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Cover calligraphy Yan Zhenqing 顏眞卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover photograph Portrait of Hedda Morrison by Adolph Lazi, Stuttgart, 1931–32 (reproduced courtesy of Franz Lazi)

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their most appreciative thanks to Mr Alastair Morrison
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FROM BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY TO HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHY: A TRANSFORMATION IN CHINESE HISTORICAL WRITING

史 *Brian Moloughney*

> The duty of the official historian lies in encouraging goodness and reproving evil, documenting the achievements and virtues of the dynasty with honesty, narrating the careers of loyal ministers and eminent persons and recording the shameful conduct of traitorous officials and obsequious people, and conveying these things for posterity.[1]

The biographical essay provided the core to traditional Chinese historical writing. The success of a dynasty was thought to be dependent upon the virtues of its emperors, ministers and officials and thus a principal concern of the historian was the recording of exemplary lives, the writing of biography. And as the art of classical Chinese prose lay in succinctness, it was the essay that became the vehicle for this biographical writing.[2] Such a close association of biography and history ensured that biographical writing displayed all the characteristics of traditional Confucian historiography. History was seen as a record of the working out in the lives of people of the principles of political morality that were thought to govern the state and society, principles enshrined in the Confucian classics.[3]

This was to change with "the radical erosion" of the Confucian tradition that began in the last decade of the nineteenth century and culminated in the collapse of institutional and scriptural Confucianism.[4] Although the authority of the Qing administration had been challenged much earlier in the century, it was only in the 1890s that the framework of Neo-Confucian discourse began to fracture and the legitimacy of a Confucian state was called into question. The first calls for a new history, a history radically different from the official historiography of the traditional state, were part of this erosion of the Confucian tradition. The enormous importance that was attached to history, to its function as a storehouse of precedent and as a record of exemplary lives, meant that new perceptions of the past directly challenged

I am grateful to S. A. M. Adshead, Geremie Barmé, Lo Hui-min and Igor de Rachewiltz, all of whom read drafts of this article and suggested ways in which it might be improved.

[1] LiAo, "Baiguan xingzhuang zou" [Memorial on obituaries for officials] (AD 819) in *Li wen gong ji* [The collected works of Li Ao] (1875 edition), *juan* 10, pp.1a–b. Beginning his memorial in this way, Li Ao is restating the ethos of traditional historiography, an ethos that has its origins in interpretations of *Chunqiu* [The spring and autumn annals]. For early expression of this ethos see *Zuozhuan* [The Zuo commentary] for the years Chenggong 14 and Zhaogong 31 in Du Yu, *Chunqiu jing zhuan jijie* [Collected interpretations of *The spring and autumn annals* and its commentaries], reprint ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1978), 1: 735 and 2: 1,592. In his autobiographical postscript to *Shiji* [Historical records], Sima Qian describes the 'virtues' of *Chunqiu* in a similar way: "It calls good good and bad bad, honours the worthy and condemns the unworthy." See *Shiji*, reprint ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959). *juan* 130, p.3297.

[2] "It is when the text is concise while the events are rich that we have narrative writing at its best." Liu Zhiji, *Shitong* [Understanding history], reprint ed. (Guizhou: Renmin Chubanshe 1985), vol.1, p.217. This translation is from Stuart H. Sargent, "Understanding /OVER

and undermined the tradition. Increasing exposure to the radically different world of the West, and in particular to the way Western traditions were perceived in Japan, encouraged a perception of the past that was a far cry from that of "the rationalistic Confucianism which wielded history as philosophy by example."[5] New questions were asked of the past and very different methods employed in response to them. Biography very quickly lost its status as the principal narrative perspective in historical writing.

For many this meant that biographical writing might be established for the first time as an independent genre, free from the strictures imposed by traditional historiography. Such freedom allowed biography to be seen in a new light. Much greater interest was shown in portraying the individuality and personality of a subject. These changes were reflected in a new relationship between biography and history and encouraged the emergence of independent historical biographies as a sub-genre of modern historical writing.

The considerable interest which has been shown in the development of a Marxist historiography in China is only natural, yet this was but one aspect of the many changes that came in historical writing as a consequence of the collapse of the Confucian tradition. One of the features of the new history of the early twentieth century was its great diversity. This article is an attempt to bring out more of that diversity. The biographical perspective was central to traditional historical writing, thus by looking at how the relationship between history and biography developed, and at how this relationship changed with the collapse of the official traditional historical enterprise, something more of the nature of the changes that came with the emergence of the new history can be seen.

The Emergence of Biographical Writing

Biographical writing in China probably had its origins in the desire to establish a presence beyond death. The *Zuozhuan*左傳 (Zuo commentary) states that such a presence could be achieved in one or more of three ways: through moral force, distinguished service, or the power of words. When knowledge of such distinction did not fade this was what was meant by achieving immortality, "to die yet not perish."[6] Without a belief in an afterlife yet with a strong commitment to the continuity of the family and the clan, there evolved very early in the Confucian tradition the notion that the only way to establish a presence beyond death was through the power of the written word. The earliest writings devoted to ensuring that knowledge of the worth of an individual's life did not fade were probably records of funerary orations, records that were to develop into a diverse genre of writing as the ritual veneration of ancestors came to be seen as an important social duty.[7] Liu Xie 劉勰 (c.465–522) suggests that elegies *(lei* 誄*)* were written during the Western Zhou period (c.1025–722 BC), although it is not until the

/history: the narration of events," *Renditions* 15 (Spring, 1981): 31. For further discussion on how the laborious task of inscribing characters on bamboo or stone encouraged succinctness and how the narrative economy displayed in texts such as *Chunqiu* constrained Chinese prose, see Qian Zhongshu, *Guanzhui bian* [Pipe-awl chapters] (Hong Kong: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980), 1: 163–4.

3 "The classics are the principles of governance, the histories the evidence." Zhao Yi, *Nianer shi zhaji* [Notebook on the twenty-two standard histories], reprint ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1987), preface, p.2.

4 The abolition of the imperial examination system in 1905 and then the removal of the Confucian classics from the school curriculum in 1912, as well as the collapse of the imperial state itself in 1911, marked the culmination of this process. It is Hao Chang in *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and intellectual transition in China, 1890-1907* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p.296, who talks of the process as being a "radical erosion" of the Confucian tradition. The concept 'scriptural Confucianism' comes from Mark Elvin's discussion of the most important textual evidence of "a deep-seated, and indeed terminal, sickness of the old body of thought," in "The collapse of scriptural Confucianism," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 41 (Mar. 1990): 45–76.

5 "The name became hopelessly unrectified." See Joseph Levenson, "The inception and displacement of Confucianism," *Diogenes* 42 (Summer 1963): 77.

6 *Zuozhuan*, Xiang gong 24. See Du Yu, *Chunqiu*, vol.2, p.1011. Such criteria of distinction continued to be influential down into the twentieth century. One example of this is Lin Yutang's use of the *Zuozhuan* categories in assessing the achievement of Sun Yatsen: see Lin Taiyi, *Lin Yutang zhuan* (Taibei: Lianjing Chubanshe, 1989), pp.63–4.

7 Three common forms of necrology or funerary writing were: the grave record *(muzhi* 墓志*)* which was buried with or near the coffin; the grave notice *(mubiao* 墓表*)* placed above ground near the grave; and the spirit-road tablet *(shendaobei* 神道碑*)*, a more extensive form of grave notice usually written only for people of high social standing. The prose section of these inscriptions was often followed by a

Zuozhuan that we find the earliest recorded example. But Duke Ai's outpouring of grief on the death of Confucius tells us little of its subject, only that he was much admired and will be greatly missed.[8]

* * *

The move away from such expressions of grief to a more extensive record of an individual's life is difficult to trace. In the Graeco-Roman world this process seems to have been gradual, from the early encomia of Isocrates to the work of Xenephon, Aristoxenus and Cornelius Nepos, culminating eventually in the 'lives' by Plutarch, Tacitus and Suetonius. In discussing this gradual process, Momigliano argues it was the social and political changes of the fourth century BC that were of primary importance in the emergence of Greek biography.[9] The new power that individual political leaders obtained during the century, combined with changes in the nature of philosophy and rhetoric which saw greater emphasis on individual education, perfomance and self-control, focused attention upon the lives of individuals in a way that had not been the case before.

It is possible that such social and political changes were also of importance in the emergence of Chinese biographical writing. The period from late Zhou, through Qin, to early Han is known as a time of great upheaval, one that allowed individuals of differing social classes unprecedented influence, in particular the group known as *shi* 士 (men of service).[10] The political and philosophical debates of the period and the greater emphasis placed on rhetorical skills, as evidenced in *Zuozhuan*, *Guoyu* 國語 (Conversations from the states) and *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Intrigues of the Warring States) as well as the numerous *zhuzi baijia* 諸子百家 writings, saw greater interest in and respect for the individual. There was opportunity for the able, the adventurous and the arrogant to make a name for themselves. Some Chinese scholars have argued that it was this period of great social change that was of paramount importance in the emergence of Chinese biographical writing.[11]

Indeed, some of the accounts of character in the early narratives of this time, such as the famous story of the conflict between the two brothers of Zheng told at the beginning of *Zuozhuan*, could be seen as indicating a shift toward biographical writing.[12] With an emphasis on revealing aspects of character, such as the virtues of filial piety as in the abovementioned story, these anecdotes show many of the characteristics of early Chinese biographical writing. But they are isolated anecdotes, embedded in a body of text devoted to the narration of events. The lives of the individuals concerned are not central to the story. True biography emerges as a radical departure from these earlier texts.

The compilers of the great eighteenth-century compendium of Chinese literature, the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (The complete collection of the Four Treasuries) considered the *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 (The annals of Master Yan), a collection of moral injunctions supposedly delivered by Yan Ying 晏嬰 who served as prime minister of the state of Qi 齊 in the late sixth and

/short eulogy in verse (*ming* 銘). The sacrificial ode or requiem (*jiwen* 祭文) was generally shorter than an inscription, written solely in verse and often burnt after being read aloud at the burial ceremony. For a list of some twenty different names for various forms of grave record, as well as a variety of different names for funerary tablets (*bei* 碑) and grave notices see Li Shaoyong, *Sima Qian zhuanji wenxue lungao* [An essay on Sima Qian's biographical literature] (Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe, 1987), pp.57–8. See also James R. Hightower, "The *Wen Hsuan* and genre theory," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 20 (1957): 512–33.

[8] Liu Xie and Yang Mingzhao, *Wen xin diao long jiaozhu* [An annotated commentary on *Wen xin diao long*] (Shanghai: Gudian Chubanshe, 1958), p.80. For Duke Ai's elegy upon the death of Confucius see *Zuozhuan*, Liang gong 16, in Du Yu, *Chunqiu*, vol.2, p.1818. The elegy reads:

"Compassionate Heaven vouchsafes me no comfort, and has not left me the aged man, to support me, the One man, on my seat. Dispirited I am, and full of distress. Woe is me! Alas! O Ne-foo! There is none [now] to be a rule to me!"

(For this translation see James Legge, *The Chinese classics*, reprint ed. [Taibei: Southern Materials Centre, 1985], 5: 846.)

[9] A. Momigliano, *The development of Greek biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp.43–6.

[10] For a discussion of the difficulties of translating this term see Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The world of thought in ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1985), pp.57–8, and J. I. Crump, Jr., *Intrigues: studies of the Chan-kuo ts'e* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), pp.1–9.

[11] Li Shaoyong, *Sima Qian*, pp.16–43; Ji Zhenhuai, *Sima Qian* (Shanghai: Renmin Chubanshe, 1979) p.83; Chen Lancun and Zhang Xinke, *Zhongguo gudian zhuanji lungao* [An essay on traditional Chinese biography] (Xi'an: Shaanxi Renmin, 1991), pp.152–201; and Shigesawa Toshiro, "Shiba Sen no shigaku kanken" [My personal views on Sima Qian's historiography], *Shinagaku* 10.4 (Dec., 1942): 568–71.

[12] *Zuozhuan*, Yin gong 1; Du Yu, *Chunqiu*, vol.1, pp.5–7. A translation of this story is given by Burton Watson in *The Tso* /OVER

Chuan: selections from China's oldest narrative history (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp.1–4.

13 Ji Yun et al., *Siku quanshu zongmu* [Catalogue of the complete collection of the four treasuries], reprint ed. (Shanghai: Dadong Shuju, 1930) *juan* 57, p.1a.

14 Wu Zeyu, *Yanzi chunqiu jishi* [Collected commentaries of the annals of Master Yan] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1962).

15 Burton Watson, for instance, writes that although the *Yanzi chunqiu* contains a number of speeches and admonitions supposedly by the famous minister of Qi, it "is actually a philosophical work expounding policies associated with his name and anecdotes in which he figures; it cannot be regarded as a life of the man himself." See his *Ssu-ma Ch'ien: grand historian of China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p.124. Similar views are expressed by Wang Yun, *Zhuanji xue* [A study of biography] (Taibei: Mutong Chubanshe, 1977), p.15; and Chen Shih-hsiang, "An innovation in Chinese biographical writing," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 13.1 (reprint ed., Nov., 1953): 50.

16 Mao Zishui, "Wo duiyu zhuanji wenxuede yixie yijian" [My observations on biographical literature], *Zhuanji wenxue* 1.1 (June, 1962): 5–6, discusses and endorses this view put forward by Hu Shi in a lecture given at the Normal University in Taiwan in 1953. Du Zhengxiang makes similar points in "Zhuanji yu zhuanji wenxue" [Biography and biographical literature], *Zhuanji wenxue* 1.2 (July, 1962): 6-7, 39.

