Mirroring the past the writing and use of history in imperial China

On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang.

MIRRORING THE PAST

The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China

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This book was not written to resolve scholarly problems concerning historiography in imperial China; nor is it intended to advance technical discussions on the subject. What we offer is an up-to-date, reliable survey of imperial Chinese historiography, an account that we believe to be a reasonably comprehensive and truthful reconstruction of the parameters and patterns of historical production in a culture distinguished for its veneration of the past. We wrote this book because there is a great need for such a panoramic work.

Chinese civilization is well known for its long, continuous tradition of historical writing. Since antiquity, writing history has been the quintessential Chinese way of defining and shaping culture. As China forged a unified empire, dynastic rulers gradually but surely turned the production of history into a routine, bureaucratic business, as evidenced by the appointment of court historians and the institutionalization of the History Bureau in the seventh century. Indeed, from the third century B.C.E. onward, the writing of dynastic histories was undertaken as a matter of course. One central and inescapable task of a new dynasty was to compile the history of the previous dynasty. History was the textual manifestation of a new imperium, and control of the past, by imperial fiat, was part of the power and authority of the new regime. According to one estimate, in order to render the official dynastic histories, or "standard histories" (zhengshi), that have been compiled over more than a millennium into English, a total of some forty-five million words would be required (Dubs 1946, 23-43). And this total does not include an almost equally large number of private and unofficial histories that further testified to the Chinese predilection for ordering the past through historical narratives.

The study of Chinese historiography in the English-speaking world has never really flourished. Scholarly endeavor has been sporadic and intermittent, if not downright sparse. In 1938 Charles Gardner published, to our knowledge, the first systematic, book-length study entitled *Chinese Traditional Historiography*, a small volume of some hundred pages. It was fol-

lowed in 1955 by Yu-shan Han's Elements of Chinese Historiography and W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleyblank's edited volume, Historians of China and Japan, in 1961. Pulleyblank later contributed a long article, "The Historiographical Tradition," to Raymond Dawson's anthology, The Legacy of China, which appeared in 1964. The three decades from the 1960s to the 1990s were apparently a fallow period except that 1975 witnessed publication of Essays on the Sources for Chinese History, edited by Donald D. Leslie, Colin Mackerras, and Wang Gungwu, a work that offers some coverage of the Chinese historiographical tradition. Otherwise, no major works on historiography in traditional China have appeared in English. Despite the immense value of the studies we have listed, these pioneering works are now out of print and outdated. Denis Twitchett's The Writing of Official History under the T'ang, published in 1992, was the first major study on traditional Chinese historiography to appear in a long time. It was followed by two monographs on Sima Qian, the great historian in the Han, written by Stephen Durrant and Grant Hardy. But all these studies are specific in scope and coverage. Twitchett's study focuses on the Tang, while those by Durrant and Hardy deal with only one historian, important though Sima was. However valuable individual studies on aspects and periods of Chinese historiography may be, they cannot adequately substitute for a continuous account. In short, there is no single, up-to-date English-language volume that offers a critical survey of the Chinese historiographical tradition.

This relative lack of attention to traditional Chinese historiography not only reveals a lacuna in the field of Chinese studies but also detracts from a general understanding of Chinese civilization, of which the charisma of history was integrally a part. Insofar as history, the storehouse of moral lessons and bureaucratic precedents, was the magister vitae—the teacher of life—to the Chinese literati, neglect of the historiographical tradition of China meant diminution of a broad view of Chinese culture. Accordingly, a current and comprehensive survey of traditional Chinese historiography, one that integrates and reflects the scholarship and academic interests of the past two decades, is necessary.

It may also be argued that this need is not a parochial one defined solely in terms of Chinese studies. The onslaught of poststructuralism, deconstructionism, postmodernity, postcolonialism, and other post-Enlightenment theories in the human sciences has underscored the multivalent and polyvocal loci of truths. Setting aside the question of the interpretive cogency and explanatory power of these theories, they have, at the very least, usefully demytholized the paradigmatic status of European Enlightenment values and world views. A variety of historical conceptions have been shown to be ideological constructions rather than cultural truisms. Thus, for instance, it has become de rigueur these days in academia to deuniversalize a host of notions that have hitherto been Eurocentrically construed and defined, such as modernity, or even the concept of culture itself. As the putative universality of the Western tradition of historiography wanes, it seems increasingly necessary for practicing historians and

historiographers to come to terms with alternative perspectives. To the extent that every people has a legitimate history of history, the development of a deeper understanding of the historical profession and discipline as a whole may well require seeking insights and inspirations from the historiographical traditions of other cultures. In the recently published A Global Encyclopedia of Historical Writings, edited by a group of Western historians (Woolf 1998), for example, many of the entries pertain to non-Western traditions of historiography. Hence, even though this book on traditional Chinese historiography speaks to scholars and students of China, it should also appeal to historians of other parts of the world, if for no other than pedagogical reasons. While appropriate texts are abundantly available for the study of the historiographical traditions of Europe and America, instructors often find themselves at a loss to identify proper books for China. Many are forced to fall back on works published decades ago. Our work, at the same time that it traces the general contour of traditional Chinese historiography, is an advanced technical synthesis of the latest scholarship on the subject.

As befits an overview of traditional Chinese historiography, this book is organized chronologically, following the dynastic successions, beginning in antiquity, during which time the early forms of historical consciousness emerged, and ending in the mid-nineteenth century, when encounter with the West began to engender a fundamentally different historical outlook. This periodization corresponds with the conventional division of Chinese history that we find in much of the scholarly literature produced in the West. The main merit of this schema is that it strikes a chord of harmony with many existing books on other aspects of Chinese history. Readers can readily integrate the materials found here with information on the other historical developments from other works. The individual chapters detail the complexities and nuances of the unfolding historiographical tradition, revealing the roles that history and historians played in phases of Chinese history. For every period we explore and examine Chinese historiography on two levels: first, historiography as the gathering of raw materials and the writing and producing of narratives in order to describe what actually happened in the past-the compilation of history; and second, historiography as thought and reflection about the meanings and patterns of the past—the philosophy of history.

A continuous narrative in the form of a general survey often runs the risk of highlighting the trees while losing sight of the forest. In detailing the multitude of causal and crucial elements in the historiography of the various dynastic periods, a survey may blur the overarching themes. It may gloss over the metanarrative, as it were, neglecting the unyielding bedrock of logic and the assumptions that lie beneath and extend beyond and above the surface historical minutiae. A recounting of the historiographical endeavors and accomplishments of the individual dynasties that on their own become luminous with significance may in the end fail to illuminate the very substance and nature of historiography in imperial

China. Told in the form of a survey, the historiographical story may appear to be just one damned fact after another, much as happens in handbooks or encyclopedias. What integrated picture, then, do all the dynastic snapshots yield? What overall profile can be constructed out of the separate developments? What continuity flowed through the apparent disjunctions of epochal segmentation? What whole may be intuited from the accumulations of the parts? Our work aims to answer these questions and thereby demonstrate the main lines and themes of historiographical developments. To seek to demonstrate the whole is not to flatten out the diverse movements in Chinese historiography throughout the ages in the name of static coherence. It is not, as critics are wont to say these days, to essentialize what making history was all about in imperial China. What we do seek here, however, is an integrated view of Chinese historiography, one that reveals the continuity that persisted within particular periods.

Historical consciousness in early China germinated within a unique world view animated by an anthropocosmic commingling of Heaven and humanity, wherein human affairs and agency were at once the reflection and the embodiment of Heaven's will and action. Confucius, generally acknowledged as the author-editor of the Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu), purposefully employed and manipulated historical retelling as educative disquisition. Otherwise a pedestrian chronological record, the Spring and Autumn Annals became in the hands of Confucius a powerful tool that infused moral purport into the writing of history. This didactic act of using the past to convey the moral messages and judgments vouchsafed by Heaven exerted an enduring impact on Chinese historiography. The making and writing of history came to be enmeshed in moral edification. And it was precisely because of this historiographical principle and practice of bestowing praise and levying blame (baobian) on personages and events of the past that history acquired its unmistakable charisma and authority.

