussion were of European origin.²

In order to avoid misunderstandings, the Chinese colleagues chose to origin on Sima Qian as a historian as he is known by all who are interested in Chinese history and historiography. But I would also assume that they chose Sima Qian because his way of writing history fits more than most of what I know in terms of traditional Chinese history writing into what a European historian would expect to find in a historiographical text. Last but not least, both professors Huang and Wong argue that there is something which they call humanism in Sima Qian’s texts which is as close to what they think European historiography is about as it can be. From the point of view of selecting an adequate topic for intercultural dialogue the colleagues have, indeed, done very well in choosing Sima Qian; however, if we ask the question whether or not European historians can understand “Chinese historiography” by understanding Sima Qian, the answer given by the commentators are diverse. Achim Mittag expresses his doubts as to the later influence of Sima Qian on Chinese historiography when he points to the fact that it was the *Han shu* 漢書 (which does not comply with Sima Qian’s style) which is to be regarded as the model of Chinese official history writing until the end of the empire in 1912.³

² See also Peter Burke’s comment, p. 113.

³ See Achim Mittag’s comment, p. 99.

Comments given by Fritz-Heiner Mutschler⁴ and Peter Burke⁵ reveal that they grasped the intentions of professors Huang and Wong, are nonetheless uncomfortable with the implicit understanding of European historiography which seems embedded in their choices and interpretations. As Huang and Wong prefer to relate to ancient Greek historiography, they refer to one specific way of writing history which for them might represent traditional European historiography just as much as Sima Qian stands for Chinese historiography in a European context. Peter Burke reminds us in his comment that relating to medieval or early modern forms of European historiography would also provide a basis for comparison.⁶ However, this would not fit into the conventional way of juxtaposing East and West. We tend to develop a *pars pro toto* understanding of each other and select from the respective repertoire of sources and interpretations those which fit best. Part of this *pars pro toto* image is that we feel comfortable when we can assign something to the “other” culture which we think we lack in “our” culture or vice versa: We feel good about “our” culture because it contains something which we do not find in the culture of the “other”. This is true also for the field of historiography which is conventionally understood as being official and strongly related to bureaucratic institutions of history writing. Therefore, a widely held argument goes: Chinese historiography does not tell the truth about history, but tells us only what the respective power holders wanted their historians to write down for posterity. The subtext of this is: We Europeans have a tradition of writing history independently from political constellations and therefore our history is true history. If our historical knowledge today surpasses that of the past, this is mostly so because we have access to sources former historians did not have access to. This impression of Chinese historiography is known to our colleagues from Taiwan and their interventions into our intercultural dialogue are aimed at helping us to overcome these prejudices and thus establish respect for Chinese historiography. That is why Professor Huang writes about the relationship between history and philosophy rather than between history and politics; and that is why he writes about history and morality. However, as we can read in Peter Burke’s commentary, European historiography also knows periods of close cooperation with politics, even if we try to pretend that this is a “Chinese phenomenon”.⁷ The *pars pro toto* image creates a dialogue which tends to reveal how much we do not know of each other.

Despite all the efforts to make Chinese historiography compatible with what Europeans expect history writing to be, no European can escape the predicament

4 See Fritz-Heiner Mutschler’s comment.

5 See Peter Burke’s comment, p. 113.

6 See Peter Burke’s comment, p. 114f.

7 See Peter Burke’s comment, p. 114f.

of finding Chinese language history writing extremely difficult to access even if the texts are translated into European languages. The main reason is the lack of familiarity with the many anecdotes which form the repository of historical examples, the majority of which Chinese intellectuals are still knowledgeable. Chinese intellectuals do not need further explanation when they come across these anecdotes, and often they not only know them, but also how the anecdotes were later used, discussed and interpreted. This is what even the interested European non-specialist of Chinese history and culture usually does not know and what makes it so difficult to appreciate Chinese historiography. To know these stories means to be part of an intellectual elite in the Chinese world. Not to know them is the reason why one cannot belong to this group.⁸ This closed shop mentality is yet another reason why access to Chinese historiography is so difficult and seldom reaches beyond the *pars pro toto* level.

This is no longer true for twentieth century Chinese history. To prove this, Dr. Hu chose to write about Qian Mu and his attempt to write a national history in the form of a narrative, if not a master narrative. Hu argues that Qian Mu as a prominent representative of twentieth century Chinese historiography went beyond history writing in the exemplary mode and gave explanations based on the casual relationship between events in history. In Jörn Rüsen's model this implies that with him, Chinese historiography moved from the exemplary mode to the generic mode and thus "caught up" with what we regard as normal in Europe. The selectivity behind this text is interesting in several respects. On the one hand, Dr. Hu measures Qian Mu against standards set by late nineteenth and early twentieth century European historiography and thus opens a totally different perspective on Chinese historiography as presented by professors Huang and Wong. On the other hand, he selects from the myriad of possibilities to look at "modern" Chinese historiography one historian who has been influential but by far not the model for history writing in the Chinese speaking world.⁹ In this sense, he selected his historian according to the same criteria professors Huang and Wong applied when choosing to write on Sima Qian, i. e. whether or not the historian would write in a mode similar to "Western historiography". However, whereas Huang and Wong show how Chinese historiography had already ad-

8 See: Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "Our ancestor dragons have already died, but their souls are still with us – The Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius (批林批孔) and the problem of 'Restoration' in Chinese Marxist Historiography", in: Viren Murthy / Axel Schneider (eds.), *The Challenge of Linear Time: Nationhood and the Politics of History in East Asia*, Leiden: Brill, 2014.

9 For an overview of 20th century Chinese historiography see: Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "Post-49 Chinese Historical Writing since 1949", in: Axel Schneider / Daniel Woolf (eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 1–5, vol. 5, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 615–636.

vanced to enlightened humanism long before the Europeans, for Hu, Qian Mu progresses in the linear development of modes of historiography to finally reach the stage Chinese historiography should have reached.

With the end of the empire, historiography in China was confronted with a new task. While pre-modern historiography was very much aimed at providing a reservoir of statecraft experiences to the ruling elites, from the first decade of the twentieth century onwards the writing of history has been closely related to the nation building process. It was in this context that Liang Qichao as one of the first intellectuals trying to define the historiography of the modern age demanded that the writing of history should serve the aim of bestowing the Chinese nation with a sense of solidarity, belonging and identity.¹⁰ Qian Mu's history of the nation tries to fulfill this task by writing history into a story and by making implicit casual explanations explicit. As long as the familiarity with history was a form of esoteric knowledge by which the knowledgeable distinguished themselves from the ignorant, many explanations were not pronounced in an explicit manner. They were instead inherent in the text.¹¹ For a history of the nation which needs to reach out to a wider public in order to create identity and belonging beyond the elite, this manner of writing history was obsolete. However, although in the European context writing history into a story is regarded as the best way to create a master narrative for the nation, in the Chinese context the so called *zhangjie* 章節 system was transferred from Japan. Thus a form of history writing became dominant which relates principles to facts or facts to principles.¹² The principles were no longer those which Professor Huang describes in his text. But the idea that historiography has to convey history and philosophy was not dismissed.

10 For more information on Liang Qichao's historiography see: Peter Zarrow, "Old Myth into New History: The Building Blocks of Liang Qichao's New History", in: *Historiography East and West* 1.2 (2003), pp. 204–241, to be viewed online under the url <https://uscholar.univie.ac.at/search/journal/Historiography%20East%20and%20West> (last seen February 25, 2014); and Tang Xiaobing: *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity. The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996. For an overview over the PRC discourse on Liang Qichao see: Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "Recent PRC Scholarship on Liang Qichao and the Globalization of the Research on Modern Chinese History", in: Martin J. Jandl / Kurt Greiner (eds.), *Science, Medicine and Culture. Festschrift for Fritz G. Wallner*, Frankfurt/M.: Lang, 2005, p. 176–198.

11 That seems to be the reason why Huang Chun-chieh refers to casual explanations he finds in Sima Qian while Hu Chang-Tze underlines that casual explanations for historical events are the characteristic of the generic mode of writing history which he detects in Qian Mu's oeuvre.

12 Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "History and Truth in Chinese Marxist Historiography", in: Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer / Achim Mittag / Jörn Rüsen (eds.), *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism, and Ideology*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005, p. 421–464. For a similar view on non-Marxist historiography see: Axel Schneider: *Wahrheit und Geschichte. Zwei chinesische Historiker auf der Suche nach einer modernen Identität für China*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997.

Stefan Berger discusses the issue of national history and the problem of defining the “other” in order to define the identity of the “self”.¹³ Our *pars pro toto* view on Chinese historiography as well as our colleagues’ *pars pro toto* view on European historiography is embedded in a mode of writing history which is part and parcel of the invention of the nation both in Europe and East Asia. This implies that the writing of national history is embedded into the competition among nations and the kind of leverage they need to generate in the global prestige contest. In this context, it seems of utter importance that the participants of the intercultural dialogue regard each other as equal and avoid teaching each other lessons. This is a very difficult task as it implies that all historians are equal in accessing the past of anyplace in the world. I do not think that we have already reached this level of mutual understanding and mutual respect. In times of globalization, understanding each other’s history by readings into each other’s historiography can build the foundation of the kind of mutual understanding we need to develop in order to be able to cope with the complexity the world presents us. This does not necessarily imply that we have to give up the nation as a form of imagination of how and why “we” are different from “them”.

1. On Truth in History and the Question of the “Mandate of Heaven”

Several commentators refer to the relationship between religion and historiography in their respective observations these observations being related to explanations Huang and Wong have given in their texts. Both Huang and Wong argue that Sima Qian stands for a form of historiography which emancipates itself from the belief that gods orchestrate history and puts the human being at the center. Implicitly they compare Sima Qian with humanism as a product of European history which occurred much later, and in this sense their position in favor of respect for Chinese historiography resembles Hu Chang-Tze’s. However, Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer politely suggests that “this statement reiterates the confrontation of a monotheistic world-conception on the one side and an inner-worldly one on the other”.¹⁴ I would suppose that a close reading of Wong’s text reveals how difficult it is to fit Sima Qian into an Enlightenment mold. Wong explains several times that Sima Qian in most cases explains reasons for success or failure by referring to the capabilities of the leaders involved in the event; however whenever Sima Qian cannot give reasons which comply with his rationality, he refers to “heaven” as having taken the decision. While Huang argues

13 See Stefan Berger’s comment, p. 129–133.

14 Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer’s comment, p. 122.

that Sima Qian is true to the principle of writing history as “it was”, Wong shows that sometimes Sima Qian diverts from this principle.¹⁵ What does this mean? Did Sima Qian not know better? Or is our and Wong’s understanding of Sima Qian so far away from his original intentions that we cannot but look at early Chinese historiography through the eyes of contemporary European historiography? In the face of these difficult questions, the European reader tends to fall back into long held prejudices related to Chinese historiography which reiterates the notion that Chinese historiography has long been characterized by its secularity.¹⁶

The “humanist” approach to historiography which Huang, Wong and Hu suggest in their texts leaves no room for an affirmative approach to the relationship between historiography and religion. However, if I understand Professor Huang correctly, it is the relationship between history and philosophy, i. e. the relationship between *Dao* 道 and history, which we need to understand in order to overcome our prejudices about Chinese history writing. The writing of history is a way to undertake philosophical reflections, not only in the sense of coming to terms with the moral challenges of life, but also in the sense of gaining an understanding of what the *Dao* is about. Regardless of whether we look at it from a Neo-Confucian perspective or from a perspective of, if I may say so, classical Confucianism, it is only through history that we can come close to understanding the *Dao*; and as this “coming close” to the *Dao* never implies that we can have a definite understanding of what the *Dao* might be, the writing of history is related to philosophy and religion, and religion as well as philosophy are inseparable from politics.¹⁷ From Professor Huang’s as well as Professor Wong’s point of view history and philosophy can and must go with each other, but historiography needs to keep a distance from religion and politics. With this attitude, they represent a vast majority of historians in the Chinese speaking world; however, there has always been a minority which sees in its intimate relationship between religion and history the very essence of Chinese historiography.¹⁸

15 For an interesting commentary on how Chinese historiography can lack a clear boundary between reality and imagination see: Thomas H. C. Lee, “Hong Mai’s *Yijian Zhi*: Testing the Boundary between Wordly and Otherwordly Facts”, in: Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer / Achim Mittag / Jörn Rüsen (eds.), *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism and Ideology. Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture from a New Comparative Perspective*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005, pp. 255–288.