17 If we accept Li Changzhi's suggestion that Sima Tan wrote certain sections of *Shiji*, then it would be more accurate to say that biographical writing in China was the creation of both father and son—or as Sima Qian himself states, the text was "the achievement of one family." See *Shiji*, 130, p.3319. For Li Changzhi's discussion of which chapters might be attributed to Sima Tan, see *Sima Qian zhi renge yu fengge* [The personality and style of Sima Qian], reprint ed. (Hong Kong: Taiping Shuju, 1962), pp.155-62.

early fifth centuries BC, to be China's first biography.[13] These anecdotes were probably collected during the fourth century BC, although the present text dates from the edition put together by Liu Xiang 劉向 (c.79–6 BC).[14] Modern critics have tended to disagree with the editors of the *Siku quanshu*.[15] Rather than a work of biography, *Yanzi chunqiu* is seen as little more than a collection of anecdotes, where the character of Master Yan is used simply as a vehicle to convey the doctrine. If *Yanzi chunqiu* were to be considered a work of biography, then surely other 'philosophical' texts such as *Lunyu* 論語 (The analects) and *Mengzi* 孟子 (Mencius) should be considered biography as well. Indeed, some have argued this. Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), for instance, claimed *Lunyu* to be China's oldest work of biography.[16] It seems more appropriate, however, to consider these works as examples of the genre known as *lunbian* 論辯 (essays and arguments), although *Lunyu* and *Mencius* occupied a distinctive place in the Confucian canon. Until the compilers of the *Siku quanshu* transferred *Yanzi chunqiu* into the biographical section of historical works it was classified as a work of philosophy, a more appropriate designation.

Figure 1

Sima Qian, author of Shiji (Historical Records), *which became the first of the twenty-four dynastic histories. Principally a compilation of biographies, this work set a model which was subsequently widely imitated but never surpassed.*
(From a Ming woodcut album, Lidai guren xiangzan 歷代古人像贊 *[Portraits and eulogies of historical figures], dated 1475)*

Biography proper only comes with *Shiji* 史記 (Historical records) and can be attributed to the genius of Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–?90 BC). Rather than concentrate on the detailing of event as had been the case with previous chronological narratives, Sima Qian produced an account of the past as told through the lives of prominent individuals.[17] With *Shiji*, Sima Qian not only created a new format for Chinese historical writing, he also introduced biography into the Chinese traditon.

As is well known, Sima Qian divided his history into five sections. The first of these, the twelve *benji* 本記 or basic annals, are accounts of the major public events in the lives of those individuals who exercised paramount authority, whether they be emperors or not.[18] The next section, the ten chapters of *biao* 表, or tables, provide chronological lists of important events and people. The third section, the eight *shu* 書, or treatises, are essays on institutional aspects of state administration. The fourth section, the *shijia* 世家, or hereditary houses, consists of thirty chapters devoted to the lives of prominent members of important families, families who exerted considerable influence in the governing of the realm. Lastly there are the seventy *liezhuan* 列傳, or biographies, the largest section of the text. These incorporate an extraordinary variety of material and although a few of the chapters are devoted to accounts of groups of people, such as the Xiongnu, for the most part they are biographies of those whose lives Sima Qian considered exemplary.

There has been much speculation about possible antecedents to *Shiji*, texts which may have influenced the way Sima Qian conceived his history.[19] And while it is probable that the form of one or more of the five sections that compose the work was based upon portions of earlier texts, this does not negate the radical reformulation of narrative writing that Sima Qian achieved. As Li Shaoyong writes:

> Although the *jizhuan* 記傳 [composite] form consists of five sections, its most important sections are the *benji*, *shijia* and *liezhuan*, and while the narrative techniques of these three sections are not identical, fundamentally they all embody the essential characteristics of the *jizhuan* form—that is, they are all biographies of one or more people. The basic difference between the *biannian* 編年 [chronological] and the *jizhuan* form [of writing] is that the former stresses events while the latter emphasizes individuals.[20]

It was this composite format that was adopted as the model for all subsequent standard dynastic histories, the official and authoritative interpretation of the Chinese past. Biography thus provided the principal narrative perspective for historiography. Of course, not all traditional historical writing conformed to the pattern of *Shiji*. One notable genre that differed significantly from the *jizhuan* format was that of the great institutional histories that were produced from the Tang dynasty onwards and which focused on the process of administration, not the lives of adminstrators and eminent people.[21] Yet it remained the case that from Sima Qian's time Chinese historical writing was essentially biographical in character. The official nature of the standard histories gave the biographical essay an authoritative status within the Chinese prose tradition that it was to retain into the twentieth century.

[18] For a discussion of the various sections of *Shiji* see Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien*, chap.4, pp.101–34.

[19] For the claim that Sima Qian simply integrated pre-existing forms of writing into a composite history see Zhang Shunhui "Lun *Shiji*," in *Sima Qian--qiren ji qishu* [Sima Qian—the man and his work], ed. Wang Guowei et al. (Taibei: Chang'an Chubanshe, 1987), pp.126–40; and for the contrary view that Sima Qian created the various forms of the work himself, see Xiao Li, *Sima Qian pingzhuan* [A critical biography of Sima Qian] (Changchun: Jilin Wenshi Chubanshe, 1986), pp.54–70. These are just two of the more recent contributions to this long debate. A good historical summary of the debate, from Yang Xiong's (53 BC – AD 18) association of *Shiji* with the *Huai nan zi* to the views of Liang Qichao and Fan Wenlan in the twentieth century, is given in Li Shaoyong, *Sima Qian*, pp.1–15.

[20] Li Shaoyong, *Sima Qian*, p.13. Liang Qichao makes a similar point, writing that the greatest difference between *Shiji* and previous historical writing was that it "regarded people as its foundation." See his *Zhongguo lishi yanjiu fa* [Methods for the study of Chinese history], reprint ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1987), pp.15–16.

[21] For studies of these institutional histories see Albert B. Mann, "Cheng Ch'iao: an essay in re-evaluation," in *Transition and permanence: Chinese history and culture. A Festschrift in honor of Dr. Hsiao Kung-ch'uan*, ed. David C. Buxbam and Frederick W. Mote (Hong Kong: Cathay Press, 1972), pp.23–57; Hok-lam Chan, "'Comprehensiveness' *(t'ung)* and 'change' *(pien)* in Ma Tuan-lin's historical thought," in *Yuan thought: Chinese thought and religion under the Mongols*, ed. Hok-lam Chan and Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp.27–87; and Robert M. Hartwell, "Historical analogism, public policy, and social science in eleventh- and twelfth-century China," *American Historical Review* 76. 3 (1971): 692–727.

The Nature of Traditional Biography

The formal characteristics of traditional biographical writing were established in the *liezhuan* section of *Shiji*. While some of the *benji* and *shijia* chapters were much admired, most notably the biography of Xiang Yu, it was in the seventy chapters of *liezhuan* that Sima Qian made his great contribution to Chinese biography.

Finding an adequate translation for the term *liezhuan* has proved difficult. Interpretations of the term depend on what people conceive Sima Qian's intention to have been in writing these chapters. Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721) felt the *liezhuan* provided elucidation and explanation of the material included in the *benji*, just as a commentary *(zhuan* 傳*)* sought to explain a classic.[22] Yet most feel that the term *zhuan* had a much wider meaning than just commentary, encompassing the sense of a body of 'tradition', and that in the *liezhuan* Sima Qian selected material from these traditions in order to compose his portraits. This interpretation has the advantage of explaining the great diversity of material which the *liezhuan* contain.[23] The important position that *Shiji* occupies in the Chinese literary canon is, at least in part, attributable to the inclusion in the *liezhuan* chapters of this great variety of material from the written and oral traditions. Writers and critics would often use *Shiji* as a standard against which to judge literary achievement, and much of the fiction produced in later periods had its origins in these *liezhuan*, or 'ordered traditions' of Sima Qian.[24]

An entirely different interpretation has been suggested by Pierre Ryckmans, who proposes the character *lie* be read as 'exemplary', thus translating the term as 'exemplary lives'. Ryckmans writes that what determined the selection of subjects for the biographies was:

> ... not so much the importance of their historical role, as their value as archetypes of human behaviour, and among their actions those which merit his [Sima Qian's] attention are not necessarily those which had a significant impact on history, but those which best reveal a character, a temper, a personality.[25]

Indeed, towards the end of his biography of Chancellor Zhang, Sima Qian notes the names of a number of others who had served in the same position yet were not worthy of consideration because they had not distinguished themselves in any way; there was nothing about them that was unique.[26]

This importance placed upon the distinctive nature of the subject explains the frequent use of anecdote as a means "to focus our attention upon the exemplary situation, where a typical pattern of behaviour, a specific human character all reveals itself at one blow."[27] Certain distinctive features are associated with different subjects in the biographies, so that we remember Shang Yue 商鞅 for his 'harshness', Li Si 李斯 as 'corrupt', Han Xin's 韓信 'wisdom' and Xiao He's 蕭何 'firmness'.[28] Yet the biographies are not purely anecdotal, concentrating only on what made the subjects exemplary. Sometimes Sima Qian simply provides a chronological account of the events of an individual's life, such as in the biography of the general Wei Qing 衛青.[29]

[22] Liu Zhiji, *Shitong*, vol.1, p.49.

[23] In advocating such an interpretation, James Hightower writes: "... if we consider them [the *liezhuan*] as collections of material handed down *(ch'uan)* by tradition—oral and written—materials for which Ssu-ma Ch'ien may have been unwilling to give unqualified endorsement, their lack of homogeneity ceases to be relevant." See James R. Hightower, "Ch'u Yuan studies," in *Silver jubilee volume of the Zinbun Kagaku Kenkyusyo* (Kyoto: Kyoto University, 1954), p.197, n.1. Studies of how Sima Qian incorporated such popular 'traditions' into the *liezhuan* chapters include Guo Shuangcheng, *Shiji renwu zhuanji lunwen* [An essay on the biographies in *Shiji*] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Guji Chubanshe, 1985), pp.278–94; Miyazaki Ichisada, "Miburi to bungaku—*Shiki* seiritsu ni tsuite no ichi shiron" [Gestures and literature—oral tradition in *Shiji*] *Chugoku bungakuho* 20 (1965): 1–27; Timoteus Pokora, "Ironical critics at ancient Chinese courts (*Shih chi*, 126)," *Oriens Extremus* 20 (1973): 49–64; and Chauncey S. Goodrich, "Ssu-ma Ch'ien's biography of Wu Ch'i," *Monumenta Serica* 35 (1981–83): 197–233.

[24] Andrew Plaks writes: "... it might be argued that the historical development of many of the genres of Chinese fiction both began with, and remained inextricably linked to, the prototypes of biographical narrative forged in Ssu-ma Ch'ien's *Shih-chi*." See his section "Terminology and central concepts" in David L. Rolston, *How to read the Chinese novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.119. Li Shaoyong studies this relation of Sima Qian's *liezhuan* to the subsequent development of Chinese literature in *Sima Qian*, pp.79–204.

[25] Pierre Ryckmans, "A new interpretation of the term *lieh-chuan* as used in *Shiji*," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 5 (March, 1972): 138. For a similar, though slightly different, interpretation of the criteria Sima Qian employed in selecting subjects for the biographies see Jurij L. Kroll, "Ssu-ma Ch'ien's literary theory and literary practice," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 4 (1976): 313–25.

[26] *Shiji*. 96, p.2685.

[27] Ryckmans, "New interpretation," p.138.

[28] These characteristic attributes of the various subjects of Sima Qian's biographies are discussed by Zhang Dake in *Shiji yanjiu* [A

It would seem, then, that there is no clear translation of *liezhuan* that will cover the great diversity of material included in these chapters and incorporate all the different meanings that can be associated with the term. There are problems even in reading the term simply as 'biography', as some of the *liezhuan* contain accounts of territories and peoples. For the most part, however, the *liezhuan* are biographical. Sima Qian felt the lessons of the past were demonstrated best in the lives of individuals and he moulded existing 'traditions' to create a new form of narrative in which he could portray these 'exemplary lives'. As Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727–1814) has noted, Sima Qian gave this new meaning of 'the specific record of an individual' to the term *zhuan*, and from then on it has been used principally in this way, to signify biography.[30]

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Despite the close association of biography with historical writing that was established in *Shiji*, notions of what biography represented remained flexible. It was not until after the emergence of a bureaucratic historiography under the control of the central government during the early Tang dynasty (618–690) that the standard and uniform character of the *zhuan* of the official dynastic histories came to dominate traditional biographical writing. Prior to this the term *zhuan* was used for writing of considerable diversity, much of it never intended for inclusion in historical compilations.

The exemplary nature of early biography was prominent in the brief 'pseudo-biographical' anecdotes collected to form the *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 (Biographies of women) (c.16 BC).[31] Not only was the text intended for inspiration, but illustrations based on these anecdotes were painted on screens and walls to encourage conformity with the six womanly virtues. Much of the material incorporated in these *zhuan* was legendary, the term retaining its sense of 'tradition', and the stories of these women are often considered as examples of the link between biography and the moral and supernatural fiction that began to emerge from the third century AD onwards.[32]

Daoist and Buddhist writers also used the *zhuan* format in their early hagiography, the first Daoist work of this kind being the *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳 (Biographies of immortals), although more extensive biographies are presented in the compilation attributed to Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343) and entitled *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 (Biographies of divine immortals). The oldest surviving collection of Buddhist biography is the compilation by Hui Jiao 慧皎 (497–554) entitled *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (Lives of eminent monks).[33] Considering the wealth of Indian Buddhist literature translated into Chinese it is interesting that Chinese Buddhists should turn to a genre of writing such as the *zhuan*, with its close association to Confucian historiography, when composing sacred biography. But Indian literature did not provide a tradition of biographical writing to emulate and Arthur Wright has suggested that the use of the *zhuan* form by Buddhist biographers indicates a desire to rescue sacred biography "from the limbo of the exotic, the bizarre" and to give the lives of its subjects "a place of honor in the cultural

/study of *Shiji*] (Lanzhou: Renmin Chubanshe, 1985), pp.309–10.

29 *Shiji*, 111, pp.2921–2948. For this point and a good discussion of the variety of narrative techniques employed by Sima Qian in the *liezhuan* see Joseph Roe Allen III, "An introductory study of the narrative structure in the *Shiji*," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 3 (Jan., 1981): 31–66.

