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FORUM: CHINESE AND WESTERN HISTORICAL THINKING

1.

THE DEFINING CHARACTER OF CHINESE HISTORICAL THINKING¹

CHUN-CHIEH HUANG

ABSTRACT

Imbued with profound historical consciousness, the Chinese people are *Homo historiens* in every sense of the term. To be human in China, to a very large extent, is to be historical, which means to live up to the paradigmatic past. Therefore, historical thinking in traditional China is moral thinking. The Chinese historico-moral thinking centers around the notion of *Dao*, a notion that connotes both *Heavenly principle* and *human norm*.

In view of its practical orientation, Chinese historical thinking is, on the one hand, concrete thinking and, on the other, analogical thinking. Thinking concretely and analogically, the Chinese people are able to communicate with the past and to extrapolate meanings from history. In this way, historical experience in China becomes a library in which modern readers may engage in creative dialogues with the past.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, China has been noted for its historical-mindedness, and its people and their society have lived under the tutelage of history. The founding emperors of imperial China always sought to legitimize their dynasties by reference to history. In the same vein, the Chinese people have always turned to history to justify revolutions in their politics and culture.

This article explores the peculiarities of Chinese historical thinking. Section II considers the significance of history in China; section III delves into the sense of time in Chinese historical thinking; section IV discusses two outstanding aspects of Chinese historical thinking; and section V contains some concluding observations.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORY IN CHINA

China has been imbued with the writing of history since as early as 841 BC. Ever since then, the Chinese people have been able to "look at the past from the present," to judge and shape the present in the light of the ideal past, and to judge the past in the light of the present ideals thus shaped. Such judgments were taken with absolute seriousness. To get at the real facts has been an all-consuming passion of Chinese historians, so much so that some of them sacrificed

1. An earlier version of this article, titled "Salient Features of Chinese Historical Thinking," was published in *Medieval History Journal* 7 (2004), 243-254. Permission to publish the revised version is gratefully acknowledged.

their lives in opposition to their rulers' pressures on them to write otherwise than what they believed to be true. For instance, in 548 BC (the twenty-fifth year of the reign of Duke Xiang 襄公 of the State Lu 魯), a "grand historian" in charge of historiography recorded that "Cui Shu 崔杼 assassinated his ruler." Angry, Cui Shu had this grand historian executed. Then his younger brother took over the office of grand historian and recorded the identical statement, and was likewise executed. Next came the second younger brother, who again recorded the identical statement, and so on, up to the fourth brother! At this point, Cui Shu had to give up the idea of rewriting or "erasing" history.² Historians in China are indeed the incarnation of conscience and as such devote their lives to recording and preserving the facts.

This is the reason that historians' words were taken quite seriously in traditional China. "To receive [the historian's] single word of praise is to be glorified beyond high emolument; to be accused by his slightest word of blame is to be punished beyond [hacking of] axes," asserted the literary critic Liu Xie (劉勰, 456?-520?) in his *The Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon* (*Wenxin Diaolong*, 文心雕龍).³

In traditional China, history is shaped by human pathos in reflective and often tragic living as the Chinese people integrated meaningfully or disintegrated pathetically with the vicissitudes of Chinese history. This is because, as the great historian of twentieth-century China, Qian Mu (錢穆, 1895-1990) said in his *The Spirit of Chinese History* (*Zhongguo Lishi Jingshen*, 中國歷史精神), "National history awakens the soul of a nation," for "history is the whole experience of our life, the whole life past. We can understand our life by referring ourselves to history. History can thus allow us to appropriately project our life into the future."⁴

In other words, history in China is taken as the crystallization of past personal life experiences. "Personal" means that the meaning of one's life is discovered, interpreted, and shaped by the history in which one is situated. In the Chinese context, to live humanly is to be historically oriented.

All Chinese historians believe that history lets us understand ourselves and plan our future because history, as seemingly neutral, is the description of what happened, and precisely because of this, it provokes us to formulate some universal

2. Yang Bojün, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Taipei: Yulanliu Publishing Co., 1982), II, 1099. For an English translation, see *The Tso Chuan*, transl. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 147.

3. Fan Wenlan, *Wenxin Diaolong zhu* (Taipei: Kaiming Bookstore, 1968), IV, 1.

4. Qian Mu, *Zhongguo Lishi Jingshen* 中國歷史精神 (*The Spirit of Chinese History*), in *Qian Binsi Qianji* 錢賓四全集, ed. Editorial Committee of Mr. Qian Binsi's Complete Works (Taipei: Lianjing Publishing Co., 1998), XXIX, 6. The nationalistic sentiment in Qian Mu's historiography reminds one of Jules Michelet (1798-1874) when he said in his introduction to his *The People* (1864) (transl. P. McKay [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973]), "This book is more than a book; — it is myself. That is the reason it belongs to you. Yes, it is myself; and, I may venture to affirm, it is you also. All our various works have sprung from the same living root. — The sentiment of France, and the idea of our country." See *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present*, ed. Fritz Stern (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 109. For a discussion of history as "national epic" in twentieth-century China, see Ying-shih Yu, "Changing Conceptions of National History in Twentieth-Century China," in *Conceptions of National History: Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 78*, ed. Erik Lönnroch, Karl Molin, and Ragnar Björk (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), 155-174.

principles of life. Ironically, this becomes most apparent when historical facts challenge our initial facile convictions. The Grand Historian Sima Qian (司馬遷, 145?–87? bc) was deeply troubled as he confessed in his classic, *Historian's Records* (*Shiji*, 史記):

Some say, "Heaven's way favors none, but always sides with good men." Can men such as Bo Yi and Shu Qi be called good then, or bad? They accumulated such virtue, kept their actions this pure, and died of starvation.

Of his seventy disciples, Confucius recommended only Yen Yüan (顏淵) as "fond of learning." But Hui 回 (Yen Yüan) was often poor, and did not get his fill of even rice dregs and husks, finally dying young. How then does Heaven repay good men?

The Bandit Zhi 盜跖 killed innocent men daily, made delicacies from men's flesh, was cruel and ruthless, willful and arrogant, gathered a band of thousands of men and wreaked havoc across the world, yet finally died of old age. From what virtue did this follow?

These are just the most notorious and best known examples. As for more recent times, men who do not follow what is proper in their actions, and do nothing but violate taboos are still carefree and happy for all their lives and wealthy for generations without end; men who choose carefully how they tread, wait for the right time to offer their words, in walking do not take shortcuts, and except for what is right and fair do not vent pent-up emotions, still encounter disaster and catastrophe in numbers beyond counting. I am deeply perplexed by all this. Perhaps this is what is meant by "the Way of Heaven." Is it? Or isn't it?⁵

As Sima Qian lamented, we also are deeply troubled by the unfolding of "the Way of Heaven" in history. History's display of such affronts to our sense of justice provokes in us a profound value judgment. Reading the historical account of how good people fared and how evil ones did, we hate the evil fellows and cherish the sagely good with yearning—no matter how they fared, and in fact precisely because they fared against our conscientious expectations! This is not to prove any law of retribution in life, but to confirm in a heartfelt manner our deep moral conviction.

Specifically, Chinese historians believe that the provocation of intense indignation at how evil ones prospered leads us to realize the intrinsic value of the sagely and the intrinsic lack of value of the evil ones, independently of how they fared. Importantly, it is through "how they fared" that we are provoked to righteous indignation at the unfairness and the injustice of evil ones prospering and good ones dying young in starvation or in misfortune.

In other words, it is by thus negating the negative that the positive is manifested, which is the *Dao* (way, 道) and the *Li* (principle, 理) that is both the law of the universe and the norm of humanity. For we would instinctively scorn people who would plan their lives just in order to prosper as Bandit Zhi (盜跖) did, and we loathe enemy informants, although we may grudgingly pay them for the convenience they give us. In other words, "the Chinese transcendental world of *Tao* and the actual world of everyday life," as Ying-shih Yu indicates, "were conceived from the very beginning to be related to each other in a way different from other ancient cultures undergoing the Axial breakthrough."⁶ This is how

5. *The Grand Scribe's Records*, ed. William H. Nienhauser, Jr. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), vol. VII, *The Memoirs of Pre-Han China*, 4.

6. "Address of Yü Ying-shih on the occasion of receiving the John W. Kluge Prize at the Library of Congress December 5, 2006," http://www.loc.gov/loc/kluge/docs/yy_kluge.pdf, accessed January 23, 2007.

Chinese people come to "praise the good and blame the evil,"⁷ and formulate the heartfelt values, intrinsically and universally valuable, independently of what actually happens.⁸

This heartfelt feeling came, first, to be formulated explicitly, and then applied to actualities both of former times and the present situation. In this way, the so-called "hermeneutic circle" is actualized in traditional Chinese historical thinking. First, we get the sense of a universal principle, *Dao*, of justice from history, then we apply it to a particular historical situation, and this in turn enriches our sense of *Dao*; it is thus that the circle of the history of understanding is accomplished. Let us see how the procedure goes.

First, the intense sense of the meaning of history can be extrapolated and appropriated from the historical facts. As Mencius (371?–289? bc) 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 Jin, the *Tao Wu* of Chu and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* of Lu are the same kind of work. The events recorded concern Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin, and the style is that of the official historian. Confucius said, "I have appropriated the didactic principles therein."⁹

Ever since the time of Confucius (551–479 bc), Chinese historians have tried to appropriate didactic principles from history. This has been true especially since the tenth century. For example, Sima Guang (司馬光, 1019–1086), in his *Records of the Ancient History* (*Jigulu*, 稽古錄),¹⁰ said, "The ruler's *Dao* is one, his virtues are three, his talents are five. . . . Since the beginning of peoples and throughout the ultimate recess of Heaven and earth, there is nothing other than these to ones who possess the state through its ups and downs." The neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130–1200) systematized the above informal expression in a more perceptive manner, by proposing *Li* (principle) that describes the Way things operate and prescribes the norm by which humanity should live. More often than not, philosophical argumentation in China was made possible by historical narration.¹¹

7. This is as Sima Qian quoted Dong Zhongshu's (c. 179–104 bc) words in Sima's celebrated Preface to *Historian's Records* (*Shiji*). See Sima Qian, *Shiji* (Taipei: Taishun Bookstore, Photo-reproduction of new punctuated edition, 1971), CXXX, "The Grand Scribe's Preface," p. 3297. The very process of quotation here is history. Sima personally experienced this sentiment when he received a tragic punishment (castration) for his honestly assuring the emperor of his devoted friend's loyalty to the state, who then ended up capitulating to the enemy. His punishment occasioned the writing of the *Shiji*, which is the Chinese version of Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum*, to vindicate his sense of "historical justice."

8. Sima Qian quibbled, after reviewing the records of the noble men who had vanished, "All these men had a rankling in their hearts, for they were not able to accomplish what they wished. Therefore they wrote of past affairs in order to pass on their thoughts to future generations." See *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, ed. William Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), I, 372.

9. *Mencius*, transl. D. C. Lau (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1979, 1984), II, Book 4:B, 165. B refers to the later part of the book.

10. Sima Guang 司馬光, *Jigulu* 稽古錄 (Records of the Ancient History) (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan photo reproduction of *Xuejin taoyuan* 學津討源 edition, 1965), juan 16, p. 75–78.

11. See my "The Philosophical Argumentation by Historical Narration in Sung China: The Case of Chu Hsi," in *The New and the Multiple: Sung Senses of the Past*, ed. Thomas H. C. Lee (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2004), 61–106.

Second, the *Li* or *Dao* obtained by observing history became the concrete general norm and lever whereby historians judged, admonished, and even remonstrated with rulers, both in the past and at present. Zhu Xi boldly declared:

Fifteen hundred years are all like this, going through days merely patching and fixing the status quo. During this period, [days of] "small peace" were not lacking, but not a day passed without the Way transmitted by Yao, Shun, Three Kings, Duke Zhou, and Confucius being neglected in practice in the world. Yet, nobody has anticipated the permanent presence of the Way. This is the only thing that has been everlasting, in ancient days and today, always present, never perishing, indestructible despite fifteen hundred years of deeds of destruction by humans.¹²

Although worldly affairs are in the thousands and hundreds of thousands, really there is but one single Way or Principle. This is what is called "Principle One, manifestations many."¹³

According to Zhu Xi, the *Li* derived from history became the standard for the critique of history, past and contemporary. The standard embodies historical flesh and blood, filled with tears of suffering people, labor of workers in the searing sun, lived devotion of loyal subjects and filial sons, brutalities of insensitive officials, virtuous ladies' courageous chastity, and so on. The law and principle are both solidly based on the facts of history and are universally applicable as norms of humanity and dynasties. In China, politics as an academic subject is basically history; strategic deliberation, too, is based on history. Legal decisions in the court must consult records of precedents in history. Therefore, the writing of history in traditional China is nothing but an act of political and moral criticism.¹⁴

It was thus that the "circle of understanding and interpretation" came about. Historians in China observed historical processes intently to obtain from them some universal principles — both descriptive and prescriptive — so as to apply them as prescriptions and judgments to history itself, both in the past and at present. This circle is called the "hermeneutic circle" that solidifies our concrete universal "historical thinking," which guides the daily comportment of each individual on the one hand, and the vast cosmic activities of the entire world on the other. This expresses the ultimate essential importance of history in China.

III. THE SENSE OF TIME IN CHINESE HISTORICAL THINKING

The above discussion of the significance of history in China has much to do with the sense of time in Chinese historical thinking. The Chinese mind centers on and revolves around history. In China, to be human is to be historical. The Chinese people believe that we are human because we think and behave historically. Thus,

12. Zhu Xi, *Hui'an xiansheng Zhu Wengong wenji* 晦庵先生朱文公文集 (Taipei: Zhongwen Chubanshe photo-reproduction of the *kinsi kuseki sokan* 近世漢籍叢刊 edition, 1972), juan 36. "Da Chen Dongfu 答陳同甫," p. 2306.

13. *Zhuji Yulei* 朱子語類, ed. Li Jingde 黎靖德 (Beijing: Zhonghua shujū, 1981), juan 136, p. 3243.

14. Cf. Yü Ying-shih, "Reflections on Chinese Historical Thinking," in *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate*, ed. Jörn Rüsen (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 152-172, especially 161.

to understand Chinese culture, and how peculiar it is, it is important to understand what history is, and how historical thinking works.

In the Chinese mind, history describes how aware we are of being in time that flows as we engage in various activities in the world. Since the "flow" includes its direction, to be aware of being in time means to have a sense of direction. This direction of time flows from what has passed through what is now to what is coming; our activities clearly go from the past through the present to the future in an unmistakable direction.

Such a definite direction gives us the prospect and purpose of living. Chinese people are particularly sensitive to this sense of time. To have this sense of time is to have purpose in life. Confucius (551-479 BC) stood at the bank of the "river of time," and sighed, "Oh, how it flows day and night, without ceasing!"¹⁵ In contrast, to lose this sense of time-direction is to be exiled out of living itself, to feel "out of place," unspeakably lost and lonesome in the world. Chen Zi'ang (陳子昂, 662-702) of the T'ang Dynasty (618-907) gave a long sigh, saying, "Beholding no ancients/ Beholding no one's coming/ Vainly thinking how vast the skies and broad the earth/ Being alone, I lament, shed tears."¹⁶

In the Chinese tradition, then, the sense of history is the warp and woof of life, and is an important indicator of how society should be managed and how politics should be conducted for social stability and prosperity. Concretely, every time a dynasty replaced another, often with considerable bloodshed, a question about the legitimacy of the new regime was earnestly raised in terms of history. "Why did the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) lose the world, why did the Han Dynasty get it?" was hotly debated at the dawn of the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD).¹⁷ At the same time, based on this legitimacy with the concrete causes of Qin losing the "Mandate of Heaven" and Han obtaining it, people in and out of the royal palace eagerly discussed concrete measures as to how best and most appropriately the new regime should govern and manage the world.

In all these debates and deliberations, history served as an important weathervane and concrete guide. History justified the legitimacy of Han to overthrow Qin,¹⁸ and history provided guidance to the newly installed Han administration to back up its legitimacy by "good governance"; history, too, provided a watchful eye over the rulers to make them stick to their vows and declarations to enforce good governance. Since the Tang Dynasty, such historic responsibilities of watching over and warning the throne fell to the writing brushes of the Office of the Historiographers who compiled the Emperor's *Qijū zhu* (diaries of activity and repose, 起居註). The historiographers kept this daily journal of comments in strict

15. Confucius, *The Analects*, transl. D. C. Lau (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1992), Book IX, chapter 17, p. 81.

16. Chen Zi'ang 陳子昂, "Deng Youjiutai ge" 登幽州台歌 (Song on Mounting the Youzhou Tower) in *Quan Tangshi guangxuan xinzhu jiping* 全唐詩廣選新注集評 (New Commentaries on the Complete Tang Poetry) (Liaoning: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 2001), I, 508.

17. Sima Qian, "Biographies of Li Sheng and Lu Jia," in *Shiji* (Taipei: Taishun Bookstore Photo-reproduction of new punctuated edition), p. 2699.

18. See my "The Ch'in Unification (221 BC) in Chinese Historiography," in *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-cultural Perspective*, ed. Q. Edward Wang and Georg G. Iggers (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 31-44.

confidence and with meticulous conscience. They never wavered in their duty, sternly kept the comments away from the Emperor's eye, and literally devoted their lives to fulfilling their duty. Such has been the Chinese utter devotion to history.