The two acclaimed historians in the Han, Sima Qian (c. 145-85 B.C.E.) and Ban Gu (d. 92 C.E.), played remarkable roles in orienting historical writing in new directions. As a consequence, the grand enterprise of doing history began to depart from the antique model established by Confucius in terms of both scope and style. Yet notwithstanding their innovations that boldly forged new conventions and expanded the horizons of historical writing, Sima's intention to explore and reveal the relationship between Heaven and human affairs through history, and Ban Gu's concern with dynastic history and the ways in which knowledge of the past was preserved and presented, very much reflected earlier historiographical assumptions. Both asserted that the history of human knowledge and awareness of the past was, in its essentials, pragmatic knowledge, the practical purpose of which was demonstrated through distinguishing the good and excoriating the wicked. The pragmatic lessons of the past were most revealingly conveyed in the exemplary lives of individuals, and indeed, beginning with Sima Qian, the biographic form became the major narrative vehicle for

bringing to light the deeds of the past. History was essentially the record of the operation and influence of moral forces and principles in the lives of past personages, whose behavior and agency were in turn brought to bear on the well-being of the state and society. Thus history was normative; it was a moral narrative guided by the principal didactic function of celebrating virtues and deterring vices (Pulleyblank 1961, 143-144; L. Yang 1961, 52; Moloughney 1992, 1-7). History was not only considered morally edifying, but it was also thought to be capable of proffering trustworthy socioeconomic and political precedents and analogies, so that it served as a most reliable guide for contemporary statecraft. The abiding historiographical conviction held that juxtaposing and probing similar events of past and present would yield invaluable practical insights crucial for the betterment of the state and society (Hartwell 1971, 694-699). It is small wonder that Etienne Balazs's famous characterization of Chinese historiography as history "written by officials for officials" has become a sort of adage that supposedly encapsulates the substance and import of historical production in imperial China (Balazs 1964, 132, 135).

An interesting related issue, or subtext, one that has increasingly engaged the attention of scholars working on the intellectual culture of the Renaissance and early modern Europe, needs to be mentioned here, and that is the question of readership. It may reasonably be argued that if the educative and moralizing stance on history of Sima Qian and Ban Guand for that matter of the later Chinese historians and historiographers as well-reflected their prerogatives and imperatives as authors, then we may assume that a world of readers existed where history was expected to be read in a certain manner. In other words, the Chinese historians authored history in a particular way because they assumed that history would and should be read in this manner. Just as writing about the past was purposefully intended to educate people, the state, and society, so reading about the past was a deliberate, goal-oriented act of learning pursued with practical aims. For instance, in the Song, reading and discoursing on history before the throne came to be institutionalized as imperial lectures through which rulers and officials were educated in the art of rulership and governance. In fact, testing the knowledge of history in the imperial civil service examinations was a clear example of the mindful and goal-oriented reading of the past (cf. Grafton 2001, 13-14; Jardine and Grafton 1990, 30-78; Hartwell 1971, 696-698; 703-709). Understood from the vantage point of both author and reader, history was normative and ameliorative, charismatically transformative.

Apart from its utility as statecraft and morality, history had its use in political legitimation and propaganda. In imperial China the compilation of a dynastic history served the political goal of confirming the legitimate succession of the new regime. The transition from one dynasty to the next was conceived and explicated in terms of the continuation of power and authority by a "proper" (zheng) ruler, who successfully forged "unity" (tong)—hence the ideal of zhengtong, the orthodox and systemic continua-

tion of power. By dint of its virtues, its moral excellence, not to mention its political and military prowess, a new dynasty received the Mandate of Heaven and assumed authority by legitimately displacing and replacing the moribund predecessor. At the service of *zhengtong* history was supposed to set the record straight by affirming orthodox transmissions of power (L. Yang 1961, 46–48; H. Chan 1984, 19–48).

This unabashed and overt indenturing of history to ideological and political orthodoxy and moral-ethical edification, while acknowledged as a clear indication that the Chinese venerated the past, has been regarded by many Western commentators as an unmistakable indication of the ultimate ahistoricity of the Chinese way of recording and interpreting the past. Often evaluating imperial Chinese historiography in terms of modern Western historical standards, and frequently neglecting the substantive achievements of traditional Chinese historians, critics have frequently reached simplistic and unjustified conclusions. Wong Young-tsu, in a recent article (2001), has rightly voiced his dissatisfaction with some of the sweeping misconceptions of traditional Chinese historiography, which he exposes and takes to task. Take, for example, the historiographical principle and practice of praise and blame. While historical didacticism and analogies may have generally been accepted as working in the service of moral and political certitude, they were by no means invariably crude forms of moral hucksterism and ideological boosterism that ignored truth. To praise and blame was to give credit where credit was due, an endeavor that was informed by fidelity to what had actually happened. It was by preserving the veracity and authenticity of the past that history appropriately and efficaciously served as the great teacher of life; and it was in the act of truthful recording that moral lessons were pronounced and enshrined. Likewise, with regard to the orthodox and legitimate assumption of power, there was by no means consensus among Chinese historians as to which dynasties were legitimate. Lively and vociferous debates on this issue occurred ever so often, as individual scholars rendered judgments on legitimacy, based on the historians' rigorous investigations and critical readings of historical events (Wong 2001, 128-131; L. Yang 1961, 32; K. Hsu 1983, 435-436).

Indeed, we should realize that the desire to unearth the truth about the past for its own sake is relatively recent in the West. The disinterested quest for knowledge of the past and the cognitive approach to historiography, supposedly free of practical intent, came into being only with the onset of European modernity. Before the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the West was, like China, preoccupied with history as pragmatic and usable knowledge (Iggers & Wang 2001, 21–35). In point of fact, we may reasonably contend that any culture that values the past invariably engenders and sustains conceptions of history that embody larger meaning and significance—paradigms of human actions, patterns of cosmic movements, and wills and purposes of providential forces. Even today, apprehension of the meaning and significance ensconced in history enables us

to shed light on the present and speculate about the future. History constitutes, to put it another way, a practical past (Graham 1997, 1–2; 201–202). Seen in this cross-cultural light, traditional China was hardly exceptional.

Moreover, post-Enlightenment, if not postmodern, thinking in the West has long acceded to and taken for granted the inexorable role of the present in the making of the past. The Rankean assertion of objective realism and scientific history-to write history as it has really been, shorn of the cultural and personal burden of the present - is as much a myth as the Confucian proleptic conception that present problems are reenactments of past problems — that history literally repeats itself. In our practice of history, we have come to accept the fact that the point of entry for historians is always present determinations and current events, an assumption, or more correctly, reality, which we may call presentism. The eminent French historian Lucien Febvre has famously declared that such presentism is the very bedrock of the reconstruction of the past: "The Past is a reconstitution of societies and human beings engaged in the network of human realities of today" (de Certeau 1988, 11). Thanks to the many works of literary critics such as Edward Said and historical theorists like Hayden White, which we need not belabor here, historians have become quite cognizant of the inherently constructivist and representational nature of any historical discourse. Narratives and interpretations of the past cannot be absolutely truthful presence of the past; they are perforce "a re-presence, or a representation" (Said 1979, 21). A historical narrative "is not merely a neutral discursive form that may or may not be used to represent real events," insofar as it entails the ideological and political stances of the narrator (White 1987, ix). In other words the conviction of historical truth premised on the assumption of a neat correspondence between what happened in the past and its recovery in historical research and retelling in historical narratives has been rent asunder. Of course, reference to such intellectual developments and sensibilities in the contemporary West does not suggest that imperial Chinese historiography was self-consciously aware in like manner of the ontological and epistemological condition in the representation, or re-presentation, of the past. Rather, it is to remind us that the Chinese conception of history as the repository of recoverable lessons for present and future actions is an instance of the inexorable presence of presentist motives in the endeavor to disinter the past.

