Review Articles

Reflections on Reflections on Mirrors

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Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China. By On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005. Pp. xxiii + 306. $55.00.

This is an ambitious but useful book, covering from the beginning of China's historical consciousness to the end of the Qing dynasty, when Western historiography was introduced and largely displaced the Chinese tradition. The authors are ambitious, their audacity to be congratulated, but they have the qualification for the task. What we have thus is a comprehensive but interpretative survey of the history of China's historiographic tradition. It reflects the current state of scholarship and will prove to be useful for many years to come. Both authors are relatively young, trained in both Chinese and Western historical philosophy; they are thus positioned to go beyond the earlier sinologists' appropriation of the Chinese tradition that often presented China in a way that both the Chinese and the Westerners would find strange. This book hopefully will open up a new vista that will attract both camps, and establish a genuine dialogue. But most importantly, it fills a lacuna of a very important field in Chinese studies.

The first important distinction of this book is that it is written with an attempt to rescue Chinese historical thinking from the obscuring misunderstanding of it, or of any historical writing in general. While the authors do not deny that history is often truth imagined and is representation or reconstruction by historians to fit their contemporary self-image, they nonetheless question whether this pessimistic view can properly be applied to the Chinese tradition (see pp. xii–xiii and the last sentence of the book in p. 264). They also deny that the imperious power of moral interpretation necessarily renders Chinese intellectual experiences as ahistorical (p. xii). Here and there, the authors correct past interpretations, and are not afraid of proposing new ones. As we go on, we shall have a chance to examine many of the new views. The overall positive tone is welcomed, although the authors do admit that ultimately comparative historiography makes it imperative that certain views that we adopt as commonplace because of modern Western influences are indeed not found in traditional Chinese historical thinking (see p. 262).

The second important distinction is that this book introduces a significant amount of recent studies published in Chinese (including those from Taiwan) scholarship. This

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is very important, because Western scholars have not benefited as much in the past from the scholarship of these places. Works by Du Weiyun 杜維運, Huang Qihua 黃啟華, Qu Lindong 瞿林東, He Guanbiao 何冠彪 (Ho Koon Piu), etc. have provided us with a better understanding of the contributions of such as Zhao Yi 趙翼, Qian Daxin 錢大昕, or the Qianlong 乾隆 Emperor's interest and meddling in the editing of Zhu Xi's 朱熹 *Outline and Details of the Comprehensive Mirror* 資治通鑑綱目.[1] This is important, and can only be done by people who have versed themselves in more than one scholarly or intellectual tradition.

The third distinction is that the authors do not dodge using Western terminology or conception to interpret Chinese ideas. Sometimes the bold conceptualization may cause problems, but overall, the results have been quite positive. One must wonder how impoverished we would have been if the authors refrain from the attempts in comparison—I use this word with caveat, but obviously such conceptions as "anachronism," "historicism," and evolutionary views ("evolutionism"), are helpful and should be encouraged. The authors are quite well trained in Western historiography and thinking, and therefore capable of using them to illuminate the sometimes fuzzy ideas that were tentative and suggestive, awaiting to develop to their full potentials. I will examine some of them in this essay.

I will now list some of the more important themes, and discuss them critically so as to assess the potentials of them and the accomplishments of the authors.

The first is the authors' attempts to describe Chinese ideas in exact, but in reality often only approximately catching, English vocabulary. Rendering Chinese ideas in English is always a challenge, and the willingness to introduce new ways of explanation or translation often risks the danger of expanding or breaking the boundary of the original meaning. An immediately evident characteristic that emerges from the book is that the authors are inclined to using rather difficult, though invariably impressive and elegant, English expressions or statements that are not more than rhetorical. The expressions or sentences often convey meanings that are overly broad and slippery. Sometimes I wonder if they really achieve the explanatory or interpretative function. Examples are plentiful: "Sima [Qian] was determined to establish the authority of history itself" (p. 62); "an abiding interest in finding human explanations for what had happened in the past" (p. 129);[2] "As a literatus who viewed his own time and state with satisfaction, confident in the glorious nature of the culture of the

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1 Other examples include such as the revisionist discussion on Wei Shou 魏收 (p. 89), relying on Qing and now Du Weiyun's studies, showing that Liu Zhiji's 劉知幾 slandering assessment of him might have been based on misinformation. Wei Shou's historiography, much approved by historians of Buddhism, has been well known, but historians of historiography have only recently paid a greater attention to the issues. I will return to this later (see note 40). The study, relying heavily on Yang Yanqiu's 楊豔秋 recent works, on the so-called "san'an" has also been interesting and useful (pp. 198–201).

2 This is used to characterize Du You's 杜佑 historiography. One wonders if Du You was the first to do so, or even the most prominent among Chinese historians to be "human-centred."

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day, the Five Dynasties could only appear inferior and brutish" (p. 141);[3] "moral aesthetics" (p. 261); "In one common voice they affirmed that the present could always be redeemed, and the future always held hope" (p. 261),[4] etc.