In short, we are warranted in saying that in China, the society, the people, the culture, the politics, all are history. To contact the Chinese and their culture is to contact their history. Their history constitutes their flavor, their atmosphere—in fact, the very existence of China. The people, politics, and culture of China are its history. China is the place where we see most clearly that the human being is *homo historiens* through and through. By “*homo historiens*” I mean that the Chinese people are both shaping and being shaped by history, just like the spiders working the web of history that crisscrosses the globe. This strong historical consciousness in China manifests itself in the writing of Qian Mu. Qian powerfully insisted that studying bits of historical information will miss the spirit of historiography, that is, the intimate relation between historical knowledge and the actualities of life, the knowledge of the facts about how our civilization changed and grew, and how it transpired.¹⁹

IV. TWO OUTSTANDING ASPECTS OF CHINESE HISTORICAL THINKING

Now we are in a better position to appreciate the defining characteristics of Chinese historical consciousness. In traditional Chinese historical thinking, history is formed as the people think *analogically* and *concretely* about the events of life. Let me now proceed to explicate these two salient aspects of Chinese historical thinking.

In the first place, the Chinese believe that history is formed in and by *analogical thinking*. Analogy is not an abstract logic that cuts us off from concrete details. It is neither wild imagination that is baseless and haphazard, nor sporadic reports of isolated events without rhyme or reason. Analogy is instead concrete, systematic, open-ended, and comprehensive. Analogy has two features: it is metaphorical and it takes a part for the whole (*pars pro toto*).

First, analogical thinking is “metaphorical.” Liu Xiang (劉向, 77–76 BC) of the Han Dynasty in his *Shuo Yuan* (說苑) quoted the famous logician Hui Shi (惠施, 380–305 BC) as saying, “Pi (辟) is to analogize the unknown by the known.”²⁰ As the “Appended Remarks” of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*, 易經) says, “taking what are close by our bodies, taking things from afar” (近取諸身，遠取諸物)²¹ to know and judge things far and unknown.

The Chinese people keep to representative historical cases in drawing generalizations. The factual case is the “knot” of the “cord” of actuality. This contrast shows a different usage of “exemplum,” that is, a short story as metaphor. Whenever

19. Qian Mu, *Guoshi Dagang* 國史大綱 (An Outline of the National History), in *Qian Binsi xiansheng quanji*, vol. 27, pp. 29–30.

20. Liu Xiang 劉向, *Shuoyuan* 說苑 (Collection of Discourses) (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan: photo reproduction of the Sibu congkan chubian suoben 四部叢刊初編縮本 edition, 1965), juan 11, p. 51.

21. Gao Heng, *Zhouyi Dazhuan jinzhuzhu* 周易大傳今注 (Jinan: Jilu shushe, 1979), juan 5, pp. 558–559.

Chinese thinkers want to “argue” some universal principles or draw some moral codes, they always return to concrete historical examples or experience. Mencius (371–289? BC) is a good representative thinker in this context. In “articulating” his moral philosophy, Mencius cited many historical examples of famous people, such as Shun (舜), Fu Yue (傅說), Jiao Ge (膠鬲), Guan Zhong (管仲), Sun Shu'ao (孫叔敖), and Boli Xi (百里奚). Then he said that Heaven exhausts one's frame in starvation, hardship, and frustration before placing on one a great burden and thereby provoking innovation.²² Exempla in the West are used as illustrations of an abstract thesis, and as such are dispensable and merely decorative. In contrast, Chinese notions collapse when abstracted from the exempla to which they point. For example, Zhuangzi's (399?–295? BC) “double walk” (*liang xing*, 兩行) is senseless without the monkey story that gives it its meaning. In the story, the Monkey Keeper proposes the rule, “morning three, evening four” bananas but it is booed by the monkeys so the Keeper switches to “morning four, evening three,” to win their approval; in this way he did the “double walking” of fulfilling both desires, his and the monkeys'.²³ This concrete story indispensably “knots” the “cord” of actuality as no abstract concept can.

Metaphor is thus an essential part of Chinese thinking; metaphor in the West is a dispensable embellishment. We may describe different uses of metaphor in the two cultures with a rather dated metaphor. The West inserts metaphor as a feather onto a hat as an adornment, while Chinese thinking employs metaphor as a feather on an arrow—a necessary part of the arrow since an arrow cannot fly straight to its target without its feather.

Second, Chinese analogical thinking often takes a part for the whole (*pars pro toto*); for example, it takes “bread” as “food” in general, or “flag” as “the entire nation.” By the same token, historians often pick one event, one view, ancient or modern, in terms and perspective of which they wish to describe the entire situation. They use one point of view to confirm or even protest the entire situation of the past. One extreme case of this is Sima Qian, who in his *Historian's Records* protested, from his perspective that “Heaven is always on the side of good people,” as unfair that righteous Bo Yi (伯夷) and Shu Qi (叔齊) had to starve to death.

Again, the West often takes argumentation as “war,” as “winning” or “losing” an argument. Such an attitude disregards argument as midwifery dialogue²⁴ or exhortation and persuasion with metaphors, as often happens in China. In general, Chinese historians instinctively think from one perspective, picking one perspective to comprehend all—the whole situation—and so, in the Western mode of thinking, their comprehension would seem inevitably restricted to one aspect of the situation highlighted by that perspective (argument as war), and the analogous effects (argument as midwifery, as persuasion) are largely ignored.

22. Mencius, transl. Lap, Book 4:B, 261–263.

23. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, transl. Burton Watson (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968), chapter 2, “Discussion on Making All Things Equal,” 36–49, esp. 40–41.

24. Cf. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3–13.

Another feature of analogical thinking in Chinese historical thinking is *coherence*. To think is to think coherently, of course, and our history forms as we think coherently. We re-walk, re-enact, and re-describe the days gone by that form our life story and our history.

For Chinese historians, the reconstruction of history means the description of "facts" in the context of value. Even "feigned" history makes some allowances for moral judgments. All this sounds as if it were straight from the confessions of the historians and should serve as a lesson for conscientious journalists today. Ideally, today's journalist is supposed to act like the official historiographer in traditional China who was a solitary, brilliant star in the brutal glorious or gloomy past of bygone dynasties. Both journalists now and "historians" then are expected to have their historical conscience. They are determined to report to readers—contemporary or future—what actually happened, to let them form their own opinions and apply the lessons they draw to their own times and circumstances.

V. CONCLUSION

In this article I have argued that history occupies a pivotal position in the make-up of the worldview and philosophy of life in the Chinese tradition. The Chinese people are *Homo historiens* through and through. They have a profound sense of time in their historical consciousness. Facts, events, and personages are considered and evaluated in the context of the "flow" of time. At the very core of Chinese historical thinking lies the notion of *Dao* or *Li* with which Chinese historians pass judgment upon historical actuality. In this sense and to that extent, Chinese historical thinking is a kind of moral thinking. Ethics in Chinese historical thinking is thus grounded in metaphysics, which is centered upon the notion of *Dao* or *Li* that comprises both *principle* and *norm*, and on *empirical historical fact*. This groundedness of ethics in metaphysics in Chinese historical thinking is, on the one hand, a very powerful lever by which historians can judge any historical figure, but on the other hand, it is a *double-edged sword* that cuts short historians' explanatory power in accounting for evil in history.

Moreover, Chinese historical thinking is something like a shuttle between the past and the present for mutual enrichment. Past experience is not dead and wrapped like the mummies in museums, but alive and interactive like the library in which present-day readers may engage in creative dialogues with historical figures. All these "conversations" are made possible by the *analogical* as well as the *concrete* thinking that constitutes the two outstanding elements of Chinese historical thinking.

National Taiwan University

FORUM: CHINESE AND WESTERN HISTORICAL THINKING

2.

CROSSING CULTURAL BORDERS: HOW TO UNDERSTAND HISTORICAL THINKING IN CHINA AND THE WEST¹

JÖRN RÜSEN

ABSTRACT

Topical intercultural discourse on historical thinking is deeply determined by fundamental distinctions, mainly between the "East" and the "West." The epistemological preconditions of this discourse are normally not reflected or even criticized. This article follows Chun-Chieh Huang's attempt to give Chinese historical thinking a new voice in this intercultural discourse. It agrees with Huang's strategy of focusing the description of the peculiarity of Chinese historical thinking on fundamental criteria of historical sense-generation. Huang argues for a strict difference between the Chinese way of sense-generation in history and the Western one. Against this distinction I argue that both traditions of historical thinking follow the same logic, namely that of the exemplary mode, which is known in the Western tradition by Cicero's slogan "Historia vitae magistra." Instead of claiming this mode as typical of Chinese historical thinking, I propose to clarify the difference between China and the West by looking for a *modification of the same logic*. Finally the question arises as to what the paradigmatic shift of historical thinking from the exemplary to the genetic mode means for the Chinese tradition Huang has presented. This shift cannot be understood as only a Western one, since it is a mode of pursuing modernity in history by a fundamental temporalization in the interpretation of the human world.

I

The process of globalization involves an intensifying intercultural communication. Every nation and culture has to present itself vis-à-vis its cultural differences from others. In this communication, history is the medium of articulating one's own cultural identity in respect to its difference from the identity of others; it is the voice of peculiarity in the dialogue between self and others. This is what Professor Huang actually does with his text. He claims an essential historicity for Chinese culture and he describes it by referring to classical texts.² His reading discloses a basic logic of historical thinking in the Chinese tradition, which is claimed to be valid even today.

1. An earlier version of this article, titled "A Comment on Professor Chun-chieh Huang's 'Salient Features of Chinese Historical Thinking,'" was published in *Medieval History Journal* 8 (2005), 267-272. Permission to publish the revised version is gratefully acknowledged.

2. His interpretation follows a general line of thought by East Asian scholars that distinguishes between East and West. Cf. Masayuki Sato, "Cognitive Historiography and Normative Historiography," in *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate*, ed. J. Rüsen (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 128-141; Thomas H. C. Lee, "Must History Follow Rational Patterns of Interpretation? Critical Questions from a Chinese Perspective," in *ibid.*, 173-177.

At first glance this seems to be only an empirical description, but it is actually much more: it is a claim for a cultural peculiarity in which China differs from others. The paradigmatic "other" is not very often specified in Huang's text, but in its last part it becomes apparent who is meant: the West.

Huang's argument offers a clear objection to Western dominance in the field of historical thinking. In this it stands against the tendency in the modernization process in which all cultures around the world have been seized by the dynamics of the modern way of historical thinking—at least in the form of history as an academic discipline, as a "science"—a way of thinking that originated in Western late-Enlightenment thought and in historicism. This has become the dominant form of doing history, at least on the level of academic discourse. Huang's text reverses this dominance of the West: we have to learn that there is no other culture in the world that is more historical than the Chinese. How should a Western scholar react to this provocation?

First, Western scholars have to learn about the substantial historicity of Chinese culture. The culture of historicity is not a privilege of the West, and therefore the Western paradigm of historical thinking should no longer be used as a standard and parameter of intercultural communication and comparison.³ But should one simply replace a dominant Western paradigm by a dominant Chinese one? Besides the simple fact that there are other cultures in the world with their own specific way of doing history (for example, the Islamic), the confrontation of Western and Chinese historical thinking leads into a logical dilemma: both modes of doing history claim to be universal. How should we come to terms with differing universalisms in historical thinking? Western and Chinese scholars ought to agree that both positions can't be right; moreover, they should then come to terms with their differing universalisms within the horizon of their own traditions and their own understanding of what historical thinking is about.

II

In order to solve this dilemma one should follow Huang's argument and refer to basic logical principles of historical thinking. He describes the logical principles of Chinese historical thinking as being concrete, as analogical-metaphorical, and as synthesizing empirical evidence and normative intentions. This synthesis is brought about by a specific interrelationship between concrete historical facts on the one hand and universal laws of human life on the other hand. Historical thinking generates general rules out of the observation of historical facts. By doing so it enables people to apply these general rules (based on concrete historical experience) to present-day problems. This is exactly the logic of exemplary sense-generation in history.

It is my main claim that this logic has not been valid exclusively in Chinese culture; it can be observed in many other cultures as well, including that of the West. In the West it dominated historical thinking from antiquity until the rise of modern historical thinking in the second half of the eighteenth century. Cicero described

3. See Rüsen, ed., *Western Historical Thinking*.

this logic with the slogan "Historia vitae magistra,"⁴ and it can be found in most of the paradigmatic examples of Western historical thinking, in Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* as well as in Machiavelli's *History of Florence*, to give just two examples. Indeed, it is not difficult to present Western examples and explications for each of the features Huang describes as typical of Chinese historical thinking.⁵ He says, for example, that in China "politics as an academic subject is basically history."⁶ The same can be said about one of the most paradigmatic theories of politics in the West: in his *Discorsi* Machiavelli developed his idea of what politics is about by interpreting the ancient historiography of Livius.⁷ Livius provides the historical examples that Machiavelli uses to find the very nature of politics. This logic of history can easily be found in other cultures as well. For example, the most famous historian of the Islamic world, Ibn Khaldun, significantly called his great work *The Book of Examples* (ca. 1377).⁸

Huang is well aware that there is exemplary historical thinking in the West as well. But he argues that, in contrast to China, in the West historical *exempla* are only illustrations of theoretical knowledge, that there is a dominance of abstract universalistic rules over the empirical evidence of historical facts. However, this is definitely *not* the case in the realm of Western historical thinking. "Historia" for centuries in the West has been a word that has simply meant "empirical evidence."⁹ History has served as a huge reservoir of experience that has enabled people to articulate general rules that they can use to master the problems of their present-day lives and to develop a solid future perspective. The logical superiority of general rules and theoretical knowledge over single facts and events is a matter of the natural sciences, but not of history, in the West.

III

If it is true that the exemplary mode of historical sense-generation so convincingly described by Huang is valid for Western as well Chinese historical thinking, then we have to ask the question about the peculiarity of Chinese historical thinking and its difference from the West in a new mode. It is not a case of the exemplary mode against another one; what is at issue is a specification of this mode. Asking in this way gets rid of the highly problematical confrontation of two universalisms. The West and China share the logical universality of the exemplary mode of historical sense-generation in their historical culture. Their difference is a differ-

4. Cicero, *De Oratore* 2, 26.

5. See the collection of texts representing the humanistic theory of history in early modern Western history in Eckhard Kessler, *Theoretiker humanistischer Geschichtsschreibung* (Munich: W. Fink, 1971).

6. Chun-Chieh Huang, "The Defining Character of Chinese Historical Thinking," *History and Theory* 46 (2007), 184 (this issue).

7. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* [1531]. See Felix Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in 16th Century Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

8. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, vol. I, transl. F. Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958).

9. Arno Seifert, *Cognitio Historica: Die Geschichte als Namengeberin der frühneuzeitlichen Empirie* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1976).

ence in the manifestation of this shared universalism, a difference brought about by different conditions under which it has been developed and embodied in different understandings of concepts of humankind, nature, religion, and so on.

IV

I would like to conclude my comment with some questions that still have to be asked with respect to the Chinese and Western traditions of historical thinking. In doing so I would like to propose a new mode of doing history that may help to answer these remaining questions in a productive way: culturally different manifestations of the logic of historical thinking ought to be framed in such a way that they do not exclude one another, but rather interpret one another. In this way differences would be treated under the rule of mutual recognition. This recognition would be based on an agreement about a logic of universalism and universalization in historical thinking that comprehends cultural difference. Within this universalism difference does not vanish but, instead, its features become clear. Sharing this universalism of interrelating universalisms in a discursive and inclusive way, scholars from different cultural traditions can then communicate their specific historical identity peacefully and with mutual respect—beyond the “clash of civilizations” raised by the question of what culture owns the “real” historicity.¹⁰

What are the questions that ought to be asked about Chinese and Western modes of historical thinking? The first question is whether they contain logical elements effective within them other than those of the logic of exemplary sense-generation. I think that this is indeed the case. In all cultures we find more than only a single logic of making sense of the past. The peculiarity of cultures can be explained by different constellations of the different logical elements that most cultures have in common (such as the exemplary mode of historical thinking).¹¹ These modes can typologically be distinguished on the level of a general theory of history.¹²

The second question is related to modernity. In the West the long-lasting dominance of exemplary thinking in history came to an end with the beginning of modern historical thinking. The exemplary mode of doing history has been replaced by a genetical one. In the genetical mode the issue is not the logic of judgment mediating concrete empirical facts and universal rules, but the logic of an internal temporality of these universal rules themselves.¹³ This new logic meets the chal-

10. See Jörn Rüsen, “Culture: Universalism, Relativism, or What Else?” *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads* 1:1 (April, 2004), 1-8.

11. Jörn Rüsen, “Some Theoretical Approaches to Intercultural Comparison of Historiography,” *History and Theory: Chinese Historiography in Comparative Perspective*, Theme Issue 35 (1996), 5-22 (Chinese translation: “Kua wenhua bijiaoshixue de yixie lilun zongxiang,” in *Zhongguo shixueshi yantaohui cong bijiao guandian chufa lunwenj*, ed. S. Weigelin-Schwiedrzik and A. Schneider [Bangiao/ Taipei: Taotian chubanshe, 1999], 151-176).

12. See Jörn Rüsen, “History: Overview,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. N. Smelser and P. Baltes (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001), 6857-6864. I have explicated my typology of historical sense-generation in various texts. The most extended one is “Die vier Typen des historischen Erzählens,” *Zeit und Sinn: Strategien historischen Denkens*, ed. J. Rüsen (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1990), 153-230; an English summary is Jörn Rüsen, “Historical Narration: Foundation, Types, Reason,” *History and Theory, The Representation of Historical Events*, Beiheft 26 (1987), 87-97.

13. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

lenge of accelerating change in the basic organizations of human life. It is this change that problematizes the validity of super-temporal rules to guide the very change in human affairs occurring in the modernization process and its multiple developments around the world.

The paradigm shift of historical thinking to which I am referring can be described as an essential *temporalization* in the realm of the universal principles that history has derived from the concrete facts of the past. It is an open question whether there is any potential for this essential temporalization on the level of general principles concerning human life in the Chinese tradition as well. In this case the change from the logic of exemplary sense-generation to the logic of genetic sense-generation in history cannot be understood as simply being an import from the West. Within the concept of “multiple modernities”¹⁴ it can be interpreted as a change at least partly along the lines of one’s own cultural potential.¹⁵

At least this temporalization offers a chance to develop a new outlook on cultural difference concerning universalistic approaches to history. By means of temporalization these universalisms can be mediated in a new way: they can be put into a processual order in which their interrelationship can be understood as a movement toward the mutual recognition of differences and mutual enrichment by this recognition. In this new realm of temporalized universal principles of historical thinking, East and West may meet in a discursive way. The struggle of mutual exclusion is replaced by a culture of the recognition of differences in which the competence of different traditions and their validity are related to the potential of recognition.

Huang has described the typical Chinese way of doing history as being guided by non-aggressive argumentation. In it, he says, an argument is not a weapon in a semantic war, but an aid to gaining valid knowledge. If this is true, then Western scholars will have no problem in agreeing with this Chinese mode of doing history. I am very happy that Huang used the metaphor of a midwife for what he thinks of as typical Chinese historical argumentation, for it was Socrates who also characterized his way of arguing by calling himself a midwife. In using this metaphor, therefore, Huang implicitly shows that we actually agree, and that though China and the West have particular identities we can nevertheless still communicate with each other with a common commitment to respect and recognition.

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14. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus* 129 (2000), 1-30.

15. Hellwig Schmidt-Glintzer and Achim Mittag, “‘Aufklärungshistorie’ in China?,” in *Dimensionen der Historik, Geschichtstheorie, Wissenschaftsgeschichte und Geschichtskultur heute: Jörn Rüsen zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. H. W. Blanke, F. Jaeger, and T. Sandkühler (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998), 313-330.

FORUM:
CHINESE AND WESTERN HISTORICAL THINKING

3.

SIMA QIAN AND HIS WESTERN COLLEAGUES:
ON POSSIBLE CATEGORIES OF DESCRIPTION

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ABSTRACT

This article comments on some of Professor Huang's theses by looking at ancient historiography. It deals with the significance of history in its respective cultural contexts; the kind of orientation that historical thinking and historiography provide; and the relationship between concrete examples and abstract rules in historical argumentation. Distinguishing between ancient Greece and Rome, it shows that Huang's explicit and implicit East-West oppositions are more valid with respect to ancient Greece than to ancient Rome. On important points, the situation of Rome is surprisingly close to that of China. Thus not only in China but also in Rome, tradition and history are highly important as a life-orienting force (as opposed to the importance of speculative thought in Greece); and not only in China but also in Rome the orientation that historical thinking and historiography provide is to a great extent moral (as opposed to orientation through intellectual insight that, for a historian such as Thucydides, is placed in the foreground). As to the relationship between concrete examples and abstract rules in historical argumentation, the paper takes up Professor Rüsen's category of "exemplary meaning-generation," but suggests a distinction between example in the sense of "case/instance" and example in the sense of "model/paragon." Though the two corresponding modes of exemplary meaning-generation are mostly entwined, it appears that in Chinese and Roman historical works (in accordance with their stress on moral effect) there is a tendency toward meaning-generation by example in the sense of "model/paragon," whereas in Greek historiography (in accordance with its stress on intellectual insight) the tendency is toward meaning-generation by example in the sense of "case/instance."

In his essay Professor Huang characterizes Chinese historical thinking as it presents itself through the ages. Nevertheless, his presentation contains a certain emphasis on antiquity. Sima Qian, the father of Chinese historiography, is the author quoted most often. Obviously, in Huang's opinion the "classics" exercise a normative and formative function in the case of historical thinking, too. Though I am aware of the fact that important voices argue that the Western world as a distinct unit came into being only in the Middle Ages if not at the beginning of the modern era, being a classicist I sympathize with Huang's view. Thus, I intend to look at his characterization of the peculiarity of Chinese historical thought from a classicist's perspective and to deal with three of his theses by focusing on antiquity.

The first thesis concerns the overwhelming significance of history in Chinese culture. Huang writes: "In the Chinese context to live humanly is to be historically

oriented" (181)¹; "in the Chinese tradition . . . the sense of history is the warp and woof of life" (185); "China is the place where we see most clearly that the human being is *homo historiens* through and through" (185). As Professor Rüsen states in his commentary, this thesis seems to contain a provocative point against the paradigmatic "other," the West, whose "modern way of historical thinking" as conceived in late-Enlightenment thought and in historicism "has become the dominant form of doing history, at least on the level of academic discourse" (189-190). However this may be, let us see whether Huang's claim about the peculiarity of the significance of history as an orienting force in Chinese culture is supported by a comparison of Chinese and Western antiquity.²

Concerning ancient Greece, the claim seems to be justified. In Greek antiquity historical thinking and historiography did not play a life-orienting role comparable to that in ancient China.³ In China, as the saying goes, "all classics are history" (Zhang Xuecheng). In contrast, at the beginning of Greek literature (eighth century BCE) lie epic and didactic poetry: the subject matter of epics being mythical events such as the Trojan war, led by heroic figures, and watched and influenced by the Olympian deities; the subject matter of didactic poetry being divine genealogy and the farmer's calendar. Then in the seventh century BCE lyrical poetry, and a century or two later (around 500 BCE) dramatic poetry, come into being, in neither of which does history play a decisive role. Philosophy, which starts developing in the same period, is at first mainly occupied with the nature of the physical world, before it is "brought from heaven to earth" in the mid fifth century BCE. Only around this time does historiography come into being, and it never plays a particularly outstanding role in Greek intellectual life.

But Greece is only one part of Western antiquity. Concerning the other part, Rome, the situation is quite different. This becomes clear as soon as we think of the concept of *mos maiorum* and the importance it had in Rome. This concept served as a guiding principle for social and political life; it entailed in general a conservative orientation of private and public conduct to the model of the preceding generations. If one orients oneself to the ways of the forefathers, one must know something about them; in other words, one must cherish history, at least the history of one's commonwealth. This is what the Romans do: the city of Rome, at least from the middle of the Republic (around 300 BCE) onward, is full of monuments commemorating historical persons and events of the realms of both domestic policy and foreign affairs. But the significance of history is also reflected

1. Page references to Chun-Chieh Huang, "The Defining Character of Chinese Historical Thinking," and to Jörn Rüsen, "Crossing Cultural Borders," *History and Theory* 46 (2007) (this issue) will appear in parentheses.

2. In the following I draw on earlier papers on Greek, Roman, and ancient Chinese historiography: "Vergleichende Beobachtungen zur griechisch-römischen und altchinesischen Geschichtsschreibung," *Saeculum* 48 (1997), 213-254; "Zu Sinnhorizont und Funktion griechischer, römischer und altchinesischer Geschichtsschreibung," in *Sinn (in) der Antike. Orientierungssysteme, Leitbilder und Wertkonzepte im Altertum*, ed. K.-J. Hölkamp and J. Rüsen (Mainz: Von Zabern, 2003), 33-54; "Tacitus und Sima Qian: Eine Annäherung," *Philologus* 150 (2006), 115-135; "Tacitus und Sima Qian: Persönliche Erfahrung und historiographische Perspektive," *Philologus* 151 (2007), forthcoming.

3. Pertinent remarks in Yingshih Yü, "Reflections on Chinese Historical Thought," in *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate*, ed. Jörn Rüsen (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 152-172, 158-160.

in literature. The early epics of Rome (around 200 BCE) deal with Roman history, be it a particular event such as the First Punic War (Naevius) or Roman history in its entirety (Ennius). At the same time historiography comes into being and establishes itself as the most important prose genre that continuously develops until it reaches its peak in the works of Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus. In contrast, philosophy is a latecomer and at least its main proponent in prose, Cicero, starts out with works of political philosophy in which the history of the Roman *res publica* is a constant point of reference. Thus, history is thoroughly present in the social, political, and intellectual life of the Romans.

At this point, a complementary remark seems called for. Following Huang, I have so far characterized the position of history in ancient China, Greece, and Rome in relatively general terms. However, such characterization carries us only so far; to gain a deeper knowledge about the role of history in these cultures we must describe things in a more concrete way. This is possible by asking about the social position of historians and the institutional context in which their works were written and read. The answers to these questions lead to a rudimentary, yet distinct, typology.

In China, historical writing from its very beginning is closely related to a particular post within the bureaucracy of the state: that of the *shi*, generally rendered as "scribe" or "historiographer." The *shi* may originally have had the task of recording the results of ceremonial archery contests. Yet it appears that he soon acquired other duties as well: observing the calendar and determining lucky and unlucky days; noting down the results of oracle bone inquiries; issuing and archiving official statements; and, finally, chronicling important political events, above all the words and deeds of the current ruler. In all these tasks the most consistent feature seems to have been the exact and faithful recording of what happened. Hence, as far as the historiographical side of the office is concerned, at least as early as Confucius there appears the ideal of the incorruptible registration and assessment of historical events and persons, in the fulfilment of which the *shi* should not flinch from bodily harm or even death. The position of the ancient Chinese historian was thus a prestigious one right at the center of political power. Moreover, the institutional framework in which the Chinese historian's records were situated was such that, most probably, those bearing political responsibility took them into account.⁴

In Greece the situation is again very different. Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Polybius, to refer only to the best-known historians, belonged to the upper layer of society. At the same time, however, each of them for one reason or another had to leave his homeland and go into exile. Thanks to their social origins, their financial resources, and their personal qualities they lived there in a position of some respect. This peculiar situation in which they were honorable outsiders dwelling more or less far away from their native communities might

4. I am aware of the fact that Sima Qian and his father, though they held the office of the *tai shi gong*, did not write their work in this capacity, but, so to speak, as private persons. This does not, however, contradict the main claim about the role of the historian in Chinese culture. Sima Qian's and his father's situations were special and neither downplayed their own esteem for their work nor that of their later readers.

well have been a source of inspiration for independence of judgment and breadth of historiographical approach, but it also meant that they produced their works as private citizens or even free-floating individuals addressing a virtual community of intellectually interested upper-class people in the Hellenized world. They could not and did not expect to exercise concrete political influence through their historiographical works.

In Rome, finally, we have a kind of intermediary situation. From relatively early on, there were the annals of the Pontifex Maximus, terse official records of events of religious and political significance. The first authors of more elaborate histories, however, did not write as officeholders, but—like their Greek predecessors—as private persons. Nevertheless, practically all of them were members of the aristocracy and had held offices, and they considered history-writing as a continuation of their civic activities in a different form. Their works dealt exclusively with Roman history, and their public was mainly the aristocracy to which they themselves belonged and on whose political and moral conduct they wanted to exercise influence. That they actually did have such an influence is not improbable, as the members of Rome's political class understood (and evaluated) themselves and their achievements to a large extent in terms of the contributions of individuals and families to the development of the Roman state in the course of the centuries—and this means: in historical terms.

Thus, as for the significance of historical thinking and historiography in ancient China and Greco-Roman antiquity, we can state that there were differences of the kind Huang sees, but rather between China and Greece and less so between China and Rome.

Another of Huang's theses concerns the way in which history exercises its enormous influence in Chinese culture or, to say it more precisely, the specific kind of orientation that it supposedly provides. Huang's point here is that the most important function of historical thinking and historiography in China is to provide *moral* orientation. The process by which this comes about is not easy to describe and implies what Huang calls a specific kind of hermeneutic circle: from history itself historians glean the principles by which they then explain and judge history, right up to the present. The decisive point is that the principle, the *Dao* or *Li*, that can be discovered in and extracted from history is above all a *moral* principle, one that enables the historian to recognize the intrinsic value of good and evil, and thus "to 'praise the good and blame the evil,' and formulate the heartfelt values, intrinsically and universally valuable, independent of what actually happens" (182). Again we are probably supposed to understand this as a peculiarity of Chinese as opposed to Western historical thinking. As "Wertfreiheit" is often considered a quality mark of (Western) academic historical research, this idea seems not unfounded.

But let's again see how things present themselves from the Western classicist's point of view. As already on the Chinese side, if we consider someone like Sima Qian, moral orientation is entwined with intellectual insight in a peculiar way, we should not expect simple oppositions of strictly contrary elements, but rather different combinations and accentuations of similar elements on the two sides. This is what we find—with variations even within the Western sphere itself.

On the one hand is Thucydides, a historian whose aim seems to lie strictly in the cognitive realm, that is, who wants to provide his reader with intellectual insight into the principles by which human nature and thus politics and political history work, but not moral orientation. In this as well as in other respects, Thucydides has often been seen as the forestalled paradigm of modern (Western) historical scholarship.

But Thucydides does not make up Greek historiography in its entirety, and with Herodotus, Xenophon, and even Polybius things are different. Herodotus, to be sure, is interested in historical causation, as the last part of his introductory sentence shows,⁵ but if one looks at his work it is clear that he presents his readers with models of good and bad conduct and thus with moral orientation as well. For rather old-fashioned Xenophon this is without doubt a main purpose of his historical and semi-historical writings, and even Polybius, who is probably the most Thucydidean among the later Greek historians, and who strains every nerve to gain insight into the causal connection of the events described, explicitly declares moral edification to be one of the tasks of history.⁶

In Roman historiography the moral impulse is even more important. Insight into causation is—in part probably under Greek influence—from the late second century BCE a declared goal of Roman historiographers.⁷ But they put more weight on the moral effects of their writings: Sallust attributes to historical memory the edifying and inspirational effects of the death masks of the ancestors;⁸ Livy, in his preface, speaks about the apotretic and protretic examples with which the reader is provided by historiography;⁹ and Tacitus refers explicitly to praising good and blaming evil as the “outstanding task of his annals.”¹⁰

Thus, once again, where at first sight a clear opposition (in this case, normative versus cognitive) seems to exist between Chinese and Western historiography, a closer look reveals rather the same basic elements on both sides of the ledger, only combined or accentuated differently. In this case, as in that above, the Roman situation is closer to the Chinese one than the Greek one is.

These observations are not without relevance for the discussion of Huang's third thesis, which concerns the role of concrete examples and abstract rules in historical argumentation. According to Huang, Western historical thinking works with abstract rules, using concrete examples only as “dispensable and merely decorative” “illustrations” (186). In contrast, Chinese historical thinking focuses on concrete examples, as “Chinese notions collapse, when abstracted from the exempla to which they point” (186).

In his commentary Rüsen takes up this point and contradicts it. In his opinion, what Huang refers to is simply “the logic of exemplary meaning-generation in history” which “can be observed in many other cultures as well, including that of the West” (190). Thus “it is not a case of the exemplary mode against another one;

5. 1, 1, 1, where he declares one of his topics to be the question “for which reason they [i.e. the Greeks and the barbarians] made war against each other.”

6. 1, 1, 2.

7. The first from whom we have an explicit pertinent formulation preserved is Sempronius Asellio.

8. *Jugurtha* 4, 5-6.

9. *Praefatio* 10.

10. *Annals* 3, 65, 1.

what is at issue is a specification of this mode” (191). Following upon Rüsen's remarks, I would like to suggest a differentiation between two modes “of exemplary meaning-generation” that will be connected with the distinction between the cognitive and the normative functions of historiography. This differentiation may help in understanding what Huang has in mind with his third thesis and in testing to what extent his thesis holds vis-à-vis ancient Greek and Roman historiography.

I suggest distinguishing between “example” in the sense of “case or instance” and “example” in the sense of “model or paragon.” Historians may treat events as “examples” in either of these senses. If they treat events as “cases or instances” they will mostly do so to abstract from them general rules in the sense of natural laws. If they look at events as “models or paragons” they will mostly be interested in gleaning general rules in the sense of moral norms. Thus, one could say that examples of the first kind are the objects of “cognitive” historiography, whereas examples of the second kind are the objects of “normative” historiography.

It seems to me that Chinese historical thinking treats events to a great extent as examples of the second kind. This is exactly the reason in Chinese historical thinking, as Huang insists, that the concrete individual event cannot be replaced by the general rule. An event that serves as one “case” or “instance” among others becomes of secondary importance once the general law it follows has been abstracted from it. In contrast, an example in the sense of “model” or “paragon” can exercise its emotional effect only on the basis of its concrete individuality, and for this reason cannot be dispensed with and replaced by the general norm. Understood in this way, Huang's third thesis makes sense as far as the Chinese side is concerned.

But is it true that we have here another difference from Western historical thinking? As far as antiquity is concerned the answer to this question has to be a mixed one, in analogy to our observations concerning the cognitive and normative functions of historiography.

If there is one historian who is to be considered a representative of the first mode of “exemplary meaning-generation,” then it is certainly Thucydides. His work is dedicated to the study of an exemplary case, the Peloponnesian War, and the aim and result of this study is insight into the general laws of men's political actions.¹¹ Even a figure such as Pericles, whom Thucydides seems to respect more than all other protagonists of his work in terms of political foresight and ability, is presented as a case to be studied rather than as a model to be emulated. With other Greek historians things are less clear-cut. Polybius, with his frequent insistence on the necessity of causal analysis as the precondition for drawing lessons from history, is very close to Thucydides, but even he considers the impartial attribution of praise and blame as an important task of historiography when it deals with exemplary personalities.¹²

In Roman historiography “exemplary meaning-generation” is present in both variants, too. The events treated by historians are supposed to allow for insight

11. Telling is the often-noted closeness of Thucydides' approach to the medical research of his time.

12. Cf. for example, 10, 21, where he talks about the different tasks of the historian and the biographer.

into the laws of historical causation. But as in the historians' eyes the moral qualities of individuals and polities are a decisive factor in the historical process, the cognitive function of historiography is not to be separated from its normative function. Accordingly Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus talk more or less overtly about the presentation of protreptic and apotreptic examples as one of the historian's tasks,¹³ and, in fact, throughout their works provide examples of how their readers ought or ought not to conduct themselves as political actors.