30 Zhao Yi, *Nianer shi*, p.4. See also the views of the two Ming critics, Wu Na 吳納 and Xu Shi 徐師, discussed in Li Shaoyong, *Sima Qian*, pp.56–7.

31 For a detailed study of this text see Takao Shimoni, *Ryu Kyo 'Retsujō-den' no kenkyū* [A study of Liu Xiang's *Lienü zhuan*] (Tokyo: Tokai Daigaku Shuppankai, 1989).

32 Li Shaoyong, *Sima Qian*, pp.123–4; and Chen Shih-hsiang, "Innovation," p.50. Kenneth J. DeWoskin notes the "central importance" of the *zhuan* in the emergence of this supernatural fiction in his entry on *zhiguai* 志怪 (describing anomalies) in *The Indiana companion to traditional Chinese literature*, ed. William H. Nienhauser, Jr. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp.280–4. See also the entry for *chuanqi* 傳奇 (tales), pp.356–60, where the borrowing from historical biography is noted. For a more detailed consideration of the importance of biography for the development of fiction during the Six Dynasties and early Tang periods see DeWoskin's article, "The Six Dynasties *Chih-kuai* and the birth of fiction" in *Chinese narrative: critical and theoretical essays*, ed. Andrew H. Plaks (Princeton: Princeton Univerity Press, 1977), pp.21–52.

33 See the chapter on Buddhist biography in Chen and Zhang, *Gudian zhuanji*, pp.106–24.

34 Arthur F. Wright, "Biography and hagiography: Hui-chiao's *Lives of eminent monks*," in *Silver jubilee volume of the Zinbun Kagaku Kenkyusyo* (Kyōto: Kyoto University, 1954), p.385. Asvaghosa's poetic description of incidents in the life of the Buddha, the *Buddhacarita*, had been translated by Dharmaksema (fl. 385–433), yet this work cannot be considered biography. For a discussion of this text and the general absence of biographical writing in early Indian literature see N. N. Bhattacharyya, "Historical biographies in early Indian literature," in *Historical biography in Indian literature*, ed. S. P. Sen and N. R. Ray (Calcutta: Institute of Historical Studies, 1979), pp.29–34.

history of China."[34] The adoption of the *zhuan* format for writing that ranged from such sacred biography to the fringes of supernatural fiction is testament not only to the authoritative position of historical discourse in the Chinese tradition, but also to the extremely flexible nature of early biographical writing.

The first century AD had also seen the emergence of biographical collections with a distinctly regional focus, precursors of what were to be large biographical components in the later local gazetteers. The need to broaden the base of the administrative hierarchy had resulted in a search for talent that reached out into the provinces and regions of the empire in a way that had not occurred before, and this in turn stimulated an increased interest in local achievement and local biography.[35] While most of these texts have been lost and thus it is impossible to know their nature, it is indicative of the increasing popularity of biographical writing that people whose distinctions were of regional rather than empire-wide significance were considered as suitable subjects for *zhuan*.

Associated with this greater regional perspective was a growing interest in 'characterology' or 'personality appraisal' *(pinti renwu* 品題人物*)*, a method for evaluating and judging the character and ability of individuals so as to assess their value to administrators. This concern with the individual was encouraged by the weakening of collectivist Confucian values that accompanied the decline and eventual collapse of the Han dynasty and contributed to a climate in which biography emerged as the most popular form of narrative writing.[36] Perhaps the clearest indication of this is the large number of *biezhuan* 別傳, separate or private biographies, that appeared during the period from the fall of the Han dynasty in the early third century to the reunification of the empire under the Sui in the late sixth century.[37] Although these biographies were often used in historical compilations, as with Pei Songzhi's 裴松之 (372–451) commentary to the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Record of the Three Kingdoms), they seem to have been written as independent 'lives' and sometimes shows signs of an unusually critical perspective.[38] Chen Shih-hsiang argues that it was these "spirited" *biezhuan* that might have provided the seeds from which independent and "full-fledged biographies close to our modern sense of the genre" could have grown.[39] Perhaps Chen

[35] A list of a number of collections of such regional biography that appeared during the reign of the Han emperor Guangwu (AD 25–57) can be found in the bibliographical treatise of *Sui shu* and is discussed by Zhu Dongrun in "Zhongguo zhuanxu wenxue de guoqu yu jianglai" [The past and future of Chinese biographical literature], *Xuelin* 8 (June 1941): 19.

[36] For the relationship of 'characterology' to the growth of individualsim see Yü Ying-shih, "Individualism and the Neo-Taoist movement in Wei-Chin China," in *Individualism and holism: studies in Confucian and Taoist values*, ed. Donald J. Munro (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1985), pp.121–53; and Mou Zong-san, *Caixing yu xuanli* [Human talent and profound theory] (Hong Kong: Rensheng Chubanshe, 1963), pp.43–4. The range of biographical writing produced in this period is discussed in Zhu Dongrun, "Zhongguo zhuanxu wenxue," pp.19–22.

[37] For a good discussion of *biezhuan* and other forms of non-official biographical writing from this period see the chapter on *zazhuan* 雜傳 in Chen and Zhang, *Gudian zhuanji*, pp.229–47. Chen and Zhang follow Ruan Xiaoxu (479–536) in using the term *zazhuan* to refer to all biographical writing that was written independently of official historical compilations and note that it was during the Wei Jin Nan Bei period that such writing flourished.

[38] The most notable example of this is the *Cao man zhuan* [Biography of Cao Cao], extracts from which are quoted in Pei Songzhi's commentary to Cao Cao's biography. See Chen Shou, *Sanguo zhi*, reprint ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1985), pp.1–55. A list of the sources used by Pei in his commentary, which include a large number of private biographies and family genealogies, is given by Rafe de Crespigny in *The Record of the Three Kingdoms: a study in the historiography of the Sankuo chih* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1970), pp.43–89.

[39] Chen Shih-hsiang, "Innovation," p.52. For a contrary view see D. C. Twitchett, "Chinese biographical writing," in *Historians of China and Japan*, ed. W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleybank (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). p.99.

[40] Hui Li and Yan Cong, *Dacien si sanzang fashi zhuan* [Biography of Master Xuan Zang of the Dacien Temple], reprint ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1983). For the view that this work represents perhaps the best in traditional Chinese biographical writing see Zhu Dongrun, "Zhongguo zhuanxu wenxue," p.22; and Wu Pei-yi, *The Confucian's progress: autobiographical writings in traditional China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.7.

[41] This process of the reorganization of historical writing during the Tang dynasty is discussed by David McMullen, *State and scholars in T'ang China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.159–205; in particular see pp.162–70 and 191–5.

[42] "The term *liezhuan* began with the Grand Historian. It is a form of history. Those not commissioned to write official histories, should not write *zhuan*." Gu Yanwu and Huang Rucheng, *Ri zhi lu jishi* [Collected commentaries

is right. The famous biography of the Buddhist monk Xuan Zang 玄奘 (596–664) composed by his disciples Hui Li 慧立 and Yan Cong 彦悰 is an example of the way Chinese biographical writing may have developed.[40] Considered by some to be the best biography written in pre-modern China, it is an independent work and is much longer than most traditional biographical writing. But this was an example not to be pursued by other writers. The reorganization of official historiography during the early Tang dynasty, which saw the state bureaucracy assume almost exclusive control over the writing of history, ensured that biography was to retain its close association with historical writing. This would continue to be so throughout the remainder of the imperial period.[41]

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The emergence of this bureaucratic historical enterprise saw the official dynastic histories compiled under the control of central government attain a new status as the most authoritative interpretation of the past. Thus, not only did the *zhuan* retain its close association with historical writing, it assumed even greater prestige and popularity through this association. Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–82) would later argue that as the *zhuan* was a form of historical writing it was inappropriate for anyone other than the officially-appointed state historians to compose such biographies.[42] Inappropriate, perhaps, but many more *zhuan* were written than just those compiled by the official historians, although the status attached to the dynastic histories did produce a remarkable degree of similarity in this writing. As David McMullen notes, "the most coveted eventual destination for a biographical text was not the grave of its subject, or a collection of biographies, but the dynastic history itself."[43] Recognition through inclusion in a dynastic history carried such prestige that it encouraged conformity with the requirements of official historiography. The bureaucratic nature of official historical writing also meant that the range of subjects thought suitable for a biography in a dynastic history narrowed, so that the *zhuan* became restricted to recording administrative achievement and status. In the *Ming shi* 明史 [History of the Ming] (1368–1644), 158 of the total 220 chapters of *zhuan* are devoted to recording the public lives of those who had served the state in one way or another, while only a few chapters are devoted to those whose lives were thought distinctive for other reasons, such as the 'filial and just' or the 'obsequious and fawning'. Gone also was the diversity and richness that was such a feature of the biographies in *Shiji*.[44] Some Tang writers did ignore this trend, producing portraits of 'ordinary' people who would never be considered suitable for inclusion in a dynastic history, yet whose lives they regarded as exemplary. Others wrote startling parodies of the *zhuan* form. And in the late Ming period there appeared a greater degree of intimacy in some non-official biographical writing. But these instances were the exceptions to the rule.[45] It was official historiography, with its concern to relate virtue to administrative success, that provided the agenda for biographical writing.[46]

/on *A record of daily learning*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1985), *juan* 19, p.1475. A similar view is presented by Zhang Xuecheng, although Zhang recognized the general popularity of biography and also considered it appropriate for compilers of local gazetteers to write *zhuan*. He notes that when he came to compile a gazetteer for Hubei he modelled the biographies in it on the *zhuan* of the dynastic histories. See his essay on biography in Zhang Xuecheng and Ye Ying, *Wen shi tong yi jiaozhu* [An annotated edition of *General principles of literature and history*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1985), *juan* 3, pp.248–50.

43 McMullen, *State and scholars*, p.193.

44 The argument that the first four dynastic histories are superior to those compiled after the reorganization of official historiography under the Tang is well known. The editors of a recent anthology of traditional biographical writing suggest that the restrictions of the historical enterprise were such that not even a great writer like Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 could produce biographies that compare with those of Sima Qian and his immediate successors; see Qiao Xiangzhong et al., eds, *Zhongguo gudian zhuanji* [Traditional Chinese biography] (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1982), preface, p.2.

45 The exemplary nature of the *zhuan* composed by Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 is discussed by Yu-shih Chen in *Images and ideas in Chinese classical prose: studies of four masters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp.97–102, and Han Yu's 韓愈 parody of the form, "Mao ying zhuan," is discussed by Herbert Franke in "Literary parody in traditional Chinese literature: descriptive pseudo-biographies," *Oriens Extremus* 21.1 (1974): 21–31. For the more intimate biographical writing of the late Ming period see the interesting chapter devoted to this period in Chen and Zhang, *Gudian zhuanji*, pp.278–96.

46 In his analysis of the 'literary' *zhuan* included in the great Song anthology, the *Wenyuan yinghua* [Finest flowers from the literary garden], William H. Nienhauser Jr. notes how it was the biographies of the dynastic histories that provided the standard for all such writing: see "A structural reading of the *Chuan* in the *Wen-yuan ying-hua*," *Journal of Asian Studies* 36.3 (May. 1977): 443–56.

The constraints imposed by offficial historical writing also meant that the structure of these *zhuan* was basically the same. The preliminary section of the biography listed the various names and ancestral home of the subject, which was occasionally supplemented with information regarding notable ancestors. Following this the biographer might relate an incident to show how the character of the subject was already evident in childhood, although it was more usual to rely simply on a few familiar phrases for this purpose.[47] The main part of the biography was then built around a list of educational achievements, successive appointments, titles and honours received, and was given substance by descriptions of the subject's involvement in public events, quotations from memorials or literary works, and sometimes the inclusion of anecdotal material intended to reveal character. The final section of the biography would give an account of the subject's death, list any posthumous honours conferred, and might provide the names and brief biographies of children who had also been prominent in public affairs.[48]

As an epilogue, and clearly distinct from the text of the *zhuan* itself, the biographer would usually provide a brief comment *(zan* 贊*)* on what it was about the life of the subject (or subjects, in the case of group biographies) that was important, particularly with regard to the ethical principles which it was the writer's task to demonstrate. In describing the past through the perspective of individual lives, writers of biography, whether they be official historians or not, were conciously constructing a body of evidence to demonstrate the operation of the principles of political morality that were thought to govern both the state and society. The audience for these works was the same group of scholar-officials from which the writers came and the biographies functioned as a form of guide to the ethical standards upon which sound public administration was thought to be based.

The importance of metahistorical ethical and political Confucian principles was also obvious in the body of materials which writers drew upon when composing *zhuan*. This body of material consisted mostly of the commemorative writings produced following the death of an eminent person; the funerary inscriptions, and 'accounts of conduct' or 'obituaries' *(xingzhuang* 行狀*)*, which are to be found in the collected works of almost all Confucian writers.[49] In the case of a senior official the Bureau of Evaluations *(kaogong si* 考功司*)* might compile an obituary from government records, but in general it was left to the family of the deceased to commission a well-known writer or prestigious person to prepare a laudatory account of the deceased's life. Such commemorative writing might then be submitted to the government in the hope that the deceased would be granted a biography in an official compilation, in particular, the dynastic history, and writers of *zhuan* relied extensively on this material, often simply copying extracts directly from a funerary inscription or an obituary.[50]

Underlying all of this writing was a continuing concern with the exemplary. At the level of the family as well as that of the official historians there existed a strong sense that biography ought to provide examples for

[47] For discussion of the use of these formulaic phrases, or *topoi*, see Herbert Franke, "Some remarks on the interpretation of Chinese dynastic histories," *Oriens* 3 (1950): 120–1; and Hans H. Frankel, "T'ang literati: a composite biography," in *Confucian personalities*, ed. Arthur F. Wright and D. C. Twitchett (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), pp.72–3.

[48] Good brief discussions of the basic structure of the *zhuan* can be found in Peter Olbricht, "Die Biographie in China," *Saeculum* 8 (1957) p.226; and D. C. Twitchett "Problems of Chinese biography," in Wright and Twitchett, eds, *Confucian personalities*, p.28.