Remarks like these, and others, show that sometimes the authors get carried away by speculation. Most speculations are of course innocent or innocuous, but accumulatively, they reflect a degree of carelessness, sacrificing serious investigation for the convenience of rhetoric or common sense. This can be annoying, especially if the speculation is disproportionate because it may hurt the attempts to bring about new understanding of Chinese thinking. For example, to use "causal relations" for Sima Qian's "xiangyin 相因" (which literally means "continuing and succeeding," p. 157)[5] is, I think, unnecessary, and to consider the idea of "guirang 貴讓" (p. 69) as indicative of Sima Qian's Daoist tendency can be vulnerable. Indeed, one must look elsewhere for any suggestive causal relation hints. Let me propose one: Sima Qian 司馬遷, in describing Su Qin's 蘇秦 diplomatic endeavour, remarked, "Su Qin having had completed the alliance returned to Zhao and was granted the title of Wu'an Knight by Count Su of Zhao. He therefore announced his accomplishment [in bringing the six states into alliance] to Qin. Qin troops thereafter did not advance beyond Hangu Pass for fifteen years." This remark suggests a causal connection between Su's success in forming the alliance among the six states to oppose the Qin and the "consequential" refrain by the Qin from moving against them. Nearly one thousand years later, when Sima Guang 司馬光 composed his *Comprehensive Mirror* 資治通鑑, he, by examining the sequence of events, found out that such a causal connection did not actually exist, and therefore struck out the last sentence. He commented that the Qin actually attacked Zhao immediately after Su's announcement. This shows that a consciousness of "causal relations" was at work in Chinese historical tradition. Although both Sima's did not formulate any precise language for it, clearly, they were aware of its significance in historical narrative, that sequential narrative constitutes, suggestively, a kind of causal relationship.[6] In short,

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3 This refers to Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, who had only recently failed in the 1044 reform attempt, together with Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹, to effect comprehensive political and economic changes.

4 One wonders if this is indeed characteristic of Chinese historical thinking, especially in view of the fact that we generally think that its most important idea is that of degeneration (the authors' preferred expression is "caducity," see p. xix) and spiral view of time in the concept of "three epochs." The "degenerative" view of history is not really discussed in the book. The idea of "spiral view of time" is also not discussed by the authors when they deal with the "three epochs."

5 The expression appears in Sima Qian's *Shiji* 史記 only three (or, strictly speaking, two) times and none of them could be read as "causal relations." I dare say that this expression as such had never been used that way in the two thousand years after Sima. I by no means deny that there was the idea of "causation" in Chinese intellectual tradition, Buddhist idea of "causation" having notably contributed to it.

6 *Xinjiao* Zizhi tongjian *zhu* 新校資治通鑑注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), vol. 2, p. 72.

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it would seem to me that to find "causation thinking" needs a more in-depth analysis of texts than relying on seemingly suggestive remarks by historians. In this particular case, to invoke "xiangyin" as a proof unfortunately is wrong-headed.

Similarly, the statement that Ban Gu 班固 changed Sima Qian's nomenclature of "benji本紀" into "diji帝紀" is wrong (p. 72). Ban Gu actually continued to call his part of "annals" *benji*. He only more strictly reserved that part of his *Han History* 漢書 for legitimate Han emperors, thus distinguishing himself from Sima Qian in the definition of *benji*. And yet, it would be inappropriate to say that he changed the nomenclature. Incidentally, the acceptance and recording of posthumous titles of emperors in historical writing did not begin with Ban Gu, as seemingly suggested by the authors. Sima Qian did faithfully write into his *Historical Records* 史記 the posthumous names of Han's deceased emperors.

The use of *guirang* (loosely and somewhat irresponsibly translated by the authors as "readiness to relinquish political power") to describe Sima Qian's philosophy behind the famous chapter of "Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊" and link it to Sima's Daoist inclination is also inappropriate (p. 69). First, this expression *guirang* is not Sima Qian's, as the authors seem to suggest. Moreover, I do not see how Sima Qian was an eclectic thinker and that he was a Daoist, consciously following its philosophy. There is also little evidence that *guirang* is a Daoist idea. There is no denial that Sima Tan 司馬談, living in a time dominated by Daoist political philosophy, gave preeminence to Daoist thinking. But most scholars agree that Sima Qian's moral scepticism, as revealed so clearly in the "Boyi and Shuqi" chapter, was perfectly within the parameter of Confucian ethical thinking.[7]

Likewise, to say that Ouyang Xiu did not include "monographs" (*zhi*志) in the *New History of the Five Dynasties*新五代史 is to deny both conceptually and structurally the "examinations or surveys" (*kao*考) as its equivalent (p. 140). It is true that Ouyang Xiu was critical of some of the conventional monographs, especially those on the five phases, or unnatural phenomena (calamities and strange events), but this did not preclude him from composing two "examinations" ("surveys") on the observation of astronomical (or heavenly) phenomena (*sitian*司天) and on the administration of local government (*zhifang*職方). Most commentators consider the two "examinations" as equal to the traditional "shu 書" (Sima Qian), or "zhi" (Ban Gu), etc. This at least was the opinion of Sun Yi 孫奕 (?–after 1205) of Song.[8] The authors could have mentioned, and preferably discussed, the purpose and significance of the two "examinations."

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7 For recent studies on Daoist historical thinking in the Han, one may wish to consult Wu Huaiqi 吳懷祺, ed., *Zhongguo shixue sixiang tongshi* 中國史學思想通史, vol. 2 (on Qing and Han, written by Wang Gaoxin 汪高鑫)(Hefei 合肥: Huangshan shushe 黃山書社, 2002), pp. 118–48. The author does not suggest that Sima Qian was influenced by Daoist ideology.

8 See his *Lüzhai shi'er bian* 履齋示兒編 (Taipei: Shijie shuju 世界書局, 1963), *juan* 卷 7, pp. 63–64.

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The problems discussed above come by and large from speculations on the part of the authors.[9] The conjectures are not serious flaws, and actually can stimulate readers for more in-depth thinking. However, linguistic differences between Chinese and English do sometimes cause misunderstanding that can be troublesome, and this sometimes happens in this book, especially when the authors themselves do not come up with clear definition.