That there may be a general difference between the Greek and Roman ways of historical thinking is suggested by the diverging treatment of example in Greek and in Roman rhetorical theory. As has been convincingly shown, Greek rhetorical theory advises the use of the *paradeigma* mostly for the purpose of intellectual clarification, whereas Roman rhetorical theory advises the use of the *exemplum*—and in particular of the historical *exemplum*—particularly for the purpose of emotional appeal. Accordingly, the decisive criterion for the selection of the right *paradeigma* is similarity, whereas for the selection of the right *exemplum* it is authority or more generally emotional force.¹⁴ Taken all in all, it looks as if in this case, once again, the Roman situation is closer to the Chinese one than the Greek one is.

To summarize: in his essay Huang works with very generalizing oppositions. As a starting point this is fine, especially as the direction in which his oppositions point can more or less be agreed upon. As a second step, however, it is necessary to look at things more closely and to add nuances and shades. As far as antiquity is concerned, two points seem relevant. First, one should differentiate between Greece and Rome, as with respect to both the significance and the mode of historical thinking clear differences are to be observed between them. Surprisingly, these differences are such that the Roman and the Chinese situations are relatively close to each other, in some ways closer than either of them is to the Greek one. This brings up interesting questions—not to be dealt with in this context—as to the interrelation of political structure and historical thinking, since in this respect, too, there are parallels between China and Rome (unified empires) in contrast with Greece (multiplicity of *poleis*). Second and more generally, the above analysis seems to confirm the usefulness of the “similar elements—different accentuations and constellations” model that has been gaining ground in intercultural studies in recent years. This model implies that the similarities between different cultures are as important as the differences. This should mean that the chances of mutual understanding, including acknowledgment of the otherness of the other, are not as bad as they sometimes seem to be. In a word, all is not yet lost in intercultural dialogue.

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13. Cf., for example, notes 8–10 above.

14. Cf. M. Stenmiller, *Auctoritas exempli*, in *Mos maiorum*, ed. B. Linke and M. Stenmiller (Stuttgart: Untersuchungen zu den Formen der Identitätsstiftung und Stabilisierung in der römischen Republik, 2000), 141–205, 150–167.

FORUM: CHINESE AND WESTERN HISTORICAL THINKING

4.

IS THERE A CHINESE MODE OF HISTORICAL THINKING? A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Q. EDWARD WANG

ABSTRACT

Taking Chun-chieh Huang's ruminations on the defining character of Chinese historical thinking as a starting point, this essay discusses the ways in which historical cultures and traditions are compared and contrasted and explores some new ways of thinking. It argues that cultural comparisons often constitute two-way traffic (one begins to examine itself after encountering the other) and that attempts to characterize one historical culture, such as that of China, are often made relationally and temporally. When the Chinese tradition of historiography is perceived and presented in the West, it has been regarded more or less as a counterexample against which the “unique” traits of Western historical thinking are thrown into relief. Given the hegemonic influence of Western scholarship in modern times, latter-day Chinese historians also valorize the East–West dichotomy. A closer look at this dichotomy, or the characterization of both cultures, reveals that it is not only relative but also relational and temporal. When the modern Chinese appeared impressed by the rigor of Rankean critical historiography, for example, they were essentially attempting to rediscover their own cultural past, for example, the eighteenth-century tradition of evidential learning, in adapting to the changing world. Our task today, the essay contends, is to historicize the specific context within which cultural comparisons are made and to go beyond readily accepted characterizations in order to reassess certain elements in a given culture, to apply historical wisdom, and to cope with the challenges we now face.

1. INTRODUCTION

Across the non-Western world, it has become a truism that the expansion of Western powers from the eighteenth century on touched off a serious process of soul-searching and cultural reexamination. To non-Western people, to engage in this process serves a twofold purpose: to seek a way to fend off the Western incursion, and to search in the past for any possible reasons explaining their present “weakness” and “inadequacy” in the face of the Western challenge. It is little known, however, that after it initiated contacts with the outside world, a similar cultural reexamination also occurred in the West, albeit for a different purpose. In *Culture and Imperialism*, one of the late Edward Said's important books, we are told that the notion of an “English literature” was conceived not in England, but actually in its colony, India—it was constructed by the English colonizers to educate the colonized Indians about the culture in the metropolis!¹

1. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 42.

When we look at the study of the history of Western historiography, a field that traces the development of historical consciousness in the West and defines, as it were, how Western culture differs from the rest, we find that one of the earliest surveys of the tradition of Western historiography from the ancient to the modern was penned by George G. Zerffi (1820–1892), a Hungarian exile and a self-made historian in London.² Commissioned by the Historiography Bureau of the Meiji government in Japan, Zerffi completed *The Science of History* in 700-odd pages in 1879, which not only preceded Eduard Fueter's landmark work the *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie* but also boasted a broader scope. Having preliminarily studied the Japanese tradition of historical writing, Zerffi concluded that it was essentially different from Western historical practice because the latter's style was scientific, and scientific history was a unique product of Western culture. To prove his point, he traced its origin all the way to ancient Greece. In fact, he was so carried away by this teleological search that in the end, he had few pages left to cover the rise of German/Rankean historiography, which in his opinion represented the acme of this glorious trajectory of scientific historiography.³

This example shows that attempts at cultural characterization are both temporal—after one culture encounters the other—and relational and/or relative—a culture acquires its distinctiveness only in comparison with the other. “Intelligibility,” Michel de Certeau states while examining the origin of historiography, “is established through a relation with the other.”⁴ This temporality and relativity are better revealed, I believe, through historicization, which will be my approach to commenting on Chun-chieh Huang's thought-provoking essay. In other words, I do not believe that we can assume an endogenous Chinese mode of historical thinking, for such an assumption disregards the specific circumstances under which it is constructed and the relational pole with which it is compared. As the above two examples show, understanding and representing the self are intrinsically connected to the desire to comprehend the other. On the other hand, I take pleasure in participating in this discussion on the characteristics of Chinese historical culture. By identifying the apposite locale where these characteristics become prominent and distinctive helps reveal the value of comparative historiography.

2. The first survey of historical literature is, arguably, Ludwig Wachler's *Geschichte der historischen Forschung und Kunst seit der Wiederherstellung der litterarischen Cultur in Europa*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: J. F. Röwer, 1812–1820). I am indebted to Jörn Rüsen for this information.

3. *The Science of History* was published by W. H. and L. Colingridge in London in 1879. About a decade later, Zerffi reissued it as *The Science of General History*. See Thomas Keirstead, “Inventing Medieval Japan: The History and Politics of National Identity,” *Medieval History Journal* 1:1 (1998), 67, note 46. For Zerffi's writing of the book, see Numata Jirō, “Meiji shoki ni okeru seiyō shigaku no yunyū ni tsuite: Shigeno Yasutsugu to G. G. Zerffi, *The Science of History*” (“The Importation of Western historiography in the Early Meiji period: Shigeno Yasutsugu and G. G. Zerffi's *The Science of History*”), *Kokumin seikatsushi kenkyū* (Studies of the History of National Life), ed. Itō Tasaburō (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1963), III, 400–429; and Margaret Mehl, *History and the State in Nineteenth-century Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 74–80. For George G. Zerffi's life and career, see Tibor Frank, *From Habsburg Agent to Victorian Scholar: G. G. Zerffi, 1820–1892*, transl. Christopher Sullivan and Tibor Frank (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2000).

4. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, transl. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 3.

II. THE ROLE OF THE INTERLOCUTOR

Zerffi was not the first in the Western context to note the difference between historical practices in the East and West, nor by any means the last. Hegel, his contemporary, for example, used this difference as evidence to delineate the ascendancy of the “World Spirit” from the East to the West. Since Hegel, many historians and historical thinkers have offered their thoughts on the Western–Eastern distinction in historical thinking, most notably Herbert Butterfield and Jack H. Plumb. Like Hegel, Butterfield and Plumb used the East Asian historiographical tradition as a counterexample. Their argument went like this: though China had established an equally long tradition of historical writing, it was preoccupied with moral didacticism. As a result, Chinese historians did not possess a critical spirit in treating historical sources, nor did they develop a full-fledged form of historical consciousness. For instance, Plumb argued in his *The Death of the Past* that the Chinese had not been able to distinguish “past” from “history.” (His thesis, incidentally, still holds certain currency; *The Death of the Past* was reissued by Palgrave Macmillan in 2003, prefaced by Simon Schama and Niall Ferguson.⁵)

If Western historians have not changed many of their opinions about the Chinese historiographical tradition (or for that matter, that of non-Western historiographical traditions as a whole), Chinese historians seem to have periodically reexamined their legacy of historical writing vis-à-vis that of the West. Using a different case, Jürgen Kocka has called this phenomenon “asymmetrical comparison,” for once one historical experience is perceived and established as the “norm,” it hardly requires more elaboration; more energy is to be spent on explaining the “abnormal.” However, as Kocka rightly points out, there is some danger in doing so, to which we will return below.⁶

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinese historians started to take a critical look at the Chinese tradition of historical writing. In 1902, for example, Liang Qichao (1873–1929) published the *New Historiography* (*Xinshixue*), in which he scorned the age-old practice of dynastic historiography, the mainstay of traditional Chinese historiography, for failing to rouse nationalism among the Chinese. In the wake of China's repeated defeats by Western powers and, more recently, by Japan, Liang considered the nation-building project crucial to the rejuvenation of the country. History-writing, he declared, ought to serve this purpose, as exemplified by Western historiography. Again, in the 1920s, buoyed by enthusiasm for modern scientific culture, Chinese historians launched attacks on the tradition. This time they focused more on criticizing moral didacticism because it contributed, so they argued, to the unreliability of historical output. In both criticisms, the Western model loomed large in the background, against which the dismal failure of the Chinese practice is thrown into sharp relief.⁷

Of course, the Western model served divergent, even contradictory, purposes in the two cases. In Liang's passionate call for “new historiography,” he urged

5. J. H. Plumb, *The Death of the Past* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

6. Jürgen Kocka, “Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: The Case of the German Sonderweg,” *History and Theory* 38 (February 1999), 44–50.

7. Q. Edward Wang, *Inventing China through History: The May Fourth Approach to Historiography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 42–66.

Chinese historians to render their writings useful for the nationalist cause, because this was how it had been done in the West. Yet he seemed oblivious to and unbothered by the fact that though different in style and content, dynastic and nationalist histories are both plagued by political hucksterism and ideological boosterism. That is, despite its expansive scope (covering national progress rather than the behavior of an emperor), nationalist historiography is equally motivated by political interest. Nonetheless, this nationalist focus suited Liang because he was then working on introducing constitutionalism and representative government to China.

In their promotion of scientific history during the 1920s, Chinese historians were undoubtedly impressed by the critical, objective historiography exemplified by Ranke and his school. Consequently, they ignored Ranke's religious belief and political conservatism. They overlooked that, as Georg Iggers succinctly puts it, "archival studies," the hallmark of Rankean historiography, "everywhere went hand in hand with a political agenda which combined nationalistic aims with a defense of a bourgeois social order."⁸ This oversight on the part of the Chinese historians may be as much an act of ignorance as of deliberation. They advocated critical historiography *qua* the Western model because they also wanted to rediscover and revive so-called "evidential learning," a major intellectual movement from the eighteenth century known for its empirical interest in philology-based textual and historical criticism. By reviving evidential learning and establishing it as a "scientific" enterprise, these historians hoped to demonstrate to their compatriots that modern scientific culture was not entirely foreign to Chinese culture.⁹

Though seemingly unavoidable and even necessary, this kind of selective, asymmetrical *re*-presentation of a Chinese tradition against the "norm," namely, the Western way of historical practice, is nonetheless dangerous, as Kocka notes.¹⁰ First, it tends to overemphasize the difference between the self and other, while overlooking their similarities. In his comment on Huang's essay, Rüsen reminds Huang and us that "exemplary historiography," or moralized historiographical practice, was not a unique Chinese phenomenon, but an age-old tradition that had existed almost everywhere else, including the pre-modern West.¹¹ Second, it tends to idolize and fossilize the "norm" (here, the Western model of historiography), while failing to note the diversity and historicity within itself. As many have noted, not only was the Western tradition of historiography in premodern times similar to those in other parts of the world, but its modern transformation also took varied forms.¹² Moreover, this variation not only bore national characteristics, for

8. Georg Iggers, "The Professionalization of Historical Studies and the Guiding Assumptions of Modern Historical Thought," in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, ed. Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 234.

9. Wang, *Inventing China through History*, 1-26, 53-66. Cf. Jerome Grieder, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

10. Kocka, "Asymmetrical Historical Comparison," 48-50.

11. See also Jörn Rüsen, "Historical Consciousness: Narrative Structure, Moral Education, and Ontogenetic Development," in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. Peter Seixas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 63-85.

12. Peter Burke once came up with ten forms of Western historical consciousness that he believed distinguish its historical practice from that of the rest of the world. But Iggers and others have pointed out that Burke's generalization is teleological, for these ten forms have mostly derived from the

example, the German/Rankean emphasis on source criticism vis-à-vis the English tradition in liberal historiography, but, as Hayden White reveals in *Metahistory*, it also stemmed from more deep-rooted linguistic and stylistic preferences among individual historians.¹³

III. FORM AND TIME

If the foregoing discussion has established that modern scholars' overhaul of a cultural tradition, for example, study of a historical culture, often leads invariably to a relational, comparative study, this makes it possible for us to identify a peculiar *Chinese* mode of historical thinking and speculate on its characteristics. The Chinese form of historical consciousness is salient and distinct once it is examined from a comparative perspective. Huang's essay has showcased an interesting exercise for us, though it is not explicitly a comparative study. But, it seems to me, Huang has engaged the Western experience nonetheless throughout his essay. Thus, at the essay's outset he makes the statement about Chinese culture being thoroughly *historical*, which is clearly to repudiate the widely accepted assumption among Western scholars that the Chinese lacked a bona fide historical-mindedness. He then goes on to discuss the Chinese notion of time because, as he has elaborated elsewhere, in this respect the Chinese idea of history acquires its distinction. Also, the notion of time is crucial to the formation of Western historical thinking, and in modern times it has drawn ample attention from many modern philosophers in the West, most notably Martin Heidegger.¹⁴

Huang's essay has successfully pointed out some of the extraordinary features in Chinese historical thinking. In the following, I shall historicize some of these features by reconstructing their apposite contexts. I will also discuss some others that seem to have failed to catch Huang's attention. My discussion will be of a comparative nature, though the West will not be the only interlocutor. To begin, I would like to concur with Huang's statement that historical consciousness, so defined as an interest in memorializing the past and evaluating its significance and relevance to the present, has been deeply embedded in the history of Chinese civilization. More importantly, I would add, the Chinese historical consciousness has gone through a course of development characterized by phasic differences and, at times, patent progress—namely, it has had a history in its own right. In its most rudimentary form, which occurred in the age of Confucius (ca. 551-479 BCE), attention was focused on preserving the memory of the past, much like what Herodotus intended to do with the Greek victory over the Persians in his *Histories*.

experience of modern Western historiography, but not that of earlier periods. See *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate*, ed. Jörn Rüsen (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002).

13. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

14. See Chun-chieh Huang, "'Time' and 'Supertime' in Chinese Historical Thinking"; Jörn Rüsen, "Making Sense of Time: Towards a Universal Typology of Conceptual Foundations of Historical Consciousness"; and Q. Edward Wang, "Time, History and *Dao*:" Zhang Xuecheng and Martin Heidegger," in *Notions of Time in Chinese Historical Thinking*, ed. Chun-chieh Huang and John B. Henderson (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2006), 3-44, 131-156. Also see *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*, ed. Chun-chieh Huang and Erik Zürcher (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

While nostalgic about the bygone ages that he considered most ideal, Confucius was not oblivious to epochal difference and the danger of anachronism. In fact, his nostalgia seems to have made this anachronism more conspicuous to him. For instance, he was keenly (painfully?) aware that his own age had become markedly different from the preceding ones.

However unrefined and immature it might look, this anachronism appeared time and again in later periods, such as the fall of the Han dynasty in the third century when the sense of a radical change of historical time was apparent. During the Song period of the eleventh century, this sense of historical change acquired a more mature form. It prompted Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) to rewrite some of the histories of the previous periods. Having done his revision, Ouyang renamed these works, unabashedly, “new” histories.

Ouyang was not alone in his time. In vogue with the agnostic zeitgeist, Sima Guang (1019–1086) reworked the extant historiographical corpus and completed his magnum opus, *Comprehensive Mirror of Aid in Government* (*Zizhi tongjian*). An exemplar in moralizing historiography, Sima’s work has not fared well among modern scholars, including those in China. However, there should be no gain-saying that his effort represents an attempt to reorganize the past. That is, Sima refused, in the words of Hans-Georg Gadamer, to listen “sanctimoniously to the voice that reaches out from the past but, in reflection on it, replace[ing] it within the context where it took root in order to see the significance and relative value proper to it.”¹⁵ Of course, the “significance” Sima saw in his past is manifestly different from that of our own. But his project is undoubtedly motivated by the attempt to reorder the past.