[49] For evidence of the enormous quantity of this writing see *Qingdai beizhuan quanji* [A complete collection of inscritptions and obituaries from the Qing period], reprint ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1987). See also the chapter on tomb inscriptions in Chen and Zhang, *Gudian zhuanji*, pp.140–51.

[50] Denis Twitchett notes the similarities in purpose and function of funerary writing, obituaries and *zhuan* in both "Chinese biographical writing," pp.103–12; and "Problems of Chinese biography," pp.27–9. There are few studies comparing a *zhuan* with other biographical sources for the subject's life, but in a recent article William H. Nienhauser, Jr. notes how the biography of Ouyang Zhan in the *Xin Tang shu* [New Tang history] presents "a homogenized version of the life which obscures both the points-of-view and the biases of its sources." See "Literature as a source for traditional history: the case for Ou-yang Chan," *Chinese Literature; Essays, Articles, Reviews* 12 (1990): 13.

future generations. The selection of material for inclusion in an epitaph, an obituary, or a *zhuan*, was governed by the central concern to relate virtue to administrative success. A good writer might produce a portrait that managed to be exemplary and at the same time revealed something of the individuality of the subject, as with Su Shi's unusually long obituary for Sima Guang, but the tendancy was for the biographer to ignore materials that did not fit the pattern of behaviour considered appropriate for good government.[51] The didactic aspects central to Confucian writing meant that in all biography, not just the *zhuan* of the dynastic histories, there was this concern with the exemplary, with the art of praise and blame *(baobian* 褒貶*)*. The fact that biography served as the principal narrative vehicle for historical writing simply encouraged this concern, so that the status accorded the dynastic history produced even in the commemorative writing of families an overriding emphasis on how the public events in an individual's life demonstrated the principles of the Confucian world.

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The one form of traditional biography that was to some extent separate from historical writing was that of the *nianpu* 年譜, or chronological biography. The origins of this sub-genre lay not in historical narratives but in the exegetical texts that grew up around China's earliest collection of poetry, the *Shi jing* 詩經 (Book of Songs), and it was the concern to organize a writer's work in a sequential way, corresponding to the order of composition, that saw the emergence of the first true chronological biographies.[52] Stephen Owen has argued that it was the collected works of a writer that provided the perfect form of autobiography in the Chinese tradition:[53]

> Here editorial exclusions, arrangement, and juxtapositions created a species of interior history, not narrating a life story, but letting a life story unfold in the author's sequence of responses.

With *nianpu*, the biographer uses similar methods of selection and chronological ordering to present an image of an individual's life; perhaps "not so much a biography as a collection of notes for a biography."[54] It was a format most suited to the lives of writers and became increasingly popular from the Ming period onwards. Part of this popularity can be attributed to the fact that chronological biographies remained separate from historical writing. Growing dissatisfaction with the restrictions associated with the standard form of biographical writing, the *zhuan*, encouraged writers to turn to chronological biography instead, and private scholars could take advantage of its form to record information and opinions that would not be considered appropriate in an dynastic history.[55] Yet despite this growing popularity of chronological biography, the *zhuan* would remain the dominant genre of biographical writing in China until the collapse of the official historiographical enterprise at the turn of the twentieth century.

[51] For example, the biography of the famous dramatist Tang Xianzu in *Ming shi* includes a quotation from a memorial Tang submitted to the emperor, yet says nothing of his plays. See *Ming shi* [History of the Ming], reprint ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), *juan* 230, pp.6015–16. For a discussion of this point see Wu Pei-yi, *The Confucian's progress*, p.5. Su Shi's obituary for Sima Guang can be found in *Su Dongpo ji* [The collected works of Su Dongpo], reprint ed. (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1934), *juan* 36, pp.67–81.

[52] Zheng Xuan's (127–200) *Shi pu*詩譜 [A register of poetry] on the *Book of Songs* is seen as an antecedent to chronological biography, although true *nianpu* did not appear until Lu Dafang produced his studies of the work of Du Fu *(Du shi nianpu)* and Han Yu *(Han wen nianpu)* in 1084. For a good brief discussion of the origins of chronological biography see Zhu Dongrun, "Zhongguo zhuanxu wenxue," p.25.

[53] See Owen's article "The self as perfect mirror: poetry as autobiography," in *The vitality of the lyric voice: Shih poetry from the late Han to the T'ang*, ed. Shuen-fu Lin and Stephen Owen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p.73. In an essay on *nianpu* devoted to Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan, Zhang Xuecheng makes a similar point that "collected works are histories of individuals." See *Zhangshi yishu* [The literary legacy of Mr Zhang] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1936), *juan* 8, p.272.

[54] Twitchett, "Chinese biographical writing," p.113.

[55] T. C. Liang provides a fairly comprehensive catalogue of *nianpu* which shows the increasing popularity of the form from the Ming period onwards. See his articles entitled "Nianpu kaolüe" [A bibliography of chronological biographies], *Guoli Beiping Tushuguan yuegan* 3.1 (July 1929): 109–23; 3.2 (Aug. 1929): 245–76; 3.3 (Sept. 1929): 419–46; 3.4 (Oct. 1929): 547–66; and 3.5 (Nov. 1929): 699–710. For mention of how *nianpu* could be used to convey opinion and information considered inappropraite for other forms of biographical writing see Wang Yunwu's preface to *Xinbian Zhongguo mingren nianpu jicheng* [A newly edited collection of chronological biographies of famous Chinese] (Taibei: Commercial Press, 1978), preface, p.6.

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For the historian, the attraction of biography is not difficult to understand. An individual life represents a natural and manageable perspective from which to view the complexities and confusion of the past, and by selecting subjects of central historical significance it is possible to gain an acute insight into the circumstances of an age. But this does not mean that biography need only be associated with history. In the Graeco-Roman world distinctions were drawn between the two by both historians and biographers, although there remained considerable correspondence in their writing. Plutarch's familiar statement at the beginning of his *Life of Alexander*—that he is writing biography not history—indicates a perceived distance between the two types of narrative, yet, as Albert Cook notes, the 'lives' "envisage comparisons and sequence in the arena of public action," hence they are as much history as biography.[56] Early historical writing was diverse in nature, and Plutarch was probably trying to distinguish his work from the pragmatic, political history advocted by Polybius, not the Isocratean tradition which encompassed material of much greater variety, including the biographical.[57] Cicero made a similar distinction between types of historical writing in a letter asking Lucceius to write a history of his consulate. He wanted the history written not as an annalistic record of events, but in such a way as to arouse the interest and sympathy of readers, using the term *fabula* to describe such writing, and noting that when such an account is "rounded off by a notable conclusion, our minds as we read are filled with the liveliest gratifiction."[58]

Cicero could easily have been describing differences in early Chinese historical writing, the *zhuan* of *Shiji* being as different from *Chunqiu* as the *fabula* was to be from the annals of Roman historiography. Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801) notes two main forms of Chinese historical writing: *zhuanshu* 撰述, or narrative, in which the description of event needed to be "rounded off with intuitive projection," and *jizhu* 記注, or record-exegesis, in which events needed to be "squared," or grounded, in "knowledge."[59] Zhang considers Sima Qian's history as part of the narrative tradition, where the concern was not simply with the documenting of events. Instead, the focus was on moulding the evidence from the past into narratives that would both inspire and instruct, the concern being with what was perennial and thus salutary, and the biographical essay, or *zhuan*, was seen as the perfect form for this purpose. Similarly, for Plutarch it was the moral principle that was of paramount importance, and he also turned to biographical narrative to convey these lessons from the past.[60]

While this centrality of moral vision, the concern with the allocation of praise and blame, was a feature common to both Sima Qian and Plutarch, there were significant differences in their biographical writing. Plutarch never conceived his biographies as part of a historical compilation and thus there is a tension in his portraits between 'life' and 'times', a tension absent from all traditional Chinese biographical writing, not just that of Sima Qian, where the context for an individual life came not in the *zhuan* itself but from

[56] Albert Cook, "The problematic emergence of history writing as a separate genre," in his *History/writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.16. For Plutarch's statement, "I am writing biography, not history," see the translation by Ian Scott-Kilvert in *The age of Alexander* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p.252.

[57] This point is made by Bruno Gentili and Giovanni Cerri in *History and biography in ancient thought* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1988), esp. pp.66–8. Gentili and Cerri contest the view put forward by Momigliano in *The emergence of Greek biography* that the ancient Greeks clearly distinguished and separated biography from history.

[58] See the translation by D. R. Shackelton Bailey in *Cicero: selected letters* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p.81. In discussing Cicero's letter, Gentili and Cerri write that he uses the term *fabula* to indicate a historical narrative "of the monographic type, centred on the achievements and the changing fortunes of a highly significant historic personage rich in emotional tension." (*History and biography in ancient thought*, p.57.)

[59] Zhang Xuecheng, *Wen shi tong yi, juan* 1, p.49. Li Wai-yee considers Zhang's analysis of historical writing in a fascinating discussion of the nature of different forms of narrative in a thesis entitled "Rhetoric of fantasy and rhetoric of irony: studies in *Liao-chai chih-i* and *Hung-lou meng*" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1988), pp.38–9.

[60] The only comparative study I am aware of that provides an analysis of the biographical writing of both Sima Qian and Plutarch is the essay by Li Shaoyong, "Sima Qian yu Pulutake" [Sima Qian and Plutarch] included in his *Sima Qian*, pp.205–318. For a discussion of Plutarch's concern with 'praise and blame' see D. A. Russell, *Plutarch* (London: Duckworth, 1973), pp.103–6.

the larger work in which it was included. Frustration at this subservience to official historiography did encourage the writing of more chronological biography and autobiography in late imperial China, although most never considered biography as being independent of history, and the writing of *zhuan* continued to be enormously popular. It was not until the collapse of the state-centred historical enterprise that it became possible to conceive and establish a radically different relationship between the writing of history and biography.

The 'New History' and Biography

Prior to the collapse of the official imperial historical enterprise changes within the world of Confucian historiography itself had already produced a change in perceptions with regard to the historian's task. In the scholarly communities of the mid-Qing, private historians turned away from the explicit concern with praise and blame and emphasized the need to 'seek truth from facts'. Here it was felt that the historian's role was to record events and let them speak for themselves, not be preoccupied with the moral imperative to show that with good leadership came prosperity while bad leadership brought turmoil and decline.[61] In the world of classical studies this emphasis on the methods of evidential research (*kaozheng* 考證 – scholarship) undermined the status of orthodox Song Learning and led on to the conflicts between Old Text and New Text scholars, between historicism and classicism, that dominated political discourse in late imperial China.[62] The *kaozheng* emphasis on the critical use of diverse source materials also provided an important legacy for historians of the early twentieth century, enabling them to find within the Chinese tradition methods similar to those they were discovering in their encounters with modern Western historiography and thus providing an important foundation upon which they could build in their efforts to construct new, post-Confucian approaches to the past.[63] Despite their emphasis on critical scholarship, however, the *kaozheng* historians themselves remained very much part of the Confucian tradition. They did not question the fundamentals of the Confucian world view, nor the authoritative status of the official histories. Their primary concern lay in resolving issues of textual inconsistency. It was not until after the failure of the reform movement in 1898 and the exodus of large numbers of intellectuals to Japan that radically different and explicitly iconoclastic approaches to the past were proposed.

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In Japan, historical writing became both more 'scientific' and more 'social' during the years of the Meiji Restoration, and these changes were to have considerable influence over Chinese intellectuals. Evidential research *(kōshōgaku* 考證學*)*, with its roots in China, had developed to such an extent that it became the foundation for the official historical compilation, the *Dai*

[61] Emphasis on the need to 'seek truth from facts' and a critique of the use of praise and blame can be found in Wang Mingsheng's well known preface to *Shiqi shi shangque* [Critical discussions of the seventeen histories] (Suzhou: Dongjing Caotang Zangban, 1787), preface, 1a–b and p.4. For more on *kaozheng* historiography see Du Weiyun, "Qing Qian-Jia shidai zhi lishi kaojuxue" [Historical evidential research during the Qianlong and Jiajing reigns of the Qing dynasty] in his *Qingdai shixue yu shijia* [Historians and historiography of the Qing Dynasty] (Beijing: Xinhua Shuju, 1988), pp.271–315.

[62] This process is discussed in detail by Benjamin A. Elman in *Classicism, politics, and kinship: the Ch'ang-chou school of new text Confucianism in late imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[63] The legacy of Qing historiography for modern historians is discussed in Qi Sihe, "Jinbainian lai Zhongguo shixue de fazhan," [The development of Chinese historiography over the last one hundred years], *Yanjing shehui kexue* 2 (1949): 1–35; and Wang Fansen, *Gushibian yundongdexingqi* [The rise of the *Gu shi bian* movement] (Taibei: Yunchen Wenhua, 1987).

*Nippon hennen shi*大日本編年史 (Chronological history of Japan), work on which began in 1882.[64] The critical use of source materials that was central to evidential research saw an increasing separation of ethical and political concerns from historical scholarship, something that was encouraged by the growing interest shown by Japanese historians in the methods of contemporary European historiography, and, in particular, those of the German tradition.

In 1887 the German historian Ludwig Riess (1861–1928) took up a position in the history department of Tokyo Imperial University and began teaching Western techniques of historical research. Riess stayed in Japan until 1902 and was responsible for many Japanese learning the methods of Rankean 'scientific' historiography.[65] German methods of historical research were also taught by Tsuboi Kumazō 坪井九馬三 (1858–1936), who had studied in Europe, and it was through translations from Tsuboi's textbook on methodology, *Shigaku kenkyū hō* 史學研究法 (Methods for the study of history), that Chinese readers were first introduced to the methods of German historiography. Extracts from Tsuboi's textbook first appeared in Chinese in 1902, at a time when Chinese were just beginning to talk of a 'new history'.[66] The translation of another influential work, Ukita Kazutami's 浮田和民 (1859–1945) lectures on methodology, *Shigaku genron* 史學原論 (Principles of history) was even published in 1903 under the title *Xin shixue* 新史學 (New history).[67] It seems unlikely that there was any clear consensus as to what the term 'new history' meant, except that it signified historical research and writing that was clearly distinct from traditional Confucian historiography and its concern with individuals and ethics. These works on methodology discuss Western techniques for organizing and assessing historical materials and consider history as a science, related to other disciplines such as geography, archaeology and philology. But the term 'new history' meant more than this. It incorporated the notion that history should be the study of the past of all aspects of a society, not just its rulers and administrators. Here also the Chinese were influenced by Japanese writers and historians.