16 See Jörn Rüsen’s comment, p. 138.

17 See also: Helwig, Schmidt-Glintzer, “Why Has the Question of Truth Remained an Open Question Throughout Chinese History?”, in: Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer / Achim Mittag / Jörn Rüsen (eds.), *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism and Ideology. Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture from a New Comparative Perspective*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005, pp. 115–132.

18 See Axel Schneider, “Nation, history and Ethics: The Choices of Post-Imperial Historiography”, in: Axel Schneider / Viren Murthy (eds.), *The Challenge of Linear Time*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, p. 83–112.

Fritz-Heiner Mutschler is puzzled by the fact that Professor Huang refers to Hayden White, saying: Sima Qian “would have been hard pressed to accept Hayden White’s position that, ‘the historical text is [simply] a literary artifact’”.¹⁹ While he agrees with Professor Huang’s assessment, he interprets the mentioning of Hayden White as a sign of Huang assuming all Western historians would applaud Hayden White’s argument. However, I believe that Professor Huang knows very well that the majority of European and US American historians would not agree with Hayden White. What he wants to show by critically referring to White is his understanding that historians around the world are united under the idea that the writing of history has to conform with the truth. This is how Sima Qian, Qian Mu and Huang Chun-chieh can be made to unite with Herodotus and everybody who rejects White’s understanding of history writing among present day European historiographers. Interestingly, it is this notion of being able to write history “as it was” which also unites Chinese language historians on both sides of the Taiwan Straits. The continuity in the history of Chinese historiography which many comments allude to is a continuity which is based on the assumption that the writing of history can be, is, and should be, truthful. Up till now, historians in the Chinese world claim a special position in society not only because history is positioned at the very center of Chinese culture, but also because the historian has *per definitionem* and proven by history a privileged access to the “dao”. It is on the basis of this privilege that he not only wrote history on behalf of the ruling dynasty, but also had the duty to act as the censor of those ruling dynasties he was working for. Without this privileged access to the *Dao* which we label “objectivity” today, no historian could claim to have the right to censorship.²⁰ Last but not least, Professor Huang also alludes to Hayden White because according to his understanding, in the Chinese context historiography is not, as Hayden White suggests, a translation of literary modes to the mode of historiography, but a form of discourse related to history and philosophy. Indeed, Chinese historiography is a separate and independent form of discursive intervention. It is not shaped by plot structures derived from literature. There is literature which writes about history, but no historiography which uses a literary mode. Interestingly, Sima Qian is much in contrast to what Professor Huang contends is often read as an example from Chinese historiography which writes history into a story. However, to my knowledge no one has so

19 See Fritz-Heiner Mutschler’s comment, p. 104.

20 For a discussion on contemporary mainland Chinese historians’ attitude to this question see: Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “Die chinesische Historiographie in den 90er Jahren: Zwischen Erkenntnistheorie und Marktwirtschaft”, in: *Comparativ. Leipziger Beiträge zur Universalgeschichte und vergleichenden Geschichtsforschung*, 11.4 (2001): *Nichtwestliche Geschichtswissenschaften seit 1945*, edited by Hartmut Kaelble and Dietmar Rothermund, pp. 53–79.

far argued that Sima Qian's story follows the plot structure of literary texts. Professor Huang's one sentence remark also hints at this problematic.

2. On the Difficulty of Engaging in Intercultural Communication

There is yet another reason why the three authors from Taiwan chose the topics they chose: They know that Jörn Rüsen is searching for a kind of humanism which could provide the basis for intercultural communication. The kind of humanism the three authors found in their respective sources obviously serves them as a bridge to the "other" in this dialogue. However, the "other" does not seem totally convinced that the experiment can be regarded as successful. Instead, most commentators want to know more about Chinese historiography or intend to make more known about Chinese historiography.²¹ The reason is not only that humanism as such is not accepted by everybody as a valuable concept for intercultural communication.²² A close reading of the commentaries reveals that there is a strong tendency among most of the commentators to shy away from normative questions and that they feel the time is not yet ripe for engaging in normative discussions as long as our understanding of Chinese historiography is a *pars pro toto* understanding.

I feel that this reticence is well justified even if I can also understand the argument Jörn Rüsen expresses in his commentary and the urgency he feels when advancing the ideal of intercultural communication. The problem, however, arises when we try to answer the question why "we" should be interested in Chinese historiography if we do not share Jörn Rüsen's vision of intercultural communication. For our colleagues from Taiwan the question as to why they should be interested in "our" historiography has long been answered. They, as the majority of historians in the Chinese world, have integrated many aspects of European historiography into the way they formulate their own history. The intercultural dialogue was and is to a certain extent up until now a dialogue shaped by the colonial experience and the belief that China had to catch up with global modernity. While this kind of dialogue is implicitly intercultural, it has seldom been raised to the level of explicitly. Chinese historians are much more knowledgeable about of European history and historiography when compared to European historians and their grasp of Chinese history and historiography. However, most Chinese specialists of Chinese history do not engage in the study of European history and historiography because they want to understand Europe. They do this because they want to write Chinese history. In this respect, I

21 See the comment by Peter Burke, p. 118f; and the comment by Ulrich Timme Kragh.

22 See the comment by Stefan Berger.

would argue that the East/West dialogue is instrumental rather than normative, and that this implicit understanding is shared by the majority of those who participate in this dialogue.

A second basic understanding all participants in this experiment share is that they cherish the past and seem reluctant to deal with the present. Both, intellectuals from the Chinese world as well as intellectuals from Europe, tend to idealize the Chinese past and look for orientation within the reservoir of what we usually call Chinese tradition. In contrast, I would suggest that we need to engage in understanding contemporary historiography in order to gain access to the undeniably wonderful reservoir of ancient Chinese historiography. Bodo Wiethoff²³ promoted this argument long ago and has trained me, along with a whole group of China specialists in accessing the past by accessing contemporary China. If we want to avoid the *pars pro toto* imaginary on both sides of the dialogue we have to learn to get engaged with each other in our common endeavor of trying to understand each other's historiography. Joint research is the best way to overcome boundaries between different disciplines and between different cultures. This book is a very important milestone in what I anticipate as a long process toward real intercultural communication. But we are still talking about each other and not with each other!

23 Bodo Wiethoff, *Grundzüge der älteren chinesischen Geschichte*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971, especially pp. 9–38.

IV. Responses

15. Some Notes on Chinese Historical Thinking

1.

The seven “comments” and three “second thoughts” are intriguing and ideas-provoking. I have learned a great deal in reading the ten articles. Before responding to them, I would like to comment on Sima Qian 司馬遷 as the representative historian of Chinese historiography.

As Professor Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik aptly pointed out, the difficulty in intercultural dialogue lies in the fact that the representative historians to be chosen for discussion, Sima Qian in our case, were highly selective and subjective, if not biased. Professor Weigelin-Schwiedrzik asked the question of the extent to which Sima Qian was a representative historian in Chinese historiography.

I agree with Professor Weigelin-Schwiedrzik when she indicated the fact that “historians who are not specialists of Chinese culture or history tend to rely with their understanding of Chinese historiography on a very small number of texts which happen to have been translated into a European language [...]” (p.184). The same is also the case in some Chinese colleagues’ understanding of European historiography. However, my discussion of Sima Qian is not because Sima Qian’s work was translated into English. Rather, it is that lofty ideal of “comprehensiveness” in Sima Qian’s history writing which made him the “father of history” in Chinese historiographical tradition. Sima Qian proclaimed, “it was my hope, by a thorough comprehension of the working of affairs divine and human, and a knowledge of historical process, to create a philosophy of my own”. Sima Qian’s ideal of “comprehensiveness” in history writing stood out as a siren call to a great number of Chinese historians, predominantly Du You 杜佑 (735–812), Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1104–1162), Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) and Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (1254–1324/5) and so on, and inspired them to entitle their *magnum opus* as “comprehensive” (*tong* 通).

As for the comparison between Sima Qian and Ban Gu 班固 in Chinese historiography, Professor Achim Mittag made a good point when he indicated that Ban Gu’s *Han Shu* (*History of the Former Han*) was regarded as the model of the

writing of dynastic history. However, the main reasons why I took Sima Qian as the representative historian of traditional China lay in the fact that Sima Qian upheld the ideal of “comprehensiveness” in Chinese historical writings. This very ideal has been the main-stream value orientation among Chinese historians. Among others, Qian Mu (錢穆, 1895–1990) was the great historian of twentieth century who strove to writing history in line with this ideal. We do not need to agree with the twelfth-century historian Zheng Qiao’s satire, in his preface to *Tong zhi* 通志 (*Comprehensive Treatise*), that the comparison between Sima Qian and Ban Gu is that between a dragon and a pig, yet Zheng Qiao was correct in indicating that the ideal of “comprehensiveness” had long lost in Chinese historical writing since Ban Gu’s “dynastic history”. It is in this sense that I regarded Sima Qian as the father of Chinese historiography.

2.

Professor Achim Mittag argued that the key concept of Song and post-Song historiography was the notion of “moral constitution of the heart-and-mind” (*xinshu* 心術) or “motivation” (*xin* 心), but not the “principle” (*li* 理) as I asserted.

It seems to me that the concepts of “principle” and “motivation” were not contradictory in the philosophy of history in traditional China. The “principle” had often been used in the macro-historical context in Chinese historians’ interpretation of history. In the case of Sima Qian, the concepts of “principle” or “heavenly way” (*tiandao* 天道) were reflected upon in “the workings of affairs divine and human”. In contrast with the “principle”, the “motivation” or *xinshu* had often been used in the individualistic micro-historical context of what Sima Qian termed as the “changes between the ancient and the modern”. In the historical writings of Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and Zhu Xi 朱熹, (1130–1200) who were baptized in the Confucian values, the history shall be moving to the road without “principle” if the “motivation” of the majority of the people of a given era became wicked. In Zhu Xi’s discussion with his disciples on Chinese history, the notion of “motivation” was often used in the sense of individuality while the notion of “principle” was used in the sense of collectivity.

Two points can readily be observed in traditional Chinese historical thinking. In the first place, Chinese historians regarded man and woman as agent of action in history had their own free will. Therefore, they must be held responsible for results of their deeds. Secondly, Chinese historians confirmed that the transformation of the world started from the transformation of everyone’s self. Therefore, the study of history in traditional China was the best way to study the models of the “paradigmatic individuals”, predominantly the legendary sage-rulers such as Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Yu 禹 and Duke of Zhou 周公 in the Golden Antiquity.

The above two points have much to do with Professor Fritz-Heiner Mutschler's comments on the fact that Chinese historians devoted much more attention to the individual agent of history while Western historians stressed the supra-individual factors such as the will of God.

Although I agree with Professor Mutschler's observation, I have to stress that the contrast between Chinese and Western historiographies is primarily a matter of degree.

As a matter of fact, Chinese historians also considered factors beyond individual agents of action. Among other things, the most predominant "supra-individual" factor in Chinese historians' interpretation of history might be propensity (*shi* 勢). The Tang literati Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819) had stressed that the formation of feudalism in ancient China was primarily attributable to the propensity of unstoppable trend in history which is beyond the control of personal will. However, we have to note that Chinese historians had devoted equal attention to the will of individual person as agent of action in history. As Zhu Xi put it, "it is only the sages who are able to observe where the principle lies in and act to inherit or change it".¹ It is difficult, if not impossible, for Chinese historians to accept historical determinism totally.

This issue has much to do with the relationship between fact and value in Chinese historical writings as I discussed in chapter one. I agree with Professor Mutschler when he said, "what historians actually do is to reconstruct a nexus of a certain kind of conduct and a certain kind of outcome, while independently giving the former a moral evaluation" (p. 108). However, his assertion that "extrapolation of moral principle, i.e. 'Sollen', from historical facts, i.e. 'Sein', is logically impossible" would not be the case in Chinese historiography. In traditional Chinese historical thinking, the "logical" and the "historical" in Hegel's terms are merging together. Ever since Sima Qian, Chinese historians believed that the "to be" and the "ought to be" must form a harmonious whole. Although they might not intentionally extrapolate moral principles from historical facts, traditional Chinese historians firmly believed that the moral lessons might be exuded or distilled through their historical narration.

¹ Zhu Xi, "Random Notes on Ancient History (Gushi yulun, 古史餘論)", in: *Literary Corpus of Zhu Xi* (Zhu Xi wenji, 朱子文集), Taipei: Defu Cultural and Educational Foundation, 2000, Book 7, vol. 72, p. 3639.