Admittedly, traditional Chinese historians were stuck with the mode advanced by Sima Guang for too long. Interestingly, this kind of “exemplary historiography” had not only once prevailed in the West, but had also existed in other parts of the Sinitic world and elsewhere. The proliferation of the *Fürstenspiegel* (mirror for princes) literature spanning tenth- to thirteenth-century Persia seems to be a case in point.¹⁶ All the same, during the eighteenth century a new form of historical scholarship was emerging in Qing China, marked by the zest to recover the classical culture of Confucius’s time and to relinquish later interpretations advanced by, say, Sima Guang and his Song cohorts. The Qing scholars reasoned that the Song scholars were untrustworthy because they had lived in a much later time. Thus, a new sense of anachronism prevailed in Qing thought, prompting the scholars to seek a different interpretation of the past.¹⁷

The development of historical consciousness in China also shows that historians can reorder the past not only by constructing a new narrative, but also by deploying chronicle and other more formulaic and inflexible forms of historical

15. Quoted in Seixas, ed., *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, 8–9.

16. Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 113–118.

17. Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984); On-cho Ng, “A Tension in Ch’ing Thought: ‘Historicism’ in Seventeenth-and-Eighteenth-Century Chinese Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54:4 (1993), 561–583; and Q. Edward Wang, “The Rise of Modern Historical Consciousness: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Eighteenth-Century East Asia and Europe,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 40:1–2 (Winter–Spring 2003), 74–95.

writing. Among his many accomplishments, Confucius is believed to have edited an existing chronicle of his home state: *Spring and Autumn Annals*. His editing involves supplanting some of the words in the annals’ record with some other, more carefully chosen, words, for the purpose of expressing moral contempt and exercising political censure. In other words, out of his respect for tradition and, perhaps more importantly, constrained by the physical conditions of his time (for example, the paucity of paper), Confucius does not want to replace the existing record with a new one, nor alter the gist of the historical information embedded in the record. But by changing the key words in the record (for example, replacing the word “kill” with “murder” to effect a stronger condemnation of the perpetrator), it achieves a desirable effect nonetheless. In fact, Confucius himself seemed quite aware of and confident about his work’s potency. Confiding to his disciple, he said that, “It is the *Spring and Autumn* which will make men know me, and it is the *Spring and Autumn* which will make men condemn me.”¹⁸

As a style of historiography, chronicle has been featured in many historical cultures across the world. But in ancient China, contrary to conventional wisdom, it was not the only form of historical writing, nor even the dominant one. When Sima Qian (ca. 145–85 BCE), arguably the greatest historian in imperial China, launched his project of writing the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*), the chronicle had already begun to lose its appeal. Sima Qian’s style, which was adopted by many later dynastic histories, is somewhat misleadingly translated as “annals-biography,” but in actuality it is comprised mostly of nicely narrated biographies. The only remnant of the chronicle’s influence is that his work follows a clear chronological order. During the Song period, when historical writing experienced a remarkable change in China, Sima Guang revived the chronicle in compiling his *Comprehensive Mirror*. Yet then it was no longer a repository of disparate records as in Confucius’s time, but was more of a chronography. Around the same time, Yuan Shu (1131–1205) invented a new narrative style—“narratives from beginning to end” (*jishi benmo*)—suggesting a diverse effort that was made to re-present the past.

If the chronicle retains somewhat its attraction to Chinese historians, this is because it allows them to display their distinct notion of time, a subject discussed by Huang in his essay. Indeed, if time is understood in Western culture as finite and temporal—according to the Gospel, human history would inexorably come to an end in seven thousand years, facing the apocalypse—the ancient Chinese regarded time as infinite and eternal. Standing on a cliff and marveling at the water flow in a river below, Confucius sighed, as quoted by Huang, “That which goes by is like this, without stopping day and night!”¹⁹ In other words, in contrast to the anthropocentric notion of time in Western culture, the Chinese notion of time always involves nature, or the physical world, which both conditions and constrains human development. Moreover, to the Chinese it is against this infinite

18. Quoted in On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 24.

19. Confucius, *Analects*, transl. Chichung Huang (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 105. Note that I use a different translation from Huang’s.

and eternal framework of reference that the evanescence and temporality of human history is best illustrated.

The influence of this correlative idea of the natural and human is born out by the development of Chinese civilization. Though the Chinese might not have been the first to design a lunar calendar, based on cyclical changes in the cosmos, they could have been the first to record human activities in correspondence with seasonal and cosmological changes.²⁰ Chronicle became its historians' natural choice in historical writing because it enables the historian to record occurrences in both the natural and the human world and to speculate about their mutual influences. This mode of thinking, one that was termed by Benjamin Schwartz "correlative anthropocosmology,"²¹ characterized the early development of historical thinking in China. Its influence is still discernible in modern Chinese culture. By contrast, the works of Herodotus and Thucydides are perfect examples of the anthropocentric approach—their narratives vividly portray the unfolding of human drama, alternating between feat and fiasco, excellence and malevolence, and splendor and squalor—but this theatrical effect is often achieved at the expense of the accuracy and sequence of time.²²

Just as Chinese historians later developed interest in narrative history, beginning in the Middle Ages Western historians also accorded much more attention to time sequence in their writings. Yet a latent tension between the two forms of historical presentation remains perceptible. Modern historians have by and large maintained a preference for narrative over chronicle. To Benedetto Croce, chronicle is a "dead" history because it fails to present ideas in historical writing. This becomes questionable if we bring in the aforementioned Confucian historiographical experience. In Hayden White's theorization, chronicle is inferior to narrative because it disallows the historian's "emplotment."²³ Incidentally, such preference also prevails in today's China: historical works are now written predominantly in a narrative style. In short, if there is a battle between chronicle and narrative in historiography, the latter has scored a clear victory worldwide. Nonetheless, if Chinese historical thinking, as Huang concludes in his essay, is "a shuttle between the past and the present for mutual enrichment," I believe it will be beneficial for us to "shuttle" back to the past, not so much for reviving the chronicle, but for revisiting the ideas (that is, the ancient Chinese notion of time and their anthropocosmological worldview) on which it rests. That is, despite the remarkable strides we have made over the past several centuries that we call "the modern age" in showcasing the efficacy of human agency, it remains imperative—perhaps more

20. Masayuki Sato, "Comparative Ideas of Chronology," *History and Theory* 30 (October 1991), 275-301.

21. Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), 350; also John B. Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), passim.

22. Virginia Hunter, *Past and Process in Herodotus and Thucydides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 237-265; Donald J. Wilcox, *The Measure of Times Past: Pre-Newtonian Chronologies and the Rhetoric of Relative Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 51-82. Also see Q. Edward Wang, "Time Perception in Ancient Chinese Historiography," *Storia della Storiografia* 28 (1995), 69-86.

23. Benedetto Croce, *History: Its Theory and Practice* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1921), and White, *Metahistory*, 5-7.

so than ever before in this age of global warming—for us to respect the natural world. Humans and nature, as Chinese wisdom teaches us, are immanently and constantly locked in a correlative relation, and Chinese historiography offers a way for us to grasp this essential point.

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5.

INDIA, *ITIHASA*, AND INTER-HISTORIOGRAPHICAL DISCOURSE

RANJAN GHOSH

ABSTRACT

An effective and enriching discourse on comparative historiography invests itself in understanding the distinctness and identity that have created various civilizations. Very often, infected by bias, ideology, and cultural one-upmanship, we encounter a presumptuousness that is redolent of impatience with the cultural other and of an ingrained refusal to acknowledge what one's own history and culture fail to provide. This "failure" need not be the inspiration to subsume the other within one's own understanding of the world and history and, thereby, neuter the possibilities of knowledge-sharing and cultural interface. It is a realization of the "lack" that provokes and generates encounters among civilizations. It should goad us to move away from what we have universalized and, hence, normalized into an axis of dialogue and mutuality. What Indians would claim as *itihasa* need not be rudely frowned upon because it does not chime perfectly with what the West or the Chinese know as history. Accepting the truth that our ways of understanding the past, the sense of the past, and historical sense-generation vary with different cultures and civilizations will enable us to consider *itihasa* from a perspective different from the Hegelian modes of doing history and hence preclude its subsumption under the totalitarian rubric of world history. How have Indians "done" their history differently? What distinctiveness have they been able to weave into their discourses and understanding of the past? Does the fact of their proceeding differently from how the West or the Chinese conceptualize history delegitimize and render inferior the subcontinental consciousness of "encounters with past" and its ways of being "moved by the past"? This article expatiates on the distinctiveness of *itihasa* and argues in favor of relocating its epistemological and ideological persuasions within a comparative historiographical discourse.

Efforts to circumscribe our understanding of Indian history within Chinese and Western universals lead to the conclusions that "history is one weak spot in Indian literature" and that "early India wrote no history because it never made any."¹ These efforts have the same result as that of Hegel to incorporate all history within a single scheme, as Wilhelm Halbfass notes:

1. A. A. Macdonell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (London: William Heinemann, 1900), 10-11. Quite rightly, Troy Organ considers Macdonell's statement as "unkind and untrue." There is, however, a greater amount of truth in Macdonell's statement that "the Brahmins, whose task it would naturally have been to record great deeds, had early embraced the doctrine that all action and existence are a positive evil, and could therefore have felt but little inclination to chronicle historical events," even though it is misleading. See Troy Wilson Organ, *The Hindu Quest for the Perfection of Man* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1970), 30.

Hegel's scheme of the history of philosophy is primarily designed to deal with the history of European thought from Thales to Kant and Hegel himself. However, this is not just one line of development among others. Hegel's conception of "Weltgeist" (world spirit), and the corresponding unity of the world-historical process, leaves no room for the assumption of other, independent or parallel streams of historical development. Where in this scheme does Asia, and India in particular, have its place?²

Why should India need to have a place in Hegel's scheme of things, or in schemes derived from Chinese or Western historiography? Can we not argue for a distinctive character in the Indian approach to history—"an Indian historiography of India" (in the words of Ranajit Guha)³—that would embody a different scheme? So in the efforts to disclaim what I see as the "Indian" way of doing history, or *itihasa*, the point that goes unperceptively overlooked is how history can be conceptualized and appropriated in ways that are different from one's very own. This is crucial because it is the difference in the approach toward how one makes sense of the past that makes historical knowledge-formation and the relevant discourse vibrant. Thus, to qualify a historiographical approach as anomalous and ahistorical because it does not fit within the purview of a particular civilization or culture, or is incongruous with the idea of the "world-historical," is not only to misunderstand and disrespect that approach but also to cut off the generative dimensions of history and to ignore its potential for intercultural dialogue.

Professor Huang's essay, with its underpinning of ethnocentrism (in Jörn Rüsen's sense of the term), contains a "pre-given sense of what historiography is."⁴ Specifically, it assumes that it is comprised of efforts to appropriate didactic principles from history (including basing law and principle, and generating universally applicable norms of humanity and dynasties, on the facts of history); loyalty to "real facts"; and the "hermeneutic circle." In this way his essay bears the implicit claim that no civilization can legitimize its authority/authenticity in historical meaning-generation without being true to these requirements. But this way of proceeding violates the comparative method of historiography. Peter Burke finds that virtually no one has tried successfully to study historiography in a comparative way, regretting how comparative studies can at times be vitiated by the author's assumption that the "Western style of historical writing is superior in every way to the alternatives."⁵ To generalize Burke's point: in understanding comparative historiography it is more essential to argue out the differences and the cultural and social contexts responsible for them than to judge the viability and legitimacy of the "other" by the extent to which it conforms to some universal principles or the dictates of "world history." On these grounds, the Indian concept

2. Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 88.

3. See Ranajit Guha, "An Indian Historiography of India: Hegemonic Implications of a Nineteenth-Century Agenda," in his *Dominance without Hegemony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 156-176.

4. Jörn Rüsen, "Some Theoretical Approaches to Intercultural Comparative Historiography," *History and Theory*, Theme Issue 35 (December 1996), 7.

5. Peter Burke, "Western Historical Thinking in a Global Perspective—10 Theses," in *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate*, ed. Jörn Rüsen (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 15.

of history should not be validated by how much of Chinese or Western principles of historiography it can take in its stride.

Amaury de Riencourt rightly observes that, "As a self-contained, self-enclosed and autonomous civilization India had completed her historical cycle, whereas the west was not even halfway through. The dramatic misunderstandings of the past and the present were the inevitable outcome of this mental blindness."⁶ India's history does not possess the "detailed narrative" that is found in the history of Greece, Rome, or China, but like the histories of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia it has only been possible, in the words of R. C. Mazumdar, to "reconstruct the skeleton with the help of archaeological evidence discovered in comparatively recent times. This history differs radically from what we normally understand by the word."⁷ Mazumdar points out that it is the "continuity of her history and civilization" that differentiates India from Persia or Babylon or Sumer; Indian history and institutions "form an unbroken chain by which the past is indissolubly linked up with the present":

The modern peoples of Egypt and Mesopotamia have no bond whatsoever with the civilization that flourished there millennia ago and its memorials have no more (usually very much less) meaning to them than to any enlightened man in any part of the world. But not so in India. The icons discovered at Mohenjo-Daro are those of gods and goddesses who are still worshipped in India, and the Hindus from the Himalaya to Cape Comorin repeat even today the Vedic hymns which were uttered on the banks of the Indus nearly four thousand years ago. This continuity in language and literature, and in religious and social usages, is more prominent in India than even in Greece and Italy, where we can trace the same continuity in history.⁸

For instance, it is said that, though sketchy and disheveled, the information found in the *Puranas* can be stitched together into a narrative of meaningful political history all the way back to the start of the Gupta rule in the early half of the fourth century CE. Despite having a "good deal of what is untrustworthy in them, Puranic history can still lay claim to something like a continuous historical narrative and it is absurd to suppose that the elaborate royal genealogies were all merely figments of imagination or a tissue of falsehood."⁹

But this continuity is not comprised of a series of well-established empirical facts fashioned into a well-toned flow of events caught between a past leading to the present. Although Kalhana (in the mid twelfth century) exclaimed that a "virtuous poet alone is worthy of praise who, free from love or hatred, ever restricts his language to the exposition of facts,"¹⁰ Indian history plays a good deal looser with the notion of fact than that found in either Chinese or Western historiography. (Recall that, in Huang's words, "judgments were taken with absolute seriousness. To get at the real facts has been an all-consuming passion of Chinese historians,

6. Amaury de Riencourt, *The Soul of India* (London: Honeyglen Publishing, 1986), xiv.

7. R. C. Mazumdar, "Indian History: Its Nature, Scope and Method," in *The Vedic Age*, ed. R. C. Mazumdar (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1952), 41.

8. *Ibid.*, 38.

9. A. D. Pusalkar, *The Vedic Age* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951), 304-305. It is debatable, though, whether Pusalkar's chronological division of early Indian history can be left unchallenged.

10. Mazumdar, "Sources of Indian History," in Mazumdar, ed., *The Vedic Age*, 49-50.

so much so that some of them sacrificed their lives in opposition to their rulers' pressures on them to write otherwise than what they believed to be true."¹¹) What Chinese or Western historiography takes to be universals may not always be the right criteria by which to judge the Indian way of historical meaning-generation. Unlike the Chinese who have left well-attested historical treatises for posterity, Aryans are said to have left behind myths, and in several cases of transmutation we have history as a blend of fact and "imagination." Though the court of every important king in India is said to have been endowed with a chronicler (*Arthashastra* points out the existence of official records and the importance of officers responsible for maintaining them), and despite the fact that a strong oral, literary, and writing tradition in ancient India was somewhat informed with a sense of preservation, the unflinching commitment to the factual is nonexistent in subcontinental culture. Hindus did not preserve records as diligently as the Chinese did; "what the Hindus felt worth preserving was the meaning of events, not a record of when events took place."¹² They were more tradition-minded than history-minded but this is the way they generated meaning out of their interface with the past. One needs to acknowledge that mere chronological progression does not make up the fundamental ingredient of Indian history; Indian history requires an understanding of an abiding spiritual quest for the ultimate changeless reality, a quest that can lead it to overlook strict documentation of the rise and fall of an empire, the ascension and dethronement of kings, and so on. In this way Indian history can flaunt the luxury of achronicity and ahistoricity. So the Indian mind would prefer the "general to the particular," and meaning to chronology.

It should thus not be surprising that Indians over the ages have not evinced much interest in the history of doctrines and their development. Scarcely a document exists that traces the history of philosophy or the history of politics or of medicine. As A. B. Keith observes:

What interests writers is not questions of the opinions of predecessors as individuals, but the discussion of divergences of doctrine all imagined as having arisen *ex initio*. The names of some great authorities may be preserved, as in the case of schools of philosophy, but nothing whatever with any taint of actuality is recorded regarding their personalities, and we are left to grope for dates. This indifference to chronology is seen everywhere in India, and must be definitely connected, in the ultimate issue, with the quite secondary character ascribed to time by the philosophies.¹³

So the ancient Indian view of history puts greater accent on the processes of thought and cultures than on the flow of events. The emergence of the concept of *yugas* is one such dimension of the cultural process, for Indians found more interest in eternity than in temporal linearity. It is in this spirit that the Indian concept of time is unique compared to its Western and Chinese counterparts. Referring to the *Puranas*, Ainslie Embree notes that, "human existence must be seen against a background of an almost unimaginable duration of time." Compared to other civi-

11. Chun-chieh Huang, "The Defining Character of Chinese Historical Thinking," *History and Theory* 46 (February 2007), 180-181 (this issue).