But does it mean that this belief in the talismanic power of history swamped any serious concern with establishing what really did happen? Did the Chinese historians treat the past merely as a treasure trove of lessons and precedents to be placed in the midst of the present society? Was history simply memorialized with faith and memorized by rote rather than examined with zeal and reconstructed with imagination?

In addition, critics have frequently referred to the imperial patronage and control of the production of history in traditional China as a crippling impediment to telling the truth about the past. And it is true that the great majority of the dynastic histories were compiled under imperial aegis by scholars working in official capacities. From the fall of the Han dynasty in the third century to the rise of the Sui dynasty in the late sixth, the writing of dynastic histories received official endorsement, and they came to be known as the "standard histories" (zhengshi). With the consolidation of the venerable tradition of official historiography, the writing of history indeed seemed to be, as Balazs commented, undertaken by officials for officials (1961, 78-94). In the Tang dynasty, official patronage of historical writing became institutionalized when the imperial court established the History Bureau (shiguan). There, historians were given assistance and support for their research and writing, but they were also handed instructions and directives from supervising officials and emperors. As the making of history was institutionalized and coopted into the bureaucracy, so the reasoning goes, critical impulse and creative spirit were stultified. W. J. F. Jenner, for instance, has launched a withering critique of traditional Chinese historiography, especially official historiography, which he sees as a mere stratified stockpile of accumulated administrative experience, couched in rigid and conventionalized language, whose aim was to instill the right values in the minds of the bureaucrats. This invented past, invested with the imprimatur of imperial power, became a veritable cultural prison marked by the tyranny of a history that was the final arbiter of values and behaviors (Jenner 1992, 5-12). Interestingly enough, Jenner's evaluation was prompted by his desire to determine the reasons that explained the tragic events of Tiananmen in 1989 in relation to the nature of Communist rule. The irony is that his reconstruction of the Chinese historiographical past bespeaks the presentist origination of his project. He resorts and appeals to his usable past after all.

What is wrong with Jenner's portrayal? The principal problem is that it gives very short shrift to the Chinese insistence, perhaps even fixation, on truthfulness and veracity in the retelling of the past. Chinese historians had always been inspired and empowered by what Liu Yizheng has called the ideal of the "authority of history" (shiquan), whose very potency and persuasiveness came from its fidelity to what actually happened (1969, 19-35). Confucius himself was keenly sensitive to the availability of sources. He remarked to his disciples that he could discuss the rituals and ceremonies of the Xia and Shang dynasties but not those of the Qi and Song states because he found insufficient documents, physical artifacts, and oral traditions for the latter two. Confucius' distinguished pupil Zi Gong cast appropriate doubt on the traditional accounts of the reign of the last ruler of the Shang, and concluded that King Zou's decadence and turpitude might have been exaggerated. Mencius (c. 372–298 B.C.E.) warned that if one were to completely believe what the Classic of History (Shujing) said, then it would be better not to read it at all. Han Fei (280-233 B.C.E.) took a dim view of the stories of the legendary sage-rulers of Yao and Shun, the cultural heroes and paragons of Confucian China. But perhaps the foremost case of upholding the principle of truthful recording is that included in the Zuo Commentary to Confucius' Spring and Autumn Annals. In 568 B.C.E.

three brothers, all of whom were official historians of the state of Qi, were put to death one after another, because they insisted on recording a story truthfully, contravening and thwarting the wishes of those in power. The tale was told matter-of-factly, without pathos, clearly intimating that in ancient China, there was already the widely accepted and unyielding principle of upholding the truth about the past at all costs, even to the point of accepting death with equanimity (K. Hsu 1983, 432).

It is important to note that the Chinese themselves were very aware of some potential pitfalls in official compilations of history, carried out under imperial auspices and oversight. Thus, the institutionalization of the making of history also meant the installation of means to safeguard the truth by forestalling its corruption and compromise. In the Tang, when the History Bureau came into being, the emperor had no access to what the Bureau had written precisely because of the anticipation and fear of imperial interference. In fact, individual compilers did not share their writing with fellow compilers in order to maintain each writer's independence from undue influence and pressure. In Chinese history there were many cases of the official historians' courageous fight for truth, even at the risk of alienating their imperial overlord and losing their lives. Needless to say, there were also many cases of imperial meddling and political strong-arming such that compilation rules were violated and historiographical conventions subverted. Nonetheless, while it would be naïve to think that all official historians were men of principle and official compilations emerged unscathed from the briar patch of imperial whims and bureaucratic infighting, we must not lose sight of the elaborate mechanisms created in the Chinese officialdom to ensure and encourage the truthful preservation of past records. By the time the history of the Ming was compiled, the principles and iterations of thorough gathering of sources and impartial recounting of the past had become standard fare in the world of official historiography. These included the broad marshalling of materials. vigorous vetting of the sources, careful distribution and division of labor among the compilers, standardized rules of recording, faithful adherence to truth in recording, impartial evaluation, patient and painstaking effort in compilation, and narrative concision (L. Yang 1961, 55; J. Chen 1981, 38-47).

Moreover, we must not lose sight of the vibrant world of private historiography that consciously transcended the strictures of collective compilation under direct court patronage. The innovation and creative imagination in these works must not be ignored (Wong 2001, 133–137; J. Chen 1981, 56–68). Furthermore, we ought to pay heed to the myriad cautions issued by the Chinese historiographers and historians themselves with regard to the unreliability of official compilations. Liu Zhiji (661–721), for instance, an astute historiographer and philosopher of history of the Tang, extended his criticisms of the History Bureau to other important areas of historiography. He tirelessly argued for the critical evaluation of the sources and impartial reconstruction of historical narratives through

truthful recording that conscientiously avoided concealment, embellishment, and distortion. At the same time that Liu maintained praise and blame as the paramount function of history, he reminded readers that such functionality was entirely contingent on the veracity of the historical accounts in the first place. It was only when accounts separated the authentic from the apocryphal, presenting both the good and wicked in equal measure, that histories could legitimately play the requisite and valued role of moral adjudicator (K. Hsu 1983, 435–438; J. Chen 1981, 47–56).

Besides the issue of truth, observers and critics in the West have questioned the nature and methods of historical records in imperial China. While most of them have been impressed by the voluminous and continuous records that do undoubtedly furnish crucial material for understanding the Chinese past, many have blithely and sweepingly characterized them as products of "scissors-and-paste," to borrow R. G. Collingwood's words, wanting in reflection on the nature and meaning of history. In other words, to many Western observers, much of Chinese historiography was mere mechanistic assemblage of congeries of lived stories and events, an encyclopedic parade of facts and information.

It is quite true that we may readily identify certain fairly standardized formats that dominated the writing of history in imperial China. First, there was the annals-biography, or composite, style (jizhuan) that most of the standard histories adopted. As mentioned above, the biographical essay formed the core of traditional historical writing, for the exemplary lives of individuals were seen and presented as the realization of the enduring principles and values embodied in the classics. The rise and fall of dynasties, and the complex unfolding of past happenings, were conveniently filtered through the lives of people of pivotal historical significance, through whom crucial insights into a past era could be developed. In addition, the biographic information and narratives were often complemented by brief comments (zan) that purposefully highlighted the importance of the lives depicted. The annals of the imperial rulers and princes, and the biographies of the notable officials and personages, together forged an educative catalog of evidence of the worthy and timehonored principles that were at work in history through individual lives. These paragons and role models became vivid guides to proper action and ethical conduct for posterity (Moloughney 1992, 1–13). Yet it is noteworthy that as early as Sima Qian and Ban Gu, biographies alone were deemed to be inadequate. Hence within the composite style, there was also the use of tables and the writing of monographs or treatises on specific topics. The tables were historical charts, and the treatises and monographs addressed issues that went beyond biographic details to covering a wide array of topics from geography, to astronomy, to flora and fauna, just to mention a few. In short, Chinese historians conscientiously studied various aspects of human activities but within a narrative style that crystallized around individual lives.