The use of Western conceptions to explain Chinese ideas that the Chinese had not analysed and concretized into a conception can also be tricky. The expression, anachronism, comes to mind immediately. Perhaps the first person to make this expression famous as an important way of understanding historical thinking is Myron Gilmore, whose 1959 article on the Renaissance conception of historical lessons is a classical statement on how "sense of anachronism" constitutes an important modern Western historical idea.[10] I have myself used it to characterize Song historical thinking, arguing that they had developed an incipient understanding of it.[11] Ng and Wang have used "anachronism" several times (see Index, plus p. 158), to suggest that it could, as I understand it, give the Chinese people a sense of the past that was not "filtered through the lenses of classicality and caducity," but that was historicist (p. xix),[12] "modern" (p. 135), "evolutionary" (p. 187), and even conscious of "the inexorable flux of time" and the futility of "inherited interpretations" (p. 220). In short, the authors think that the sense of anachronism could be found in various times and individuals through Chinese history. Awareness of anachronism

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9 Speculations are not necessarily bad or wrong; the problem is that speculative remarks are often so general, that we are never sure if they are correct. They are often more rhetorical than substantial. For example, the authors say that "history and merit examinations proved to be the enduring twin legacy of the Tang, embraced faithfully by later regimes" is, generally speaking, not wrong, but how does one prove that it is correct? Nobody has ever said that the Tang invented "merit examinations" (this itself is a badly constructed expression); still fewer think that the Tang perfected the institution. As for the tradition of compiling official standard histories, the authors seem to be not entirely certain about whether it was a good system (see pp. 116–17), but by the use of "legacy," the authors seem to be giving it a positive spin.

10 Myron Gilmore, "The Renaissance Conception of the Lessons of History," in *Facets of the Renaissance,* ed. W. H. Werkmeister (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1959). This work has since been republished in various anthologies.

11 Thomas H. C. Lee, "New Directions in Northern Sung Historical Thinking (960–1126)," in *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-Cultural Perspective,* ed. Q. Edward Wang and Georg G. Iggers (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), pp. 59–87.

12 This point is quite difficult to understand. Unfortunately the authors never revisited it. Perhaps what the authors are saying is that degenerative (caducitive) or classicist views of history do not lead to historical reflection. See also pp. 152–53 for some discussion on the distinction between historicism (and hence anachronism) and classicism. However, I think a careful distinction should actually be made between historicism and anachronism. See later.

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is admittedly a part of our common modern heritage in thinking about history, the authors therefore (perhaps unconsciously) take an approving attitude towards it, and show that in different times and individuals, it emerged, if haphazardly, as the informing principle of their thinking about history.

However, beyond pointing out the fact that throughout the long Chinese history this consciousness has remained only incipient, or tentative, and that even in the Song, it remained a still-born,[13] it would be beneficial also to discuss whether sense of anachronism was an underlying principle that had persistently or consistently informed Chinese thinkers, or, put it in another way, the dominant theme. Recognizing that the idea of "anachronism" could be more than a teleological and interpretative norm, one must also consider whether it was ever developed into a kind of problematic or discourse (*tropes*) that people of different times engaged. The authors seem to have shunned this possibility. They seem content with the fact that it was like sparks of inspiration that lit up here and there in the Chinese history of historiography and that none of them grew into a bright torch that could illuminate the routes that could lead to "better" historical understanding. Then the authors were not saying that "sense of anachronism" was a distinctive "Chinese" historical idea. In any case, the authors have chosen to use the idea flexibly, evidently to avoid overstatement.

Another word is "historicism," briefly referred to above. I also have misgivings about its use,[14] though it is difficult for the authors to refrain completely from using it. However, it would seem to me that the authors could have used it more consistently or cautiously. The authors admit that cross-cultural comparison inevitably leads to using Western concepts to appropriate Chinese ideas, but historicism is a word loaded with a very wide range of meanings, and therefore requires all the more careful redefinition or clarification. The most important thing is that most historians consider that it began only in the Renaissance times, and among French scholars.[15] Like the consciousness of anachronism, it is a teleological conception. When used in the Chinese context, its developmental aspect has to be excluded, or the readers may be at a loss why Chinese historical thinking had its historicist moments for so many times. In fact, one questions whether some occasional remarks by individual Chinese historians on the nature of history could really be construed as "historicist." The authors have used "historicism" primarily in connection with *daoxue* 道學 thinkers, such as Zhu Xi (p. 159), Hao Jing 郝經, Xu Heng 許衡 (p. 192), and Dai Zhen 戴震 (pp. 246–47) to mean, not entirely convincingly, that it was a willingness to use examples from history to better understand the classics. This is too general a definition. It is often said, "history is philosophy teaching by examples," but true historicists may not like it.

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[13] I have given an example of how Sima Guang used a Song expression to describe a Han phenomenon and was criticized by Zhu Xi in my article referred to in note 10 above.

[14] The authors must have decided completely to reject the Popperian meaning of this word.

[15] Donald Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship, Language, Law, and History in the French Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

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In other words, the authors could have given the individualist aspect of historicist thinking a fuller consideration, because this aspect of historicism is an important component of the post-modernist challenges to the Enlightenment thinking. In other words, it seems that the authors have used historicism as primarily a tentative awareness of the need to concretize universalism, forgetting that its individualist aspect is perhaps more relevant and easy to understand for the readers. Can any critical approach to the classics be considered as historicist if the criticism is not founded on individualist thrust? Perhaps some late Ming thinkers come nearest to this. Their studies of history, using examples taken from historical records to critique Confucian ideology, come close to historicism as we understand it. The attitude goes beyond what Chen Liang 陳亮 had advocated in his debates with Zhu Xi.[16] The real historicist moment in Chinese history is when Li Zhi 李贄 brought Confucian thinking to task, using historical experiences as his bullets. In the words of the authors, paraphrasing Zhu Xi, Chen Liang "sought principles exclusively in the diachronic [*sic*] universe of historical events, and . . . asserted that values were relative and contingent upon changing contexts" (p. 160). It is ironic then to see that Zhu Xi is characterized by the authors as historicist (and with a sense of anachronism, pp. 159, 163) while Chen Liang is not (who, according to the authors, was in favour of some kind of "diachronicism"). I think students of Chinese historiography may in the end conclude, differently from the authors, that certain historicist thinking had begun to emerge in the Song, but found its fullest (if still nascent) expression in the late Ming writings of such as Li Zhi and perhaps also Fang Yizhi 方以智.[17]