The concern with *bunmeishi* 文明史, or the history of civilization, was the other main feature of Meiji historiography. Here the focus was on society, not methodology, and the *bunmeishi* writers drew on the ideas of European social theorists such as Herbert Spencer and the histories of civilization by Henry Buckle and François Guizot.[68] The most influential of these writers was Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 (1835–1901), and Fukuzawa's ideas were developed in the *bunmeishi* histories by Taguchi Ukichi田口卯吉(*Nihon kaika shōshi* 日本開化小史 [A short history of Japanese civilization : 1877–1882]), Miyake Yonekichi三宅米吉(*Nihonshigaku teiyō*日本史学提要 [A manual for the study of Japanese history] [1886]) and Saga Shōsaku 嵯峨正作 (*Nihonshikō* 日本史綱 [An outline of Japanese history [1888]).[69] Central to these works was the idea that history was progressive, not cyclical,

[64] Ōkubo Toshiaki, *Nihon kindai shigaku no seiritsu* [The emergence of modern Japanese historiography] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1986), pp.69–92, and Jiro Numata, "Shigeno Yasutsugu and the modern Tokyo tradition of historical writing," in *Historians of China and Japan*, ed. W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleybank (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp.264–87.

[65] Ōkubo, *Nihon*, pp.98–100. Prior to the arrival of Riess, the Japanese had commissioned a work on European historiography from the British historian George Zerffi. Although never published, a translation of this work, "The science of history," was used by the official historians working on the *Dai Nippon hennen shi* (Ōkubo, *Nihon*, pp.96–7).

[66] As well as the Rankean approach to history, Tsuboi Kumazō introduced his readers to the ideas on methodology put forward by Edward Freeman (*The methods of historical study* [1886]) and Ernst Bernheim (*Lehrbuch der historischen Methode* [1889]). See Ōkubo, *Nihon*, pp.101–4. For details about the Chinese translation of Tsuboi's work see Yu Danchu, "Ershi shiji chunian Zhongguode xinshixue sichao chukao" [An exploratory study of the new history in China during the early years of the twentieth century], *Shixueshi yanjiu* 3 (1982): 56–7, 58–9.

[67] Yu Danchu, "Ershi shiji," p.57. Yu gives a list (pp.58–61) of various works on historical methodology published in China during the first decade of the twentieth century, including translations from Japanese works such as those by Tsuboi and Ukita.

[68] Buckle's *History of civilization in England* was translated into Japanese in 1874, and Guizot's *History of civilization in Europe* was translated in 1872. Spencer's *Education: intellectual, moral, and physical* was available in Japanese translation in 1880. For discussion of how these works influenced *bunmeishi* historiography, see Ōkubo, *Nihon*, pp.39–41, 109–34.

[69] Ibid, pp.418–20.

and that it was in the life of the society as a whole, not just the actions of rulers and administrators, that this progress towards civilization could be seen. In his *Bunmeiron no gairyaku* 文明論の概略 (An outline of a theory of civilization [1875]), Fukuzawa Yukichi discussed how it was the intelligence of a whole people, what he called the 'spirit of the times' *(jisei* 時勢*)*, that moved the society forward. Fukuzawa wrote:

> When great historical personages achieved success in their own times, it was not because they advanced the level of knowledge and virtue of the people through their own talents, but rather because the level of the people's knowledge and virtue permitted the successful achievement of their plans.[70]

This perception of the role of the individual in history was very different from the Confucian notion that it was the moral conduct of the élite that determined the fate of a society. The *bunmeishi* historians who followed Fukuzawa extended their focus from an exclusive concern with the state and its representatives to include consideration of wider social factors: subjects such as geography, popular customs, religion, literature, and ethnicity featured in their writing. Chinese intellectuals reading these works saw that a 'new history' must involve more than just the use of 'scientific' methods; it also must go beyond the Confucian concern with politics and ethics and address the history of Chinese civilization in a more comprehensive manner. It was Liang Qichao 梁啓超 (1873–1929), one of the most influential figures of the time and a man who used his command of the new popular press to great effect, who was to do most to bring these ideas before a Chinese audience.

* * *

By the first years of the twentieth century Liang Qichao was arguing from exile in Yokohama the need for everything Chinese to be made anew. He claimed China needed a new citizenry, new fiction and new history. The main thrust of this argument came in his *Xinmin shuo* 新民說 (Theory of a new citizenry), a powerful critique of the Confucian tradition. Here Liang argued the case for a new nation-state, to be built around the collective needs of the Chinese people.[71] Essential to this was the requirement that both fiction and history be made to serve the new citizenry.

In 1901 Liang began writing what was to be a general history of China, and although he completed only the first chapter the ideas it contains show how the 'new' history was envisaged as a radical departure from traditional historical writing. Liang wrote that:

> The duty of the modern historian is different from that of historians of the past. [Whereas] in the past historians simply recorded events, the modern historian must explain the association of causes and consequences to events. Previously, historians merely narrated events related to one or two influential people. Although this was called history, in fact it was only genealogy. The modern historian must inquire into the advancement of all people, and, moreover, relate this to the total experience of the nation.[72]

[70] David Dilworth and G. Cameron Hurst, trans., *Fukuzawa Yukichi's* An outline of a theory of civilization (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1973), p.55. Carmen Blacker discusses the relation of this work to the emergence of new notions of history in *The Japanese enlightenment: a study of the writings of Fukuzawa Yukichi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp.90–100.

[71] For discussions of Liang's *Xinmin shuo*, see Elvin, "Scriptural Confucianism," pp.64–73; and Hao Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao*, pp. 149–295. And for Liang's ideas on fiction see C. T. Hsia, "Yen Fu and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao as advocates of new fiction," in *Chinese approaches to literature from Confucius to Liang Ch'i-ch'ao*, ed. Adele Austin Rickett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 221–57.

[72] Liang Qichao, "Zhongguo shixulun" [An appraisal of Chinese history], *Yinbing shi heji, wenji* [Collected writings from an ice-drinker's studio, literary works] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1936), 6: 1.

Early the next year Liang developed these ideas in an essay published in his new journal *Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報 (Collected reports on a new citizenry). Here Liang argued in more detail his claim that the new history must be concerned with evolutionary change, and with how the lives of the majority of people evolve, not just focus on the court and the lives of a few prominent individuals. Liang stated that such an approach to the past was essential if China was to be made anew: "Without a revolution in historiography, China cannot be saved."[73] The conception of history Liang Qichao articulated in these essays may seem a commonplace today, but in China at the turn of the century it was revolutionary, and it is for this reason that these essays are seen as marking the beginning of modern Chinese historiography.[74]

Liang Qichao's claim that previous historical writing amounted to little more than genealogy was to be repeated often over the coming years as the agenda of the new history was gradually put into practice.[75] Yet while it seemed that Liang was contesting the notion that biography, or at least biography in its traditional *zhuan* form, could provide the principal narrative perspective for historical writing, at the very time he was setting out this agenda for the new history he was producing more biography than at any other stage of his life. Underlying his concern that history should be more responsive to the development of Chinese civilization, to the collective legacy of the Chinese people, was the notion that it was vital to inculcate a greater degree of patriotism amongst people in order for China to confront the new challenges it faced. At this time Liang saw the foundation of European strength and independence in patriotism and believed it was vital that the new historical writing engender a similar patriotic nationalism in China.[76] Thus, although Liang criticised traditional historiography for concentrating only on one or two influential people, he turned to biographies of people he himself considered influential in order to cultivate the kind of patriotic sentiment he felt was essential for China's survival.

In the first of these biographies, the accounts of the six 'patriots' executed following the failure of the 1898 reform movement, Liang used the traditional *zhuan* format.[77] Of the many biographies he wrote over the next ten years most were brief lives, similar if not identical in form to the *zhuan*. But Liang also went beyond the tradition, experimenting with new ways of writing biography. He did this first in 1901 in his biographies of Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901) and Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), and also in his most significant piece of biographical writing, the study of Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–86) he had published in 1908.[78]

[73] See "Xin shixue" [The new history], *Xinmin congbao* 1 (8 Feb. 1902), repr. in *Yinbing shi heji, wenji* 9, pp.1–11. The quotation is from p.7.

[74] The point that Liang's essays mark the beginning of modern Chinese historiography is made by Zhou Yutong in "Wushinian lai Zhongguo zhi xin shixue" [China's new history of the last fifty years], *Xuelin yuekan* 4 (Feb. 1941; repr. March 1970): 18–20; and Yin Da in *Zhongguo shixue fazhan shi* [A history of the development of Chinese historiography] (Henan: Zhongguo Guji Chubanshe, 1985), 2: 425. A more detailed study of Liang Qichao's views on history can be found in the chapter devoted to him in Xu Guansan, *Xin shixue jiushi nian* [Ninety years of new historiography] (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1986), 1: 9–53.

[75] Lu Xun, for instance, remarked that the dynastic histories amounted to "no more than the family chronicles of emperors, kings, generals, and ministers ... ." See "Zhongguoren shidiao zixinli le ma" [Have the Chinese lost their self-confidence?], in *Lu Xun quanji* [The complete works of Lu Xun] (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1981), 6: 118.

[76] See Liang's 1899 article "Aiguo lun" [On patriotism] in *Yinbing shi heji, wenji* 3, pp. 65–77. For a discussion of the contradictions, or "uncongenial propositions," in Liang's conception of the new history see chap.4 in Joseph Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and the mind of modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), esp. pp.132–6.

[77] See "Xunnan liu lieshi zhuan" [Biographies of six martyrs], *Yinbing shi heji, zhuanji* 1, pp.95–112.

[78] See "Nanhai Kang xiansheng zhuan" [A biography of Mr Kang of Nanhai]. *Yinbing shi heji, wenji* 6, pp.57–89; "Zhongguo sishi nian lai dashi ji: yiming Li Hongzhang" [A record of the major events in China over the last forty years: the famous Li Hongzhang], *Yinbing shi heji, zhuanji* 3, pp.1–90; and *Wang Anshi pingzhuan* [A critical biography of Wang Anshi], reprint ed. (Hong Kong: Guangzhi Shuju, n.d.).

[79] See the very first of his prefatory comments to this biography in *Yinbing shi heji, zhuanji* 3, p.1. For recognition of the innovative nature of Liang's biography of Li Hongzhang see Zheng Zangbo, "Lun zhuanji wenxue" [On biographical literature], *Zhuanji wenxue* 1.3 (Aug., 1962): 4–5.

[80] See the section "Yingxiong yu shishi" [Heroes and circumstances] in his 1899 essay "Ziyou shu" [The book of freedom], *Yinbing shi heji, zhuanji* 2, pp.9–10.

[81] Richard C. Howard, in "Modern Chinese biography," *Journal of Asian Studies* 21.4 (Aug., 1962): 470, argues that Liang Qichao gives a Carlyle-like heroic interpretation of his subjects. For Guo Moruo's reading of Carlyle in late 1919, and his subsequent perception of himself as poet-hero, see David Tod Roy, *Kuo Mo-jo: the early years* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp.99–100. A translation by Zheng Xubai of Carlyle's *On heroes,*

In the biography of Li Hongzhang, Liang begins by announcing his intention to depart from the *zhuan* format and follow the style of Western biographical writing, and in its structure this biography does indeed differ from traditional biography.[79] Liang emphasized the need to see the lives of individuals within the social context in which they lived and thus begins his biographies of Li Hongzhang, Kang Youwei and Wang Anshi with a discussion which relates each subject to the major social and political events of his time. For several years Liang had been contemplating the role of the individual in history, discussing the relationship between 'heroic' individuals and the times in which they lived, and in the biographies written at this time he developed this theme further.[80] It was to be some years before the likes of Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) were to show their fascination with Carlyle, and it would be wrong to see Liang Qichao's interest in biography as simply an expression of an emerging 'cult of the hero'.[81] He may well have continued the Confucian concern with the exemplary, seeing particular individuals as the embodiment of certain values or ideals, but his perception of the role of the individual in history was never simply heroic. It was impossible, he argued, to see individuals abstracted from the enviroment in which they lived, creating the world around them.[82] It is also important to remember that Liang Qichao conceived these biographies as 'independent lives' and that they therefore lacked the context provided for a *zhuan* by the dynastic history in which it was included. Thus, Liang felt it was essential to incorporate within each biography the social and historical background for the subject's life. It was here, in this new emphasis on the tension between 'life' and 'times', a tension central to biographical writing in the West, that Liang made his great contribution to Chinese biography.

* * *

These 'new' biographies by Liang Qichao also reflected the changes that were occurring within the structure of narrative prose, with a shift away from the segmented narrative of traditional historical writing and towards more unified monographs. Behind these changes lay the increasing influence of the ideas about evolutionary change that played such an important part in undermining the authority of Confucianism.[83] These ideas led to the questioning of the notions of historical atrophy *(lishi tuihua* 歷史退化*)*, the falling away from a Golden Age in the past, and the cyclical view of dynastic change *(zhiluan xunhuan* 治亂循環*)* that were fundamental to traditional historiography. With the 'new' history came instead an emphasis on the progressive development of society, and this encouraged a greater concern in accounts of the past with continuous, linear development.

The narrative structure of traditional historiography was segmented in character, with texts compiled from numerous interrelated essays.[84] Because of the nature of such works, information regarding an individual would not necessarily be confined to a single biographical essay. For example, Sima Qian devotes much of one of the biographical essays in *Shiji* to the life of Tian Fen 田蚡, the Marquis of Wu'an 武安侯, yet relates different informa-

/hero-worship, and the heroic in history was published in 1932: see *Yingxiong yu yingxiong chongbai* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1932).