In contradistinction to the composite style, there was the chronicle

(biannian). It was a chronological recounting of the past as a concatenation of events, sequentially ordered and arranged. One obvious shortcoming of this format was that events were recorded individually in isolation without a broad sense of situational context and circumstantial interconnection. While a chronicle had the distinct merit of providing a clear picture of temporal continuity, the spatial coherence of events was often in short supply. As a consequence there emerged a third style of narrative, known as "narratives from beginning to end" (jishi benmo). The goal of these histories was to reorder and reorganize the information culled from a chronicle by subsuming it under topics and themes. Materials on a particular topic or event, often scattered throughout the chronicle, were reassembled so that the development and trajectory of any one episode in history might be mapped, retraced, and reconstructed. In this format of recording, isolated parts would be brought together to constitute a cohesive whole, a full-fledged historical narrative with a beginning, middle, and end.

In addition to these three dominant styles, there were many variations, especially in the world of private historiography. Some focused on treatises or monographs; others were highly synoptic works organized by theme, such as institutional developments; still others were miscellanies. The point here is that notwithstanding the apparent uniformity of forms favored by the standard histories, there were many actual historical styles. Moreover, the manner of recording was by no means so highly conventionalized that the intrinsic drama was bleached out of events. They were not merely bland factual entries in a dry encyclopedic catalog of the human past (Wong 2001, 138–144).

Did format hamstring and constrain substance? Did rigid style mean conventional substance? In fact, if Chinese historiography had simply been generated by the scissors-and-paste method, and if format stultified substance, historical criticism would not have been such a prominent pursuit that inspired and engaged so many Chinese historians. Furthermore, these critics of history were not simply engrossed in isolated minutiae; their historical criticism did not target piecemeal particulars alone. Many were intent on rebuilding and refurbishing the factual foundation of ancient history through wholesale rigorous critiques. Liu Zhiji, for instance, tackled not only individual classics and texts but sought to reexamine the entire antiquity tradition, which to him was much entrapped in a penumbra of myth and fable. Liu questioned the accuracy of many entries in the Spring and Autumn Annals and doubted the veracity of Sima Qian's and Ban Gu's renderings of China's ancient past. Even the iconic story of the much-admired practice in ancient China of voluntary surrender of the throne - Yao selflessly yielding his position to the virtuous Shun, and Shun altruistically giving up his rulership in favor of the sagely Yu—was subject to skeptical interrogation.

In the Song, the growth of antiquarian studies further stimulated the critical and skeptical impulses within Chinese historiography. Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), who complemented his historical research of textual material

with investigations of ancient artifacts, showed that at least three of the "Ten Wings" (appendices explaining the moral significance of the hexagrams in the Classic of Changes) were not authored by Confucius but by later scholars. Zheng Qiao (1104–1062), who was equally adept at exploring the worlds of material culture and classical scholarship, scrutinized the Han classical commentary tradition and questioned the credibility of their descriptions and interpretations. Sima Guang (1019–1086) set up rigorous standards of determining and measuring truth based on comparisons of sources; he repudiated all manner of literary works containing the fanciful, bizarre, and fabulous.

In the Qing dynasty, spurred on by the exacting and meticulous methodology of evidential research (kaozheng), classicists and historians critically parsed the meanings of the sages' words and carefully determined the origins and authenticity of the ancient texts and artifacts. In short, there was a concerted reexamination of the classics and antiquity, whose roles in Chinese culture would be increasingly historicized—antiquity became a segment in time and the classics became objects of study. As the classics and antiquity came to be historicized, they were no longer viewed as transtemporal, universal, and therefore, immutable, but rather as products in and of history. This effort produced two historiographical developments. First, it yielded a remarkable improvement in the means by which historical sources and materials were read and examined. This in turn led to new understandings of previous historical scholarship. Second, it fostered a historicist sense, a historical-mindedness or consciousness—the awareness of the passage of time, the cognizance of anachronism, and the knowledge that the present and the past were qualitatively different. Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692), for instance, called for the critical vetting and verification of sources as he urged historians to cultivate a sense of anachronism, an awareness that the past and present "each has its own time, its own situation and its own emotions, values and reasons" (K. Hsu 1983, 443). Gu Yanwu (1613-1682), as he immersed himself in the study of ancient history and culture—language, phonetics, institutions and so forth—was bent on reconstructing the past in an unbiased and impartial fashion, guided solely by corroborated facts and evidence. In the eighteenth century, Dai Zhen (1724-1777) asked scholars "to explain the past with past meanings; neither infusing one's own opinions nor projecting ideas of later generations into the past" (K. Hsu 1983, 445). This epistemological stance culminated in Zhang Xuecheng's (1738-1804) bold and eloquent contention that the classics were all histories (K. Hsu 1983, 435–446).

Not only were Chinese historians insistent on ascertaining truth through exacting methods of verifying evidence, constructing narratives, and effecting interpretations, they were also keenly interested in espousing conceptual historical schemas that sought to give shape to the past. In other words, Chinese thinkers had their own grand overarching theories and philosophies of history. In the main, Chinese theories of the flow of history displayed three dominant, but interrelated modes of expression:

classicality, caducity, and continuity. Historical classicality refers to the conviction that the antique past established excellent criteria of achievement and values of judgment, and they therefore became the classic ones by which subsequent ages and cultures would have to be measured. The antique past, the golden age, was the wellspring and storehouse of moral and practical lessons. The corollary of historical classicality was historical didacticism, the idea that history was the charismatic teacher of life in all its diversity (Frykenberg 1996, 149-152). Historical caducity points to the related sense that time is degenerative; the present is perforce inferior to the ancient past. Historical continuity celebrates timeless universality as opposed to contingent particularities. The present is seen to be the same as the past, because both are essentially uniform in character. Without a sense of anachronism, perception of the difference between the past and presence is filtered through the lenses of classicality and caducity—the present divergence is the result of a fall from the glorious classical past (Burke 1969, 1-2; Logan 1977, 18).

Given the pervasive historicist conceptions of classicality, caducity, and continuity, the primary criteria for value in imperial China were generated by the past, and not engendered by present experience or anticipated future ideal (Mote 1976, 3-8). Even though the appeal to the classical need not mean blind aping of the past, the summoning of antique models did imply that the subsequent ages and the present were afflicted with a perennial pathology, that there was a besetting cultural degeneration as time marched on. The measurement of the present against the classical past also suggested their essential continuity, as the inferior present could be improved by retrieving the old, insofar as there was qualitative uniformity bridging the two. These perspectives of the past were very much reinforced by the Neo-Confucian grand unity of the cosmos and the social, cultural, and political polity. The abiding Way (dao), and its manifestations of Heaven (tian) and Principle (li), inhered in the cosmos and humanity as the ultimate authority. They embodied the universal norms and values that transcended time. Since its only function was to ratify the validity of the overall pattern and the overarching principle, the particular was rendered incidental and peripheral (Ng 1993b, 564-567). Since the present was not regarded as a period sui generis but merely a degenerate version of a past era, there was no epochal differentiation in the modern sense.

Nonetheless, within the three dominant modes of historical thinking—classicality, caducity, and continuity—the Chinese thinkers formulated their own epochal concepts as they sought to make sense of the past through historical schemas. In accordance with the historical vision of the Han New Script (*jinwen*) classical tradition, Dong Zhongshu (179?–140? B.C.E) espoused the idea of the "Three Beginnings" (*sanzheng*). Here he was referring to the legitimate succession of three regimes, the Zhou, the Shang, and the state of Lu, of which Confucius was the uncrowned king. Dong also postulated a cycle of Simplicity (*zhi*) and Refinement (*wen*), positing that the beginnings of dynasties were characterized by the insti-

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tution of simple but pious rituals and rites, while their conclusions were steeped in extravagance and artificiality that sowed the seeds of eventual demise. From the Eastern Han exegete He Xiu (A.D. 129–182), we get a modified form of this tripartite succession, known as "Preserving the Three Systems" (cun santong), or "Linking the Three Systems" (tong santong), which was in turn associated with the "Three Ages" (sanshi). In the eighteenth century, followers of the New Script tradition, such as Zhuang Cunyu (1719–1788), offered their own interpretations and variations. But these epochal constructions and orderings all dealt exclusively with antiquity (Ng 1994, 1–32). In their essentials they buttressed the historical perspective of classicality.