An important conception that has served the authors very well in defining the characteristics of Chinese historiography is the so-called "multiple narratives." It is Grant Hardy who first used this post-modernist conception to explain an alleged trait of Chinese historiography. Hardy might have been inspired by the late Yang Lien-sheng's 楊聯陞 famous 1961 article on Chinese official historical writing. Yang, in turn, got the idea from Su Xun 蘇洵 who opined that Sima Qian employed a writing method in that certain facts that might contradict the unifying theme of the narrative at hand were left recorded in other parts of the book.[18] The authors now use it not only for Sima Qian, but find it a recurring method

16 The famous debates between Zhu Xi and Chen Liang in the twelfth century remind me of the debates between Herder and Kant. Someone may wish to do a comparative investigation about the two famous debates. For the Zhu-Chen debates, see Hoyt Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism, Chen Liang's Challenge to Chu Hsi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

17 Li Zhi is characterized by the authors as espousing a sense of anachronism (p. 220), but nothing of his possible historicism is mentioned. Fang Yizhi is not studied in this book. This kind of conclusion may sound irritating from orthodox Confucian view, but Zhu Xi, as I understand him, is a man of kindred spirit and perhaps visions.

18 Su Xun, "Shi lun 史論" (on histories), part 2, in Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊 and Liu Lin 劉琳, eds., *Quan Song wen* 全宋文, vol. 22 (Chengdu 成都: Ba-Shu shushe 巴蜀書社, 1992), *juan* 925 (8), pp. 139–40.

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throughout the Chinese history of historical writing. In Hardy's opinion, this is a kind of Chinese post-modernist way of demonstrating the diversity of Chinese historical experience. I am just wondering if this method has been indeed concretely recognized, let alone established, in Chinese historical writing, and that Chinese historians employed it to show that truth was multiple (pp. 42, 62, 67, *passim*). I cannot be sure, I am just uncomfortable with the claim.

Let me turn to yet another conception, that of evolution. This word seems to have been used interchangeably with change, especially that which occurs over time. The idea of evolution is of course a modern one, and is indeed also used in the West as equivalent to historical change or even progress. However, most Western historians use "evolution" with a degree of caveat; they usually limit the use of it to characterizing the historiography of "pre-history," namely, the time when there were no written records. It is well know that evolutionary view of history often implies the idea of progress, even though early Greek evolutionary interpretation of history, by Aristotle or his student Decaearchus, did not necessarily carry that implication (Aristotle held a kind of cyclic view of evolution in interpreting the development of political institutions, and Decaearchus actually even spoke of a kind of degenerative "historical evolution"). The same could be said of the Chinese tradition. Any careful reader of *Mirroring the Past* will find that the authors usually associate evolutionary view of history in China with Legalist (*Fajia*法家) thinkers (Han Fei韓非 in p. 50, Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元in pp. 129–31 and Du You in pp. 128–33). Zheng Qiao 鄭樵(p. 158) and Ma Duanlin 馬端臨may also have espoused evolutionary interpretation of ancient human history (p. 187), though they are not usually considered as Legalists.[19] Ma is nonetheless an interesting figure. Intellectually no less enigmatic than the nineteenth century Gong Zizhen 龔自珍(pp. 253–55), Ma's fondness for institutional history makes him sound like a Legalist thinker. Therefore, the authors allow the readers to think that evolutionary view of history had been by and large shared by institutional historians of Legalist inclination, especially those authors of the *tong*通 compendia. It is well known that Han Fei and the Legalists in general shared a forward-looking (progressive) view of human history. It is then useful to return to evolutionism to see whether the conception means "progress" and was more than merely a different name for "change." If evolutionism is more general than

19 In Ma Duanlin, the stage in that the "*guang* 光 ([three] lights) and *yue* 嶽 (hill or mountain peaks) were not yet separated" has been understood by the authors as a cosmogonic notion of the stage of undifferentiated "brightness and darkness" (reminding the readers of the Biblical teaching of creation). This is based on Hok-lam Chan's 陳學霖 article on Ma in *Yüan Thoughts: Chinese Thought and Religion under the Mongols,* ed. Hok-lam Chan and Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 27–83. However, I think this is an unwarranted and expanded reading of the original text. *Yue* cannot be construed to mean "darkness." It is literally mountain peak, and by implication earth. Having said all of these, to say that Ma definitely espoused an evolutionary view of history can be tricky. Recent interpretations of him coming out of China have not been as emphatic as earlier ones on Ma's evolutionism.

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the belief in decipherable stages of historical development, then it would be inappropriate to say that Han Fei was a champion of evolutionist historical philosophy.[20] He made no attempt to conjecture the different stages of the evolution of human society. The idea of "evolutionary view of history" as a conception as used in this book therefore calls for some clarification. Do the authors mean that evolutionary views imply progress, or do they mean by it the attempt to discover the developmental stages in human history? When the authors say that Chinese historians always "affirmed that the present could always be redeemed, and the future always held hope" (quoted above), are they saying that the Chinese upheld the idea of progress? Did the Chinese have any sense of the tragic or the grotesque?

The employment of Western historical ideas is inevitable, and can be used intelligently and beneficially. The authors have done an admirably decent job in bringing them to bear upon Chinese historical thinking, and to help us better understand the specific times and individuals when certain potentially powerful ideas emerged as a unifying principle to direct the orientation or course of development.

