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

This is the reason that historians’ words were taken quite seriously in traditional China. “To receive [the historian’s] single word of praise is to be glorified beyond high emolument; to be accused by his slightest word of blame is to be punished beyond [backing off] axes,” asserted the literary critic Liu Xie (劉勰, 456?–527?) in his The Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon (Wenxin Diaolong, 文心雕龍).

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

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

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

principles of life. Ironically, this becomes most apparent when historical facts challenge our initial facile convictions. The Grand Historian Sima Qian (司馬 竺, 1459-877 BC) was deeply troubled as he confessed in his classic, Historian's Records (Shiji, 史記):

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

Of his seventy disciples, Confucius recommended only Yeu Yian 靖子 as "fond of learning." But Hui fei (甄子) was often poor, and did not get his fill of even rice drags and hawks, finally dying young. How then does Heaven repay good men?

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

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

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

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

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


Chinese people come to "praise the good and blame the evil,"5 and formulate the heartfelt values, intrinsically and universally valuable, independently of what actually happens.6

This heartfelt feeling came, first, to be formulated explicitly, and then applied to actualities both of former times and the present situation. In this way, the so-called "hermeneutic circle" is actualized in traditional Chinese historical thinking.

First, we get the sense of a universal principle, Dao, of justice from history, then we apply it to a particular historical situation, and this in turn enriches our sense of Dao; it is thus that the circle of the history of understanding is accomplished. Let us see how the procedure goes.

First, the intense sense of the meaning of history can be extrapolated and appropriated from the historical facts. As Mencius (371-289 BC) said:

"After the influence of the true King came to an end, songs were no longer collected. When songs were no longer collected, the Spring and Autumn Annals were written. The Sheng of Jin, the Tao Wu of Chu and the Spring and Autumn Annals of Lu are the same kind of work. The events recorded concern Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin, and the style is that of the official historian. Confucius said, 'I have appropriated the didactic principles therein.'"

Ever since the time of Confucius (551-479 BC), Chinese historians have tried to appropriate didactic principles from history. This has been true historically since the tenth century. For example, Sima Guan (司馬光, 1019-1086), in his Records of the Ancient History (Jiglu, 漢書), 42, said, "The ruler's Dao is one, his virtues are three, his talents are five... Since the beginning of peoples and throughout the ultimate recess of Heaven and earth, there is nothing other than these to ones who possess the state through its ups and downs." The neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130-1200) systematized the above informal expression in a more perceptive manner, by proposing Li (principle) that describes the Way things operate and prescribes the norm by which humanity should live. More often than not, philosophical argumentation in China was made possible by historical narration.11

7. This is an Sima Qian quoted Dong Zhongshu's (c. 179-104 BC) word in Sima Qian's celebrated Preface to Historian's Records (Shiji). See Sima Qian, Shiji (Taipei: Tsaihsin Bookstore, photo-reproduction of new pen-crafted edition, 1971), CXLI, "The Great Scribe's Preface," p. 339. The very process of question here is history. Sima personally experienced this sentiment when he received a tragic punishment (censure) for his honestly assuring the emperor of his devoted friend's loyalty to the state, whom he ended up betraying to the enemy. His punishment occasioned the writing of the Shiji, which is the Chinese version of Abaelard's Historia Calamitatum, to vindicate his sense of "historical justice."
8. Sima Qian quibbled, after reviewing the records of the noble men who had vanished, "All these men had a ranking in their hearts, for they were not able to accomplish what they wished. Therefore they wrote of past affairs in order to pass on their thoughts to future generations."
to understand Chinese culture, and how peculiar it is, it is important to understand what history is, and how historical thinking works.

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

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

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

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

III. THE SENSE OF TIME IN CHINESE HISTORICAL THINKING

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


Chinese thinkers want to "argue" some universal principles or draw some moral codes, they always return to concrete historical examples or experience. Mencius (371–289 BC) is a good representative thinker in this context. In "articulating" his moral philosophy, Mencius cited many historical examples of famous people, such as Shun (舜), Fu Yit (傅説), Jiao Ge (召公), Guan Zhong (管仲), Sun Shao (孫叔敖), and Boli Xi (百里奚). Then he said that Heaven exhausts one's frame in starvation, hardship, and frustration before placing on one a great burden and thereby provoking innovation. Exempla in the West are used as illustrations of an abstract thesis, and as such are dispensable and merely decorative. In contrast, Chinese actions collapse when abstracted from the exempla to which they point. For example, Zhangzi's (399–297 BC) "double walk" (liang xing, 諸子) is senseless without the monkey story that gives it its meaning. In the story, the Monkey Keeper proposes the rule, "morning three, evening four" bananas but it is hoaxed by the monkeys so the Keeper switches to "morning four, evening three," to win their approval; in this way he did the "double walking" of fulfilling both desires, his and the monkeys'. This concrete story indispensably "knits" the "cord" of actuality as no abstract concept can.

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

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

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

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

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

V. CONCLUSION

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

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

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FORUM:

CHINESE AND WESTERN HISTORICAL THINKING

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ABSTRACT

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

I

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

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