In the early nineteenth century, other New Script scholars like Gong Zizhen (1792–1841) and Wei Yuan (1794–1856) added their own versions of the Three-Age schema. Gong actually offered several versions. They all aimed at explaining the general principles and shape of the flow of time, which no longer only applied to antiquity. But as Gong himself made clear, this temporal trichotomy was after all a repetition of the antique Three Ages, in that its ending point was the age of universal peace, an age which happily replicated that same great golden era of yore. In other words, the paradigm of historical classicality still held sway in Gong's historicism. Wei's Three-Age schemas also exceeded the bounds of antiquity, but they were by and large devolutionary and regressive in nature, thereby affirming the paradigm of caducity. Moreover, he injected a principle of constancy, variously described as the One (yi), the ideal of wuwei (nonaction), and the Way that revealed his conformity to the traditional paradigm of continuity (Ng 1996, 82–85).

There were other means of ordering the diachronic passage of time. In the Neo-Confucian vision of the transmission of the Way (daotong), antiquity, from the age of the ancient sages to the time of Mencius, was the golden age during which the Way was created and flourished. With the passing of Mencius, the Way was eclipsed and in decline, which ushered in a prolonged age of degeneration, when Buddhism, Daoism, and other heterodox ideas pervaded China. Then with Han Yu's (786–824) retrieval of the Confucian Way came the beginning of the age of regeneration, which was finally brought to fruition by a succession of Confucian masters from Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073) to Zhu Xi (1130–1200).

Another way of identifying periods, which acquired some currency in the Song dynasty, was based on the dominant mode of scholarship at a certain time. Late antiquity, that is, the Han period before what some writers regarded as the infestation of Buddhism, was characterized as a philological age. From then through the Tang was deemed to be a literary age, while the Song itself excelled in speculative contemplation and was thus the age of philosophy (Barrett 1998, 80, 87–88). Another notable epochal scheme is found in Buddhism, generated by the Buddhist millenarian idea of "the latter days of the law." According to this scheme, after the Buddha's demise, the world went through three eras: that of the True Law, the Imitative Law,

and the Latter Days of the Law. The temporal flux was marked by the degeneration of the Buddha's teachings, until, in the final era, the world was engulfed in chaos and ruin because people had completely forsaken the Buddha's law. Just as medieval Europe was anxious about the end of the millenium, so in China there was a prevailing concern among the Buddhist devotees regarding the onset and chronology of the Latter Days of the Law. In fact, in medieval China, this age was believed to have started in A.D. 552 (Sato 1991, 287; Barrett 1998, 75–78; cf. Burke 1976, 137–152).

Perhaps the most common way of periodizing Chinese history was through the creation of reign names that were combined with the sexagesimal cycle system of calendrical reckoning, beginning with Emperor Wu of the Western Han in 114 B.C.E. He decreed that the year of his ascension to the throne (116 B.C.E.) ushered in the reign of yuanding (the beginning of the tripod ding, a figure of speech for assertion of rule). The practice was institutionalized so that henceforth the enthronement of a new emperor went hand in hand with the declaration of a new reign name. However, at times a special occasion would also initiate a new reign title. This dating system was overtly political in purpose, for it affirmed and symbolized the legitimacy, dignity, authority, and administrative ideal of each new ruler. In fact, the dominance of this scheme may have discouraged the formation of other segmenting devices to shape and order the past (Sato 1991, 275–301; Wright 1958, 103–106).

In terms of the modern sense of historicity, the various schemes all failed in the end to generate a full-fledged sense of anachronism, that is, a distinguishing of one period from another by ascertaining their uniqueness and particularity. Nevertheless, there were historical perspectives in the world of imperial Chinese historiography that demonstrated a keen appreciation for the contingent and particular in the passage of time. In the Song dynasty, some historians such as Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072) and Sima Guang (1019-1086) were quite aware of the anachronistic nature of sources as they explored causation in the rise and fall of dynasties. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries especially, as the study of the classics and ancient history gathered momentum and became prevalent, antiquity increasingly came to be viewed as a segment in time. Gu Yanwu, for instance, railed against obdurate adherence to old institutions, arguing for institutional changes that would meet the special needs of the time and rejecting the idea that the ancient texts could be applied wholesale to current problems. Likewise, Wang Fuzhi affirmed the inevitability of change as new conditions and circumstances (shi) continually arose (Teng 1968, 111– 123; C. A. Peterson 1979, 12; Ng 1993b, 567–578). In the eighteenth century this historical sense may be summed up by Zhang Xuecheng's proclamation that the classics were all histories, in the sense that they were the records of the governance of the ancient rulers. In effect, Zhang suggested that the classical past was time-bound and therefore could not reveal what happened after antiquity (Nivison 1966, 141-142). Similarly, Dai Zhen resisted the totalizing Neo-Confucian claim of a universal principle by posit-

ing that the Way was simply the quotidian practices in human relations manifested in everyday activities (Ng 1993b, 572–578). In the nineteenth century Gong Zizhen and Wei Yuan favored the provisional in varying and changing historical contexts; human accomplishments and actions were related to temporal movement in a human world, not charted by providence or rigidly defined by classical model.

Thus Chinese historiography did contain historicist views that shaped and ordered the past, schemes that qualified the traditional historical perspectives of classicality, caducity, and continuity by deauthorizing and loosening the transcendence, omnipresence, and constancy of the Way. To some extent the present came to be distanced from the Ur present—the antique past—and thus escaped the ghost of the Way-above-history.

So far, we have sketched three dimensions of history in imperial China—the use and usability of the past, the form and format of recounting the past, and the shaping and ordering of the past. By teaching moral behavior through history and by employing historical analogies as sociopolitical guidelines, historians in imperial China asserted the intimate and organic relation between the past and culture. History was embraced for its heroic charisma, at once the agent of moral transformation and the embodiment of culture. History was the collective cultural memory through which philosophy (the quest for the first principles of being) and politics (the erection of the ideal of rulership and the implementation of governance) acquired intelligibility. Historical narratives (which assumed a variety of forms and style) and historical philosophies (which gave order and shape to the apparently amorphous flow of time) proffered eidetic illustrations of the enduring principles of cosmology (the workings of Heaven and earth) and anthropology (the flux and occurrence of human events and actions).

In the chapters that follow, we highlight the dynamic nature of Chinese historiography by noting innovations and changes during different historical periods. We show that historical writing in imperial China was by no means merely bibliographic logorrhea or uncritical amassing of information and that it was not entrapped in a static rehashing of the old as veneration of received traditions. By examining a wide array of historians and historical texts, including both official dynastic histories and private compilations, we hope to portray the diversity and heterogeneity of the Chinese world of historiography. Our framing of the Chinese historiographic past means, perforce, inevitable exclusions, even as we attempt to reconstruct a continuous and comprehensive account. In this account, our goal is to illustrate changes in the ways of conceptualizing and looking at the past and to show how these changes influenced and related to the writing of history itself.