Let me now raise a couple of more substantial questions: the first is whether "historians" (*shi* 史) really played such a major role in the formation of the Chinese civilization. In their enthusiasm to show that the Chinese is a people of history, the authors have exaggerated the importance of *shi*. In their lengthy discussion on the etymology, duties and activities of the *shi,* the authors have said things that are difficult to prove, and have even made factual errors.[21] Exaggerations are like suggesting that the *Classic of Odes* 詩經 was an anthology compiled by *shi* (p. 10),[22] lumping *shi* and *zhu* 祝 in terms of their roles and duties (pp. 6–7, 11),[23] or magnifying Confucius's role in the

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[20] To be fair to the authors, Han Fei is said to have been "convinced of historical evolution." The authors did not specifically say that he had espoused any theory of the stages of development in history.

[21] The Duke of Zhou 周公 was not a *Dazhu* 大祝 (I think this should more properly be pronounced as *Taizhu*), as stated in p. 5. It is his son, Boqin 伯禽, who was. That a Han child should be able to know 9,000 characters (p. 2) perhaps should better be understood as to have "recited" than "known" that many characters.

[22] There is no denial that since *shi* were rising in importance in the mid-Western Zhou, when they probably also played the role of singers in rituals, and thus composers of poems that eventually made up the main corps of the *Classic of Odes*. However, we know really little about this matter, and it is difficult to suggest, as the authors seem to, that they *alone* by this time were the poets, and they *alone* introduced the correlation ideas. It would also be preposterous to suggest that the *shi* were the authors of the *Odes*.

[23] The duties to "explain celestial phenomena, interpret omens, offer prophecies, and, most important, design calendars" (p. 7), and to "prepare the prayers, design the divinatory inquiries, and announce the results" (p. 11) are all attributed to the *shi*. By mixing the roles of shamans with *shi,* the *shi* became the originator and bearer of all cultural accomplishments, "reorganizing, modifying, and synthesizing this culture" (p. 11).

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editing of the *Book of History* 尚書 and the *Classic of Odes*.[24] The authors almost come close to saying that Confucius was a scribe (*shi,* p. 10). He was, instead, a gentleman.[25] The rise of the "gentleman" was a critical part of the rise of historical consciousness in ancient China, but not all gentlemen were scribes/historians and vice versa.

The problem of this part stems from the zeal to prove the importance of historical consciousness and historians in the formation period of the Chinese civilization. The authors perhaps carried it a bit too far.

A second problem is the rise of humanist awareness that has characterized ancient Chinese intellectual history. Historians of ancient China now agree that there was reform in the middle of the Western Zhou, and that the *shi* likely played a prominent role.[26] However, the reform was more institutional than intellectual. Shaughnessy, who pioneered this subject-matter, has not really argued that intellectual transformation or transvaluation happened then. Therefore, the association of *shi* to the rise of historical consciousness at that time remains an "open question." I rather think that the intellectual breakthrough occurred in the early Spring and Autumn period, culminating in Confucius, and this is a commonly accepted knowledge. In reading *Mirroring the Past,* however, we get a feeling that the process was strongly associated with the Duke of Zhou: "into the theory of the Mandate of Heaven, the Duke of Zhou had inserted history and thus human agency . . . ," say the authors (p. 13). This is in contrast to the characterization of Confucius as fundamentally a "transmitter" ("to transmit the culture of the Zhou," p. 15). It is true that Confucius deemed himself a "transmitter," but scholars of course prefer to believe that he gave the Zhou civilization the needed renaissance; he infused in it the interpretative strength to survive the next twenty-five hundred years. Without Confucius, the transformation that had started with the Duke of Zhou would lead to nowhere. Therefore the statement that Confucius "placed more [!] emphasis on human agency" (p. 15) seems to suggest that he was only continuing what the Duke of Zhou had started, and that he was indeed not more than a transmitter. This belittles the pivotal position he occupied in this most important chapter of China's intellectual formation.

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24 To use "compilation" to characterize Confucius's role in the "xiu 修" of the two books leads the readers to think that it was Confucius who authored or put together these two works. Not even the most ardent followers of traditional scholarship on Confucius literally accept the belief that Confucius actually "compiled" (authored) the Confucian canons.

25 Some more discussion on gentleman *shi* will come later.

26 See Michael Loewe and Edward Shaughnessy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 323–28, 333. Please note that Shaughnessy, the author of this chapter, does not touch upon the role of *shi* in this reform, but only hint at it.

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My feeling is that this issue deserves a very careful thinking, so that the emergence of a humanist worldview, enabling the rise of historical consciousness in ancient China could be definitively described. The efforts by the authors are important, but they have not entirely sorted this through. Nonetheless, they have provided a foundation for further and more extensive examination.

A third issue that I think also deserves more thinking is the idea of "shilu 實錄" (truthful records/history; "veritable record" in the authors' translation) advanced by Liu Zhiji and Han Yü 韓愈 (pp. 125–26). This is a relatively simple or even simplistic ideal, and had been easily said than done. The authors not only endorse this idea, but also seem to suggest that this had influenced later practice of historiography, challenging Gardner's less sanguine appraisal.[27] It is true that Liu Zhiji was not only advocating "veritable records," but was also fiercely critical of the practice of "concealment." He was consistent. However, the idea of "historical criticism" which of course is an intimately related idea to truthful presentation of historical facts seems to me to be still a relatively new idea in Liu Zhiji's time. The first time "historical criticism" is mentioned in this book is about Pei Songzhi 裴松之 who took a critical approach to Chen Shou's 陳壽 *Three Kingdoms* 三國志. For Pei Songzhi, factuality was what made history "a useful mirror for the advancement in government," the authors say (p. 107). Naturally, one does not have to accept that the very definition of history as a dependable and useful knowledge is factuality. Pei Songzhi was critical of the "concealments" that Chen Shou here and there used. But "factuality" is more complicated than the missing of information because of "concealments"; it involves arbitrary selection of materials for inclusion. I do not see that Pei Songzhi's historical criticism included this meaning. In general, my reservation notwithstanding, most historians, long before Pei Songzhi, considered it natural, and even a definition, that historians should write down what actually happened.[28]

The authors say that Liu Zhiji's admonition was faithfully heeded by Sima Guang, seemingly suggesting that Sima's work lived up to the ideal of "veritable records." Whether

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27 Charles S. Gardner, *Chinese Traditional Historiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938).