[82] See, for instance, the emphasis Liang places on this when introducing the life of Li Hongzhang: *Yinbing shi heji, zhuanji* 3, pp.4–5.

[83] Du Weiyun, "Xifang shixue shuru Zhongguo kao" [A study of the introduction of Western historiography to China] in his *Yu Xifang shijia lun Zhongguo shixue* [Western historians and Chinese historiography], reprint ed. (Taibei: Dongda, 1988), pp.291–6. See also Satō Shin'ichi, "*Ten'en ron* izen no shinkaron: Shinmatsu chishikijin no rekishi ishiki o megutte" [Views on evolution before *Tianyan lun*: historical consciousness among intellectuals in the late Qing], *Shisō* 6 (1990): 241–54; and Hao Chang, *Chinese intellectuals in crisis: search for order and meaning (1890–1911)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp.50–3.

[84] For use of the term 'segmented narrative' to decribe traditional historical writing see Jaroslav Průšek, "History and epics in China and the West," *Diogenes* 42 (Summer 1963): 20–43. Andrew Plaks makes a similar point, that the "format of the dynastic histories serve to militate against any sense of continuous narration of discrete units," in "Towards a critical theory of Chinese narrative," *Chinese narrative: critical and theoretical essays*, ed. Andrew H. Plaks (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p.316.

[85] For the main biography of Tian Fen see *Shiji*, *juan* 107, pp.2839–56, while other accounts of him can be found in *juan* 29, p.1409, and *juan* 113, p.2980. This example is given by Zhu Dongrun in his discussion of how the segmented nature of historical narrative affected traditional biographical writing. See "Zhongguo zhuanxu," p.19. More general consideration of Sima Qian's use of this narrative technique (also known as *hujianfa* 互見法) can be found in Zhang Dake, *Shiji yanjiu*, pp.290–307.

[86] Similar changes were occurring in fictional narrative. Although there had been an increasing coherence within works of fiction since the late Ming, Milena Dolezelová-Velingerová notes that in the last decades of the Qing dynasty the traditional plot pattern of the novel, "where relatively self-contained episodes were organized in a /OVER

/'string' sequence," was being discarded in favour of shorter works with a tighter more coherent structure. See her article, "The origins of modern Chinese literature," in *Modern Chinese literature in the May Fourth era*, ed. Merle Goldman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p.33.

87 Of these three forms, the *benmo* (beginning-to-end) allowed the greatest narrative coherence. In the various essays that comprised a *benmo* text, particular social, economic and political developments could be traced over time. Quinton Gwynne Priest has suggested that the increasing popularity of this genre in the late imperial period "may have been part of a renewed emphasis upon the nature of narrative, engendered by the appearance of the novel and short story on the literary scene." See *Historiography and statecraft in eighteenth century China: the life and times of Chao I (1727–1814)* (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 1982), p.130. This linking of literary trends and historiographical developments is important, but it was not until the early years of the twentieth century that the transition from segmented histories composed of distinct essays to integrated historical monographs occurred.

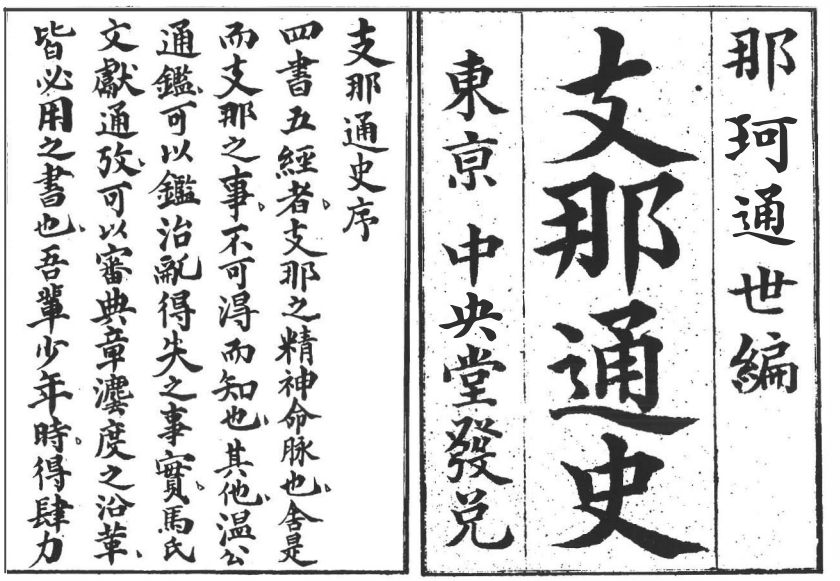
88 Naka Michiyo, *Shina tsūshi* [A comprehensive history of China] (Tokyo: Dai Nihon Tosho, 1888–90). Although this only went as far as the Song period, it was written in Chinese and had a great influence over Chinese scholars. See Zhou Yutong, "Wushi nian," pp.16-17.

89 First published by the Commercial Press between 1904 and 1921 under the title *Zhongguo lishi jiaokeshu* [A textbook of Chinese history], this work was later reissued under the title *Zhongguo gudai shi* [A history of traditional China] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1933). Xia Zengyou was not the only scholar stimulated to write general history through reading the work of Japanese historians such as Naka Michiyo; Liang Qichao and Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 both set down outlines for such works, but never completed them. See Liang Qichao, *Yinbing shi heji, wenji* 6, p.1, and Zhang Binglin, "Zhongguo tongshi lueli" [Guidelines for a comprehensive history of China] in his *Qiushu* [Compelled writings] (Shanghai: Gudian Wenxue, 1958), pp.158-63. The extent of the transition to a unified and coherent narrative structure in historical writing tion about the Marquis in other parts of his history, in biographical essays devoted to other subjects.[85] To appreciate all that Sima Qian has to say about Tian Fen it is necessary to read the full history, not just the biography devoted to him. This was common to all biographical writing in traditional Chinese historiography, and one of the characteristics of modern biography is its move away from such segmented narrative.[86]

This transition from the segmented narrative of traditional historiography towards more unified historical monographs can be seen in the new general histories of Chinese civilization which began to appear as the 'new' history took hold. In these works the traditional narrative forms of *biannian*, *jizhuan* and *jishi benmo* 紀事本末 were abandoned in favour of a continuous and integrated narrative.[87] Initially, it was the work of the Japanese scholar, Naka Michiyo 那珂通世 (1851–1908), that showed what a new comprehensive history of China might look like.[88] But it was in the general history by Liang Qichao's friend and colleague, Xia Zengyou 夏曾佑 (1865–1924), that the break with traditional narrative structure was made.[89] In his prefatory comments to the work Xia states that his central concern was to "explain the origins of contemporary society," and rather than relate aspects of the past in distinct units he provides an integrated discussion of the gradual evolution of the Chinese people.[90] It was the narrative coherence that resulted from such a focus that distinguished this general history from traditional historical writing. Xia's book was extremely influential and was adopted as a principal text in history courses in secondary schools and some

Figure 2

Title-page of Naka Michiyo's Shina tsūshi *[A comprehensive history of China], published in Tokyo 1880–1890*



universities during the first decades of the twentieth century. The emergence of such new histories encouraged the move away from the *liezhuan* of traditional historiography and towards the modern, independent biographical monograph.

For Liang Qichao the political significance of the subjects he wrote about was more important than any experiment with narrative structure, yet in deliberately seeking alternatives to the *liezhuan* format he began the transition to modern biographical writing. With his study of Li Hongzhang he self-consciously sought to write what he thought was a Western-style biography, and he certainly achieved a much more detailed and critical portrait of Li than would have been possible had he written in the traditional *zhuan* style. With his longest and most important biography, the study of Wang Anshi published in 1908, Liang adapted the format of the traditional *nianpu* in order to develop the kind of detailed portrait he desired, quoting extensively from Wang's letters and other contemporary sources. But rather than simply ordering this material in chronological sequence, Liang rearranged it in different chapters so as to bring out aspects of Wang's career he considered to be of political importance. This extensive quotation from source materials may have been in part a consequence of the influence that Cai Shangxiang's 蔡上翔 (1717–1810) earlier *nianpu* of Wang Anshi had over Liang, but his adaptation of the techniques of traditional chronological biography suggested how aspects of the tradition might be refined in order to be more responsive to the needs of the 'new' history.[91] New did not simply imply Western, and this concern with adapting traditional forms to meet modern needs would be something Liang returned to in the famous lectures on historical methodolgy which he gave at Nankai and Qinghua universities in the 1920s.

Following this biography of Wang Anshi, Liang Qichao turned his attention to other things. Biography did not seem a high priority, and what he did write was restricted to traditional forms, funerary writing and *nianpu*.[92] Despite this, he had not abandoned his interest in the relationship of biography to the 'new' history, and this was to be a major focus of his second series of lectures on historical methodology.[93]

In these lectures Liang described the five categories which he felt ought to constitute the core of the modern historical enterprise, categories he called 'specialized history' *(zhuanshi* 專史*)*. The first of these five categories, the history of individuals, would include various forms of biographical writing, biography thus retaining its place at the heart of the historian's work.[94] Four of the five forms of biographical writing which comprised the history of individuals Liang retained from traditional historiography: the *liezhuan*, the *nianpu*, *hezhuan* 合傳 (group biography), and *renbiao* 人表 (biographical tables). Liang felt that each of these forms of biographical writing fulfilled unique functions and thus each should remain as integral to modern historical writing.[95] But more important than any of these traditional forms of biography, Liang argued, was the *zhuanpian* 專編, (biographical monograph) or *zhuanzhuan* 專傳 (special biography). What Liang Qichao meant

/can be seen in the later and much admired general histories by Qian Mu, *Guoshi dagang* [Outline of the nation's history] (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1940), and Zhang Yinlin *Zhongguo shigang* [An outline history of China] (Hong Kong: Sanlian, 1946).

90 Xia Zengyou, *Zhongguo gudai shi, pian* 2, "Fanli," p.2.

91 Cai Shangxiang's *Wang Jinggong nianpu kaolüe* [A chronological biography of Wang Jinggong] (1804; reprint ed., Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju,1959), was little known before Liang Qichao gave it prominence. For a study of the relationship between the interest in political reformers and the emergence of modern Chinese biography see Wang Gungwu, "The rebel-reformer and modern Chinese biography," in *Self and biography: essays on the individual and society in Asia*, ed. Wang Gungwu (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1974), pp.185–206.

92 For the funerary inscriptions see *Yinbing shi heji, wenji* 15, and for the *nianpu* of Tao Qian, Zhu Shunshui and Xin Jiaxuan written in the 1920s see *Yinbing shi heji, zhuanji* 96–8.

93 These two series of lectures were extremely influential and were reprinted often after their first publication by the Commercial Press. Tang Zhijun gives an account of the publishing history of the lectures in his introductory comments to a recent edition of them: see "Liang Qichao he *Zhongguo lishi yanjiu fa*" [Qichao and *Methods for the study of Chinese history*], in Liang Qichao, *Zhongguo lishi yanjiu fa*, p.4.

94 The other categories, or *zhuanshi*, included the histories of events *(shi* 事*)*, cultural artifacts *(wenwu* 文物*)*, regions *(difang* 地方*)*, and particular periods or dynasties *(duandai* 斷代*)*. See Liang Qichao, *Zhongguo lishi yanjiu fa*, pp.145–7.

95 Ibid, pp.182–5.

when he talked of a special biography, or biographical monograph, was the type of study he had been working towards with his own biographies of Li Hongzhang and Wang Anshi.

For Liang Qichao the biographical monograph was to provide the core of the important category of historical writing he called the history of individuals. Such monographs were vital, he argued, because they would focus on individuals who were of central significance to the time in which they lived and, unlike a *liezhuan*, they would give detailed consideration to the individual's life. Again, Liang's emphasis remains on the tension between 'life' and 'times', with the subject of the biography serving as a pivot around which could be built a discussion of the significant events of the period. Liang was not interested in the interior life of an individual; rather, it was their involvement in affairs of public importance which ought to concern the historian.

Biographical monographs were also seen as different from *nianpu* in that they would entail not just a chronological detailing of the events of a life, with copious quotations from source materials, but rather should provide a critical interpretation of a life and its significance to the modern world.[96] Liang went on to consider how a series of biographical monographs, one hundred of them, each devoted to figures of intellectual, political or artistic significance from different periods of the past, might offer a unique and valuable insight into the Chinese past: "if written well, they could provide, through the perspective of individual lives, a comprehensive history of Chinese civilization in one hundred monographs."[97]

It was to be some time before Liang Qichao's suggestions about the importance of a new form of historical biography were taken up and developed by others. Many did believe that biography remained very much a part of the historian's work, but it was the traditional forms of biographical history which occupied them. Such writing remained very popular in the early twentieth century. The projected dynastic history for the Qing period involved historians for whom the *liezhuan* form retained its authoritative status as an integral part of the historiographical tradition.[98] And private scholars continued the traditional practice of bringing together compilations of biographical essays and funerary writing.[99] More importantly, the gradual shift of biography away from its almost exclusive subservience to historiography, as seen in the increasing popularity of *nianpu* during the Qing period, continued during the early years of the twentieth century.[100] For most historians, however, the agenda of the new history provided different and more compelling questions about the past than those encompased by the tradition, and the writing of biography no longer seemed of great importance.

At the same time as Liang Qichao had been lecturing on the relationship of traditional historiography to the new history, others, such as He Bingsong 何柄松 (1890–1946), were introducing Chinese students to a very different conception of what the new history should be. Texts on historical methodology, many of them translations of Western works, were extremely popular

[96] Ibid, p.183.

[97] Ibid, p.235.