However, more than comprehensive coverage, we aim to identify the dominant mode, or *Zeitgeist*, of historical thinking at a given time, and to explain its genesis and influence in terms of the contemporary sociopolitical and intellectual contexts. It is interesting to note that if the Chinese historians devoted themselves to the collating of human variety, and to the

minute annotation of dynastic rise and fall, it was because of their faith in Geist—the Way, the Principle—the animating and guiding force of spirit, thought, and above all, culture. In this view, people died, regimes passed, institutions crumbled, things perished, matter decomposed, and colors faded. But the Way, the culture, and the patterns of the past persisted. They knew so because history served as the mirror that reflected and showed the enduring value of the Way and the age-old, time-honored patterns of culture. In the final analysis, the monumental and exacting historical works produced in imperial China mapped the contour of Chinese civilization, not for the sake of understanding the past as disembodied and theoretical learning, but for realizing the grand didactic and pragmatic purpose of teaching the world by mirroring and displaying the past, warts and all.

Because we now know history cannot be a purely empirical enterprise of transcribing past happenings, and our present determinations and concerns inexorably impinge on our historical reflection, perhaps we can join in spirit the Chinese historians in their excavation of a practical and usable past.

CHAPTER 1

The Age of Confucius

The Genesis of History

The Grand *Shi* wrote in his records: "Cui Zhu assassinated his ruler." Cui Zhu had him killed. The Grand *Shi*'s younger brother succeeded to the post and wrote the same thing. He too was killed, as was another brother. When a fourth brother came forward to write, Cui Zhu finally desisted.

Meanwhile, when the Shi living south of the city heard that the Grand Shi had been killed, he took up his bamboo tablets and set out for the court. Only when he learned that the fact had been recorded did he turn back. (Watson 1989, 147, modified transliteration)¹

his dramatic, death-defying devotion to duty took place in 548 B.C.E. and was recorded in the Zuo Commentary (Zuozhuan), a historical text from the early Warring States period (475–221 B.C.E.). The Zuo Commentary tells us that Cui Zhu was a ruthless, ambitious minister in the powerful state of Qi, which occupied a substantial part of North China Plain during the Zhou dynasty (1066–256 B.C.E.). He murdered the ruler of the state and replaced him, but gathered all power to himself. In other words he engineered a bloody coup d'état. Though successful, Cui's perfidious behavior did not escape the attention of the shi, who, apparently undaunted by the prospect of execution, insisted on "telling it like it is," to use today's journalistic parlance. The incident, although coolly described in the matter-of-fact language of the Zuo Commentary, nonetheless conveys a profound and moving moral message—the ultimate triumph of the shi's dedication to his responsibility, which was to record the truth regardless of personal cost. Who were these shi who persisted in recording a truthful account of events?

The Origin of the Shi

In modern Chinese, the character *shi* means history. But in ancient China, it referred to an official title held by a certain group of people, often from the same family. We may properly call them historians, or scribes, to the

^{1.} In quotations from other scholars, we have altered the transliterations of names to accord with usage in this book.

extent that what they did was to enter data and keep records. However, neither historian nor scribe describes the full responsibilities borne by the shi in ancient China. Indeed, the meaning of the character shi has changed over time, from denoting an official title to embodying an abstraction (Shizueshi 1983, 111; Jin [1944] 2000, 29–31; Qu 1999b, 2–7). What caused this change? What were the origins of the shi and how did their duties and charges evolve over time?

As some scholars have noted (S. Wang 1997, 211–214; Inaba 1999, 30– 31), the shi, or gushi (literally, blind historian), had existed even before writing was invented in China. Because of their exceptional memory, the shi took responsibility for remembering important events, and in the process recast and recited them in stories and poems. This image of the shi we may appropriately associate with that of Homer, the blind poet from ancient Greece who told and retold momentous events of the past. Once writing was invented, however, shi became an official position open to literate people with suitable talents and abilities. Interestingly enough, according to some sources, Zuo Qiuming, the alleged author of the Zuo Commentary and the Discourses on the State (Guoyu), was blind (Shiji 1988, 945). Zuo probably lived in the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 B.C.E.), a time when the office of the shi had become common. As the shi multiplied in number, a division of labor emerged. Most extant records show that in ancient China, shi was rarely a position held by only one person. Rather, it was a hereditary title retained in a family; once it was conferred, it could be passed on to junior members of the family and offspring. By the time this happened, the shi were probably members of the noble class (Li 1953, 5). However, whether or not the shi enjoyed a high status in the aristocracy of ancient China remains an open question. Nevertheless, the position remained hereditary well into the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-C.E. 222) and constituted an important part of government bureaucracy. Since a shi received his appointment not by virtue of military accomplishments but because of literacy and intellectual expertise, some modern Chinese scholars such as Liu Shipei (1884-1919), an influential intellectual in the early twentieth century, have argued that the shi were responsible for all scholarly activities in ancient China (T. Chen 1993, 7). Such a claim, exaggerated though it may sound, does seem to have corroboration in history. When the early Han dynasty recruited historians, the government required that the candidates know a minimum of 9,000 characters, a test that many college students in today's China would probably flunk (Hanshu 1962, 1721).

The number of shi began to burgeon in the Western Zhou period (1100-771 B.C.E.), a formative stage of Chinese civilization when an increasingly sophisticated literary culture came to be forged. Historical documents from this period show that the numbers of shi proliferated, reaching as many as a hundred. Most of their titles were distinguished by a prefix, such as zuoshi (left historian), youshi (right historian), taishi (grand historian), dashi (great historian), xiaoshi (small historian), yushi (court his-

torian), and so on.² These prefixes, however, do not tell us much about their specific duties. For instance, we are unsure whether the *zuoshi* was responsible for recording the words and the *youshi* the deeds, or vice versa, because both were documented in early texts.³ Although their responsibilities varied, the *shi* seemed to share a strong commitment to their primary assignment, the straightforward recording of what happened, regardless of political and personal risks. Their most important duty was to record the words and deeds of the king. "When the Prince had any fault," as an ancient source stipulated, "it was the duty of the historian to record it.... If he failed to record these faults, he was guilty of death" (Watson 1958, 73).

Perhaps because of the shi's reputed dedication to his job, there were etymological explanations of the character shi, based on his exemplary, virtuous role. In the Shuowen jiezi, an etymological dictionary composed by Xu Shen (58?-147?) of the Han dynasty, for instance, we find that the word shi refers not only to a scribe but also to the idea of impartiality (zhong) that his work supposedly represents. Because the Shuowen jiezi was accepted as the authoritative lexicon that encapsulated Han scholarship on ancient culture, Xu's explanation stood largely unchallenged until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when there was a strong scholarly interest in studying ancient classical culture, especially the classical and historical texts. What came to be known as "evidential scholarship" (kaozheng xue), the dominant mode of learning of the time, combined the use of philology, phonetics, and history to establish the exact meanings of ancient texts. Some scholars began to dispute Xu Shen's etymology of the word shi. Jiang Yong (1681-1762), for example, argued that the meaning of shi was associated more with the recording tools the scribes used than with the idea of impartiality. Wu Dacheng (1835–1902), a scholar from the late Qing period, supported Jiang's proposition in his critical annotation of the Shuowen jiezi. Having found many appearances of the graph shi in the bronze inscriptions of the Shang period (1600-1100 B.C.E.), which preceded the Western Zhou, Wu believed that the character zhong (the seman-

^{2.} Jin Yufu ([1944] 2000, 16-22) provides a table that lists more than thirty titles of historians found in ancient texts. Liu Jie (1982, 28-32) modifies the table with some additions. More recent studies show that in the oracle-bone inscriptions, shi has more than seventy different titles (T. Chen 1993, 5-6). Adding those in the bronze inscriptions, the number could be well over a hundred (W. Du 1993, 41-42). The best description of the shi in English appears in Hsu Cho-yun and Katheryn Linduff (1988, 244-247).