28 It is in this light that the authors' rather creative interpretation, hitherto not so articulated by other historians, of Dong Hu 董狐 (pp. 27–28) is significant. The authors should be commended for their ingeniousness. But perhaps this says something so blazingly outrageous in the Chinese tradition, that is, historians ought to record only the fact that carries moral meaning, or otherwise the fact is not worth written into historical books. See below on Ouyang Xiu's remark on why morally irrelevant matters need not be written into history. What Dong recorded was not fact, but the interpretation of it; traditional Chinese historians seem to have been little bothered by the problem of truthfulness or authenticity.

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Sima did is questionable.[29] Cen Zhongmian 岑仲勉, an erudite twentieth-century historian of the Sui and Tang dynasties, in his *Questions on the Records of Sui and Tang Parts of the Comprehensive Mirror* 通鑑隋唐紀比事質疑 lists more than six hundred items of major as well as minor errors.[30] He pointed out that, while most errors are minor and innocuous, arising from negligence, some were so glaring that they unmistakably show Sima had his private prejudice (especially against Li Deyu 李德裕, in pp. 296–97, 300–303, 310–12. See also p. 256, and p. 266, etc. See also pp. 206–7, where, in reference to Zhang Jiuling 張九齡, Sima abandoned his long-standing practice of referring to the deceased persons their officially awarded posthumous names). Cen further pointed out that Sima was particularly weak in institutional matters (pp. 203, 233, *passim*). In other words, the problem of what Liu Zhiji described as "crooked brush" (*qubi* 曲筆, p. 125) was quite real in the *Comprehensive Mirror*. Actually, what Sima did was more than mere "concealment."

My point is that Sima Guang, while meticulous in his examination and criticism of first-hand and second-hand sources, was preoccupied with the political and moral lessons that were an integrated part of didactic historiography. This led him to ignore institutional (and ethnic) matters, and let him construct a historical narrative marred by mistakes and even forgery.

Ouyang Xiu, earlier than Sima Guang, had already pointed out that while historically veritable records are highly important, historians did not necessarily have to write into their narratives matters that were of no moral or didactic value.[31] Ouyang's attitude perhaps was not entirely wrong, as historians have been perennially confronted with how best to present causal relations (and other narrative concerns such as periodization) that can

[29] The authors are quite positive about Sima's very pragmatic or realistic approach to issues related to legitimation (*zhengtong* 正統), and the adoption of era names, etc. They have not spent as much time examining Sima's textual criticism, which had been characterized by many people, based on Pulleyblank's article which quotes his compilation method, as that of "scissors and paste" (following R. G. Collingwood). See Edwin G. Pulleyblank, "Chinese Historical Criticism: Liu Chih-chi and Ssu-ma Kuang," in *Historians of China and Japan,* ed. W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleyblank (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 112–68.

[30] Cen Zhongmian, *Tongjian Sui Tang ji bishi zhiyi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964). It is too bad that this important work has been ignored by historians other than specialists in Sui and Tang history. I must hasten to add that this book's findings notwithstanding, and here I argue, it should not diminish our respect for Sima's important contributions, especially in the treatment of matters of only symbolic or ritualistic significance, and in matters of natural phenomena traditionally recorded with great care and fanfare as auguries or omens. Incidentally, Ng and Wang have carefully pointed out the former, but have not mentioned the latter.

[31] See my article cited in note 11 above. See also my "Skepticist Reconstruction and Sagely Truth in Contradiction: Song Attempts to Draw the Boundaries of the Historical Antiquity." To be published in Dieter Kuhn, ed., *Chinese Conceptions of the Antiquity* (Heidelberg, Germany: Edition Forum, 2008). Note that the same attitude is uttered by Zeng Gong 曾鞏, a contemporary of Sima's. See p. 151 of *Mirroring the Past*.

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show moral forces at work (or not at work) so that historical context could be precisely presented to illuminate the nexus of events. But for Ouyang and Sima, such concerns were of only secondary importance. Rather, historians should hold it as their supreme duty the morally correct and factually reliable presentation of events. This entails both factuality and correct narrative. It is important to note that Ouyang's concern for didactic correctness was so widely shared by traditional Chinese historians that one wonders if problems of "concealment," conjecture, or even outright forgery ("crooked brush") ever bothered even the most creative mind in Chinese tradition. This remark notwithstanding, I still concur with the authors that, from Liu Zhiji to the late eleventh century, the problem of "concealment" (if not "crooked brush") had indeed arisen to trouble the mind and heart of serious historians, and the Northern Song historians' incipient interests in the ideas of *shi* (circumstances, potentials; written on by Su Xun and Su Che 蘇轍, among others) and *quan* 權 (expediency; Zhu Xi made many comments on this idea) were a part of this mental torment. By the time Zhu Xi became imagined as the most profound and influential historical philosopher, the wrestle with the notion of "veritable records" had come its full circle, and later historians no longer considered that truthful history by itself had any intrinsic value.

In other words, from about the eighth to eleventh centuries, there were some pivotal changes and many a kindred mind could be said to be engaging the independent value of historical inquiry as serving only as a factual evidence of the perennial *dao*. Their preliminary search of the possibility of history having its own intrinsic value, verged on the revolutionary in the history of Chinese historiography. Indeed, it was at this time that sense of anachronism and a serious attempt to historicize changes (and even individuality) emerged. However, be that as it may, it did not go beyond the desire to fulfil the purpose of didactic and moralist historiography. In the following, when I discuss the nature of "annals vs. chronicles," we shall see how difficult it was for traditional Chinese historians to use "history" and narrativity to overcome the moral use of pure anecdotes and simple facts.