[98] See *Qingshi liezhuan* [Biographies (prepared) for the Qing History], reprint ed., 10 vols (Taibei: Zhonghua Shuju, 1964). For general comments on the draft history for the Qing period, compiled under the general direction of Zhao Ersun and first published in 1928, see Jin Yufu, *Zhongguo shixue shi* [A history of Chinese historiography], reprint ed. (Taibei: Dingwen Shuju, 1974), pp.136–8. For more detailed information relating to the project see Xu Shishen, *Youguan* Qing shi gao *bianyin jingguoji gefang yijian huibian* [A collection of documents and opinions pertaining to the compilation and publication of the *Draft History of the Qing Dynasty*], 2 vols (Taibei, 1979).

[99] See Min Erchang, *Beizhuan jibu* [A supplement to the collection of inscriptions and biographies], 24 vols (Beijing: Yanjing Daxue Chubanshe, 1932).

[100] See Liang, "Nianpu kaolüe," for bibliographical evidence of the continuing popularity of *nianpu*.

during the 1920s and early 1930s. He Bingsong used his own translation of one such text, James Harvey Robinson's influential collection of essays, *The New History*, in his lectures on methodology at Beijing University.[101] A characteristic of such methodologies was the emphasis placed on the need to turn away from an exclusive concern with politics and to consider social and economic issues which may have been of greater long-term significance for a society. A new problem-centred approach to the past was encouraged and the narrative perspective provided by biography was seen as being of little value to such an enterprise.

The "reorganization of the national past" *(zhengli guogu* 整理國故*)* became a major focus for historians intent on implementing the agenda of the new history. These historians turned their attention to the foundations of Chinese civilization, re-assessing classical texts and traditional views of early Chinese history.[102] Their critical perspective led them to question the exemplary nature of biographical writing in traditional historiography, where the focus was not on the specifics of an individual life but rather on the position which a subject was thought to occupy within the moral spectrum of the Confucian world.[103] Such scrutiny of core aspects of traditional historiography was an essential part of the process of establishing the foundations for new, post-Confucian interpretations of the Chinese past. It also served further to undermine the notion that biography could provide the principal narrative perspective in historical writing.

The increasing emphasis on social and economic issues during the late 1920s and early 1930s encouraged this turn away from biography. This emphasis was seen not only in the highly polemical contributions to the social history debates of the early 1930s but also in the more considered work of academic historians, most of whom had either trained overseas or had been influenced by Western historical methodology.[104] The scope of historical research expanded enormously during the early decades of the twentieth century. The need to look at the tradition anew in the wake of the collapse of the Confucian foundations of Chinese civilization saw historians ask entirely new questions about the past, and the discovery of archeological materials encouraged a critical re-assessment of traditional perceptions of China's early history. As well as the new interest in social and economic aspects of the past, historians also turned their attention to the question of China's foreign relations, particularly during the period of the Yuan dynasty. Western ideas on historical methodology were absorbed and new national and cultural histories were produced.[105]

With the focus of historical enquiry extended well beyond the traditional concern with ethics and the administrative world of the élite, biography could no longer command the attention of historians that had been fundamental to the official historiography of the past. This would change with the outbreak of war with Japan and the emergence of a more militantly nationalistic history which sought inspiration from 'heroes' of the past, but when historians turned back to biography in the late 1930s and 1940s few

[101] James Harvey Robinson, *The new history: essays illustrating the modern historical outlook* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912). He Bingsong's translation was published under the title *Xin shixue* [The new history] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1925). For discussion of the translation of this and other Western works on historical methodology, and of the influence these texts had in China, see Qi Sihe, "Jin bainian lai," pp.23–5. A detailed account of the intellectual context for the emergence of the 'new history' movement in North America can be found in Peter Novick's social history of the American historical profession, *That noble dream: the "objectivity question" and the American historical profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.87–92.

[102] Hu Shi's editorial in the first issue (Jan., 1923) of the *Guoxue jikan* [National studies quarterly] set out the aims of the *zhengli guogu* movement. See *Hu Shi wen cun* [The literary legacy of Hu Shi] (Taibei: Yuandong Tushu Gongsi, 1953), vol.2, pp.1–18.

[103] See Gu Jiegang's discussion of this in his study of the legendary bad last emperor in "Zhou e qishi shide fasheng cidi" [The order of occurence of the seven evil deeds of the Zhou emperor] in *Gu shi bian* [Critiques of ancient history], ed. Gu Jiegang (Beiping: Pu She, 1930), vol.2, pp.82–93.

[104] The most detailed study of the social history debates is Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and history: origins of Marxist historiography in China, 1919-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). For evidence of the substantial body of social and economic history published by academic historians during the 1930s and 1940s see the journal *Zhongguo jindai jingji shi yanjiu* [Studies in the modern economic history of China].

[105] For surveys of the historical writing of the early twentieth century see Gu Jiegang's bibliographical overview *Dangdai Zhongguo shixue mulu* [A catalogue of contemporary Chinese historical scholarship], reprint ed. (Hong Kong: Longmen Shudian, 1964); and S. Y. Teng "Chinese historiography in the last fifty years," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 8.2 (1949): 131–56.

sought to revive the *zhuan* of traditional historiography. During the first part of the twentieth century biography had begun to emerge as an independent genre, free from its traditional subservience to historical writing, and this led historians into a new form of biographical writing.

The Emergence of Modern Historical Biography

The new and increasingly diverse interests of historians did much to undermine the status of traditional biographical writing, and this was reinforced by the widespread criticism of tradition that was so much a part of the May Fourth years (1917–1927). It was one of the most prominent writers of this period, Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936), who produced perhaps the most powerful and influential critique of traditional biography. In his famous story of Ah Q, Lu Xun has the narrator search the tradition for a genre of biographical writing suitable for the modern life-story he has to tell, all to no avail. From the *liezhuan* of the official histories to the biographies included in family genealogies, each of the various genres is found wanting:

> What kind of biography was it to be? As Confucius once said, "Be the title not just so—Then the words refuse to flow." You really do have to be pretty darned careful about titles. But there are so many! Why, just for biography alone there are enough titles hanging around to make your head swim: narrative biography, autobiography, private biography, public biography, supplementary biography, family biography, biographical sketch. Trouble is—not one of them fits.[106]

Lu Xun goes on to give an eloquent parody of the formalized rigidity of these traditional forms of biographical writing, a parody which served to reinforce the notion that biography must escape its subservience to historiography and find a more flexible format than the tradition allowed.

While such criticsm of traditional biography was widespread at this time, much of it was not new. For instance, when Hu Shi complained of how so much of traditional biographical writing consisted of meaningless, ornamental phrases, phrases that obscured rather than revealed the subject's character, he was simply repeating a criticism that had been made frequently from the Tang period onwards.[107] Li Ao 李翺 (772–836), in his "Memorial on obituaries for officials" submitted to the throne in 819, complains of how such writing tended to be full of extravagant and unfounded claims praising the virtuous and filial behaviour of the deceased.[108] Similar criticisms were made in a memorial submitted to the History Office during the Five Dynasties period, and Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 was one of many in the late imperial period who argued that writers should restrict assessment to the arrangement of detail and refrain from making explicit moral judgements.[109]

Hu Shi's views on traditional biographical writing were probably most influenced by an essay of Zhang Xuecheng's 章學誠 entitled "Ten faults of classical prose."[110] In this essay Zhang identifies what he considered were problems within the tradition of classical prose writing, problems such as

[106] Lu Xun, *Ah Q zhengzhuan* [The true story of Ah Q], in *Lu Xun quanji* 1, p.359. The translation used here is that by William A. Lyell, from *Diary of a Madman and other stories* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp.101–2.

[107] While Hu Shi's interest in biography seems to date from 1914, it was in the prefatory comments he wrote in 1929 for Zhang Xiaoruo's biography of Zhang Jian that this critique of traditional biography was made. See Zhang Xiaoruo, *Nantong Zhang Jizhi xuansheng zhuanji* [A biography of Mr Zhang Jizhi of Nantong], reprint ed. (Taibei: Wenxing Shudian, 1965), preface. Hu Shi's criticism of traditional biographical writing reflects his more general concerns about the need for literary reform, which are discussed in Chow Tse-tung, *The May Fourth movement: intellectual reform in modern China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp.273–79.

[108] Li Ao, "Baiguan xingzhuang zou," pp.2a–3b.

[109] Wang Gungwu, "The *Chiu wu-tai shih* and history-writing during the Five Dynasties," *Asia Major* 6 (1957): 11–12. Gu Yanwu and Huang Rucheng, *Ri zhi lu, juan* 26, pp.1884–1185. Gu's critique of the explicit emphasis upon praise and blame in historical writing was to be reinforced by the *kaozheng* historians of the eighteenth century.

[110] Zhang Xuecheng, "Guwen shi bi" [Ten faults of classical prose], in *Wen shi tongyi, juan* 5, pp.504–22.

literary embellishment, distortion, exaggeration and fabrication. In almost all instances he uses examples from biographical writing to illustrate these problems. Zhang criticized the widespread practice of adding superfluous and inaccurate material in order to make biographical accounts appear more 'literary', stating that "in a biography the writing should reflect the person, [just as in] a narrative of events the writing should reflect those events. That is all that is required."[111] Similarly, Hu Shi wrote that the most important feature of biographical writing was a simple and accurate account of the events of a life, and this was where traditional biography was most deficient.[112]

* * *

But the modern critique of biographical writing went beyond these traditional concerns. It was felt that the Confucian emphasis on the exemplary produced portraits that were static, portraits that lacked individuality[113] and were unconcerned to show a dynamic and changing personality. In his influential preface Hu Shi wrote:

> What is most needed in biography is to be able to bring out the subject's true status, his real appearance and tone, so it is as if the reader can see the person and feel they truly are able to know him.[114]

Increasingly it was felt that a biography ought not portray character as simply the manifestation of an ideal which was present at birth, but as something that changes and develops during the course of a life. In part this emphasis on change within an individual life reflected a growing interest in ideas about evolution—the notion that an individual's life is subject to change and development just as is the life of a society. It also reflected the increasing concern with the individual that was so much a part of the May Fourth years.[115]

The May Fourth interest in Western literature also brought new perspectives on biographical writing. A translation of one of the talks on biographical writing which André Maurois (1885–1967) gave at Cambridge University in 1928 was published in *Xinyue yuekan* 新月月刊 [Crescent monthly] in 1930, and the same journal also carried articles introducing readers to recent biographical writing by European writers like Maurois, Emil Ludwig (1881–1948) and Lytton Strachey (1880–1932).[116] These articles described how the art of the "new biographical literature" produced by these writers lay in the use of the telling anecdote, and how it was the duty of the biographer to relieve readers of "the burden of useless material." Such writing was a reaction against the multi-volume European biographies of the nineteenth century, what Strachey had described as "those two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead."[117] While some *nianpu* might approach the detailed density of Victorian biography, for the most part traditional Chinese biographical writing was brief and circumspect. But the long association of biography with official historiography gave this writing a predictable formality which seemed stultifying to modern writers. Thus, the emphasis which biographers such as Maurois and Strachey placed on

111 Ibid, p.508.

112 Zhang Xiaoruo, *Zhang Jizhi*, preface, p.1. For a discussion of Hu Shi's views on biography see Du Zhengxiang, "Zhuanji," pp.6–7, 39.

113 Du Zhengxiang, "Zhuanji," pp.6–7.

114 Zhang Xiaoruo, *Zhang Jizhi*, preface.

115 Jaroslav Prusek, "Subjectivism and individualism in modern Chinese literature," *Archiv Orientalni* 25 (1957): 261–86; and Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Romantic individualism in modern Chinese literature: some general explorations," in *Individualism and holism: studies in Confucian and Taoist values*, ed. D. Munro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), pp.239–56.

116 The translation of the talk by Maurois was done by Shao Xunmei and published under the title "Tan zizhuan" [On autobiography]; see *Xinyue yuekan* 4.8 (1930). For Maurois' lectures see *Aspects of biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929). The articles introducing the biographical writing of Maurois, Ludwig and Strachey include "Haiwai chubanjie," *Xinyue yuekan* 2.3 (1929): 1–4; and Qiu Xin (Liang Yuchun), "Giles Lytton Strachey (1880–1932)," *Xinyue yuekan* 4.3 (1932): 1–17. Wu Fuhui discusses Liang's role in introducing such writing to a Chinese audience and the pseudonyms he used in "Liang Yuchun," *Dushu* 3 (1992): 137–46.

117 For "the burden of useless material" see André Maurois, "Biography as a work of art," in *Aspects of biography*, p.55. For Strachey's comment about "those two fat volumes" see *Eminent Victorians*, reprint ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1921), preface, p.viii.

Figure 3
Cover of volume 2 of Zhang Mosheng's Yixing zhuan, *with a painting by Feng Zikai*

capturing the spirit of a subject, and their approach to the novelist's concern with the development of character, were attractive to those interested in bringing new life to Chinese biographical writing.

Although such ideas came from the West, there was a sense that they involved a return to the essence of Chinese biographical writing as it had been practised by Sima Qian. Some critics would argue that only this writing, the biographical art of Sima Qian, could be called 'biographical literature' *(zhuanji wenxue* 傳記文學*)*. Almost all other traditional Chinese biogra-

[118] This assessment, made by Hu Shi, is discussed in Du Zhengxiang, "Zhuanji," pp.6–7. Zhang Mosheng makes the same point in the introduction to his first collection of biographies: *Yixing zhuan* [Biographies of the extraordinary], reprint ed. (Shanghai: Dongfang Shushe, 1948), *zixu*, p.6.

[119] For a detailed study of an artist and writer who resisted the increasingly didactic and proselytizing tendancies of Chinese literature from the late 1920s onwards, see Geremie Barmé, "Feng Zikai: a biographical and critical study" (PhD. diss., Australian National University, 1989).

[120] Some of those who contributed autobiographical essays to these journals include Yu Dafu *(Renjianshi)*, Chen Duxiu, Feng Yuxiang, Xie Bingrong, He Xiangning, Chen Gongbo, Wang Yunsheng and Cai Yuanpei (all in *Yuzhou feng*). There were regular sections *('jinren zhi'* and *'renwu')* in *Renjianshi* devoted to short biographical sketches, which included essays on both contemporary and historical figures, and occasional book reviews which dealt with life-writing, such as the review of Strachey's *Characters and commentaries* in *Renjianshi* 16 (Nov., 1934): 41–2.