^{3.} The "Yuzao" chapter of the Classic of Rites states that left historians recorded deeds and right historians recorded words (Liji 1993, 271). However, Ban Gu's Hanshu (Han history) states the opposite: the left historian recorded the words and right historian the deeds (Watson 1958, 73). Scholars of later times, such as Huang Yizhou of the Qing dynasty, pursued this matter with detailed study. Huang agreed with Ban Gu; in addition he pointed out that the left historian was also called neishi (inside historian) and the right historian was called waishi (outside historian); the former was responsible for drafting edicts and decrees for the king and the latter for recording important events and extraordinary natural phenomena (Cang and Wei 1983, 8–9).

tic basis of the character shi) symbolized the bamboo strips onto which the scribes put their writings.

Wu's study anticipated a new trend of classical study in the early twentieth century, as scholars extended their study from written texts to historical artifacts, especially the Shang oracle bones. Naturally, attempts were made to search for the original meanings of shi in the oracular inscriptions. Luo Zhenyu (1866–1940) and Wang Guowei (1877–1927), two prominent scholars of the oracle-bone script, provided new supporting evidence for Wu Dacheng by stating that the shi was an ancient bookkeeper. Wang Guowei (1997) ventured a more specific theory, claiming that the shi played specific ritualistic roles in royal ceremonies. Around the same time, Naitō Konan (also called Naitō Torajirō), an esteemed Japanese sinologist well known, inter alia, for his comprehensive study of the Chinese historiographical traditions, endorsed Luo's and Wang's research while offering his own interpretation. Together with Wang, Naitō noted the shi's role on ceremonial occasions. He contended that in ancient times, military affairs tended to be more important than civil ones, and he believed that the shi's initial assignment involved tallying the number of arrows shot at a ceremony. Thus in one way or another Luo, Wang, and Naitō suggested that a shi was a scribe responsible for administering protocols on important ceremonial occasions. Both Naito (1949, 3-7), as well as Jin Yufu ([1944] 2000, 12), the author of the first complete survey of Chinese historiography in twentieth-century China, explicitly stated that Xu Shen's association of the character shi with the abstract idea of impartiality was not entirely convincing.

Naito's observation about the importance of military affairs in ancient times is an interesting one. Etymologically speaking, the character zhi (knowledge)—a word and idea often associated with the work of the historian—consists of the characters of "arrow" and "mouth." The mouth component on the right indicates the pronunciation of the word, which is common in the construction of Chinese characters, and the arrow on the left suggests its meaning, which can mean "casting" and "directionality" (Hall & Ames 1987, 50). If the notion of knowledge is derived from the figurative trope of archery, it is reasonable to surmise that the shi, scribe/historian, often the most knowledgeable person in ancient society, would be responsible for tallying the shooting of arrows. In recent years Chinese and Japanese scholars have continued the etymological research on the character shi, although their findings are not radically different from those of their predecessors in the early twentieth century. If the shi was a scribe appointed to administer and assist in state and religious ceremonies, it ex-

plains the variety of its titles, for these ceremonies often followed complicated procedures, involving divinatory inquiries, sacrificial rituals, omen interpretations, as well as entering records and bookkeeping.

These ceremonies required not only the presence of scribes/historians, but also the service of the zhu (priests), the wu (shamans) and, a bit later on, the ru (masters of ritual dances and music, who were the proto-Confucians). With their participation, the ceremonies involved invocations, incantations, prayers, as well as ritual dances and music. Shamanism was indeed prevalent in ancient Chinese culture and society; ancient rulers were perhaps shamans who practiced divination and made prognostications pertaining to governance, as evidenced by the oracle-bone inscriptions (K. Chang 1984, 46-47). These ancient kings with shamanic power were aided by assistants, most of whom were zhu, who made up the core of the priestly class at the time (Maspéro 1978, 112). There is evidence that the Duke of Zhou (?-1094 B.C.E.), the peerless paragon of a selfless and virtuous official who inspired Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.), served as the dazhu (great shaman) (Ching 1997, 10-11, 16-17).

Shamanism was not a uniquely Chinese phenomenon; it was common in ancient religious lives everywhere (Ching 1997, 14). What is of interest to us is how shamanistic religious life was related to the emergence of historical consciousness in ancient China. In tracing the origin of the shi, many scholars have found that in early texts, the shi, wu, and zhu worked side by side in religious ceremonies, performing similar duties. In the Classic of Changes (Yijing), for instance, the role of the wu and shi were indistinguishable with regard to the process of divinatory inquiries (Jie Liu 1982, 32-33). The Zuo Commentary mentioned the zhu and shi many times—such as in Xianggong 27th year, Zhaogong 17th year, 18th year, 20th year, and 26th year-in the same breath and context for their ability of invocation and recitation (Zuozhuan 1993, 524, 574, 576, 580, and 593). In addition, there were instances in which the shi independently conducted divination and interpreted its result for the prince (Watson 1989, 210). A more powerful testimony came from Sima Qian (145-87 B.C.E.), arguably the most famous shi in early China, who will figure prominently in the next chapter. While describing the duties his ancestors carried out at the court. Sima Qian professed that what they did was something "close to the work of diviners and priests" (Hanshu 1962, 2732).

Even though the *shi* played roles similar to those of the priests and shamans in religious affairs, their primary duty, as shown in the bronze inscriptions of the Western Zhou period, was to record important events (Hsu & Linduff 1988, 246). One inscription describes an occasion on which a person named Song received his appointment from the king to be the official in charge of various warehouses:

It was the third year, fifth month, after the dying brightness, *jiaxu* (day 11); the king was at the Zhao (Temple) of the Kang Palace. At dawn the king entered the Great Chamber and assumed position. Intendant (zai) Yin to the

^{4.} While these scholars offer different interpretations of the character shi, they all seem to place the shi at the scene of ceremonial occasions. Chen Tongsheng (1993, 3-4) discusses briefly some of the more recent interpretations of the word shi, whereas Inaba Ichirō (1999, 32-33) includes the new research done by Japanese scholars, and Hsu Cho-yun and Katheryn Linduff (1988, 244-247) do the same for Western scholarship on the subject.

right of Song entered the gate and stood in the center of the court. Yinshi received the king's command document. The king called out to Scribe (shi) Guo Sheng to record the command to Song.... (Shaughnessy 1997, 3-4)

Important events included official investitures, as well as military campaigns, even disastrous ones. In another bronze inscription we see that the king attended a hearing about a mutiny among his troops and asked the shi to document it (ibid., 5). These inscriptions corroborate similar references in written documents. The Classic of Documents (Shangshu) recorded instances where the shi were put in charge of preparing the texts for prayers, holding documents, and composing announcements for various state and religious functions (ibid., 5-6). The image of the shi holding documents on those occasions provides, some have argued, an etymological clue to the original meaning of shi (G. Wang 1997; Naitō 1949, 5-7). The bronze inscriptions and the Classic of Documents, the earliest written document in China, clearly showed that the shi were responsible for keeping records, although their responsibilities seem to have entailed multiple functions at the royal court, a phenomenon that began in the Western Zhou period and continued through the Han dynasty (Zongtong Li 1953, 3-4). Indeed, as part and parcel of the growing literate and civil cultures, the shi had become "ubiquitous; everything done at court was now put in writing: the investitures themselves, of course (copies of which were both given to the investee and also apparently stored in the royal archives), but also verdicts in legal cases, maps, and so forth" (Loewe & Shaughnessy 1999, 326). When Confucius passionately registered his admiration for the cultural accomplishments of the Zhou—"The Zhou, as compared with the two previous dynasties—how magnificent is its culture! I follow the Zhou" (Analects 1997, 62)—he was paying tribute to a culture whose development owed much to the instrumental roles played by the shi. Similarly, when the late Herrlee Creel made the keen observation that "we simply have to accept the fact that the Chous were a people who liked to write books" (1937, 255), he paid homage to the work of the shi.