3.

Another issue involved in the dialectical relationship between fact and value in Chinese historiography is the interaction between the present and the past. While I metaphorize “history” in Chinese historical thinking as a library, Professor Schmidt-Glintzer addresses the questions of “what were the hermeneutical means used by the visitors of this library and how was this library maintained?” (p. 122) These are important issues to be tackled with in more detail. Two “hermeneutical means” may be identified in the reading of history in traditional China.

The first approach is to take the past as a mirror to reflect and observe the present. This approach is made possible on the assumption that there exist a hermeneutic circularity between the past and the present. Chinese historians studied the past for the improvement of the present and reorientation of the future. As reported by Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (c. 179–104 BCE), Confucius’ writing of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* aimed at praising the good while blaming the wicked so as to illuminate the greatness of the “kingly way”. Therefore, historical narration in traditional Chinese historiography, particularly that of the “golden antiquity” or “three dynasties” (*sandai* 三代), was primarily discourses of counter-factuality. As I had argued elsewhere, “Chinese historical thinking is thus a normative co-mirroring between the past and the present. This is a creative manifestation by the present of historical significance of the past, on the one hand, and shaping of the present by the normative significance of the past thus found, on the others”.² The ideal past was narrated not only for interpreting the world but also for changing the world. As a result, the majority of knowledge preserved in Chinese library of historiography pertained to the human behaviors in the ups and downs of dynasties.

The second means to be employed by the visitors of Chinese library of historiography is the “emic” approach on top of the “etic” approach. By “etic” approach I mean that the study of history in traditional China aimed at the reconstruction of facts in history. However, this is not the only goal of historical study. On top of the study of historical factuality, the readers of history must embody the values or lessons exuded from the human activities in history. In the “emic” approach, the study of history was not a kind of “intellectual game”. Rather, the visitors of the library of history must be imbued with the values as exemplified by historical personalities. In traditional China, the visiting of the library of history is not merely a cognitive activity but an orientative program of

2 Chun-chieh Huang, “Historical Thinking in Classical Confucianism-Historical Argumentation from the Three Dynasties”, in: Chun-chieh Huang / Erik Zürcher (eds.), *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*, Leiden: Brill, 1995, p. 76.

self-cultivation. The readers are engaged participants in historical thinking rather than observers only.

4.

As Professor Peter Burke indicated, the cultivation of the self was the common ground of humanism in Europe and East Asia. As the Chinese reading of history aimed at the cultivation of the self, they are very much fascinated with the exemplary history.

The “cultivation of the self” is a complex of ideas in Chinese intellectual history. This complex of ideas include many notions, predominantly “cultivation (*hua* 化)”, “transformation (*zhuan* 轉)”, and “nurture (*yang* 養)”. All these ideas share the concept of “embodiment” as their core value. Chinese historians recorded the deeds and thoughts of exemplary sages and the worthies or the “creative minority” as Arnold Toynbee (1852–1883) termed it for later-day readers of history to acquire the value into their psycho-somatic bodies. It is in this way that readers of history may identify themselves with the great personalities in history. Sima Qian had cited Dong Zhongshu’s saying that Confucius, in composing the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, aimed at making moral judgments through the history of Spring and Autumn era. From Confucius to Qian Mu, the eyes of Chinese historians are glued by the illness of this mundane world rather than the transcendent, divine world. Chinese historians assigned to themselves the noble task of transforming the lives of history readers so as to transform the whole world.

This point has much to do with the limitation of exemplary thinking as Professor Jörn Rüsen addressed. Rüsen had aptly indicated that morality exuded from the exemplary thinking can not sufficiently explain the experience of evil in history. He argued further that the morality in exemplary history was static and therefore unable to articulate the changes of meaning. Rüsen’s two observations run in line with the eighteenth-century Chinese historian Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801). Zhang had indicated that although the *Dao* 道 (principle) presumably existed in *Six Classics*, yet the *Dao* that emerged after the *Six Classics* were not recorded in them. This is what Rüsen meant by the limitation of exemplary history.

Pertaining to the dialectical relationship between morality and exemplary history, I like to employ the idea of “autonomy of history” in R. G. Collingwood’s (1889–1943) philosophy of history.³ The morality can be extrapolated or distilled

3 R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, London: Oxford University Press, 1962, pp. 125–6, 274–6, 318–20.

by historians from the exemplary personalities and deeds in history. However, as soon as the morality is articulated from history, it obtains “autonomy” which the exemplars of history can not confine totally. The personalities and deeds in exemplary history were indeed tempo-spatially determined. However, the moral codes distilled from exemplary history were abstract, universal and therefore supra-temporal, supra-spatial. It is in this sense that we may say that the problem of the so-called limitation of morality in exemplary history can be resolved.

5.

The final issue I like to comment is the relationship between inter-cultural humanism as Jörn Rüsen has been striving for and the writing of national history.

Professor Stephen Berger indicated that Humanism “has had a complex relationship with national history” (p. 127), and asserted the “ultimate incompatibility of the nationality principle and its accompanying national history with the project of intercultural humanism” (p. 131). Basically, I agree with Professor Berger’s position. However, we have to note that there are two different types of nationalism, i. e., the invasive and the defensive nationalisms. The first type of nationalism aims at invading other countries and enslave their people while the second type of nationalism strives for consolidating national identity through historical knowledge in the age of crisis when a given nation suffers from invasion of imperialists. This “defensive” nationalism aims at saving the country from selfdom and upheld the dignity of man. This second type of nationalism is not contradictory with inter-cultural humanism, Qian Mu’s “national history” is a typical representative case of twentieth century when Chinese people suffered from the ups and down of invasion of Western Powers and wrote their modern history with blood and tears. As I indicated elsewhere, in Qian Mu’s world of historical thinking, the past experience of China was treated as a national epic which was an inspirational library for today. Chinese history was also regarded as a reservoir of the method of humanity.⁴

It is in this sense that we are warranted to say that Chinese humanism was an outgrowth of the unending dialogue between the past and the present, rather than of the tension between the God and man. The nationalism in Qian Mu’s historical scholarship can best be characterized as what Anthony D. Smith terms as the “historical ethno-symbolism”,⁵ which emphasizes the interaction between the intelligentsia and the common folks. Qian Mu’s nationalism also stressed the socio-cultural patterns over the *longue durée* of Chinese civilization.

4 Chun-chieh Huang, *Humanism in East Asian Confucian Contexts*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2010, chapter 5, pp. 81–96.

5 Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010, p. 61.

6.

To conclude, I am inclined to agree with Professor Jörn Rüsen in saying that some historical approaches to intercultural communication in historical thinking is urgently needed. Indeed, a true dialogue between Chinese and Western historical thinking lies in the mutual historical understanding. Every historiographical tradition, Chinese and Western, bears a historical, evolving background. Therefore, a successful and creative dialogue between Chinese and Western historical thinking will depend on a mutual understanding of their respective histories.

16. Historical Thinking East and West – Let the Twain Meet

I am gratified by thoughtful comments from distinguished European colleagues. For many years, quite frankly, I was rather pessimistic about intercultural dialogue because quite a few prominent historians in the West simply dismissed the importance of classical Chinese historiography. G. R. Elton, for instance, retained the prevalent belief in the West that historical consciousness was purely Western, and in the Orient, whether India or China, was “a-historical”.¹ John Lukacs said even more confidently that “historical consciousness is still something specifically Western”, and “outside the West the memory of the past is marked by a kind of historical insufficiency”. To buttress his arguments, he quoted William Haas as saying that “Only in Western civilization could genuine history have arisen and grown as it did”, and that “the reliable histories of the otherwise highly articulate people of India, China, Persia, and Japan have been written by Westerners”². For J. H. Plumb, Sima Qian’s book “is more a narrative of morality than a narrative of history”. Hence he concludes that there is no “historical criticism” in Chinese historiography.³ Even eminent French Sinologist Étienne Balazs was willing to describe Classical Chinese historiography so succinctly but misleadingly as “history written by bureaucrats for bureaucrats”.⁴ No wonder E. H. Dance unhesitatingly states that “China knows neither history for history’s sake nor truth for truth’s sake”.⁵ In the wake of all these discouraging remarks, I find Jörn Rüsen’s tireless efforts to promote dialogue between East and West not only particularly encouraging but also truly admirable.

Let me first address myself to the questions and comments directed to me. Achim Mittag does not agree with my assessments of Sima Qian. He regards Ban

1 See G. R. Elton, *The Practice of History*, New York: Thomas Crowell Co. 1967, p. 11.

2 See John Lukacs, *Historical Consciousness: The Remembered Past*, New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers, 1994, p. 23.

3 J. H. Plumb, *The Death of the Past*, London: the Macmillan Press, 1969, pp. 21–22, esp. p. 22.

4 Étienne Balazs, “L’histoire comme guide de la pratique bureaucratique”, in: *Historical Writing on the People of Asia*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961, vol. 3, p. 82.

5 E. H. Dance, *History for a United World*, London: Harnap, 1971, p. 87.

Gu's 班固 *Han shu* 漢書 rather than Sima Qian's 司馬遷 *Shi ji* 史記 as the "ultimate model" of Chinese history writing during the long history of Imperial China. To be sure, *Han shu* started the so-called "dynastic history" (*duandai shi* 斷代史) and, indeed, the successive dynasties mostly followed his lead. But, in terms of form, layout and the style of writing, Ban Gu as well as most later official history writers, explicitly followed the biographical approach of historical writing, or the "style of annals-biography" (*jizhuan ti* 紀傳體) that Sima Qian had first created. Ban Gu only confined his account to the Western Han period (206 BCE–8 CE) to be a dynastic history for later historians to follow. Mittag seems to have overlooked Zhang Xuecheng's 章學誠 key remark: "[Ban] Gu's [*Han*] *shu* followed [Sima] Qian's style to establish the convention [of the dynastic history] ([*Ban*] *Gu* [*Han*] *shu* *yin* [*Sima*] *Qian* *zhi* *ti*, *er* *wei* *yi* *cheng* *zhi* *yili* 固書因遷之體, 而為一成之義例). Zhang went on to criticize what he considered the mediocre historians who claimed to venerate Sima Qian and Ban Gu, but in effect they were obstinately imprisoned by the established rules and turned out all the woefully obscured works. So ostensibly, Zhang considered both Sima Qian and Ban Gu the "fathers of Chinese history" (*zu Ma er zong Ban* 祖馬而宗班), and yet Mittag's reading that "turning Sima Qian into a forefather who was not sacrificed by later generations" can nowhere be found in Zhang's original text.⁶ Admittedly, not just Zhang but also many other Chinese historians of different periods sang praises to both the *Shi ji* and the *Han shu* (*Shi Han bing cheng* 史漢並稱), but none of them would say that "it was the *Han shu*, rather than the *Shi ji*, which established the ultimate model for later historiography". As they well aware, only Sima Qian could claim to have originated the "annals-biography style" that for the next two thousand and five hundred years historians were to follow. Even in the early twentieth century, the *Qing shi gao* 清史稿 (*Draft History of the Qing Dynasty*) was still being written in this particular style.

Professor Mittag tries unwittingly to discredit Sima Qian, as he mentions that "the *Shi ji* was held liable for denigrating the house of Han and hence being denounced as a 'book full of slander' (*bangshu* 謗書)". So far as I know, the late Han minister Wang Yun 王允 (137–192 CE) was the first one who made such accusation. In his words, "Emperor Wu 武帝 [of the Han] spared Sima Qian from death, thus allowing him to write the book full of slander".⁷ But the accusation met with a firm rebuttal from the noted historian Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372–451 CE), who earned his fame providing an admirable 2,389 annotations to the *Sanguozhi* 三國志 (*History of the Three Kingdoms*). As Pei justifiably put it, "Sima Qian refused to conceal Emperor Wu's mishaps and wrote [his work] straightforwardly as he should. Thus, where is the slander?"⁸

6 Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠, "Shujiao", *Wenshi tongyi* 文史通義, *neipian*, p. 37.

7 See Fan Ye 范曄, *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, *juan* 60.

8 See Chen Shou 陳壽, *Sanguo zhi* 三國志, *juan* 6.

Indeed, in contrast to the *Han shu* which resolutely glorifies the Han dynasty, the *Shi ji* appears a far more critical and objective piece of historiography. I do not believe modern scholars, Professor Mittag included, would seriously regard the *Shi ji* as a “book full of slander” (p. 98).