Let me now turn to my last point. This concerns the relationship between annals and chronicles. The authors use the two expressions interchangeably. This is not entirely wrong as far as traditional Chinese categorization of historical writings is concerned. The two styles are, however, often considered as two different types of historical writing, with chronicles seen as a turning point in the development from annals (plain records of events chronologically) to modern narratives with full causal nexus. This notion had been first proposed by R. L. Poole. Although Denys Hay somewhat challenged its validity and proposed that there was no real difference between the two,[32] most historians (including

[32] Denys Hay, *Annalists and Historians, Western Historiography from the VIIIth to the XVIIIth Century* (London: Methuen & Co., 1977). Hay is more interested in the "historicity" (my word) of these works, and made no serious attempt to distinct the two, but he uniformly used "chronicle" for Venerable Bede's influential history, and here and there seem to suggest that historical consciousness informed the chronicles which went beyond mere registers of events in chronological sequence.

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Hayden White) consider that important chronicles (such as those by Jean Froissart) indeed were distinct of their "narrativity," and made a significant step beyond annals which often were simple chronological collections of disparate records of "facts."[33]

I think Western historians' interests in the distinction between the two is instructive, and perhaps can help us tell the difference between Confucius's *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋, and Sima Guang's *Comprehensive Mirror,* and even more significantly, the rise of Yuan Shu's 袁樞 "basics and branches of recorded events"紀事本末,[34] which was aimed at describing the beginning and ramified consequences of historical events or movements. For all the veneration of the *Spring and Autumn,* one can easily see its inadequacy as a history capable of telling a story. It also does not present a narrative whole so that readers can trace the development of stories, let alone discovering the causal connection of facts. The authors have dutifully paid attention to the significance of Yuan Shu's effort, even if readers before him usually were able to recognize that Sima's chronicle contains various story lines. In China, then, the development from annals to chronicles took more than one and a half millennium to complete. In between, there were many works that could be characterized as proto-chronicles (see pp. 92 and 98 on Yuan Hong 袁宏).[35] It is noteworthy that most of these chronicles (and not just the "annals" part of the so-called "annal-biographies style" [*jizhuan ti* 紀傳體]) never rose above plain annalistic style. One wonders if the desire to have a complete history (narrativity), than just episodes, never succeeded in becoming an idea or literary form. In this sense, one may argue that the *Zuo Commentary* 左傳 has been preserved in tact, researched and

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33 Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in his *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 1–25. The noted historian, Johan Huizinga, in his *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1949) takes a very dim view of Froissart, but this book was published in English as early as 1949 (and in French even earlier). And even so, he still had the following to say about him: "with Froissart the sober and accurate description of outward circumstances sometimes acquires tragic force, just because it leaves out all psychological speculation, . . . Froissart's soul was a photographic plate. Under the uniform surface of his own style we may discern the qualities of the various storytellers who communicated to him the endless number of his items of news." See p. 292.

34 Although the authors give a correct account on Yuan Shu's style, and give its significance due (hitherto not given) recognition, their translation of the book's title as "from Beginning to End" can be misleading: the style is a rendering in narrative form of Sima's *Comprehensive Mirror,* but it is not "from the beginning to the end."

35 The authors consider the rise of the so-called *shengzheng lu* 聖政錄 (imperial policy chronicle) as a sort of amalgamation of Sima's *Comprehensive Mirror* and Du You's *Comprehensive Compendium* 通典. This is a new and suggestive opinion, and proves the simultaneous rise of consciousness of "comprehensiveness" (*tong*) and the intellectual need of "stories" in historical narrative, as was characteristic of chronicles.

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studied thoroughly, thanks mainly to its being a "commentary" than a chronicle (that is, a part of classical than historical learning). The authors continue to stress that the *Zuo Commentary* is a commentary, but since it is one that is able to provide "causal relations" context for the *Spring and Autumn,* it really is a history *par excellence* (pp. 40–41). It is just that its historicity was often de-emphasized. In this one easily sees the essential irony of Chinese historiography: the refusal to tell stories. For the Chinese historians, the study of history is to provide moral lessons. It is almost like saying that the great Chinese historical work was preserved by default!

I may be too pessimistic about the value of China's historical tradition. Actually, the tradition has offered important lessons for us to learn. What are they? The authors' contribution is in indirectly addressing this question. As mentioned above, the employment of Western ideas by the authors to investigate the Chinese tradition yields very fruitful results that will invite many more students to expand further. It is clear that the Chinese historical thinkers have approached the subject-matter in ways that are very close to those developed in the modern West. Overall, of course, whether history has to be an independent subject-matter or scholarly discipline seems seldom to bother the Chinese. But I think that the authors will agree with me that it actually did, though not exactly in the modern Western sense. Rather, it is the ultimate moral purpose of historical thinking and scholarship, more than the nature and methodology of historical writing, that is their real concern. In this sense, moralist philosophy of history has a Chinese meaning, and really should be considered as the most original contribution by the Chinese historical philosophers. Unfortunately, in this tradition which has long been dominated by passive moral concerns, Chinese thinkers talked very little about the possible contradiction between individuals and their naturally endowed destiny within history, as if this was not an issue: most people were content to consider that nature and its power over individual's personal fate has to be taken as a given. In a sense, this was precisely what Sima Qian tried to tackle when he wrote the most troublesome chapter in the entire Chinese historical tradition, that of Boyi and Shuqi. For a very long time, Sima was criticized of his moral ambivalence and scepticism. Even when his position was rehabilitated, people conveniently forgot the question posed in this chapter. It is only in modern times that we find the profoundness of the issues raised by him. In short, the true mesmerizing part of the Chinese historiographical tradition comes in its confidence about the ultimate restoration of the world to its ancient perfection.