12. Organ, *The Hindu Quest for the Perfection of Man*, 30-31.

13. A. Berriedale Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920), 146-147.

lizations that view history in term of thousands of years, the Indians—Buddhists, Jains, and Hindus—narrated it in terms of billions of years, and the historical process in its temporal manifestation becomes a part of a “vast cyclical movement.” Quite distinct from the Western and Chinese temporal schemas, then, the Hindu model, writes Embree,

is of concentric circles, moving within each other in a complex series of retrogressive movements. The vastest cycle was “a year of Brahma,” which by some reckonings was 311,040,000 million years long, with Brahma’s life lasting for one hundred of these cycles. This was followed by dissolution of all the worlds—those of men and gods—and then creation once more took place. Within these cycles there were other cycles which were of more imaginable dimensions, and it is these which are of primary significance for human history. A Kalpa or day of Brahma was 4,320 million years long, and within this were the smallest cycles, the four yugas. The Krita Yuga, the golden age, lasted for 1,728,000 years; the Treta, for 1,296,000 years; the Dvapara for 864,000 years; and the Kali for 432,000 years. The four ages are calculated as a descending arithmetical progression, marked by progressive physical and spiritual deterioration. Present history is taking place within Kali Yuga, which explains the violence and evil of human history. When this age comes to an end, a new cycle will begin—one of the thousand cycles of yugas that make up a day of Brahma.¹⁴

In fact, the polarization of the Indian and Western concepts of time has engendered a host of “stereotypical images about India” and her “otherness.” “Indian notions of time as cyclic,” writes Richard King, “are not unusual even in a western context. Ancient Greek notions of time (if this counts as western) were also predicated on a similar scheme of progressive decline and in the case of movements like Orphism, Pythagoreanism and Platonism, were also explicitly associated with a doctrine of rebirth.”¹⁵

Within a proper interculturalism it is not just the recognition of the differences between Indian historiography and its sense of time on the one hand, and Chinese and Western on the other, that matters, but also an appreciation of this difference and a valorization of it. It is the latter that makes our understanding of comparative historiographical study interesting, encouraging an attitude that refuses to predispose itself toward superiority of a system that tries to historicize every other past in its own terms and thereby to overlook the fact that in all cultures there is more than one single logic of making sense of the past.¹⁶

One must admit that India did not produce a Herodotus or Thucydides or Livy or Tacitus, or at least could not inspire herself to make sense of history in the way they methodically and conceptually did. But then this is not what Indian historiography was trying to accomplish. Indeed, it was after much bigger game; as D. K. Ganguly makes us see, *itihasa* was originally “understood to mean a past episode. But by the time of Kautilya it acquired a wider connotation to embrace all possible areas of human interest, mundane and spiritual, real and imaginary, practi-

14. *The Hindu Tradition*, ed. Ainslie T. Embree (New York: Random House, 1972), 220–221.

15. Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (New Delhi: Maya Publishers, 2000), 200. It is interesting to see the argument behind King’s statement: “We might just as well define lunch as eating a Big Mac and then point out this activity does not occur amongst vegetarian Brahmins!” 234.

16. See Jörn Rüsen, “Crossing Cultural Borders: How to Understand Historical Thinking in China and the West,” *History and Theory* 46 (2007), 189–193 (this issue).

cal and speculative. . . . It is in this broader concept that Mahabharata merits the title *Itihasa*.¹⁷ It thus demands an understanding that would differentiate *itihasa* from what the Greek or the Chinese would mean by history—*itihasa* being “more akin to religion and morality than history proper.”¹⁸ In India, unlike in the West, neither philosophy nor religion has ever been considered in isolation. Indeed, the Indian concept of history can be seen as a combination of the two. Hence, a strong mythic structure undergirds the concept of history, and there is no denying that history for the Hindus is lived-in reality and Hindu culture has both a paleocentric and mythopoetic character.¹⁹

As Sanskrit escalated to the position of *devbhasha* (language of the gods) it failed to inspire the growth of works that could be called historical by Western or Chinese standards. Indian historical consciousness with its inherent distinctiveness grew out of what the Hindus conceptualized and experienced through the concepts of *yuga*, *avatara*, *samsara*, *moksha*, and causality, to name a few. Its different view of history was strongly influenced by the rather elitist projection of the Sanskrit language, the centrality of the Brahmins in the existential-social scheme of things, and theological orientations.²⁰ So Hindu history, in the ancient and the medieval period, did not care much to acknowledge the date and life of an author, and instead argued for the truth of experience or the soundness of doctrine rather than the circumstances that gave birth to it.

In this regard one needs to revisit the fact that the storytelling ability of the Hindus has not been given the attention it deserves. The presence of *charans* or traditional minstrels, Brahminic barots and *bhats* who composed eulogies of their royal employers, formed part of the distinctiveness of the Indian concept of the past. The emergence of the *charans* expresses an attitude that “subordinates the historical reality of past individuals and individual events to the process of cultural continuity and cultural renewal.”²¹ The narratives of these Hindu storytellers have their own share of legends, fairy tales, and myths that under Western traditions of historical scholarship would not be considered “proper” history. But what is “proper” history and what is not depends on how one conceives history and its function; this is what lead Ashis Nandy to note that

in traditional Indian historiography, the data produced and the statistics used are often unique. A king is mentioned as having sixty thousand children, and the heavens are mentioned as being inhabited by three hundred thirty million gods, not only to make the point

17. D. K. Ganguly, *History and Historians in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1984), 5.

18. *Ibid.* Can epics be designated as history? As part of a discussion of Homer’s *Iliad* M. I. Finley points out that epic is a “narrative, detailed and precise, with minute descriptions of fighting and sailing and feasting and burials and sacrifices, all very real and very vivid; it may even contain, buried away, some kernels of historical fact—but it was not history. Like all myth, it was timeless. Dates and a coherent dating scheme are as essential to history as exact measurement is to physics.” M. I. Finley, “Myth, Memory, and History,” *History and Theory* 4 (1965), 284–285. From this perspective *Mahabharata* too is disqualified from being considered as history.

19. Prakash N. Desai, *Health and Science in the Hindu Tradition: Continuity and Cohesion* (New York: Crossroads, 1989), 10.

20. Pratima Asthana, *The Indian View of History* (Agra: M. G. Publishers, 1992), 26.

21. Ashis Nandy, *Alternative Sciences: Creativity and Authenticity in Two Indian Scientists*, in *Return from Exile* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998), 5.

that the king is potent and gods are many, but also to wipe out what many would consider the real data, and obviate any possibility of verification or empirical treatment. . . . In other words, in this type of historiography data are important only so far as they relate to the overall logic and the cultural symbols that must be communicated.²²

This is in strong contrast to the quantitative approach to history, which is distinctively Western.

It is not just an attitude to life and to sociocultural processes that determined the making of the Indian sense of historiography; certain realistic disadvantages also account for its characteristic differences from its Western counterpart. The lack of sufficient evidence is an important factor, as cataclysmic dynastic clashes, waves of invasion, and marauding political bands destroyed important documents and other material, with the result that several junctures of Indian historiography remain obscure (despite the fact that a tradition of maintaining archives existed, and colophons of manuscripts provided the name of monarchs and interesting historical details). This rendered as "black holes" certain crucial events in Hindu history, holes that serve as temptations for intrusive adventures—conducive to more contemporary ultra-religious incursions than objective explorations. Too, manuscripts in India could not successfully battle the climatic factor (failing most often to survive much more than five hundred years) except in the arid west of India (though the temperate climate in neighboring Nepal and the absence of hegemonic Muslim inroads helped preserve old manuscripts).²³ Again, the archival tradition lost steam and fell prey not just to climatic changes or political violence but also perished on account of certain and sudden changes of administrative centers that each dynasty created; preservation also suffered owing to the emergence of other local or regional powers who would scarcely exhibit interest in archival preservation, preoccupied as they were with their warring abilities. (That said, it needs to be pointed out that the writing of history in the Indian way did not exclude the importance of inscriptions [the two most revealing of them being the Junagadh inscription of Rudradaman c. 150 BCE and the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta c. 350 AD]. Hindu history can also, to a substantial extent, be narrated through epigraphic records and *vamsavalis* or chronicles of ruling families.)

The distinctiveness of Indian historiography briefly explicated here corroborates Rüsen's point that history is a medium for articulating one's own cultural identity in respect to its difference from the identity of others. To categorize the Indian concept of history as prehistory within Hegelian principles or strategic British historiographical imperialist schemes is cutting down the richness of possibility as "historicality shrinks in scope to enable a narrowly constructed historiography to speak for all of history." So "what is discarded is not only the pasts these so-called historyless people live by in their everyday existence but also the modes adopted by their languages to integrate these pasts in the prose of their respective worlds. In this way World-history has promoted the dominance of one

22. *Ibid.*, 6.

23. See Michael Witzel, "On Indian Historical Writing," *Journal of the Japanese Association for South Asian Studies* 2 (December 1990), 8–10.

particular genre of historical narrative over all the others."²⁴ Writing the *itihasa* of India would demand acknowledging her wide diversity (histories within history) and thus the little narratives and attitudes that have come through in her making. So, being on guard against the risk of projecting an "essentialized" India, I would suggest that the intercultural discussions of varying dimensions of historiographies humbly acknowledge the fact that what would raise a smile if applied to Europe would be soberly accepted when applied to India.²⁵ Would then embracing a way of doing history that is not like that done by either the Chinese or the paradigmatically Western methods discredit Indian ways of appropriating the past and historical meaning-generation, rendering them a less valuable and peripheral player in the stage of world history, or would it rather make them a valuable contributing member to this discussion? The answer from a sophisticated comparative historical perspective is clearly the latter.

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24. Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 45, 49.

25. See F. E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1922), v. In response to Max Müller's assertion that the Sacred Books of the East "contain so much that is not only unmeaning, artificial and silly, but even hideous and repellent," Sri Aurobindo's rejoinder is worth noting: "As to what he intends by unmeaning, artificial and silly elements, there can be no doubt. Everything is unmeaning in the Upanishads which the Europeans cannot understand, everything is artificial which does not come within the circle of their mental experience and everything is silly which is not explicable by European science and wisdom." Most European Orientalists have failed to understand the Indian psyche and this has resulted in unconvincing criticism. Peter Heehs shows us quite analytically that "Europe's literary criteria were not applicable to India. Albrecht Weber's idea that the original *Mahabharata* consisted only of the battle chapters was a case of 'arguing from Homer.' It was, he insisted, 'not from European scholars that we must expect a solution of the Mahabharata problem', since 'they have no qualifications for the task except a power of indefatigable research and collocation. . . . It is from Hindu [i.e. Indian] scholarship renovated and instructed by contact with European that the attempt must come.'" Aurobindo sees an "essential difference in mentality: the Indian mind was 'diffuse and comprehensive,' able to acquire 'a [deeper] and truer view of things in their totality'; the European mind, 'compact and precise,' could hope only for 'a more accurate and practically serviceable conception of their parts.'" What is required is the understanding of both continents of mind and thought and an effective mediation. See Peter Heehs, "Shades of Orientalism: Paradoxes and Problems in Indian Historiography," *History and Theory* 42 (May 2003), 177–178.

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6.

THE ARCHETYPE OF HISTORY IN THE CONFUCIAN ECUMENE

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ABSTRACT

Cultures are constituted by binary oppositions: the absolute and the relative; the perfect and the imperfect; the stable and the unstable. Many of the world's cultures have looked to revealed religion to discover the absolute: that which transcends the human, the intellect, and space and time. By positing a God who is omniscient and omnipotent, they conceive of an eternal and absolute that continues to exist in an immutable state.

In such cultures new perspectives for reinterpreting the past are continually propounded. This allows history to be rewritten and re-written. History simply becomes a method for becoming conscious of the past.

By contrast, many East Asian cultures have not developed such a concept of revealed religion. For them, history itself constitutes an absolute, something on which one can rely. History in East Asia is endowed with a normative function, a source of authority that does not permit easy rewriting.

I. THE ETHOS OF EAST ASIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

"Confucius said, 'I transmit but do not create. Being fond of the truth, I am an admirer of antiquity.'"

"Confucius said, 'I do not speak of prodigies, force, disorders, and gods.'"

"Confucius said, 'All the empty words I want to write down are not as clear and startling as seeing [their meaning] in action.'"

When considering the paradigmatic forms of historical narration in East Asia, these three statements attributed to Confucius have long held my interest.¹ Indeed, these three pithy comments have had a determinative effect on the fundamental ethos of historical writing in East Asia for over 2,000 years. I am prompted to inquire into the roots of this ethos.

To borrow an expression from the Western lexicon, these three statements share a commitment to the objectivity of historical narration. The notion of historical objectivity in the Western historical tradition has its roots in sixteenth-century France, and reached its full flower in the historiography of nineteenth-century Germany. From Germany, it was exported to countries around the world, and came to form the basic ethos of historical scholarship throughout the world in the twentieth century. The fundamental reason that the new academic discipline of history flourished around the world in the twentieth century is that history broke

1. *Analects*, Book 7-1, 7-21, and Sima Qian, *Shiji*, chapter 70.

free of political propaganda, and committed itself to a fresh ideology of "writing the past as it was."²

Many countries around the world have adopted the conventions of modern Western historical scholarship, but nowhere has this process proceeded more smoothly than in the countries of East Asia. The fundamental reason for this acceptance can be found in the fact that East Asian historiography already shared, at the phenomenological level, a commitment to an objectivist method of historical writing that "writes the past as it was."³

In this article I shall begin by describing the "origins of history" in the East Asian tradition, focusing on the question of the sources of "objectivity in historical writing." Historical writing in China had its origins in the scribal recording of the sacred words of shamans. During the Han Dynasty (206-220 BCE), the role of the court scribe was transformed into that of state historiographer, and until the dawn of the twentieth century this notion of the historian's task was at the core of historical writing in China and throughout East Asia. The fierce commitment of the historian to objective narration has been sustained by an unstated philosophy that the facts and phenomena of the past are the one certain existence. In the culture of China, which never developed revelatory religions, this belief was the core of the "constellation of knowledge," and argued for the creation of a system of knowledge quite opposite from that in the West. My purpose in this paper is to work out an "archetype of history"; consequently I shall have recourse to some broad generalizations.

One final note before I begin my main discussion. In the cognitive community of East Asia, argument inevitably refers to Confucius (551-479 BCE). It is important to note that what is commonly referred to as the thought of Confucius is not simply the product of that one man's mind; rather, it is more appropriate to conceive of Confucius as having mobilized his remarkable genius in summarizing and systematizing the thought of previous generations. In particular, the *Analects* must be considered as the thought of an age entrusted to the words of Confucius (even though the philosophy that had been collected and systematized under the name of Confucius has often been regarded as the philosophy of Confucius the individual). His words came to be deemed the fount of wisdom, and evolved as the core of East Asian culture.⁴ One might compare the role played by Confucius in this regard to that of Aristotle in ancient Greece.

II. THE HISTORIAN (*SHI*) AS A RECORDER OF THE SACRED WORD

It is a notable characteristic of historical consciousness in East Asia, and particularly of discussions of "the objectivity of history," that it tends to focus far more on the spirit or attitude of the historian than on the actual works of history themselves.

2. Georg G. Iggers, *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

3. Masayuki Sato, "Historiographical Encounters: The Chinese and Western Traditions in Turn-of-the-Century Japan," *Storia della Storiografia* 19 (1992), 13-21.

4. On Confucius as historian, see Masayuki Sato, "Confucius," in *Great Historians from Antiquity to 1800*, ed. Lucian Boia (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 62-66.

"History" in modern East Asia is generally parsed with the two-character compound Chinese word *lishi* (Japanese, *rekishi*; Korean, *yok-sa*), but until the middle of the nineteenth century it was expressed in the single-character term *shi* (J., *shi*; K., *sa*).⁵ This word *shi* itself originally denoted the historian, and only later, by analogy, did it come to refer to the product of the historian's craft, the written work of history itself. This is particularly interesting when we note that in the languages of Europe it was precisely the reverse: "history" referred to the written work and the word "historian" was formed to refer to the maker of this written history.

There are several theories regarding the etymology of the word *shi*.⁶ Heretofore, most analyses of the etymology of *shi* have been conducted as commentaries on the discussion of the term in the later Han dynasty dictionary *Shuowen jiezi*, by Xu Shen. According to the dictionary, "The historian (*shi*) is one who records things. It follows the idea that the hand [of the historian] holds the *zhong* ('center'). *Zhong* is truth (*zheng*)."⁷ That is, the *shi*, the official historian, is someone who records the truth. Wang Guowei (1877–1927) and his Japanese contemporary Naito Konan (1866–1934) argued that since the *shi*'s role was to count the arrows that had struck their mark at the royal archery contest, he collected those arrows in a quiver called a *zhong*—which was why the character *shi* took the shape of a hand holding a quiver. Another interpretation holds that the character *shi* "was formed from [images of] the hand, and counting sticks; it signifies the person who calculates the motions of the celestial bodies, and produces the calendar. By extension, it is the person who is in charge of historical records."⁸

However, if these were accurate understandings of the origin of the term *shi*, it would be difficult to explain why Confucius expressed his thoughts about the past, and about recording the past, in such forceful terms. In other words, his expression represents his belief that there was a powerful need to demand objective narration—that is, that there was a threat to objectivity in the recording of the past. The difficulty with both the *Shuowen* etymology of *shi*, as well as the suggestions of Wang and Naito, is that they make it impossible to conceive of the sense that there was a serious obstruction to objective recording of the past.