Unquestionably, Professor Mittag thinks Ban Gu a better and more influential historian than Sima Qian, as he says: “Ban Gu, and not Sima Qian, was seen as the master-historian *par excellence*”. (p. 99) I do believe Ban Gu a good historian. As a late-comer, indeed, he complimented his forerunner Sima Qian in many ways. Nevertheless, I am inclined to agree with the distinguished Japanese Sinologist Naitō Torajirō 内藤虎次郎 (1866–1934) that “the appraisals of the *Shi ji* and the *Han shu* have never ceased since ancient times. Whatever one may say, there is no question that the *Han shu* is not as good as the *Shi ji*”.⁹ Fundamentally, the *Han shu* was written deliberately to glorify the Han dynasty.¹⁰ Moreover, given the fact that Ban Gu copied substantial passages from the *Shi ji* with only minor adjustments, it is unfair to accuse Ban of plagiarism because he had no intention of hiding, as they were so obvious to his readers. I assume he found it unnecessary to rewrite the parts Sima Qian had already well covered. He could not possibly have known the modern concept of footnoting. Having said so, I am still not ready to go so far as Professor Mittag has put forth that Ban Gu can be seen as “the master historian *par excellence*” at the expense of Sima Qian.

Professor Mittag speaks highly of the *Han shu*’s “Treatise of the Five Elements” (*wuxing zhi* 五行志), as he argues that “this treatise occupies a central place in the *Hanshu*” (p. 99). Since the issue has been raised to that high level, I must look into it a little. Ban Gu, in this particular treatise, summarized the “theory of Heaven-man resonance” (*tianren ganying lun* 天人感應論) pronounced by Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE) and later amended by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77 BCE–6 CE) and his son Liu Xin 劉歆 (53 BCE–23 CE). For instance, as Ban wrote, Dong observed that in 698 BCE, in the wake of the military debacle following the invasion of a four state allied force, Duke Huan of Lu 魯桓公 (r. 712–694 BCE) and his officials still neglected their internal affairs and let their neighbors feel slighted. For Dong, this was not the way to perpetuate a state, so Heaven bestowed calamity to Lu 魯 as a warning. Liu Xiang observed that the Lady Lu, a jezebel, was treacherous and hence should not be involved in the solemn ceremonial sacrifice at the ancestral temple. But Duke Huan of Lu turned a deaf ear and afterwards visited the state of Qi 齊 together with his lady. Duke Xiang of Qi 齊襄公 killed Duke Lu after the latter had been much maligned by his

9 Naitō Konan 内藤湖南, *Zhongguo shixueshi* 中國史學史 (*A History of Chinese Historiography*), translated by Ma Biao 馬彪, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008, p. 104.

10 Cf. Wang Rongzu 汪榮祖 (Young-tsu Wong), *Shizhuan tongshuo* 史傳通說 (*Studies in Historiography*), Taipei: Linking Press, 1988, 1997, p. 11.

own lady. Liu Xin observed that this was the retribution for giving up moral standards and the discipline of ritual. It was incidents like these in addition to the recording of natural disasters, various extraordinary phenomena such as earthquakes and solar eclipses which were intended to convey the sense of correlation between “Heaven’s will” and human conduct. In other words, man was ultimately accountable to Heaven for his behavior.

The correlation of natural phenomena, auspicious or ominous, with the fortune or misfortune of man can be found in pre-Qin thinkers, who believed disobeying the will of Heaven would be met with calamities.¹¹ Dong drew upon the views of his predecessors and constructed the “Heaven-man resonance” theory on the framework of *yingyang* Confucianism. He saw between “Heaven” and “man” the interaction of *ying* (feminine) and *yang* (masculine) forces and the cyclical alterations of the five natural elements, namely, wood bears fire, fire bears earth, earth bears gold, gold bears water, and earth bears wood as the symbolic change of Heavenly Mandate (*tianming* 天命). Thus, how to accommodate the acting cosmic forces maintaining watch over human affairs was of the uttermost concern.

Dong Zhongshu, who lived to see the rise of the universal empire of Han, obviously had a political purpose in mind.¹² Clearly, he had the intention of using the “Heaven-man resonance theory” as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, he tried to dignify the Han Emperor, the son of Heaven, with divinity, and thereby striking His Majesty’s subjects with awe, on the other hand he intended to manipulate propitious omens or natural calamities as Heaven’s awesome messages sent to discipline an otherwise all-powerful ruler. The theory implies that only by building up virtue and kindness can a ruler carry out the Heavenly Mandate and maintain the peace and order of his world. In retrospect, Dong’s purposes succeeded only in part. While the Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子) was deified and inviolable, scholars or historians were rarely able to chastise, let alone control their mighty ruler by means of interpreting Heaven’s will as Dong had so wished. With the usurpation of Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE–23 CE) at the end of the Western Han and the restoration of the Han by Liu Xiu 劉秀 (r. 29–57 CE), the ambitious political leaders in their struggles for the throne manipulated the idiosyncratic theory to their own advantage and produced a large corpus of apocryphal texts meant to bolster claims for their respective heavenly mandates. Under the pressure of political imperative, the historians ran willy-nilly to the service of the regime and aided in its dynasty-building ambitions.

11 Cf. Mo Di 墨翟, *Mozi* 墨子, “Tianzhi” 天志 (“Heaven’s Will”), edn. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1954, *juan* 7.

12 Cf. Xiao Gongquan 蕭公權, *Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiangshi* 中國政治思想史, Taipei: Zhonghua wenhua chubanshe, 1954, vol. 3, p. 294.

In his “Treatise of the Five Elements”, Ban Gu concurred with Dong, the Lius and other similar viewpoints by confirming the Han orthodoxy with the sanction of Heaven. He actually related natural phenomena to the success of Han politics, and from time to time invoked mysteries and the cyclic changes of the Five Elements to justify the dynasty’s legitimacy. Most ostensibly, the Han were designated by Ban as bearers of the virtue of “fire” in order to link them to the ancient sage ruler King Yao 堯 in the cyclical change of the Five Elements. The linkage allowed Ban to manufacture the remarkable false genealogy of the founder of the Han dynasty.¹³ Needless to say, there was no cosmic correlation between the Liu family and King Yao. Generously citing Dong with compliments though Ban Gu did, Ban was not really a true believer of Dong’s theory. While using the theory to glorify the Han regime by any and all means, he did not apply it to criticize the throne when he dealt with the ominous signs foretelling the decline and fall of the Western Han starting from 48 BCE to 8 CE. Instead of blaming the last four emperors for losing the Mandate, he continued to more or less sing praises of these failing rulers.¹⁴ If the treatise, as Professor Mittag says, “occupies a central place in the *Han shu*”, Ban Gu bordered on writing fiction rather than history.

Were the Han literati overwhelmingly influenced by Dong’s theory and Ban’s treatise? Not at all. A substantial number of Han scholars who subscribed to Old-Script Confucianism (*guwenjing* 古文經) were essentially concerned with man, not with divinity. In opposition to a cosmic view of the past, they assumed a historical view of the past. Accordingly, they emphasized man’s performance in the past as guidance for those in the present. They likewise, however, regarded authorization of the throne as their highest duty. Reluctant of manipulating cosmic force to intervene, they had no other means but to subordinate themselves to the throne. In this regard, since there was nothing above him, the Son of Heaven became the primary force in the eminently human world. Man’s problems could be solved only by man himself. Inevitably, they were inclined to seek historical examples for guidance. With the decline and fall of the Latter (Eastern) Han Empire, the more rationalistic trend became predominant, even though the mystical elements in Chinese thinking never died out.

What really occupies the “central place” in the *Han shu* is its rather comprehensive coverage of Chinese history from 206 BCE to 25 CE, showing dynamic changes in politics, society, and culture. Its authors (if we include his father Ban Biao 班彪 and his sister Ban Zhao 班昭), based on Sima Qian’s style, wrote a history for the unified empire and opened up the field of dynastic history writing. Could we then agree with Professor Mittag that: “the *Han shu*, and not the *Shi ji*, came to be regarded as the model of history writing” (p. 99) for the following

13 See *Han shu* 1/81–82.

14 See *Han shu* 9/298; 10/330; 11/344; 12/360.

development of Chinese historiography in post-Han China? Firstly, the Ban model is insufficient without including Sima Qian. During the post-Han period, those who carried on the annals-biography tradition invariably cherished both Sima Qian and Ban Gu.¹⁵ Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), arguably the best historian of his time, unmistakably proclaimed his indebtedness to Sima Qian, and commending Ban Gu though he did, he found Sima the superior historian to Ban.¹⁶ Moreover, Fan's own importance in the lineage of Chinese historiography is due to his sensible, substantial, and comprehensive coverage of the East Han period with an elegant literary style rather than his chapter on the Five Elements.¹⁷

Secondly, to be sure, the category of Heaven as the cornerstone of the Five Elements theory definitely continued to play its role in post-Han China. Numerous regimes during the period of “Medieval China” needed such a theory to legitimize their respective royal successions, particularly in such official histories as the *Song shu* 宋書 (*History of the Song Dynasty*) and the *Wei shu* 魏書 (*History of the [Tuoba] Wei Dynasty*). But it is difficult to say that the theory “became pervasive throughout the Chinese Medieval period (c. 200–750 CE)”. Simply put, as a result of the Han Empire falling apart and the persistent turmoil afterwards, post-Han China witnessed tremendous socio-political changes during which, aided by the rising influence of Buddhism and metaphysical Neo-Daoism, began a new era for historiography and produced an unprecedentedly large number of historical works. By the end of medieval period in the sixth century, the surviving history books of the period amounted to over 800 titles. And not just in sheer number alone, many new genres were introduced, including the revived “chronology” (*biannian* 編年), “court diary” (*qijuzhu* 起居注), “historical criticism” (*kaoshi* 考史), “miscellaneous biographies” (*zazhuan* 雜傳), “informal biographies” (*biezhuan* 別傳), “biographies of eminent monks” (*gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳), “genealogy” (*puxi* 譜系), “local gazetteers” (*difangzhi* 地方志), “family history” (*jiashi* 家史), “anecdotes” (*yishi* 佚史), etc. Even more importantly, the Chinese word “*shi* 史” now referred also to a historical book, in addition to meaning the person who wrote history. There were no longer only government-patronized official historians, independent-minded historians and “private history” (*sishi* 私史) also came into being. A number of known cases of historians being prosecuted during this period

15 For details see Jin Fagen 金發根, “Lun Shi Han liang shu zhi chuanbo 論史漢兩書之傳布” (On the dissemination of the *Shi ji* and the *Han shu*), in: Jiandu xuebao bianjibu 簡牘學報編輯部 (ed.), *Lao Zhenyi xiansheng qizhi rongqing lunwenji* 勞貞一先生七秩榮慶論文集 (*Collected Essays in Com-memoration of the Seventieth Birthday of Mr. Lao Gan*), Taipei: Jiandu xuehui, 1977, pp. 1–22.

16 *Hou Han shu*, 1646–47.

17 For a recent study of Fan Ye's historical thinking see Pang Tianyou 龐天佑, *Wei Jin Nan-beichao juan* 魏晉南北朝卷 (*Book on the Wei, Jin, and the Northern-Southern Dynasties*), in: Wu Huaqi 吳懷祺 (ed.), *Zhongguo shixue sixiang tongshi* 中國史學思想史 (*General History of Chinese Historical Thinking*), 10 vols., vol. 3, Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2003, pp. 232–259.

are well-documented.¹⁸ In short, the proliferation and variations of historical writings made possible by Post-Han disunity went far beyond the scope of the annals-biography model attributed to Sima Qian and Ban Gu. Given these facts, how can we ascertain that the theory of the Five Elements still “played an enormous role in China’s medieval historiography”.