In sum, my characterization of the most core concern of contribution of the Chinese historical thinking is: the dialectics of optimism (the moral perfectibility of individuals and the fulfilment of it in historical time) and pessimism (the degenerative evolution especially in institutional matters and the belief that all human endeavours could at best only accomplish some degree of restoration to the ancient order), and the naturally desirable submission of the individual life and all the hopes that come with it to the course of collective historical change for moral uplifting. This is a bold summary, based on reading this useful and indeed well-written and well-thought-out book. I can now

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see that, in the not-so-distant future, scholars will have to think more deeply in terms of how the interplay of the Chinese society and individuals determined the ways historians thought about the meaning and nature of change in the human past. What is the real character of moral philosophy of history? Did not the Chinese realize in history that there were often insoluble contradictions between moral principles and the forces that affected and shaped the course of historical change?[36] How did it play out in historians' concerns about the exactitude of facts,[37] causal relations, and above all, the conditions in which an individual found the necessity to submit his life for the common good (ideological or imagined) and the betterment of society? How did historical education accomplish these things?[38] These are the questions that I think the authors have stimulated their readers to think along now and more deeply in the future.

I have written sufficiently long now, and should round up the review. But before that, let me just point out quickly that there are a few mistakes or errors that, hopefully, will be corrected in future editions.[39] I should also like to take this opportunity to point out the importance of Buddhist historical thinking that has not received as thorough a treatment as it should. The hagiographies of Buddhist

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36 The discussion on the problems of *shi* 勢 (circumstances, potentials) and *quan* (expediency) in this book is suggestive; these problems have only recently attracted scholars' attention.

37 Studies on the Chinese tradition of textual criticism are plentiful, in Chinese and Japanese, and even in English. But there are still no serious studies on how ethical thinking affected the selection of sources and how information was bypassed for inclusion. The study on Southern Song ban of "private writing of histories" is a good example for such kind of exploration. Indeed, I am quite amazed by the persistent uniformity of interpretations (and the comments in "the Grand Historian says" or "Official Guang says") in Chinese historical works. What were the forces at work to bring about this ideological uniformity?

38 History was a subject-matter in the curriculum of the Imperial University during the Period of Disunity. Family tradition of historical studies (and even office) was not merely limited to the Han dynasty; it was well alive throughout the Tang. Geographic specification is also often found in the historical and the geographical professions. The authors touch on these issues here and there (such as that the Tang examination system tested histories). This is an area worth further investigation.

39 Here are a couple of examples: The Tang woman historian's name should more accurately be Song Ruohua宋若華, than Song Ruoxin, even though some historians prefer Ouyang Xiu's use of the latter. However, when she was mentioned for the first time in the *Old Tang History* 舊唐書 (*juan* 16), her name is Song Ruohua. Also, now that we are on this, it would be useful also to mention that her sister succeeded her in the same capacity, and should also be mentioned. The sister's name is Song Ruozhao宋若昭. The two, together with Ban Zhao班昭, made up the whole of woman historians in official capacity known to the posterity. Another problem is the ethnic name of Särbi. It seems that the authors have chosen to use it for almost any non-Han people during the Period of Disunity (p. 120). To identity the Northern Wei as Särbi-Tabgatch (p. 192) is fine, though a more commonly name is Toba Wei. Not all contemporary alien regimes were of Toba origin.

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monks and their influence on Chinese biographic tradition, their articulation on the notion of "historical legitimation" (by transplanting the Buddhist descriptions of the beginning of the human history and its early course of development into the Chinese imagination of ancient history and then using it to give justification to the existing Chinese political order); their idea of transmission of doctrine (the idea was Chinese in origin but was adopted into Chinese Buddhist writings, and then returned to influence the Chinese *daotong* 道統 idea and *xue'an* 學案 writings); and Wei Shou's "Treatises on Buddhism and Daoism" that had significantly influenced Chinese ways of thinking about the two religions and "scholarship" in general;[40] all of these have important impact on Chinese historical thinking and the actual writing and compilation of histories.

Mirroring the Past is a precious addition to the corps of writings on Chinese historical thinking, many of which are now dated. The book is freshly and nicely written; the presentation is balanced; and the authors have effectively combined Chinese and Western historical ideas to bear upon a tradition that is so drastically different from the Western tradition. What I have presented above are some of the ideas that I have distilled from the book. I believe they are important and could be further expanded. Though sometimes marred by errors or controversial speculations, it still is a useful reference tool and will remain so for many years to come.

40 There has not been much study on Buddhist historiography, and this is a pity. For some brief discussions on the Buddhist notion of political legitimacy, *zhengtong* and *daotong,* see my *Education in Traditional China: A History* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2000), pp. 262–66. In this connection, it is useful to mention the contributions of Wei Shou, who was disparaged by Liu Zhiji, but whose reputation and historiography the authors seek to rehabilitate (pp. 102–6). The authors could have consulted Zhou Yiliang's 周一良 important article, "Wei Shou zhi shixue 魏收之史學," reprinted in his *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi lunji* 魏晉南北朝史論集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963), pp. 236–72. Incidentally, Wei Shou's idea of "legitimacy" (p. 87) needs some clarification: I do not think that he was claiming the line of succession to the Cao Wei. This can be seen in the unique way he adopted for composing the annals part of the *History of the [Northern] Wei* 魏書. He obviously was trying to establish an independent line of legitimate succession, independent from that of China (Han Chinese). Wei Shou also contributed significantly to the history of Buddhism and Daoism in China, by compiling the first ever monograph on the two religions.

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