As I was thinking about this problem, I happened on the term *shiwu* (chronicler-shaman) in the *Ijing* (The Book of Changes). I believe this term may offer the key to unlocking the etymology of *shi*.⁹ The commentary on the second line of the fifty-seventh hexagram in the *Ijing*, *sun*, reads: "Ground located below the bed. Availing of chroniclers and shamans. The mottled like significant. Without fault."¹⁰

5. Masayuki Sato, "Die Einführung der 'Geschichte' in Japan des späten 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Die Vielfalt der Kulturen*, ed. Jörn Rilsen et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 441–458.

6. Dai Junren, "Shi 'shi'," in *Zhongguo shixueshi lunwen xuanji*, ed. Du Weiyun and Huang Jinxing (Taipei: Huashi, 1976), 17–29.

7. This definition is based on the character *shi*, which Xu Shen takes as a graphic representation of a hand holding the center.

8. Morohashi Tetsuji, *Dai kanwa jiten* (Tokyo: Taishukan shoten, 1956), II, 760–761.

9. I am grateful to Dr. Rudolf Ritzema for pointing out this term in the *Ijing* to me.

10. *I Ching*, transl. Rudolf Ritzema and Stephen Karcher (Shaftsbury, Eng.: Element, 1994), 610.

Why do the chronicler (*shi*) and the shaman (*wu*) appear together here? What is the relationship between them? On seeking an explanation for the etymologies of *shi* and *wu* that might shed light on the connections between them, the interpretation of Dai Junren and Shirakawa Shizuka appears to offer some help.¹¹

To summarize Dai's and Shirakawa's etymological reasoning, the relationship between the shaman (*wu*) and the chronicler (*shi*) is as follows. They reason that the character for "shaman" appears to be formed from the character *gong* (laborer) and two hands, where the *gong* represents a ritual implement. The person who held this ritual implement in both hands while performing his incantations was the *wu*. The *wu* was someone who performed a dance, praying for the sacred spirit to come down and possess him. The character for a chronicler (*shi*) comprises two elements, *zhong* (center) and *you* (hand). *Zhong* is a representation of a ritual vessel that has been attached to a piece of wood and that is used in prayers for longevity. In a ceremony called *shiji*—the chronicler's blessing—the celebrant takes the *zhong* in his hands, presents it to the god, and offers prayers. That is, the *shiji* was a ceremony to the ancestral spirits. The metamorphosis of *shi* into a word denoting an official chronicler arises from his having assumed the role of recording and preserving in written form the ritual phrases of the *shiji*, as well as the traditions of ritual practice. This likely later evolved into signifying the person who preserved the documents and records themselves.

As I see it, both the *shi* and the *wu* were people who served the gods. However, only the *wu* was able to hear the words of the gods. I believe it was the task of the *shi* to transcribe the words spoken by the *wu* when she or he was in a trance, and the voice of the god was speaking through her or him. What was recorded in those ceremonies was later preserved as ritual incantations, and the *shi* was deputed to read those incantations—the recorded voice of the god—in appropriate ritual settings. The *shi* was someone who could not himself hear the voice of the god. But for precisely this reason, the essence of the *shi*'s duty was faithfully and accurately to record the voice of the gods as transmitted through the mouth of the *wu*.

We are now accustomed to render *shi* as "chronicler" or "historian," but this is a role that appeared later. The *shi* was fundamentally a "recorder," someone who recorded the voice of the god as it came out of the mouth of the shaman; the *shi* was also a reader who conducted certain rituals in which he was in charge of reading these records aloud. As a result, he was also what might be called a historiologist, one who recorded and transmitted the tales of the gods as they related to ritual. One could also say that the *shi* was a preserver of myth.

Another way of putting it would be to say that the job of the *shi* was to preserve the records of the incantations used in ritual, and to preserve and record tradition, based on precedent and practice. It appears that this function later evolved into the official post of archivist—of preserving documents and records. Confucius's strong assertion, "I transmit but do not create. Being fond of the truth, I am an admirer of antiquity," then, refers to the stance of the *shi* in relation to that of the *wu*, and may be taken to represent what Confucius saw as the ideal posture of the *shi*: "I transmit but do not create." The act of producing something from nothing,

11. Shirakawa Shizuka, *Jito* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1984), 361–362.

that is, is something that can only be done by the shaman who alone can hear the voice of the gods; the chronicler must do no more than record the words of the *wu* faithfully. "Being fond of the truth, I am an admirer of antiquity" is an expression of the powerful self-discipline demanded of the chronicler in order that he may preserve the records of the voice of the gods as transmitted by the shamans of old.

This was likely the experience of Confucius himself. The figure whom Confucius portrays in the *Analecets* as the most nearly ideal man is Zhou Gong, sometimes rendered "the Duke of Zhou." He was an ancient priest, probably the highest-ranking shaman of the time, and thus capable of hearing the voices of the gods, a veritable old, wise man.¹² In a particularly famous passage in the *Analecets* Confucius engages in a "virtual conversation" with the sage ("In a dream, I met Zhou Gong"), a conversation that reveals Confucius's humble stance as *shi* to Zhou Gong's *wu*. Again, one might argue that when Confucius edited the Five Books, basic canonical texts, he was engaged in this his greatest work as a *shi* embodying the dictum, "To relate and not to invent."

Their origins as recorders of ritual incantations may render more readily comprehensible the extraordinary commitment of Chinese historians to writing the events of the past as they occurred. They were simply moved by the necessity to record faithfully "sacred words" that transcend mere human intelligence. Isn't this humble stance of the chronicler toward the shaman an explanation of the meaning of *shi* that is more convincing than etymologies that look to the counting of arrows and the making of calendars?

What remained in later ages, then, was the commitment to record faithfully "that which was spoken, that which was done." It was the practice of history that elevated this commitment to the production of "a true record" to the level of a core principle of Chinese culture. The Chinese emperor, historically speaking, was the supreme shaman, the only person capable of communicating with Heaven. The emperor was always attended by two historians, the *zuoshi* (the *shi* of the left) and *youshi* (the *shi* of the right); it was the task of the *zuoshi* to record the emperor's actions, and of the *youshi* to record the emperor's words. In the emergence of this pair of chroniclers attached to the emperor we see the metamorphosis of the shamanic relationship of the *shi* and *wu*; here the *shi* faithfully continues his original role as recorder of sacred words.

However, we also see here the *shi* begin to transcend his origins as a recorder or historiologist, and to undertake his role as chronicler and consequently as historiographer. In this regard, we may consider Confucius, who is credited with compiling the *Chunqiu* (*The Spring and Autumn Annals*) to have been one of the earliest *shi*. The solemnity with which Confucius approached the compilation of the *Chunqiu* reflects his belief that observing the consequences of human action was the only way one might learn the mandate of Heaven.¹³ It is interesting to note in this regard that the *Shu jing* (*The Book of Documents*) recorded the words of the Son of Heaven, while the *Spring and Autumn Annals* recorded his acts. The fountainhead of Chinese historical scholarship was found not in a record of

12. Shirakawa Shizuka, *Koshi den* (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1991), 85.

13. The *shi* was also a teller of ancient tales, a historiologist as storyteller.

words, but in a record of acts. This is a striking contrast with the notion in the Gospel of John that, "In the beginning was the Word," and the roots of Western culture in "what was said."

Confucius describes an episode in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* that tells us what a *shi* is. In ancient China, he relates, when Cui Shu killed the king, the state historian wrote, "Cui Shu violated his king." Thereupon, Cui Shu killed the state historian. The state historian's younger brother took up his brush, and wrote exactly the same thing as his brother had done, and he, too, was killed. The next younger brother then wrote exactly as his elder brothers had done. When another state historian heard this, he said, "If they are all going to be killed, then I shall have to write it," and gathering up his writing implements, he set out.¹⁴

III. HISTORIOGRAPHY AS THE CENTRALIZATION OF POWER

Because of the belief that history is the only means for people to know the Mandate of Heaven, East Asian cultures inevitably developed the notion that history cannot be the private possession of any individual, but rather is the common property of the entire culture. Historical compilation, too, has generally been a state project in East Asia, and the official histories thus produced have constituted the core of the culture of history. In East Asia, the cultural "concentration of power" has been accomplished by historiography. This is in contrast to the cultures of Europe, India, and Islam, where the concentration of cultural power has been fixed in the law. This is something that far outstrips the concept of history as we moderns know it.

Let me begin my discussion once more with China. For more than two millennia Chinese historiography centered on the "official histories" (or "orthodox histories"), compiled under the aegis of the state. Later generations have recognized Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* as the first "official history"; it was succeeded by twenty-three more such works, for a total of twenty-four "official histories." Where the Western historical tradition developed around a focus on narrating the succession of events, a defining characteristic of these official histories is the development of a historiographic strategy that attempts to take the state itself as a total system. This strategy is called the *jizhuan* (annals-and-biographies) style. The annals-and-biographies style is a method of narration that makes it possible to take the total state—politics, economy, society, culture, technology, and so on—as a single, consistent system. History, that is, came to be written as a means to apprehend and to narrate an entire cultural system. After Ban Gu's *History of the Han Dynasty*, the central method of historical narration has been to restrict the subject to the history of a single dynasty. In contrast to Sima Qian's universal chronicle, which spanned multiple dynasties, the dynastic chronicle limited itself to narrating the history of the immediately previous dynasty. Readers may interpret the chronicles written in Europe since the Middle Ages as a counterpart to the Chinese dynastic history. However, it is more appropriate

14. *Chunqiu zuota zhuan*, the 25th year of Xiang Wang.

to compare the Chinese historiographical tradition to the heritage of the *Corpus Juris Civilis* in the West.

From the time of Ban Gu to the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912), each new dynasty compiled the official history of the previous dynasty in order to demonstrate its own legitimacy. There are differences in degree, but in the other countries of East Asia as well, historical compilation has likewise been a state enterprise.

Next, I would like to look at the purposes of writing history, something I have already done in an article published in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. First, historical writing was based on the philosophical premise that historical facts were the only certain and immutable reality. Chinese metaphysics was not premised on a revealed religion based on the existence of a unique, indivisible god; moreover, it took the world as an ever-changing phenomenon, as represented in the *Book of Changes*. Therefore, it sought immutable reality in history, because humans could not alter that which had already happened. This belief is what brought into being in China a culture that took history as its axis. This culture of history later spread throughout East Asia in tandem with Confucianism, creating a common historical culture throughout East Asia. The proclamation of this philosophy may be found in Confucius's statement that, "All the empty words I want to write down are neither so clear nor so startling as seeing their meaning in action."¹⁵

But how can we create an immutable past? In China and Korea, it was standard practice that, once the state's historical bureau had finished compiling the official history of the previous dynasty, the bureau destroyed all the sources it had collected. This was to prevent the revision or rewriting of the official history, for once it was published by the government the history itself took on the character of a sacred text. The most certain way to endow the official history with the imprimatur of authority was to destroy the sources on which it is based. In the Choson dynasty of Korea (1392–1910), for example, the source materials were burned after use.

In this fashion, East Asian cultures preserved the ideal that history was the sole immutable basis for human judgment. The biographies—they comprise over half the material in the official histories—in their own way maintained this tradition of objective narration. In the biographies, as in the other sections of the official history, they first set forth what they believed to be "fact"; following that, the historians added their own evaluations. This vast corpus of biographies forces us to consider why the historians believed biography to be a necessary part of a history. It is because in a culture that lacks a unitary supreme being, the records of the lives of concrete human beings were the true sacred texts.

The tradition was maintained of seeking the objectivity of historical narration, even more than the narration itself, in the lives of the historians who wrote it. We can find in the life of a fifteenth-century Korean historian an episode reminiscent of one Confucius himself recorded in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, in which he presented the historian as a lofty figure. It is recorded that in 1431, as the compilation of the *Veritable Records of King T'aejong* (*T'aejong sillok*) was nearing completion, his successor King Sejong (r. 1418–1450) asked the compil-

15. *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu yu hsu-pien* and *Shih-chi*, chapter 70.

ers to show him their work in advance: "In the previous dynasty, every monarch personally reviewed the veritable records of his predecessor; but King T'aejong did not review the *Veritable Records of King T'aejo*." Sejong's senior ministers replied that, "If Your Majesty were to review [the work in progress], later monarchs would surely revise [the historians' work]. Then, [future] historians would suspect that the monarch might look at the draft, and they would inevitably fail to record the facts completely. Then, how would we transmit [facts] faithfully for the future?"¹⁶

In traditional East Asia, the role of the past was to serve as a normative history. This forms an interesting contrast to Western historical practices, where it evolved as a cognitive discipline. That is, in the West the historian found his *raison d'être* in rewriting the past. The discipline of history developed as a competition among the interpretations and approaches of different historians.¹⁷

If history was the single normative mirror for mankind—as East Asian statesmen, historians, and philosophers (often the same people!)—believed, then it was quite natural that there would be a formalization of the account style of history as a means to maintain those norms.¹⁸ Similarly, it was probably inevitable that the histories would be endowed with great authority as a way to prevent revision of the past. What was to be avoided at all costs was any appearance of a conflict between fact and narrative. The most effective way to accomplish this end was to eradicate the facts that had served as the raw material of historical narration, that is, to destroy the source documents. When that was done, the account embodied in the official histories became the facts of history.

The word now used in contemporary East Asia to denote the discipline of history, as noted above, is the two-character compound Chinese word *lishi* (J., *rekishi*; K., *yok-sa*), a term first used in this sense in Japan in the nineteenth century. Until then the word simply meant, "The successive official histories of China, beginning with the works of Sima Qian and Ban Gu." Therefore, "to study *lishi*" meant to become conversant with the official Chinese histories. Consequently, there was no notion that the student of history should ask, "What are the historical facts?" in the sense of going beyond the historical narrative to examine the underlying facts themselves. Leaving aside exceptions such as the great Liu Zhiji (661–721), who in his *Shitong* (Generalities in Historiography) developed a critical historical method comparable to that of Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), the cognitive strategy of skepticism toward historical accounts did not develop substantially in traditional East Asia. Rather, the critical historical problem became one of arriving at an interpretation that resolved the contradictions among competing accounts—much like the tradition of biblical hermeneutics that developed in the West.

16. My translation is based on a text in *Chosenshi*, part 4, vol. 3, 336 (Sejong, 13/3/20), which is taken from *Sejong sillok*, vol. 51.

17. The above section is based on "Historiography and Historical Thought: East Asia," *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Oxford: Pergamon Press/Elsevier Science, 2001), X, 6776–6782.

18. The notion of history as pellucid mirror is expressed in numerous histories entitled "mirror," for example, the anonymous eleventh-century Japanese *Okagami* (Great Mirror), or Sima Guang's thirteenth-century *Zizhi tongjian* (The Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government).

Let me attempt to explain this archetype of history as it developed in East Asia. The activity of historical cognition comprises five elements: historical events, historical sources, historical narration, the historian, and the reader. Modern historians study historical sources in order to determine what the historical events were that underlay them, to narrate these events as history, and to present this narration to the reader. This is what we call today our mode of historical thought. Through the interpretation of historical source materials, we are led to a set of historical facts that differ from what we earlier believed. This is what makes the modern historical profession so interesting.

If this is the essence of modern historical thought, then it is different from the mode of thought in traditional East Asian historiography, for the latter's goal was not to elucidate the events of history through an analysis of historical sources. Rather, once the events of the past had been established through the use of historical sources, the sources were discarded, and historians of East Asia recorded this established past in an official history (*zhengshi*); this account was given the imprimatur of state authority, and the account became "the past." Re-evaluation, or multiple competing images of the past, was out of the question. History simply was the facts as written in the official histories.

The development of historiography in the West, by contrast, has been one of a continuous dynamic tension among fact, source, and historical narrative. One might say that the changing relationship of these three elements has been the motive force behind the evolution of Western historiography. It is the continuing survival of historical source materials that has made this possible. Largely because of the systematic destruction of primary documentary sources in the process of compiling official histories, the evolution of historical consciousness has been dramatically different in China and Korea (the Japanese situation is somewhat different) from the experience of the West. But it is important to note that, while fewer primary sources survived, the existence of a vast corpus of written histories in its own way reveals to us the fact that the civilizations of East Asia constructed cultures that had profound links to their past.

The tradition of state-sponsored historical compilation continues in the present day. In the Republic of Korea, the Historical Compilation Committee completed in 1982 an official history of Korea. In modern Japan, the Meiji Government in 1869 established an Office for the Collection of Historical Sources and Compilation of National History; its modern-day descendant, the Historiographical Institute at the University of Tokyo, continues to the present day. The Office abandoned the compilation of official history in 1889, after completing the *Fukko-ki*, an official history of the Meiji Restoration, but the Institute continues to collect and compile historical source materials. Still, one can see the tradition of official historiography flourishing at the sub-national level in Japan today, where local and prefectural governments continue to publish official histories. The attitude of Japanese taxpayers toward the compilation of official local histories—which may be summed up as, "It is necessary that historical accounts produced by public authority be fair and impartial, and record the truth about the past"—reaffirms the Japanese sense that the underpinnings of people's consciousness has

not changed.¹⁹ This is a form of historical writing found nowhere today except in Communist states and in the countries of East Asia.

In a 1902 letter to authors for the *Cambridge Modern History*, the editor, Lord Acton, wrote: "Our Waterloo must be equally satisfying to Frenchmen and Englishmen, to Germans and Hollanders. . . . We must write our narrative in such a way that the reader cannot tell where one writer put down his pen, and another writer took it up."²⁰ Acton's ideal for historical writing is one that has since fallen into oblivion in the West; but one wonders what his reaction would have been had he known that the very same spirit had been alive continuously in East Asian historical writing for 2,000 years.

The notion of official history has had its effect on the teaching of history as well. History-teaching in East Asia is essentially a process of providing pupils with a standard set of knowledge-claims about the history of their own country and the world. The goal is to foster their identity as citizens, and in this process the history textbook performs much the same function as did the official history in traditional China. School history textbooks are compiled or approved by the state in China, Japan, and Korea. The most vivid example of this is Japan, where the textbooks that may be used in the schools are those that have been cleared by the Ministry of Education's review board. Japan's history textbooks, that is, are a modern metamorphosis of official history. When children study history, they are not learning how to think about history, but are learning a story about the past composed by the state.

When we compare this to history education in England, the contrast is quite interesting. In English schools, there is no history textbook in the sense that we see it in Japan; rather, history teachers themselves prepare the materials with which they teach history. There is no notion of teaching a set story, but rather of having students learn the "skill" of how to use historical sources and how to interpret them. This remarkable contrast in styles of history education doesn't arise simply from differing views of education. Beneath it are deep-rooted differences in the culture of history itself, spanning more than two millennia. These fundamental differences in what one demands of the past have made history-teaching in these two cultures similar only on the surface, but starkly different underneath.²¹

IV. DE-DRAMATIZATION OF HISTORY

Why have the Chinese been so concerned with "an objective account of the past?" When I think about this, three things always come to mind.

First, I wonder why dramatic retellings of the past did not appear in ancient China. Many cultures have produced great poetic epics, like Homer's *Odyssey*

19. Masayuki Sato, "The Two Historiographical Cultures in Twentieth Century Japan," in *An Assessment of Twentieth-century Historiography: Professionalism, Methodologies, Writings*, ed. Rolf Torstendahl (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets, historie och antikvitets akademien, 2000), 33-42.

20. *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present*, ed. Fritz Stern (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 249.

21. M. Booth, M. Sato, and R. Mathews, "Case Studies of History Teaching in Japanese Junior High Schools and English Comprehensive Secondary Schools," *Compare* 25:3 (1995), 279-301.

or the *Mahabharata* of India. They have narrative poetry, but China does not.²² Of course, some might cite Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* as an analogue to the Greek or Indian historical epic, but *Records* is quite unlike epic poetry, which was intended for recitation aloud. The work of history in China never became anything more, at the formal level, than a vast compendium of rigorously objective factual information.

The second fascinating phenomenon is that there are few works of speculative or philosophical interpretation of history in China. In contrast, many cultures have given birth to speculations on the philosophy of history, such as St. Augustine's *City of God*, or Ibn Khaldun's *Preface to History*. That is to say, the Chinese did not engage in the activity of presenting an overall view of the course of their own past in the form of a comprehensive, simple, and clear story that would be understood easily by anyone, using key terms unique to their own culture. Someone calculated that more books had been written in China prior to the year 1750 than had been written in the entire rest of the world combined, and that the bulk of these were works of history.²³ Yet there is no philosophy of history. I know of only two exceptions. Shao Yong (1011–1077) developed a philosophy of history in his *Huangji jingshi shu* (Book of Supreme World Chronology) based on a theory of the *Book of Changes* in which he calculated that one cycle of history (analogous to a Platonic year) encompassed 129,600 years; and Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692) argued for a dynamic of history based on the paired notions of "conditions" (*shi*) and "principle" (*li*). Similarly, there were a few attempts at the philosophy of history in Japan, but these were, without exception, interpretations of history founded in Buddhist cosmology.

The third point to be noted is the relative paucity of works of historical theory, in comparison to the vast number of historical works. In the entire history of traditional China, only three thinkers have left books that could be called works on historical theory. These are: Liu Zhiji's *Shitong*, noted above; the "General Preface" to Zheng Qiao's (1104–1162) 200-volume *Tongzhi* (Comprehensive Treatises); and the *Wenshi tonyi* (Comprehensive Survey of Literature and History) of Zhang Xuecheng (1738–1801). What is the significance of there being so few works of historical theory? How can we explain that a theory of historical cognition did not develop in China?

Putting the three points together yields a significant question: Why did the Chinese reject the dramatization of history, and neither subject history to speculative philosophy nor evince an interest in the theoretical examination of historical consciousness?

The answer to this question lies in the cultural preference for taking the written record of the acts of people of past ages, that is, historical facts, as the sole form of truth. East Asian cultures did not posit an omnipotent deity, as seen in revelatory religions. Where many other cultures posited an absolute and supreme deity—"absolute and universal"; "unique and true"; the "absolute existence"—the peoples of East Asia posited only the acts of people of the past. Thus, the dra-

22. Masui Tsuneo, *Chugoku no rekishisho* (Tokyo: Tosui shobo, 1984), 36.

23. Shimada Kenji, "Chugoku," in *Heibonsha hyakka jiten* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1985), IX, 817–828.

matization or fictionalization of the past would have amounted to a repudiation of their fundamental philosophy. The philosophy of writing the facts just as they are, therefore, required a theory of historical practice that rejected any distortion of fact, as well as any investigation or interpretation of the facts of the past. Great significance was placed on depicting the past just as it had been depicted before. The Chinese evolved the philosophy that a true picture of the world was visible only through the acts of individual people, and through history, which constituted a great compendium of the acts of these people.

What this inevitably required was the apotheosization of the acts of the people of the past as written in history, that is, the production of the authorized historical narrative. It was unthinkable for the Chinese to doubt the facts as written in the official histories. For later scholars, the most important task, therefore, was the interpretation of the histories, and investing with meaning the narrative written in those histories. The proliferation of annotations to the official histories is truly remarkable. Takigawa Kametaro compiled the annotations to Sima Qian's *Shiji* in his monumental *Shiki kaichu kosho* (Tokyo, 1935); on average there are fifty lines of annotations for every ten characters of the original text. This is powerful testimony to the East Asian attitude toward history. Humans are seated, not before God, but before the histories the future will write.

The consequences of action that are beyond human ken, but that are manifested as human events and historical occurrences, can be known only through the reading of the assembled records that constitute their "history"; it is only through the reading of history, therefore, that we can approach that which is beyond ordinary comprehension. The Chinese arrived at the philosophical proposition that the essentials of human experience can be approached only through the existentiality of history. The character of a culture based on the notion that one could discover the absolute in the actions of people of time past is decidedly different from the foundations of Western civilization.

Many readers will, I suspect, raise the challenge that the Chinese notion of *tian* is quite similar to the notion of the godhead in revealed religion. *Tian* is usually rendered as "heaven." It is not difficult to imagine that this notion also signifies the absolute, and may be understood as synonymous with "God." But it is interesting in this regard that the concept of *tian* does not refer to an infallible, absolute entity. In explaining the Chinese concept of *tian*, I would like at the same time to clarify the role of "history." I will begin by differentiating the skepticism of the historian toward *tian* from the skepticism of the science of the heavens—that is, astronomy—toward *tian*.

The historian's skepticism about *tian*, interestingly enough, was first expressed by Sima Qian. He wrote,

Some people say: "It is Heaven's way, without distinction of persons, to keep the good perpetually supplied." Can we say then that Po I and Shu Ch'i were good men or not? They clung to righteousness and were pure in their deeds, as we have seen, and yet they starved to death. Of his seventy disciples, Confucius singled out Yen Hui for praise because of his diligence in learning, yet Yen Hui was often in want. He ate without regret the poorest food, and yet suffered an untimely death. Is this the way Heaven rewards the good man? Robber Chih day after day killed innocent men, making mincemeat of their flesh. Cruel and willful,

he gathered a band of several thousand followers who went about terrorizing the world. But in the end he lived to a great old age. For what virtue did he deserve this?²⁴

This passage in the "Biography of Po I," in the first chapter of the biographies in the *Shiji*, is also a declaration of Sima Qian's purpose in writing history. Sima's argument here goes beyond the theory that there is a causal bond between Heaven and the Human (that Heaven responds to virtue and vice in the political realm by sending appropriate benefices or disasters), to declare the necessity of clearly setting forth the factual record of events. The true principle of the world does not depend on Heaven, but is instead linked to the acts of each individual; it is the historian's task to record these acts and transmit them to later generations. Sima's query, whether Heaven is good or evil, is a declaration of the philosophical proposition that the only certainty on which the world can depend is the record of events that have already occurred, and that people may gain an understanding of that universal truth through the knowledge of that record, which is history.

Now, by contrast, I would like to look at astronomy, as the science of the heavens.²⁵ The Western science of astronomy, from the time of the ancient Greeks, has had a strong orientation toward the development of laws of the heavenly bodies. It has tended to set aside anomalies that do not conform to those laws, and in the search for the relationship between measurable phenomena and the laws of the heavenly bodies has always given priority to the latter. The firm belief of Aristotelian science, that heaven follows immutable laws, is well known, and needs no elaboration here.

But in East Asia, Heaven, which controls the world, is endowed with neither absoluteness nor infallibility. It was believed that Heaven might err at times. East Asian astronomy works with two concepts, those of heavenly regularity and irregularity. When a phenomenon occurs that cannot be explained by the regular rules that govern phenomena such as solar eclipses, it is categorized as a heavenly portent. When celestial phenomena do not accord with the behavior predicted by astronomical laws, this is not a demonstration of science's inadequate understanding of the laws governing celestial bodies. Rather, it was believed that such phenomena were classified as heavenly omens, and understood as evidence that Heaven had been disturbed from functioning properly and had erred (*tianxing buqi*).

Western astronomy, by contrast, presupposed the concept of regularity. When too many irregularities in the heavens accumulated, astronomers sought intellectually for a richer astronomical law that would accommodate and explain the observed irregularities. This could be called a "scientific revolution," or perhaps more appropriately—following Kuhn—a "paradigm shift."²⁶ Western science advanced by moving from the Newtonian to the Einsteinian paradigm partly as a way to conceptualize astronomical phenomena nomologically.²⁷

24. Burton Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien, Grand Historian of China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 188-189.

25. Nakayama Shigeru, *Nihon no tenmongaku* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1972), 18-23.

26. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

27. The paramount concern in East Asia, by contrast, was to discern the laws governing the relationship between heavenly portents (celestial phenomena) and the lives of people on earth. As Ban Gu put it in the *Han shu* (History of the Han Dynasty), "When the prince among men is not virtuous,

Contemporary Western civilization is rooted in both Greco-Roman and Hebrew civilization. It is particularly significant, when considering why "modern science" arose in Europe, to note that it draws simultaneously on the ancient Greek notion that Heaven is bound by immutable and eternal laws, on the one hand, and the Christian (and originally Hebraic) belief in a sole, unique, and infallible absolute deity. The functional analogue in East Asian cultures of the omnipotent deity sought in so many civilizations was the flowering of a "culture of history," which by contrast constructed a civilization that took the past, not God, as "absolute."

V. THE CONSTELLATION OF EAST ASIAN INTELLECTS

In "The Grand Historian's Personal Preface" to his *Shiji*, Sima Qian expressed his reasons for writing history in a passage filled with deep feeling:

The Grand Historian remarks: "My father used to say to me, 'Five hundred years after the Duke of Chou died Confucius appeared. It has now been five hundred years since the death of Confucius. There must be someone who can succeed to the enlightened ages of the past, who can set right the transmission of the *Book of Changes*, continue the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and search into the world of the *Odes* and *Documents*, the rites and music.' Was this not his ambition? Was this not his ambition? How can I, his son, dare to neglect his will?"²⁸

"Set[ting] right the transmission of the *Book of Changes*, continu[ing] the *Spring and Autumn Annals*" was the foundation on which Sima Qian was to write the *Shiji*. This is highly suggestive when we consider the functions of history in Chinese civilization. How should we conceive the relationship between the *Book of Changes* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, that is to say, history? If we are to speak of changes, we must begin by discussing the relationship between shamans and the divination based on the *Book of Changes*.

Whereas the chronicler could metamorphose into the historian and still maintain and even advance the original spirit of fidelity to records, as soon as religious practice was divorced from politics the shaman lost his position. When Confucius said, "I will not speak of strange forces or disturbed spirits," he was pronouncing the departure of the shaman, and speaking to the emptiness of the shaman's words. The escape from shamanism is the intellectual core of Confucius's thought. As Shirakawa Shizuka has pointed out, Confucius's own mother had been a shaman, so he had ample opportunity to observe firsthand what a shaman was, and thoroughly understood the shaman's nature.²⁹ Thus, when the *Analepts* speaks of Confucius on his sickbed, it notes that he rejected the incantations of a shaman.³⁰

The one who displaced the "superstitions of the shaman" for "human knowledge" was Confucius, and his method was that of divination. In divination, the diviner used bamboo stalks known as *shi*. The character *shi* is written with the elements for "bamboo" and "shaman", and signifies using these bamboo rods

a reproach appears in Heaven or on Earth, and visitations or prodigies frequently occur, in order to inform him that he is not governing properly."

28. Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien*, 50.

29. Shirakawa, *Koshi den*, 19-24.

30. *Analepts*, 7-35.

(milfoil shoots) as a medium through which to learn the will of the gods by consulting the *Book of Changes*. Nothing so well expresses the phenomenological transformation of the shaman into the diviner as the word *shì* (bamboo stalks). The diviner was nothing short of a cognitive revolution in the ancient China of 2,500 years ago.

The greatest systematizer of divination was Confucius. As with astrology in the West, the diviner was not able to make absolutely infallible predictions of people's future, nor was he a fortune-teller. The diviner handled the divination sticks according to a prescribed set of manipulations, read the text of the diagram that emerged in the *Book of Changes*, and interpreted it on the basis of his own circumstances and judgment. This was a sort of virtual conversation between the diviner and the divination diagram, a conversation with himself. In place of divination performed by using tortoise shells, or shamanic oracles, Confucius established the cognitive method of applying one's own judgment and thought through divination.

The *Book of Changes* occupied the highest status in any classification of books in East Asia for 2,000 years. It is the beginning of Chinese philosophical thought, which was transmitted throughout the countries of East Asia, and which became the dominant intellectual mode in the region until the middle of the nineteenth century. If divination were simply a form of fortune-telling, as is often supposed, it would not have held such an exalted place in East Asian culture as the highest mode of knowledge. The extreme humanity of divination is rooted in the fact that it is not a fatalistic approach that takes one's life as fixed at birth, but is rooted in a philosophy that sees humans as constantly changing, growing, and developing. It is founded in a "changism" that finds the essence of human existence in constant alteration, and that is why it has maintained a constant appeal for people in East Asia for 2,000 years.

If the Chinese never posited a constant and unchanging superhuman entity, then what did they see as constant and unchanging? Where many other cultures saw the eternal in a godhead, one might say that the Chinese found their unchanging first principle in the acts of past humans. It is interesting that the "constellation of knowledge" in East Asia is an inversion of that in the West. In contrast to the Western predilection to see the immutable in God and mutability in history, East Asian civilization saw the immutable in history and mutability in Heaven. This is a remarkable contrast in the constellation of knowledge. Perhaps if Hegel had considered the East Asian pattern of knowledge as expressed in the archetype of history in East Asia, he would not have concluded in his *Philosophy of History* that "History among the Chinese comprehends the bare and definite facts, without any opinion or reasoning upon them."³¹

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31. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, transl. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 135.

REVIEW ARTICLE

GUILTY OF HISTORY? THE *LONGUE DURÉE* OF PAUL RICOEUR

MEMORY, HISTORY, FORGETTING. By Paul Ricoeur. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004. Pp. xx, 642.

In this book, Ricoeur reiterates that he had conceived the work as a supplement to his great trilogy, *Time and Narrative* (*Temps et récit* [1983–1985]), and his autobiography, *Oneself as Another* (*Soi-même comme un autre* [1990]), because he had, as it were, forgotten forgetting.¹ This forgetting of forgetting was important for Ricoeur because his reflections on history and historical writing, undertaken to provide a basis for the reconstruction of the modern (Western) humanistic *trivium* of history, literature, and philosophy, had not, in his own opinion, done justice to memory and its relation to historical consciousness. *Time and Narrative* had been a magnificent, really Herculean effort to redeem historical consciousness as a crucial component of the modern Western mind and to establish historical knowledge as both mediator between contemporary and traditional (classical and Christian) metaphysics under threat by modernity itself in the guise of relativism, skepticism, and Heideggerian existentialism. His aim had been to show, after the manner of Kant, how history—demeaned by positivists, existentialists, analytical philosophers, and skeptics in general—was not only possible, but was also necessary to a properly human conception of our humanity, our identities as both individuals and members of communities, and our roles as good citizens of the polities to which we belonged. Put in somewhat different terms, it might be said that in his great trilogy, Ricoeur wanted to show how the past bore upon the present, how the past could responsibly be remembered in the present, and how this remembrance could be used to justify belief in a better future in spite of the realization that, in any strictly "objective" account of history, there was little reason to feel sanguine about humanity's future or proud of its past. To be sure, Hegel had provided his own version of a theodicy or justification of the ways of God to humans in the form of a philosophy of history. But Ricoeur could not abide Hegel's notion of the "plot" of this history and especially the way the Hegelian story ends, that is to say, Hegel's idea of the modern age. Hegel's modernity could not be ours. We have had too much history and, moreover, since Hegel's time, history of a different kind. This is modernity-history, as much a product of "the great crimes" of the twentieth century as it is of Western humans' astonishing

1. "[It] is a question here of returning to a lacuna in the problematic of *Time and Narrative* and in *Oneself as Another*, where temporal experience and the narrative operation were directly placed in contact, at the price of an impasse with respect to forgetting the median levels between time and narrative" (xv).