I appreciate Mittag’s perspicaciousness; however, the “minor error” he points out is not an error at all. I would not have “mistaken Sima Qian for Sima Guang 司馬光” (p. 100, fn. 37), as the two Simas lived about ten centuries apart. My assertion that Sima Qian’s use of the metaphor of mirror is based on his own famous wording: “that [the commonplace that] I live at present and record the past is for self-mirroring, is not necessarily for everyone to agree” (*ju jin zhi shi, zhi gu zhi dao, suoyi zi jing ye, wei bi jin tong* 居今之世, 志古之道, 所以自鏡也, 未必盡同).¹⁹

Ulrich Timme Kragh questions the appropriateness of using Western concepts in the Chinese context. As he states, “the word ‘humanism’ in general implies a distinct Western intellectual tradition that utilizes an academic epistemology of historicism and moreover involves an explicit political project of secular liberalism” (p. 144). Hence, in his opinion, to claim classical Chinese *shǐ* writers as being the products of ‘humanistic’ thinking would be in an “utterly *anatopistic* and *anachronistic* manner, i.e., entirely out of place and out of time”. Admittedly, any uncritical use of Western categories in a pre-modern Chinese context can be misleading. But when we write ancient China in English, we have no choice but to use not only the vocabulary but also its concepts. I do not think the material I present in my paper, in particular when referring to “history” and “humanism”, is a purely contextually defined notion to enforce “a signification specific to the modern Taiwanese context rather than European thought”. It was utterly impossible for Sima Qian to adapt to modern European thought; rather, humanism with Chinese characteristics, as Huang Chun-chieh put it, did exist during the Grand Historian’s time and earlier. Instead of fitting “pre-modern traditions of non-Western thought” into the dress of eighteenth-nineteenth-centuries European humanism, I tried to present Sima Qian’s version of humanism in its own historical context, which appears not exactly the same but apparently compatible to that of the West. In other words, I simply used the English term ‘humanism’ to describe the compatible Chinese concept of *ren* 人 (man) and *wen* 文 (refined). As well, Burton Watson, who translated parts of the *Shi ji* into English, finds Chinese historical consciousness in Zhou humanism.²⁰

18 The cases implicated Cui Hao 崔浩, Sun Sheng 孫盛, Liu Jiu, etc. can be found in official history books, such as *Wei shu* 魏書, *Nan-Qishu* 南齊書, *Bei shi* 北史, and *Jin shu* 晉書.

19 *Shi ji* 18/878.

20 Burton Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch’ien. Grand Historian of China*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1958, p. 135.

Incidentally, the eighteenth-century European men of letters and philosophers also characterized classical Confucianism as being humanist. Why Sima Qian's historical thinking cannot be characterized as being humanist? If Professor Kragh writes European history in Chinese, I wonder what term he would use except for *shi* 史. Would he say he lifts *shi* "out of its historical context and raises it to the status of a universal, timeless *topos* constituting an idealized yardstick against which to measure the value of European culture?" (Cf. p. 144) How would he make the diachronic transformation he has suggested? In addition, I find it difficult to figure out the fact that I now live in Taiwan has anything to do with "meaning-production". In fact, I was born in Mainland China, grew up in Taiwan, and studied and taught in America for over forty years. I am not sure how I would understand history and humanism synchronically. If we subscribe to Isaiah Berlin's "cultural pluralism", we do not really need to worry about "Occidental dogmas" or "Oriental dogmas". What is more, as the late Benjamin Schwartz fittingly put it, "the entire 'relativistic' attack on the application of Western categories to other cultures seems to rest on an utter forgetfulness of the problematic nature of such categories even within the history of one's own culture". Schwartz went on to say that "we will find that in the West many nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers consider that much has been written under the label of history before modern times as 'unhistorical' and certainly not historicist".²¹ If so, the problematic seems not mere "cultural disjunction" or "semantic conjunction" as Professor Kragh has argued (p. 150).

Allow me now to make a few general observations. As many colleagues here mentioned, the Qing dynasty historian Zhang Xuecheng famously said that "the Six Classics are all history" (*liujing jie shi ye* 六經皆史也). The dictum, though it is by no means Zhang's innovation, was praised as a remarkable breakthrough in historiography by modern scholars, home and abroad. Zhang was henceforth honored as the historian who had broken the sacredness of the Six Classics and treated the Classics as mere historical accounts of ancient institutions. In other words, Zhang used a historicist viewpoint to challenge the Classics, and so laid the foundation for his advocacy of replacing the Classics with history and substituting the past with the present. But this is a gross misreading of Zhang. For traditional Chinese historians, Zhang included, Classics and history are both containers of the *Dao* 道, or Way, so that the Classics are in effect history. Classics and history are really a single inseparable entity. Accordingly, there is no question of substituting one with another, let alone one challenging the other. As Zhang clearly expressed, the Classics are history because they record the invisible *Dao*. Confucius transmitted rather than authored the Six Classics, which contain

21 Benjamin Schwartz, "History in Chinese Culture: Some Comparative Reflection", in: *History and Theory* 35.4 (1996), pp. 23–33, p. 24.

the *Dao*. The *Dao* in Zhang's mind was eternal, finding its expression in the Confucian moral order, including the basic human relationships, which represents the universal value of man. Hence, the *Dao* is not merely "Confucian" but also a kind of universal ideal that all human beings at all times should observe. Thus, like Heaven, the *Dao* is unchangeable and eternal. This stance was entirely orthodox in the Chinese tradition. In short, Zhang who remained a pious Confucian scholar had no intention whatsoever to turn history against the Classics, nor any notion of replacing the Classics with history, as many modern scholars have enthusiastically assumed. Zhang's historical theory was well within the bounds of "Confucian historiography".²² Hence, Classics and history never existed as a separate entity throughout imperial China down to the early twentieth century, when history was at last "emancipated" from the Classics.

Inevitably, it is important for us to understand the entwined elements, *jing* 經 and *shi* 史, within the entity of traditional Chinese historiography. Broadly speaking, the Classics or *jing* include every piece of work associated with Confucianism. More specifically, however, it refers to the Six Classics, actually five in existence, attributed to Confucius himself. No matter how we look at it, the volume of the Classics is not remotely that of history, and yet they were complementary with each other. As the celebrated Song dynasty scholar Su Xun 蘇洵 (1008–1066) asserted, "Classics without history provides no evidence to make praises or blames, while history without Classics does not know the proper way to write".²³ To put it differently, Confucian morality and historical writings were also complimentary to each other. One cannot do well without the other. Such "Confucian historiography", however, has been criticized in the West as being "weak" as it is "more a narrative of morality than a narrative of history". Since its purpose is "to make praises and blames", it is therefore a-historical.²⁴ It commits, to use David Fischer's term, "the moralistic fallacy".²⁵ But Lord Acton (1834–1902) cited James Froude to confirm that "opinions alter, manners change, creeds rise and fall, but the moral law is written on the tablets of eternity".²⁶ The

22 For a full account of my argument see Young-tsu Wong, "Discovery or Invention: Modern Interpretations of Zhang Xuecheng", in: *Historiography East and West*, 1.2 (2003), pp. 178–205.

23 Cited in *San Su xiansheng wenji qishi juan* 三蘇先生文集七十卷 (*Essays of the Three Su Scholars in Seventy Chapters*), Ming edn., Liushi anzheng shutang 劉氏安正書堂, juan 3, p. 1b.

24 Cf. Plumb, *The Death of the Past*, p. 22; Earl H. Prichard, "Traditional Chinese Historiography and Local History", in: Hayden White (ed.), *The Uses of History: Essays in Intellectual and Social History*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968, p. 201; Edwin G. Pulleyblank, "Chinese Historical Criticism: Liu Chih-chi and Ssu-ma Kuang", in: W. G. Beaseley / E. G. Pulleyblank (eds.), *Historians of China and Japan*, London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1961, p. 143.

25 David Hackett Fisher, *The Historian's Fallacy*, New York: Harper and Row, 1970, p. 78.

26 Lord Acton, "Inaugural Lecture on the Study of History", in: *Lectures on Modern History*, New York: Meridian Books, 1961, p. 40.

Confucian code of moral conduct finding its express in the Classics was “the moral law” for the traditional Chinese historians to use as the “yardstick” (*quan* 權) by which to measure men and events in the past, as the eminent Ming dynasty scholar Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664) put it.²⁷ It is not for the individual historian to exercise his own moral and political opinion; rather, there was a commonly held ethical standard at the time for all Chinese historians to uphold. They, however, rarely turned historical writing into moral codification, or rigidly followed “the style of the canonized *Spring and Autumn Annals*” (*Chunqiu bifa* 春秋筆法) to make the good feel glorified and the bad tremble. The outstanding exception is the *Tongjian gangmu* 通鑑綱目 (*Outline and Details of the Comprehensive Mirror*) by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), who, dissatisfied with the historian Sima Guang’s (1019–1067) account did not strictly followed the *Annals*’ style. After all, Zhu Xi was cherished as a philosopher rather than historian.

A distinct feature of Chinese historiography, as is well-known, is the cardinal role the official historians played. Although Peter Burke has pointed out that the official historians were also appointed in fifteenth and eighteenth century Europe, including such prominent figures as Leibniz, Vico, and Voltaire, the appointment of official historians in China dated back to ancient times and was thoroughly institutionalized for thousands of years. For many in the West, these state-funded historians are void of independent mind and truthfulness.²⁸ Not unexpectedly, the bureaucratically supervised historical writings are condemned as the “well-indoctrinated” and a “well-invented past”.²⁹ It is almost certain that the imperial prerogative would use its ideology and influence to twist historians’ arms. Also there is no disputing the fact that the historians on one occasion or another were implicated in what the Chinese deemed as “the disaster that comes from writing history” (*shihuo* 史禍). It was not uncommon for an official historian to go to prison or, worse, to be put to death.³⁰ But in reality, no Chinese regime had effectively falsified historical writings. We must know that the purpose of bureaucratically organized historical writing is to record the factual past so as to draw lessons of success and failure from the predecessors, as the Chinese used to say: “the wrecked coach in front is a warning for those behind” (*qianche zhi jian* 前車之鑑). Falsification or distortion of history would not profit by the

27 See Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, *Qian Muzhai wenchao* 錢牧齋文鈔 (*Writings of Qian Qianyi*), Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1972, *juan* 2, p. 1.

28 See for example Herbert Franke, “Some Aspects of Chinese Private Historiography in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century”, in: Beaseley / Pulleyblank (eds.), *Historians of China and Japan*, *op. cit.*, pp. 131–32. Herbert Butterfield, “History and Man’s Attitude to the Past”, in: *Listener* (September 21, 1961), pp. 421–423.

29 Cf. W. J. F. Jenner, *The Tyranny of History: the Roots of China’s Crisis*, London; New York: Penguin Books, 1992, pp. 5–12.

30 Cf. Wang, *Shizhuan tongshuo*, pp. 20–21.

folly of antecedents. Seeking accurate knowledge of the past, in this sense, serves the best interest of any conscientious government. Not surprisingly, the great Kangxi Emperor 康熙 (r. 1662–1722) told official historians that “history which will go down to posterity is of vital importance, so that you must write accurately and impartially as well as to make judgments appropriately. Then the history you write will be free from prejudice, thus capable of handing down reliable accounts through the ages”.³¹ As a matter of fact, together with the beginning of compiling official history on a large scale in Tang China (618–907), a precedent was set to prohibit persons involved, emperor included, from reading history-in-process in order to prevent possible interference. Of course, there were no guarantees that the powerful would comply with the precedent, but at least made it a worthwhile convention to uphold. Emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 627–649) of the Tang, who captured the throne by murdering his two brothers, was unable to conceal what had unfortunately happened, but tried to justify the bloody action by citing the precedence of Duke of Zhou 周公, who similarly pacified his brothers for the stability of the regime.³² In the tenth century, a Liao emperor who went hunting caused the deaths of a dozen people from bear and tiger, then told the official historian Han Jianu 韓家奴 not to record it. Han, however, insisted on recording it. The emperor at last conceded by saying that “the official historian did as he should” (*shiguan dang ru shi* 史官當如是).³³ These stories, even if rare and exceptional, were passed on with the general approval of Chinese historians.

The courage exemplified by some noted official historians who held firmly to the truth was highly appreciated. While the “straightforward writing” (*zhibi* 直筆) was honored as model, the “distorted writing” (*qubi* 曲筆) was held in contempt as “filthy history” (*huishi* 穢史). Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721), who produced perhaps the world’s first book on historical criticism entitled *Shitong* 史通 (*A Comprehensive Examination of Historiography*), recognized the character of the upright historians as being “like the martyr die for his name and the upright fellow uphold his integrity, would rather be ‘a broken jade object than an intact piece of tile’ (rather die as a hero than live as a coward). They took the examples of [the ancient historians] *Nanshi* 南史 and *Donghu* 董狐 who stuck to their unyielding integrity in defying brute force as well as that of Wei 韋 and Cui 崔 who wrote history with passion regardless their own safety”.³⁴ The great Tang dynasty scholar-poet Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) took history as an extremely pre-

31 Cited in Liu Chengqian 劉承乾, *Mingshi li'an* 明史例案 (*Cases for Compiling the Ming History*), Wuxing: Jiayetang, 1915, juan 1, p. 2a.