[121] For instance, Zhang had worked with the May Fourth poet Xu Yunuo at a college in Henan, and much of his biography of Xu deals with the friendship that developed between the two men. See "Ji guai shiren Xu

phy, and especially that in the post-Tang official histories, could not be considered literature and must simply be called 'biography' *(zhuanji* 傳記*)*. It was in the ability to convey something of the spirit of the subject, the ability to provide a dynamic rather than a static portrait, that biographical literature was seen to differ from mere biography.[118]

Such concerns were evident in the work of those writers who retained an interest in 'self-expression' and who resisted the trend of the late 1920s and early 1930s towards a more explicit involvement in social issues and social reform.[119] Amongst these writers there was an interest in continuing those aspects of the Chinese tradition which encouraged self-expression: the brief and casual genre of the *biji* 筆記, or notes from the brush, and the *xiaopinwen* 小品文, or informal essay, as is evident in the contributions to those literary journals edited by Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895–1976), *Lunyu* 論語, *Renjianshi* 人間世 and *Yuzhou feng* 宇宙風, where autobiography and biography figured prominently.[120] What distinguished the writing in these journals from traditional biographical writing was a much greater concern with the portrayal of character.

Zhang Mosheng 張默生 (b.1897) was one of the contributors to these journals whose writing demonstrates well this new focus being given to biographical writing. Zhang chose mostly to write about people he had known personally and he always began his biographies by describing his own relationship with the subjects and why he had decided to write about them.[121] These introductory comments would be followed by the substance of the biography, which consisted simply of a series of anecdotes intended to portray the particular and unique character of the subject. None of the subjects he wrote about were particularly famous, yet Zhang portrays them as being unusual and distinctive individuals and his first collection of biographies, *Yixing zhuan* 異行傳 (Biographies of the extraordinary), was very popular.[122] Some of his biographies show an affinity with the work of classical prose writers such as Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), but the clearest influence is from Sima Qian.[123] Zhang felt most of the *liezhuan* in the official histories were "stereotypical" and "lifeless," but he admired the biographies by Sima Qian, especially "Xiangyu benji," and like Sima Qian he wrote exemplary lives, portraits he hoped would be both educative and edifying. Rather than use the *zhuan* format, however, which he felt had been rendered lifeless through its long association with official historiography, Zhang chose mostly to write informal essays *(xiaopinwen)*.[124] But he recognized also that a detailed portrait of a life was not possible within the restrictions of the essay format and thus devoted the entire second volume of *Yixing zhuan* to his longest and most important piece of biographical writing, a life of the eccentric Sichuanese philosopher and educationalist Li Zongwu 李宗吾 (1879–1943).[125]

Zhang Mosheng divided this biography into three sections, each of which is given a title adapted from traditional biographical writing. In the first section, entitled *biezhuan* 別傳 (private or separate biography), Zhang tells

/Yunuo" [A record of the unusual poet Xu Yunuo], *Yuzhou feng* 35 (Feb. 1937): 568–72. A slightly revised version of this essay was included in *Yixing zhuan* (pp.103–16). Such intimacy was uncommon in traditional biographical writing, although it was not unknown. Much of attraction in Yuan Hongdao's (1568–1610) famous biography of Xu Wei (1521–93) comes from the way Yuan begins the biography, relating his own delight upon the chance discovery of Xu's poetry. The formal part of the biography, beginning with the subject's names and native place, etc., comes only after Yuan has told of his own relationship with Xu. Perhaps such intimacy is the reason why this biography has often been included in anthologies, such as *Guwen guanzhi* [The finest of classical prose], despite the fact that it is known to be an unreliable record of Xu Wei's life. See "Xu Wenchang zhuan" [A biography of Xu Wei], in Yuan Hongdao and Qian Bocheng, *Yuan Hongdao ji jianjiao* [An annotated edition of Yuan Hongdao's collected works] (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1981), pp.715–19.

122 Following the publication of this first volume of *Yixing zhuan* in 1943 it was republished many times. I have used the sixth reprint, published in 1948. In the introduction to this volume Zhang Mosheng gives an interesting perspective on his approach to biographical writing. He also discusses this in his autobiography, *Moseng zizhuan* [An autobiography of Moseng] (Shanghai: Dongfang Shushe, 1948).

123 For instance, Zhang Mosheng's "Yi pu zhuan" [A biography of an unusual servant] (*Yixing zhuan*, pp.33–5) has much in common with Liu Zongyuan's *zhuan*, particularly a work like "Zhongshu Guo tuotuo zhuan" [A biography of Camel Guo, the tree planter] in *Liu Zongyuan ji* [The writings of Liu Zongyuan], reprint ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979), pp.473–5. Regarding Zhang's admiration for Sima Qian see *Yixing zhuan, zixu*, pp.5–6.

124 For Zhang's dissatisfaction with traditional biography and his desire to help reform biographical writing see *Yixing zhuan, zixu*, pp.12–14.

125 "Houhei jiaozhu zhuan" [A biography of the master of the thick and the black], *Yixing zhuan* 2 (Shanghai: Dongfang Shushe, 1947).

of how he came to know Li Zongwu and of the friendship that developed between them. In the main section of the biography, the *zhengzhuan* 正傳 (official biography), Zhang relates in some detail the story of Li Zongwu's life, quoting liberally from Li's philosophical and educational writings as well as from the autobiographical essays which Zhang had encouraged him to write. The narrative is interspersed with the sort of anecdotal material Zhang always turned to when trying to convey character. In the final section of the biography, entitled *waizhuan* 外傳 (unofficial biographical), Zhang discusses some interesting but unpublished writing by Li and also tries to convey some of his own feelings toward Li Zongwu. These three separate sections mean the biography lacks an overall coherence, yet this is partly due to the fact that Zhang felt he had to reproduce *verbatim* almost all of Li Zongwu's writing. Li had produced a critical reinterpretation of the Chinese tradition and most of what he had written had either been banned, confined to a limited readership, or never been published. Hence, Zhang's aim in writing this biography was not only to tell the story of Li's life, but also to introduce his ideas to a wider audience.[126] Throughout the biography Zhang Mosheng develops a detailed and absorbing portrait of an extremely interesting man, and much of the attraction of the work lies in the intimate way Zhang relates his own intellectual and personal encounter with Li Zongwu. Such intimacy is not possible with historical biography, yet the emphasis which Zhang placed on the need for a biography to convey something of the character of its subject, and his own success in doing this, suggested ways in which the writing of historical biography might be enriched. Zhang's writing also showed that it was not necessary to abandon completely the tradition of Chinese biographical writing. Like Liang Qichao, Zhang believed it was possible to transform the tradition to suit the needs of modern biography and he demonstrated how this could be done. There are similarities between his approach to biography and the writing of the 'new' Western biographers like Lytton Strachey, yet this was not a case of imitation of a Western model. Zhang drew directly on the Chinese tradition and adapted it to develop the kind of format for biography and biographical essays which he required.

* * *

By the early 1940s biography had become extremely popular once more. In part this reflected the new life being given the genre by writers such as Zhang Mosheng, but it was also a consequence of changed political circumstances. The patriotism sparked by the war against Japan generated renewed interest in figures from the past, particularly those who were considered to have been martyrs in the cause of national defense. Many temples and memorial halls devoted to such people, buildings which had been neglected for years, suddenly became the focus of renewed attention, with restoration being undertaken and memorial services held.[127] Then, in 1939, the Education Department of the Chongqing-based Guomindang government issued directives that universites and colleges should begin the teaching of courses on biography and the study of biography, courses which

[126] The subsequent interest in Li Zongwu's philosophical writing was largely due Zhang Mosheng's biography. Recent reprints of Li Zongwu's writing even include large and unacknowledged sections from the biography. See, for instance, *Houbeixuedaquan* [Collected studies on being thick of skin and black of heart] (Hong Kong: Xuelin Shudian, n.d.) and the subsequent reprints of this work in Taiwan and China under the title *Houbeixue* (such as the edition published by Qiushi Chubanshe in Beijing in 1989). For an interesting, if brief, account of the radical nature of Li Zongwu's philosophy see Wolfgang Bauer, "The problem of individualism and egoism in Chinese thought," in *Studia Sino-Mongolica: Festschrift für Herbert Franke*, ed. Wolfgang Bauer (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1979), pp.427–42.

[127] The flurry of activity generated by the war with Japan is discussed by L. C. Arlington in "China's heroes of the past," *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 5.5 (Dec. 1937): 467–76.

Figure 4

Cover of Li Zongwu's Houheixue daquan *[Collected studies on being thick of skin and black of heart] (Taibei: Nanya Chubanshe, n.d.)*

had not previously been part of the curriculum. These courses played a major part in the renewal of interest in biographical writing that came in the 1940s.[128]

While traditional forms of biography continued to be very popular, it was the new form of the independent monograph that became the focus for most historical biography.[129] With his biography of Wang Anshi, Liang Qichao had shown that the critical biography, or *pingzhuan* 評傳, might provide a new

[128] Wang Yun notes that it was as a result of this directive that he taught courses on biographical writing at Wenli College and Zhongshan University in Canton. See *Zhuanji xue*, preface, pp.1–2. His book is based on the lectures he gave in these courses. Similarly, Zhu Dongrun notes that his interest in biographical writing arose as a direct consequence of the government's directive that a course on biography be taught at Wuhan University. See "Zhu Dongrun zizhuan" [An autobiography of Zhu Dongrun] in *Zhongguo xiandai shehui kexue jia zhuanlüe* [Brief biographies of China's modern social scientists] (Xian: Shaanxi Renmin, 1987), vol. 3, p.137.

[129] At this time the History Office of the Guomindang government was involved in the compilation of *liezhuan* for a national history. This has been continued by the Republican government in Taiwan and such *liezhuan* are published regularly in the journal *Guoshi guan guankan*.

direction for Chinese biographical writing, and by the late 1930s this type of biography was becoming increasingly popular.[130] But while this format allowed a far greater degree of critical assessment than had been the case with traditional biographical writing, many felt it encouraged too much subjective commentary, with the events of a subject's life often emerging, if at all, only through the biographer's critique.[131] Chronological biographies generally paid more attention to providing an exposition of the main events of a subject's life, yet even though these might be less subjective than a critical biography and, in some recent cases, were written in the vernacular, as with Hu Shi's fine study of Zhang Xuecheng, they were still unable to escape the disjointedness of narrative imposed by the very nature of the *nianpu* form.[132] The biographical monograph provided a release from such restrictions without encouraging the subjugation of the narrative to a primary concern with critical commentary, as was the case in a *pingzhuan*. Chronological sequence remained important in the monograph, but this was developed through a continuous narrative which allowed greater freedom than did the disjointed year-by-year format of the *nianpu*. Similarly, while the monograph could accomodate critical commentary, the focus remained with the narrative account of a subject's life. Liang Qichao had used the term *zhuanzhuan* (special biography) or *zhuan pian* (biographical monograph) to refer to this new type of biography, but by the 1940s such writing was increasingly referred to as *zhuanji* (biography).[133] The term itself was far from new, the first recorded use of it being in two works entitled *Wu xing zhuanji* 五行傳記 (An account of the five phases) in the bibliographical treatise of *Han shu* 漢書, but it was only in the eighteenth century that it began to be used exclusively to refer to biography and not to a diversity of prose writing devoted to both events and individuals.[134] The increasing restriction of this term to biographical writing continued during the early twentieth century, and by the 1940s it had become the most popular term for modern biography. It is often used in a generic way to refer to all biographical writing, yet it has also the more specific sense of the modern biographical monograph.

The potential value of the biographical monograph had been shown in Zhang Xiaoruo's 張孝若 life of his father, Zhang Jian 張謇 (1853--1926), which had been published in 1930.[135] Zhang provides a detailed although uncritical account of his father's life and the biography lacks narrative coherence; nevertheless, as a piece of continuous narrative written in the vernacular, it was important in helping to establish the monographic form of modern biographical writing. Hu Shi noted in his preface to the work that it marked the beginning of a new era in the writing of *jiazhuan* 家傳, or family biography, in China and, as with Zhang Mosheng's biography of Li Zongwu, Zhang Xiaoruo showed the benefits for biographical writing that came from an intimate relationship between biographer and subject.[136] Such intimacy was not possible in historical biography, where the biographer did

[130] Two of the better known *pingzhuan* from this period are Chen Yilin's *Zhang Juzheng pingzhuan* [A critical biography of Zhang Juzheng] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1934), and Rong Shaozu's *Li Zhuowu pingzhuan* [A critical biography of Li Zhongwu (Li Zhi)] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1937).

[131] For one instance of such criticism of *pingzhuan* see Ye Shengtao's review of Zhu Dongrun's first biography in *Wenyi fuxing* 1.4 (1946): 506.

[132] Hu Shi and Yao Mingda, *Zhang Shizhai xiansheng nianpu* [A chronological biography of Zhang Xuecheng] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1929). Hu Shi's other major piece of biographical writing came later, in "Ding Wenjiang de zhuanji" [A biography of Ding Wenjiang], *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan yuankan* 3 (1956).

[133] See, for instance, how Yang Honglie uses the term in *Lishi yanjiu fa* [Methods for the study of history] (Changsha: Commercial Press, 1939), pp.224–5, to distinguish modern biography from *liezhuan*.

[134] For a discussion of the gradual transition in the use of this term *zhuanji* see Chen and Zhang, *Gudian zhuanji*, pp.34–7. Also of value is Zhu Xizu's discussion of terminology in his *Zhongguo shixue tonglun* [A general discussion of Chinese historiography], reprint ed. (Taibei: Zhuangyan, 1977), p.38. And for Zhang Xuecheng's comparatively 'modern' use of the term in the eighteenth century see his essay entitled "Zhuanji" in *Wen shi tong yi, juan* 3, pp.248--50.

[135] Zhang Xiaoruo, *Zhang Jizhi*.

[136] