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⁹ Xiong Deji, “*Taiping jing* de zuozhe he sixiang ji qi yu Huangjin he Tianshi-dao de guanxi” 太平經的作者和思想及其與黃巾和天師道的關係, in *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, 4, 1962, p. 8-25; on the limits of a strictly stylistic definition of these textual layers, see my arguments at the beginning of my paper in *Asia Major*, 15, 2, 2002, p. 1-5).

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On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China*, Honolulu : University of Hawai'i Press, 2005. xxiii-306 pages

University of Hawai'i Press offers a daring but nevertheless limited synthesis of Chinese historiography. The book is presented chronologically and divided into eight chapters framed by a prologue and an epilogue.

In the Prologue, the authors present and explain their approach and general goals. They observe that few books and articles on this subject have been published in English and therefore insist on the necessity to fill the gap. The Prologue points out the long tradition of Chinese historiography, while underlining the role of history as moral edification, a source of precedents, a means of political recognition and propaganda tool. In their desire to explore and insist on the reliability and value of traditional historiography, the two authors spend a lot of time answering its critics. However, in doing so, they overstress the tradition's richness and the methodological spirit of the literati historiographers.

Chapter One, “The Age of Confucius: The Genesis of History,” relates the origins and foundations of historical thought in China. The authors start by explaining the function of a *shi* 史 (scribe, archivist) in ancient China. Then, the second section analyses the birth of history and its links with cosmological thought. The third and last section refers to the *Chunqiu* 春秋.

Chapter Two, “From the Warring States Period to the Han: The Formation and Maturation of Historiography,” studies specifically the *Zuo-zhuan* 左傳, the *Shiji* 史記 and the *Hanshu* 漢書. Each of these three texts is fully introduced and the context in which they appeared is also explained.

The authors then emphasize the ideological bias, structure and content of the books.

Chapter Three, “The Age of Disunity: Proliferations and Variations of Historiography,” covers the period extending from the end of the Han dynasty up to the Tang dynasty, which is marked by the territorial disintegration of China. The question of legitimization through the production of histories, such as the *Sanguozhi* 三國志, whose biases for the state of Wei are well known, is raised. The next part deals with the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, and the last section gives an overview of the historical works and questions the bibliographical classification of that period. The authors also mention other important texts, such as the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 and the *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍.

Chapter Four, “The Tang: The History Bureau and Its Critics,” first discusses the systematisation of official and institutionalised historiography during the Tang period. Then the authors provide a study of the historian Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661-721) who, in his *Shitong* 史通, became famous for having criticized the writing of history under government control. Finally, they present two encyclopaedias, compiled and published under the auspices of the government, the *Tongdian* 通典 and the *Tang huiyao* 唐會要.

Chapter Five, “The Song: Cultural Flourishing and the Blooming of Historiography,” insists on three very famous people from that dynasty: Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), compiler of two standard histories (*zhengshi* 正史), the first one dealing with the Tang period, the other one with the Five Dynasties; Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086), author of the *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, a diachronical synthesis encompassing the period from the fifth-century B.C. up to the tenth-century C.E.; and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), who wrote an abridgement of this last work and whose philosophical views on history are also presented. Finally, the chapter ends up with an overview of the local gazetteers and varied syntheses and encyclopaedias published at that time.

Chapter Six, “The Jin and the Yuan: History and Legitimation in the Dynasties of Conquest” helps us to understand the context in which the histories of Song, Liao and Jin dynasties were compiled. Debates concerning the legitimacy of those regimes delayed the compilation for twenty years, which was eventually accomplished under the patronage of the historian Toghto (1314-1355). Some texts about institutions are then pre-

sented, one of them being the *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考. Additionally, the two authors analyse the evolution of Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism and its influence on historiography during that period.

Chapter Seven, "The Ming: The Flowering of Private Historiography and Its Innovations," first focuses on the process of rewriting history that occurred at that time and which depended largely of the fluctuations of power due to struggles between cliques. An important place is then given to private historiography encouraged by the publication of the *Veritable records* (*Shilu* 實錄), the annals recording the chronological facts about successive reigns that served as the basis sources for later histories.

In Chapter Eight, "The Qing: Histories and the Classics," the authors explore the systematic, methodological and historicist methods used by four major intellectual figures of the dynasty: Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695), Wan Sitong 萬斯同 (1638-1702), Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613-1682) and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692). The next section is devoted to philology and "evidential research" (*kaozheng* 考證), a particularly well-developed branch of scholarship during the period, not only in the field of classical literature, but also in historical studies. The authors also analyze the works of two philosophers, Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724-1777) and Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738-1801), the latter being known for his work, *Wen-shi tongyi* 文史通義 in which he claims that Classics (*jing* 經) are indeed historical works (*shi* 史).

The Epilogue returns to the Chinese conception of history, insisting on its aesthetic and moral aspects. The methodological role of the historian is again asserted. The book includes a glossary with Chinese characters that encompasses people's names and specialized words, an index and a bibliography.

I shall focus my criticism on the first part of the book, the one leading up to the Tang period, for that is the period I am the most familiar with. Generally speaking, for each work, the authors describe its structure, content, and insist on the political, social, and intellectual conditions under which it has been written, while underlining the author(s) biases. The description of the contents and the rhetorical procedures are indeed relevant and clear. For instance, the detailed presentation of the different styles in which the *Chunqiu* has been written, giving many precise examples, allows the non-specialist reader to have a glimpse of what a bad Chinese annalist style can be. Sima Qian's historiographic project, as shown in his letter to Ren An, is particularly well introduced, as well as the cosmological theo-

ries of Zou Yan 鄒衍 (1st half of the third-century B.C.) and Dong Zhongshu (ca. 195-115 B.C.), which were important for legitimatization during the Former Han dynasty. The authors also insist on the interest shown by the literati during the Six Dynasties for the history of Han dynasty and its collapse. This helps us to understand the general context in which Fan Ye's 范曄 (398-445) *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (only one among others works dealing with the Han) was compiled. One can also better comprehend why the negative image of eunuchs in this book is in fact due to Fan Ye's attempt to reassert literati doctrine when it was being challenged by Buddhism. The two authors promote already well-known works at the expenses of less favored works that deserve broader recognition. Indeed, certain essential works dealing with long periods of Chinese history need to be given greater attention. I think of the *Jinshu* 晉書, in particular, an important work compiled in the mid-Seventh century that remains the only available major source for the years 266-420. The authors devote only one paragraph to it, while their study of the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 occupies nearly five pages (pp. 94-98).

Chapter One, devoted to Antiquity, is the most problematic part. There, the figure of Confucius is excessively emphasized. His name appears on every page and in almost every paragraph, and, worse, the sage is shown as the real author of the *Chunqiu* ("his *Spring and Autumn Annals*"), a book seen as the "fruit of Confucius' practice of history" (p. 16). The authors repeat many times: "In any event we may be quite sure that the *Spring and Autumn* we see today is probably the one that was handed down by Confucius" (p. 25). The value of the whole book is jeopardized by this dubious assertion. First, Chinese historical thought seems to have been, if not shaped by Confucius, at least strongly influenced by him as an historical figure. Second, the integrity of the transmitted texts cited in this book is almost never questioned, a fact that becomes even more problematic with the most ancient texts, such as the Classics, which are all obviously regarded as genuine by both authors. Ng and Wang's criticism of the manipulation of the past under the Tang dynasty (p. 116) could have been applied to the previous periods, particularly to the pre-imperial literature, which was extensively reworked for ideological needs under the Han dynasty. The authors did not use *Early Chinese Texts*,¹ a standard reference work for ancient texts in Western languages that appears nowhere in their bibliography. Why?

Concerning the Tang period, the authors assert that "Tang historians spent considerably less time and space distinguishing legitimate from ille-

gitimate dynasties. [...] By and large they adopted a neutral stance toward their predecessors, accepting what happened as simply an integral part of history.” (p. 118) On the contrary, it seems to me that the progressive constitution of a corpus of standard histories, attested by the *Suishu* bibliography, and the production of new histories about the regimes founded in South China as well as in North China before the Tang dynasty, introduces a hierarchy between legitimate dynasties (provided with many chapters in the new histories) and illegitimate ones (worth just a note).

In the Epilogue, we find the following idea: “It is important to realize that introducing a cross-cultural comparative perspective does not suggest a line of inquiry that presumes Western developments as the norm by which other cultures are measured” (pp. 261-262). However, the authors do not follow their own ideas, since after having used Leopold von Ranke’s (1795-1886) historical conceptions in the Prologue (p. xiii), they make the following inappropriate comparison: “The Confucian approach considers historical writing to be a normative practice, whereas the Rankean one views it as descriptive” (p. 28). How can one compare an ancient tradition to a historian of modern times? Would not it have been more fruitful, if one absolutely wanted to show a Western counterbalance, to look at Greek or Roman traditions, let us say Herodotus or Tacitus? Nevertheless, the authors’ cross-cultural comparison is not able to explain Chinese historiography’s specific features. It is by situating Chinese historiography in its own historical and cultural context that we can fully understand it.

Apart from these analyses and substantial questions, some embarrassing historical errors remain. The authors state that Emperor Xian of the Han, the last of the dynasty, died in 220 C.E. (p. 80). In fact, he was merely dismissed at that date and died in 234 C.E.² On the same page, the Xianbei 鮮卑 are shown as the only non-Chinese people occupying Northern China after the Han. The two authors seem to have forgotten three other peoples: the Xiongnu 匈奴, the Di 氐 and the Jie 羯, who, in spite of their not well defined origins, are nevertheless mentioned in Chinese sources. Shi Le 石勒 (274-333), said to have been a Xianbei (鮮卑) general (p. 100), belonged to the Jie 羯 people.³ Furthermore, we read on p. 81: “After Zhuge [Liang]’s death in 263, the Shu state was taken by the Wei, but two years later the Wei fell into the hands of the usurping Sima family (no relation with Sima Qian).” The beginning of the sentence is so ambiguous that it seems to give the wrong fact, for Zhuge Liang died in 234. What is more dramatic is that this sentence sets forth two inaccuracies: the Sima did not take over Wei in 265, but in 249 by a coup d’état. And

they waited more than fifteen years before founding their own dynasty, the Jin. In addition, they indeed said they had common ancestors with the historian Sima Qian. Again, we note another flaw: a reference book seems to have been too quickly read concerning Chen Shou's *Sanguozhi* and its commentary by Pei Songzhi. Using a study by Robert Joe Cutter and William Gordon Crowell, the two authors say that Pei Songzhi's Commentary is longer than the *Sanguozhi* itself (p. 106). In fact, Cutter and Crowell say exactly the contrary thanks to a statistical computation provided in an annex.⁴

The inaccuracies, added together with the other flaws we mentioned above cast some doubt about the reliability of *Mirroring the Past*. In spite of its eye-catching title and the seriousness of the publishing house, this work should not be recommended to students as a reference book and should be used very carefully. It seems that only a group of specialists, each one working in his field of specialization, would be able to provide a reliable and trustworthy synthesis of traditional Chinese historiography, in the spirit of the *Cambridge History of China*. Who will take up the challenge?

¹ Michael Loewe (ed.), *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, Berkeley : Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993.

² *Sanguozhi*, Beijing : Zhonghua shuju, 1971, *juan* 3, p. 101.

³ *Jinshu*, Beijing : Zhonghua shuju, 1974, *juan* 104, p. 2707.

⁴ Robert Joe Cutter and William Gordon Crowell, *Empresses and Consorts, Selections from Chen Shou's Record on the Three States with Pei Songzhi's Commentary*, Honolulu : University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, p. 149.

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