32 Cf. Huang Yongnian 黃永年, *Jiu Tang shu yu Xin Tang shu* 舊唐書與新唐書 (*The Old Tang History and the New Tang History*), Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1985, pp. 20–21.

33 See *Liao shi* 遼史 (*History of the Liao Dynasty*) 5/1449.

34 Liu Zhiji 劉知幾, *Shitong tongshi* 史通通義 (*A Comprehensive Examination of Historiography*), annotated by Pu Qilong 浦起龍, Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1962, p. 93.

carious profession. “If he tells truth, he may get into trouble; if he does not tell truth, he will feel compunction”.³⁵ Hence, for Han Yu, the historians had to take his job very seriously and cautiously.

The official historians in traditional China somehow felt duty-bound to uphold their authority on historical writing. Some were brave enough to risk their lives for the integrity of their profession. Officials as they were, they claimed an autonomous “history power” (*shiquan* 史權).³⁶ They may not always have their way; however, armed with plentiful state-own source-materials and a keen sense of responsibility, they were more likely to produce better history than private historians who often depended upon limited sources and personal limited views. This is why in traditional China “official history” was designated as “standard history” (*zhengshi* 正史), while “private history” as “unruly history” (*yeshi* 野史).

Modern Chinese historians, Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) in particular, cherished the “statecraft notion of historical knowledge for practical use” (*jingshi zhiyong* 經史致用). How can we make historical scholarship serve practical needs and benefit contemporary social morale? Statecraft can be defined as the management of state affairs, so that only office holders could practice it. An historian, in other words, could do nothing to help beyond making his learning more utilitarian. The concept of statecraft had long been at the core of traditional Chinese thinking. It became especially urgent at the outset of the Qing dynasty, when many prominent scholars attributed the fall of the previous Ming dynasty to the speculative and useless knowledge that had become popular by the seventeenth century. As Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695) put it, the Classics should serve statecraft and a useful scholar should study history as well³⁷. Both Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) and Dai Mingshi 戴名世 (1653–1713) also contended that history as a record of past experiences could serve as the best lessons for the contemporaries and later generations.³⁸

Peter Burke rightly points out that in Europe, as well as in China, the past as a storehouse of examples taught both virtue and wisdom. Significantly, how did readers learn virtue and wisdom from history and to what effect? It is difficult to say that history readers made themselves more virtuous and wiser than others. As Hegel put it, “what experience and history teach is this – that people and gov-

35 See Han Yu 韓愈, *Han Changli ji* 韓昌黎集 (*Essays and Poems of Han Yu*), Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1973, pp. 70–71.

36 The modern historian Liu Yizheng 柳詒徵 devoted a chapter on “history power” in his book entitled *Guoshi yaoyi* 國史要義 (*The Essence of Our National History*), Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1969, pp. 19–35.

37 *Qing shi gao* 清史稿 (*A Draft History of the Qing Dynasty*), 143/13105.

38 Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, *Du Tongjian lun* 讀通鑑論 (*My Readings of the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid for the Government*), Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1966, *juan* 6, p. 12; Dai Mingshi 戴名世, *Nanshan ji* 南山集 (*The South Hill Collection*), Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1970, *juan* 1, p. 97.

ernments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it”.³⁹ Interestingly, the Ming dynasty historian Yu Shenxing 于慎行 (1545–1608) observed, that people and governments failed to learn historical lessons because they “noticed the similar type of an event while misreading the changing circumstances of it”. Yu cited historical examples to show identical crises sometimes required just an opposite way to deal with it.⁴⁰ Yu’s assertion seems to have general applicability to various sorts of historical situations. In 1950, Kim Il Sung (1912–1994) did not expect American intervention in the Korean War apparently because he took the wrong example of the recent Chinese civil war.

I appreciate Professor Burke pointing out “the allegorical approach to history” in European historiography. This particular tradition, in China, is not only long but also rich. The recent example of Wu Han’s 吳晗 historical play, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* (*Hai Rui ba guan* 海瑞罷官), is not at all unusual in the Chinese tradition. Back to the eleventh century, Su Xun in his essay used the interpretation of the six Warring States in 403–221 BCE to criticize his own Northern Song dynasty (960–1126) for giving bribes to the neighboring state of Liao. Also, his son Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) in his essay used Lord Shang 商鞅 (390–338 BCE), the ancient legalist reformer, as a reference to criticize the reformer Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086) of his own time. The idea of actualizing a historical event to insinuate a current affair can be dated back to pre-imperial China.⁴¹ The tradition of *yi gu yu jin* 以古喻今 (“using the past to refer to the present”) seems everlasting in China. For instance, the great modern Chinese historian Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890–1969) spoke of the rebellious Tang dynasty general Li Huaiguang 李懷光 in 784 CE to convey a message about the Sian Incident in 1936, during which Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi 蔣介石) was kidnapped by General Zhang Xueliang 張學良.⁴²

In speaking of the modern transformation of Chinese historiography in the early twentieth century, I regret to say that under the mighty impact from the West too many Chinese historians quickly turned their back on their own traditional historiography and embraced that of the West. Liang Qichao was the first who harshly

39 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, New York: Dover Publications, 1956, p. 6.

40 Yu Shenxing, *Dushi manlu* 讀史漫錄 (*Random Historical Notes*), edn. Ming Wanli (1573–1620), *juan* 5, p. 11b.

41 See Qian Zhongshu’s 錢鍾書 analysis in his *Guanzhui bian* 管錐編 (*Limited Views*), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979, vol. 4, pp. 1266–67.

42 Chen Yinke, “Lun Li Huaiguang zhi pan” 論李懷光之叛 (“On the Rebellion of Li Huaiguang”), in: id., *Jinmingguan congkao er bian* 金明館叢稿二編 (*Essays from the Golden Bright Studio. Volume Two*), Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2001, pp. 317–19. Chen’s piece was first published in 1937, less than a year after the Sian Incident. Cf. Wang Rongzu (Young-tsu Wong), *Shijia Chen Yinke zhuan* 史家陳寅恪傳 (*A Biography of the Historian Chen Yinke*), Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005, p. 65.

denounced traditional Chinese historiography as the worthless genealogies of emperors, marquis, generals, and ministers in his celebrated essay entitled “Xin shixue” 新史學 (“New History”) published in 1902. The new history to which Liang referred was Western-style national history. After having fully adopted Western-style educational systems, history as a discipline in the modern Chinese school system no longer treated the indigenous cultural tradition with respect. In 1920, the classical written language was replaced by vernacular language. As a result, except for relatively few experts, the Chinese found it more and more difficult to read anything written and published before 1900. Inevitably, modern Chinese historiography as an academic discipline in the main followed the West’s lead. “In little over a period of thirty years”, as a recent scholar notes, “Chinese historiography has changed both in theory and in practice in the most fundamental way”.⁴³

Following the West’s lead, the Chinese historians admired Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), presumably reminding them of the eighteenth-century *kaozhengxue* 考證學 which required historians to use both philological and antiquarian methods to do text research. When pursuing and emulating the Rankean methodology, they did pay greater attention to archival and primary material for research. However, taking Ranke inaccurately as an advocate of “scientific history”, plus their own enthusiasm for modern science, they tried to make history scientific and as exact and predicable as the natural sciences. Fu Sinian 傅斯年, the founder of the *Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica*, made especially clear that history could be as scientific as geology and biology. Fu’s influence persisted for a long time. In post-1949 China, for the obvious political reason, Marx’s historical materialism predominated in Mainland China. The Chinese Marxist historians also regarded themselves as doing “scientific history”.

When they realized that scientific history as a “noble dream” was not obtainable, Chinese historians belatedly in the 1960s followed their European and American colleagues in turning to the social sciences for assistance. Besides Marxism having remained strong in Mainland China, the French *Annalistes* also have their Chinese admirers. In the aftermath of major changes in the direction of historical writing in the West in the 1970s and 1980s, the revival of narrative and in particular the rise of postmodernism, Chinese historiographers were shocked to find what they had learned from the West, such as historical objectivity and empirical research, had now turned upside down. It is perhaps time for them to respond to the new challenge by making reflections not only on the West but also on the East, trying to reconsider their own historiographical tradition to see anything in it worthwhile in talking to Western colleagues.

43 Liu Lina 劉俐娜, *You chuantong zou xiang xiandai: lun zhongguo shixue de zhuanxiang* 由傳統走向現代：論中國史學的轉型 (From tradition to modernity: On the transformation of Chinese historiography), Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2006, p. 115.

Books, monographs, and articles about the history of Chinese historical writing published in modern times, according to a recent historian's estimation, mostly consist of chronological biographies of historians with introduction to their major works.⁴⁴ Only a few works comprehensively and critically discuss the contents of traditional Chinese historiography. Liu Zehua 劉澤華 found out that of 151 important monographs on historical theories produced during the last ninety years, sixteen were translations of Western works and the rest, by and large, brief introductions to historical methods. Genuinely creative works are extremely rare. Liang Qichao's pioneering work on the new historiography is still being widely used.⁴⁵ Most recently, the remarkable ten-volume set *Zhongguo shixue sixiang shi* 中國史學思想史 (*History of Chinese Historical Thinking*) features rich source materials and its authors have virtually made no reference to Western historiography.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, a solid foundation has been laid to reconsider traditional Chinese historical thinking, historical consciousness, and historical theories in comparison with those of the West. Chinese historiographers still have much to learn from the great tradition of Western historiography, whether ancient, modern, or postmodern – but they have no need to follow it slavishly. The best strategy, it seems, is to transform the tradition critically in order to make contributions toward a global historical thinking.

Constructive dialogue between East and West should be exciting. We may not need to strive for what sets Chinese historiography apart from Western historiography. Mansions of historiography, whether oriental or occidental, must have identical pieces of necessary “furniture”, including narration, objectivity, skepticism, textual criticism, exemplarity, allegory, statecraft, official history, philosophy of history, etc. It is difficult to say “uniqueness” in the sense that one owns and the other does not. The style and usage of furniture, however, could be very different. To know each other better would certainly be mutually beneficial. Let the twain meet, and I look forward to anticipating a much more enriched global historiography in the future.

44 Cf. Liu Longxin 劉龍心, “Qishi nian lai duiyu xiandai Zhongguo shixueshi de yanjiu huigu yu pingxi” 七十年來對於現代中國史學史的研究回顧與評析 (A Critical Review of Modern History of Chinese Historiography in the Recent Seventy Years), in: *Zhonghua Minguoshi zhuanli di si jie taolunhui lunwen* 中華民國史專題第四屆討論會論文 (*Proceedings of the Fourth Conference on the History of the Republic of China*), 1997, pp. 1–37.

45 Liu Zehua 劉澤華 (ed.), *Jin jiu shi nian shixue lilun yaoji tiyao* 近九十年史學理論要籍提要 (*Annotated Bibliography of the Important Works on Historical Theories in the Recent Ninety Years*), Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1991.

46 Wu Huaiqi 吳懷祺 (ed.), *Zhongguo shixue sixiangshi* 中國史學思想史, 10 vols., Huangshan: Huangshan shushe, 2002–2005.

17. Giving Modern Chinese Historical Thinking Back its Authenticity

I want to thank the authors for their constructive comments on and surveys of my arguments. They have contributed a wealth of new ideas from diverse perspectives including European historiography, sinology, as well as theories of nationalism, post-colonialism and historical thought that will help me to further elaborate my arguments.

In my reply I would like to start with the topic of national historiography. Even though the focus of my paper is the transformation of historical thinking, it is true that this transformation took place within an environment of nation-building. The new “genetic” mode of historical thinking, too, eventually established a national historiography. Qian Mu 錢穆, in fact, was very passionate about the nation. In the introduction of his book, *Outline of National History* (*Guoshi dagang* 國史大綱), he asks his Chinese readers to love and respect their own national past. Understandably, the comments on my paper also pay a lot of attention to the issue of the nation.

Stefan Berger singles out six factors that make the writing of national history incompatible with the idea of humanism. Consequently, he asks whether Qian Mu, despite being an advocate of Confucianism, may in fact represent a break with Confucian humanism due to his writing of national history.

Ulrich Timme Kragh argues that from the standpoint of a dependency theory of ideas my description of Qian Mu’s *Outline of National History* bears a strong resemblance with European national history writing in the nineteenth century.

Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik goes a step further by arguing that my very choice of Qian Mu as an example for new historical thinking in China was guided by the criterion of “whether or not the historian would write in a mode similar to ‘Western historiography’” (p. 186), that is that my selection of the text was based on “standards set by late nineteenth and early twentieth century European historiography”. This statement requires some explanation.

I do not understand Qian Mu’s *Outline of National History* as a history of nation-building in the sense of the German historiography of the nineteenth century. The actions and deeds of the past in Qian Mu’s historical work are

characteristically not directed towards the goal of creating a nation or a not-yet existing nation state of the future. Qian Mu's narrative completely lacks any teleological aspect which is culturally specific and a crucial part of the important German national historiography of the 19th century. His work does not feature the descriptions of glorious wars and military heroes that provided the foundations of nation building by praising its goals.

Instead, I view Qian Mu's *Outline of National History* as part of a process, unparalleled in world history, to transform China from a "realm under heaven" into a nation among others. As is generally known, Qian Mu was a historian of the history of ideas. What he delivers in this extensive transformative process through his historical writing is to reframe the universalistic claims of Confucian principles into national forces that could effectively explain the progress of China's history.

The thrust of Qian Mu's *Outline of National History* is, therefore, very different from the European national historiography of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, Berger's suggestions concerning the characteristics of national historical writing are very helpful to further elucidate some important features of the *Outline of National History*. Qian Mu's *Outline of National History* undoubtedly represents an elitist political attitude. The principle of equality and, correspondingly, individual dignity, commands a significantly lower value than that of the collective honor of the educated classes, i. e. their sense of duty towards the populace. Within the framework of the practical politics of 1930s China I would regard Qian Mu as an advocate of Sun Yat-sen's political theory of tutelage policy (*xunzheng* 訓政) as a preliminary stage to the implementation of full representative democracy.¹

Even though Qian Mu advocates assigning central importance to Confucianism in the historical development of the nation, I do not see his *Outline of National History* as a break with Confucian humanism. In fact, just the opposite. By transforming Confucian ethics into a national force of history, he abandons the claim of universality of Confucian principles. This opens up the possibility of paying full respect to the other cultures of the world, a step not made by any conservative Chinese scholar before him.

1 The writing of national history always constitutes the "self" and "the others" simultaneously. In Qian Mu's grand narrative of the Chinese nation, "the others" are the non-Chinese cultures, on the one hand, and the non-Confucian and non-official groups within Chinese society, on the other. Unconsciously, in his constitution of "self", Qian Mu shows even more disdain for the latter than for the Euro-American and East Indian cultures. In this social aspect, we have to take a critical look at Qian Mu's book. His national history of China shows that he is unable, from his Confucian perspective, to regard various groups – such as farmers, merchants, military, Buddhists, etc. – as his social equals. From this perspective, I would especially agree with Stefan Berger's antipathy towards the writing of a grand national history. Further, this bias shows the limits of his implementation of Confucianism into a history of the Chinese nation.

In the wake of repeated military defeats beginning with the first encounter between the West and the Manchu dynasty, Confucian scholars contrasted the universal *Dao* 道 with Western technology *qi* 器. Using the conceptual pair *Dao* vs. *qi*, i.e. “culture” vs. “civilization”, they hoped to strengthen their own identity while distancing themselves from the Other. From today’s point of view, however, this cannot create a basis for mutual understanding and respect for the Other. By nationalizing and thus relativizing Confucianism, Qian Mu allows Confucianism to unfold its full humanistic potential, because he establishes, for the first time, the possibility of communication with other cultures.

This fact becomes immediately clear, when we read the introduction of Qian Mu’s *Outline of National History*, which clearly reveals his pluralistic attitude towards world cultures. He uses metaphors to highlight the value of ‘otherness’. For example, he compares China’s history with a concert of polyphonic voices, while Euro-American history appears to him as an exciting tennis match. Using such metaphors he shows respect towards the Other as well as towards the Self. He can only do so because of his Confucian nationalism. This short explanation does not mean that I overlook Stefan Berger’s constructive proposal to maintain a distance with an “active promotion of national identity”. I do believe that history should more often be written in the form of social history or transnational history.

Why did I choose Qian Mu to represent the transformation of historical thinking in China? This question has been raised in different contexts by Kragh as well as by Ng and Weigelin-Schwiedrzik. As noted previously, the reason for my choice was not that I contrast Qian Mu’s writing of history with the European national historiography of the nineteenth century. Weigelin-Schwiedrzik offers a different idea to explain my motive for using Qian Mu’s historical work to describe the appearance of a genetic mode of historical thinking in China. She assumes that I want to show that Chinese historiography has finally caught up with the modern development of historical thinking in the world. She thus detects in my choice of Qian Mu a catch-up mentality, which she regards as creating difficulty in the intercultural dialog, because it instrumentalizes the understanding of the Other.

This is an open and poignant problem. First of all, I agree that the catch-up mentality is a widespread, even essential, part of China’s historical consciousness of the modern era. In my analysis of the revolutionary journal *Minbao* 民報 (*People’s Magazine*) I called this mentality “a collective hysteria of historical urgency”.²

2 Hu Chang-Tze, “Shijian yali: *Minbao* (1905–1908) shidu” 時間壓力《民報》(1905–1908) 試讀 (Time Pressure, an Interpretation of *Minbao* (1905–1908)), in: *Historical Inquiry* 台大歷史學報 15 (1990), pp. 263–274.

Sun Yat-sen, who created the term “head-on catch-up” (*yingtou ganshang* 迎頭趕上), was living in Japan during the short period when the *People’s Magazine* was published; he had Japan’s successful modernizations around 1900 in his mind. He and the authors of the journal articles, most of whom were also living in Japan, hoped that China, following its successful revolution against the Manchu dynasty would make “a small achievement every three years, a big achievement every five years”. Only a high speed of modernization could allow China to catch up with the West.

My argument is that the understanding of history as a catch-up process is based on the idea of world history as one single linear development. The political revolution of 1911 and the Movement for a New Culture (*xin wenhua yundong* 新文化運動) during the first three decades of the twentieth century carried on this catch-up history unabatedly, because both the liberal as well as the Marxist camp of the New Culture Movement took unilinear world history as self-evident, be it from the perspective of pragmatism or of Marxism, in the same vein as Sun Yat-sen and his revolutionary followers had done.

Qian Mu, in fact, represents a clear deviation from a unilinear notion of world history. This is one of the reasons for my choice. If I only look at the structure of Qian Mu’s historical thinking, I can see a revolutionary personality whose pluralist attitude breaks with the tradition of Confucianism.³ He develops his conservative interpretation of Chinese history from the vantage point of this pluralistic attitude. He refuses to measure national history against the yardstick of a universal progress, and neither espoused the position of pragmatism nor of Marxism. Thus, his historical writings represent an antithesis to the catch-up mentality.

It is true that the notion of history as a catch-up process dominates historical thinking in modern China, but it is not the only mode of post-colonial historical consciousness in China. Qian Mu’s *Outline of National History* has seen as many as twenty-one editions in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. This is a clear sign that the catch-up mentality in Chinese historical consciousness does have limits. But this does not yet answer Weigelin-Schwiedrzik’s question of whether, by emphasizing Qian Mu’s genetic historical narrative, I wanted to show that China has caught up with the modern phase of historiography in the world. Her assessment, that I have developed my argument out of a deep-seated subconscious catch-up mentality, needs to be carefully examined.

As a post-colonial Chinese who grew up in Taiwan, where Sun Yat-sen’s ideas are compulsory reading in all schools, I did inevitably inherit the notion of historical urgency that weighs so heavily on China. Did I become a historian in

3 In his adherence to Confucian values, Qian Mu was a conservative, but in the realm of the structure of historical thinking he was nothing less than a revolutionary.

order to negotiate this intellectual heritage in a self-reflective way? I feel ill at ease to give a general answer to this question. But what would be the answer if I ask myself whether or not I am confident about my argument that Qian Mu's historical writing did succeed in transforming from an exemplary towards a genetic mode of historical writing? I would answer this question positively. However, my confidence is neither based on a world historical nor on an anthropological argument. This requires some explanation.

Following the intensification of social experience in eighteenth-century Europe, people's historical thinking started to shift away from a traditional mode that understood history as exemplary stories. Reinhart Koselleck described this process as part of the *Sattelzeit* at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. Peter Burke adds in his commentary in this volume that this process in fact already started in the sixteenth century with Guicciardini and Montaigne. This historical phenomenon may inspire me, but not because I have found that China's historical thinking has caught up with early modern Europe. My interest is not directed at a world-historical process.

While Koselleck describes this phenomenon as a historical process, Jörn Rüsen treats it on a theoretical level. In his typology, he represents the exemplary mode of dealing with the past as one type of historical thinking along with three other types. Their treatment of the exemplary mode of historical thinking is different yet mutually enriching: Koselleck's approach fosters the historical semantics of conceptual history with a high analytical potential; Rüsen, alternately, provides an anthropological approach with an emphasis on strict conceptualization and the demonstration of logical connections.

I understand Stefan Berger's reference in the context of an intercultural humanism to Allan Megill's proposal "to create solidarities below the level of identities" (p. 133) as part of this anthropological approach. Rüsen's typology views historical thinking as a fundamental need of all humanity and explains how people in general deal with the experience of time. My analysis of the historical thinking in modern China follows Rüsen's approach. I start from the question of how do historians respond to an imminent crisis of meaning in which tradition is rejected completely.

Rüsen's typology serves as an heuristic tool to gain insight into the infinitely diverse and chaotic processes of China's modernity. I see Qian Mu's historical thinking as part of a conservative response to a fierce criticism of tradition. Qian developed his genuine genetic mode of thinking in the process of this counter-criticism and arrives at a new interpretation of history. I'm delighted to conclude that Rüsen's typology creates an intellectual tool to efficiently collect historical facts and assign meaning to them. It thus establishes a foundation for intercultural understanding and intercultural comparison.

Qian Mu narrates his national history of China in a genetic mode, that is, he needs to organize his narrative along the lines of an all-pervasive driving force. This driving force provides his narrative with an all-encompassing explanation of the diverse turns and changes of history. I argue that Qian Mu developed this explanation based on his own *Lebenswelt* orientation as a conservative member of China's educated class.

Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik's comment represents a different approach. She argues that Qian Mu, in his historical writings, is addressing a broad audience and therefore tries to make traditionally implicit explanations explicit. "As long as the familiarity with history was a form of esoteric knowledge by which the knowledgeable distinguished themselves from the ignorant, many explanations were not pronounced in an explicit manner". (p. 187) Thus, she understands Qian Mu's genetic mode of historical writing as an automatic consequence of the educational and rhetorical goals of national history writing.

Such an argument is questionable. If one wants to infuse the national idea into the historical narrative one could easily choose to evoke the story of a common sacred origin, as is often done with the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黃帝) in the history of China. Such a story glorifies the fact, but does not need a causal explanation of development. If one wants to inculcate the national idea among the population, one could as well tell heroic stories as patriotic examples, such as Peter Burke finds in the French schools of the nineteenth century. There is no need to establish overarching causal links between these examples. Finally, nationalist thought could even take the form of a refusal to anchor the nation in its historical past, as exemplified by the advocates of the New Culture Movement in modern China.

My reply to Weigelin-Schwiedrzik is, therefore, that the goal of nationalist education cannot have been the direct consequence for Qian Mu's shift to an explicit causal explanation of historical development. Weigelin simplifies the transformation if she claims for China that "[w]hile pre-modern historiography was very much aimed at providing a reservoir of statecraft experiences to the ruling elites, from the first decade of the twentieth century onwards the writing of history has been closely related to the nation building process" (p. 187). She emphasizes nation building as the defining factor that can be generalized to explain the specific phenomenon of Chinese historiography in the twentieth century. This overgeneralization makes her argument about Qian Mu's adoption of a genetic narrative mode logically untenable and erroneous.

As to the emergence of a new thinking, Ulrich Timme Kragh starts his review with a reflection on methodology. He understands culture as a dynamic system with fluid boundaries that is subject to constant changes in time and space. Therefore, he rejects a static approach to intercultural phenomena, as for example, the dependency theory. The very choice of "Chinese historical thinking"

as the central category under which the four authors subsume their arguments represents just such a static approach and betrays the influence of the dependency theory. This criticism is justified. The title of my article as well should be revised to take account of what Timme Kragh calls “meaning production” in order to make clear that the “transformation” I describe, too, is a construct.