It is quite understandable that Confucius extolled the literary culture of the Western Zhou. As the shi worked with the zhu and wu in state and religious ceremonies, they also came to be connected with the ru, or the proto-Confucians, with whom Confucius was identified. According to Liu Xin (46 B.C.E.?-C.E. 23) in the Han, the origin of the ru could be traced to a government position. In the early twentieth century there was great interest in identifying more specifically what this position was prior to Confucius' time. Hu Shi (1891–1962), for example, examined the social origins of the ru. He and his critics debated whether the ru constituted a social class, as in the case of the wu and the zhu, who possessed special knowledge in ritual ceremonies and skills in ceremonial dances and music (Eno 1990, 190–191; Yao 2000, 18–19). Since the ru's primary duty was the custodianship of the rites of ceremonies and the performance of ritualistic dances, they must have worked along with the wu, the zhu, and the shi. One important

ceremony was the ritual of rainmaking, which was of course "very central to an agricultural society dependent on natural beneficence" so that "the best-known dances are those devoted to rain-making" (Ching 1997, 18-19). While the principal figure in the rainmaking process was the shaman. recent etymological studies of the character ru ("cloud" above "sky") also place ru at the scene, suggesting their similarly important ritualistic role (Yao 2000, 19-20). The ru responsible for praying for natural beneficence were no doubt aided by the shi. The shi were ubiquitous and indispensable in court activities because they boasted knowledge in astrology, which enabled them to provide crucial assistance in and information on divinatory inquiries. They explained celestial phenomena, interpreted omens, offered prophecies, and, most important, designed calendars according to the movement of heavenly bodies. According to the "Yueling" chapter in the Classic of Rites, for instance, the king, on the advice of the dashi (great historian), who kept track of the movements of the sun, moon, and stars, held a ceremony to mark the arrival of spring (Liji 1993, 241). The Zuo Commentary (Zuozhuan 1993, 428, 601) mentions the shi's prophecies of political misfortunes, based on their observations of irregular movements of the stars and planets. Since the shi were responsible for recording what took place in the surrounding world, including celestial phenomena, it was not surprising that they developed knowledge of astrology. Some scholars have even suggested translating shi as "astrologer," besides "scribe" and "historian" (Bauer 1976, 73; T. Chen 1993, 5-14; Cang & Wei 1983, 10-11). The shi's responsibilities definitely included overseeing the movements of heavenly bodies, and compiling and maintaining an accurate calendrical system. This obligation remained unchanged through the early Han dynasty, when Sima Qian continued his family tradition by becoming taishiling (grand historian), whose title is more felicitously translated as the grand astrologer, according to a recent monograph on Sima (Hardy 1999, xi, 18).

The Emergence of History

While the *shi* played religious and ritualistic roles similar to those of priests and shamans, they also assumed a civil position as official scribes and historians of the court (Hsu & Linduff 1988, 244–247). This dual responsibility meant that the *shi* recorded not only significant human events but also extraordinary occurrences in nature. During the Shang and Western Zhou periods, there was not yet a keen awareness of the necessity to distinguish such events as happenings in two different and separate spheres of existence. So there are equally compelling reasons to translate *shi* as either astrologer or historian (Han 1955, 2–3; Schwartz 1985, 353). The *shi* operated within the world view of the Shang and Zhou, which saw the universe in holistic and correlative terms. To the extent that all things and affairs in the universe corresponded with one another, the ruler and the human political realm intimately followed and interacted with the cosmic order.

When assessing the role of the *shi* in the origin of Chinese historiography, it therefore behooves us to bear in mind the cosmological views and beliefs that guided their work. The multifarious responsibilities they bore were a very function and reflection of the organic integration of Heaven, earth, and humanity. The *shi*'s religious duties demanded knowledge of astrology and cosmology, through which they sought to understand the cosmos and interpret the omens and portents that were construed as messages to the human world. On the other hand, as court historians the *shi* prepared documents and preserved archives crucial for the efficient and effective operation of the central government, most notably the imperial edicts and ordinances. There was scarcely the need to distinguish the *shi*'s work as an astrologer from his endeavor as a historian.

In the Classic of Documents, the first classical anthology that collected examples of the shi's work from the Western Zhou and earlier periods, there is much evidence of the fundamental idea that nature and humanity are inextricably related. Nature, as represented by Heaven (tian), is the cosmos that is totally integrated with human beings (ren) on earth, thereby forging an intimate Heaven-humanity relation (tianren guanxi). In this relationship Heaven is the superior entity whose agency and mandate are manifested in various natural phenomena that have a direct bearing on the lives of human beings. As a result, it is imperative for humanity to observe these phenomena, interpret their meanings, and detect Heaven's will. They must abide by the Mandate of Heaven (tianning). In the "Pan'geng" chapter of the Classic of Documents, for instance, King Pan'geng of the Shang is said to have moved the capital five times so as to follow the Mandate of Heaven revealed by oracle bones. In the "Tangshi" and "Taishi" chapters, frequently quoted by Chinese scholars in the past to explain the Shang's succession to the Xia (c. 2205–1600 B.C.E.) and the Zhou's succession to the Shang, possession of the Mandate of Heaven became the major validation of the legitimacy of rulership; lack of the Mandate provided justification for challenging a regime's authority (Shangshu 1993, 120; 123-124; 126-127). In the "Dagao" chapter, it is Heaven who supposedly supported the young King Cheng of the Western Zhou, with the assistance of the Duke of Zhou, in his precarious campaign against his rebellious and powerful uncles, despite the warnings of his senior advisors. King Cheng divined the Mandate of Heaven by means of the oracular turtle shell, and in its name he rebuked his uncommitted ministers:

Stop! I the young son do not dare to disregard the command of the Lord on High, Heaven was beneficent to King Wen, raising up our little country of Zhou, and it was turtle-shell divination that King Wen used, succeeding to receive this mandate. Now Heaven will be helping the people; how much more so should it be turtle-shell divination that I too use. Wuhu! Heaven is brightly awesome—it helps our grand foundation. (Loewe & Shaughnessy 1999, 314)

Significantly, King Cheng not only used the Mandate of Heaven, received via turtle-shell divination, to justify his campaign and rally his people, but he also appealed to historical precedent to buttress his call to action. Interpretation of history thus complemented divination of the will of Heaven, an important conjunction discussed below. Suffice it to say here, this conflation of the historical and the divine constituted the core of the correlative world view—as the correspondence between the world of human events and the world of nature came to be firmly established, the world of nature was increasingly construed in anthropomorphic terms.

This correlative mode of thinking pervaded the ancient Chinese perception of their world, shaping cosmology in the most foundational way. In the words of John Henderson, "[c]orrelative thought is the most basic ingredient of Chinese cosmology," which "draws systematic correspondences among aspects of various orders of reality or realms of the cosmos, such as the human body, the body politic, and the heavenly bodies" (Henderson 1984, 1). In the *Classic of Odes (Shijing)*, an ancient classic from the Western Zhou period, many poems acknowledge the correspondence between human misfortunes and natural dislocations. In describing a devastating drought, for example, the poem "Yunhan" registers the sadness.

The drought has become so severe,
That it cannot be stopped.
Glowing and burning,
We have no place.
The great mandate is about at an end,
Nothing to look ahead to or back upon.
The host of dukes and past rulers
Does not help us;
As for father and mother and the ancestors,
How can they bear to treat us so? (Loewe & Shaughnessy 1999, 336)

In what way was this correlative mode of thought related to the historical consciousness in ancient China? We have noted that King Cheng's interpretation of the Mandate of Heaven employed historical precedents to bolster his argument, which suggests that he might have been reminded of historical examples by some of his court historians. By the middle part of the Western Zhou period, court scribes and historians appeared to have greatly expanded their role in the sociopolitical arena. Many of them might have actually composed those elegiac poems in the Classic of Odes that underscored the correlative idea (Inaba 1999, 30). The authors of these songs came from the corps of scribes (shi), who "moved from singing about the rituals to the ancestors to singing about the deeds of the ancestors themselves" (Loewe & Shaughnessy 1999, 333). In singing about ancestral deeds, that is, happenings of the past, the historians-cum-scribes also promoted and disseminated the anthropocosmic idea of the interaction