If Stefan Berger asks whether Qian Mu’s national historiography could have received Western influence indirectly through Japan, this question can be elucidated using Kragh’s conceptual differentiation of diachronic dependency vs. synchronic independency: I represent the transformation of historical thinking in modern China as an isolated process which received little influence from Western thinking. These questions are justified, since in my account I have emphasized this process as the genuine emergence of a genetic mode of historical narrative. In this way, I have downplayed the Western influences that could have, directly or indirectly, affected Qian Mu’s thought.

I understand Achim Mittag’s comment in the same vein. He dates the first emergence of the idea of progress in Liang Qichao’s 梁啟超 thought to his treatise “New Historiography” (“Xin shixue” 新史學) published in 1902. Mittag emphasizes Liang Qichao’s immense importance for the process of the modern Chinese transformation towards a genetic mode of historical thinking, because he made the earliest and most extensive efforts to bring the Western idea of progress to China, mostly via Japan. Indeed, I believe there is hardly another person in modern times who has brought Western thought to China to the same extent as Liang Qichao, especially in the field of historiography.

These critical remarks are very helpful. However, if I include Liang Qichao in my account of this transformation process, I would focus on his later period more than on the early phase of his life when he published “New Historiography”. Qian Mu himself once (in 1960) mentioned in a letter to Yü Ying-shih 余英時 that he considered Liang Qichao’s later work of Liang Qichao worth reading. Scholars, including some recent students of Liang Qichao, consider the late period as the time after Liang’s journey to Europe at the end of World War I. After 1918, he introduced many Western thinkers to China who were skeptical towards the classic idea of progress, including Bergson, Rudolf Eucken, Hans Driesch, Heinrich Rickert and Wilhelm Dilthey. In this late phase of his life, Liang Qichao in fact argued against his own earlier insights in which he had emphasized the discovery of evolutionary laws of history in his “New Historiography”. Contrary to the unilinear idea of progress of his early period, he now emphasized the plurality of cultures in human history. Against the laws of history he poses the notions of a “free will” (*ziyou yizhi* 自由意志) and “power of mind” (*xinli* 心力).⁴

4 Liang Qichao is well-known for his courage to contradict himself. A well known quote from him is: “Never hesitate to let today’s self declare war on yesterday’s old self”. The contemporary

It is probably in accordance with the wishes of the commentators that I further explore the situation of conservatism during the 1920s in order to clarify its conceptual connectedness with Liang Qichao's thought. Especially during the later period of his life, Liang intensely studied the Buddhist scriptures and used Buddhist terminology to translate Western terms. Buddhist thought played an important role in the cultural encounter with the West, as Kragh shows using the example of Zhang Taiyan 章太炎. It is also very possible that conservative followers of the journal *Xueheng* 學衡雜誌, for example, Liu Yizheng, had a pivotal role in adopting Liang Qichao's Buddhist-derived terms for Western concepts, and also in inspiring Qian Mu, who was affiliated with the journal. Any study that focuses on the Western influence on Qian Mu's new historical thinking will have to start from here.

Let me return to the beginning of my paper where I described Zhang Xuecheng as an example for China's classical historical thinking. Zhang's thought is a continuation of Liu Zhiji's 劉知幾 (661–721 CE) theory of history which considers the apportioning of praise or blame as the main responsibility of the historian. At the same time he employs Neo-Confucian ethics to establish the norms of correct praise and blame. For Zhang Xuecheng, the edifying force of narrating history in everyday practice is safeguarded by the accumulated morality of the historians. It is the latter that guarantees the truthfulness of the historical narration.

Achim Mittag emphasizes in his comment that we should not forget that Zhang Xuecheng always saw important historical works as reports of actual social practice. He considers Zhang's repeated criticism of "empty talk" (*kongyan* 空言) as the key to understanding of Zhang Xuecheng's historical thinking as a whole: "[I]t loses half its meaning unless Zhang's notion of 'empty talk' (*kongyan*) is understood" (p. 100). I think that this is a correct observation. His opposition to "empty talk" is indeed the core of Zhang Xuecheng's historical argument. I would even argue that it is at the core of what Zhang considers the meaning of his life.

Even though Zhang Xuecheng's *Comprehensive Discussion of Literary Writings and Historiography* (*Wenshi tongyi* 文史通義) is a theoretical work, one can clearly feel the author's disquiet and emotion in the text. For example, after the publication of the first edition, he requested that some of the most harshly stated passages be deleted in order to conceal his criticism of Dai Zhen 戴震: "The fact that my arguments are directed against Dai Zhen should not be immediately obvious to contemporaries" (*bian Dai zhu shuo, bu yu ju wei jinren suo zhi* 辨戴諸說, 不欲遽為今人所知). But this moderation did not mean that he would not defend his beliefs.

scholar Huang Jinxiang 黃進興 concludes that Liang's introduction of Western thought always followed the latest intellectual trends.

While Zhang voiced his opposition to “empty talk” in three treatises collected in the “Inner Chapter” (*neipian* 內篇) of his book, he also includes in this chapter an essay on the Eastern Zhejiang School of Learning (“Zhedong xueshu” 浙東學術). Here he “invents” a school of learning that had not existed before and identifies Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 as its founder and key figure. Huang Zongxi, as a Ming dynasty scholar, experienced the destruction of “his” empire at the hands of a foreign people, the Manchus. He is considered the Confucian scholar who most deeply reflected upon socio-political affairs. Zhang Xuecheng’s goal is clear: He invents a school in order to contrast it to the mainstream scholarship of his time, which he identifies as a tradition evolving from Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 and ending with Dai Zhen. This Eastern Zhejiang School of Learning, with its emphasis on social practice, was placed in opposition to the scholars of the Classics (*jing-xuejia* 經學家) who focused on evidential scholarship, that is, the philological and phonological study of editions of the Confucian classics. These scholars had lost all connection to practical questions of society and politics.

The story is well-known: During this controversy Dai Zhen criticized Zhang Xuecheng from the vantage point of evidential study arguing that it is impossible to understand the “sacred” texts of the Classics without a thorough philological investigation of the meaning of words. For a young scholar like Zhang Xuecheng a great deal of courage was necessary to fight against such an exclusion from access to “truth” and for a historiography of practical relevance.

To pursue Mittag’s suggestion concerning Zhang Xuecheng’s emphasis on practical relevance even further, we have to explore another of his revolutionary proposals. In Zhang’s eyes, “the Six Canonical Books are all histories” (*liujing jie shi* 六經皆史) that not only describe the historical reality of antiquity but also deliver practical lessons for contemporary action. But his deliberations do not end with this well-known aphorism. He continues arguing that the history of later times should also have exactly the same edifying function for our practical lives. More recent history has an even greater practical meaning for today than the history of antiquity, i. e. the Classics.⁵

5 He criticized both the Classical scholars who study the Classics without paying attention to their relevance for the *Lebenswelt* and the historians who write history without emphasizing its specific contribution for the actors in the contemporary world. In his criticism of historical writing Zhang Xuecheng contrasts two notions: that of *zhuanshu* 撰述 (exposition/the writing of history) and that of *jizhu* 紀注 (annotation/the collection of historical facts). While the latter requires a predefined frame and formulas to register and sort as many facts as possible, the former was a creative activity and should be free from fixed rules of style and format. Zhang Xuecheng sees Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 *Shi ji* 史記, which presents a continuous historical narrative, as the model for creative history writing. Sima Qian conceived a new format by telling the history of politics, culture, customs and mores, and the economy through narrative biographies. But this newly created biographical style of historical writing (*jizhuanti* 紀傳體) only served him as a means of understanding current events. Zhang Xuecheng continues to recount

The demand for practical relevance for contemporary life is a salient factor in Zhang Xuecheng's historical thinking. This has been one of the most important reasons for including him in this paper: as a case study of the exemplary mode of historical thinking in China. The exemplary mode of historical thinking always has an orientation towards the *Lebenswelt*, and in Zhang Xuecheng's work we can clearly see that his theory of objectivity and criticism of historiography both take his *Lebenswelt* orientation as a point of departure. For the same reason, I have chosen Qian Mu to represent the transformation of historical thinking, because he made a similar argument that historiography was to provide practical orientation.

how Ban Gu 班固 inherited the descriptive format from the *Shi ji* when he wrote the *Han shu* 漢書 (*History of the Han Dynasty*), but abandoned Sima Qian's free-floating style, a style that provided the basis for his multifaceted and lively narrative. Later authors of China's official dynastic histories strictly adhered to the format and patterns of the biographical style and, as Zhang Xuecheng criticizes, "unjustifiably claimed to be heirs to Sima Qian and Ban Gu" (*yi wei qishu gu zu Ma er zong Ban ye* 以謂其書固祖馬而宗班也). Zhang deeply regrets that the writing of dynastic history has fallen between the cracks of historical exposition and the collection of facts and that the true art of historical writing, as shown by Sima Qian, has been lost due to the rigid imitation of historiographic genres. In his comments on Wong Young-tsu's paper, Achim Mittag quotes from Zhang Xuecheng's *Wenshi tongyi* as if "it was the *Han shu*, rather than the *Shi ji* which established the ultimate model for later historiography". In his effort to assign Ban Gu a higher significance for historiography than Sima Qian, and thus refute Wong's argument, Mittag misrepresents Zhang Xuecheng's criticism of Chinese historical writing.

18. A Final Remark

As already mentioned in the introduction, we do not presume to present Chinese historical thinking in a comprehensive way. We want rather to demonstrate a multiplicity of intellectual approaches in order to understand Chinese historical thinking. For the sake brevity, only a few examples of Chinese historiography were addressed and discussed. These represent origins and a long-standing humanistic tradition on one hand and on the other, the changes which took place in the context of new forms of doing history in recent centuries.

Our book raises more questions than it can answer. It shows a variety of strategies for placing Chinese historical thinking into an intensive intercultural conversation. It presupposes the usual juxtaposition between China and the West, and, at the same time, questions it. The authors in their individual articles present different modes of comparison including a fundamental criticism of conventional standards and methods. It is impossible to offer a definitive result of the discussions in the form of a paradigm or a concept of comprehensive comparison and interrelatedness in and between different traditions in historical culture. Although all contributors are trained academics, they do not agree on the concepts and methods of understanding cultural uniqueness, historical change and intercultural relations within the field of historical studies.

Nevertheless, the collection of texts in this volume is anything but arbitrary or chaotic; only, its authors refuse to give a definite impression of what Chinese historical thinking and intercultural communication are about. Rather, the texts only abolish the notion of an indisputable version of understanding both issues. Instead, the theme is located within an interchange of statements through an interconnecting debate between the authors. This volume does not present definite results but – so to say – opens up possible strategies for resolution. Its goal is to presents the research on cognition in the humanities as an ongoing process. This process has a directionality which is unquestionably shared by all the contributors; a directionality belonging to a shared mental exercise driven by the will to understand. The main intent of this volume is to understand the distinctive nature of Chinese historical thinking.

Understanding any particularity requires one to have the experience of difference, and difference can only be perceived within a mental framework which includes common elements and features. "History" is the common denominator in a proper understanding of difference. It appears in a specific manifestation we call "Chinese", and its specific nature is thematized by confronting it with other manifestations. Therefore, the common ground must be historical thinking; the intention is to understand this unique manifestation as it has evolved within Chinese culture.

This will to understand is part of a widespread attitude throughout contemporary humanities studies: the wish to realize cultural diversity in a cognitive way and to engage with it in a way that those who feel committed to this diversity can agree upon its role in twenty-first century human life.

Such an agreement necessitates understanding, and understanding requires of us cognitive endeavor on many different mental levels. Concerning history, these levels are addressed presented and reflected upon in the articles of this volume.

First of all, the degree of *knowledge pertaining to Chinese historiography* is of primary concern. Secondly, the degree of *evaluating historiography within a historical context* needs to be addressed. Here single historiographical works acquire a representative status for what are considered typical features of Chinese historical culture. Furthermore, this representative status has to be described in a *comparative* way by referring to other ways of approaching history through the discipline of historiography. Finally, this comparison must itself be reflected upon in respect to its preconditions and methods concerning the supposed meaning of culture and the role history plays in it.

All these levels are interrelated, and by their interrelatedness they are explicitly and implicitly addressed in the authors' contributions to this book. In doing so, they demonstrate different perspectives when considering Chinese historical thinking. There exists no meta-perspective into which all of these discrete perspectives can be integrated. Instead, an across-the-board component of all perspectives lies in their unified dynamic cognitive interrelatedness and by the will to understand. It is this understanding which gives this volume its particular significance.

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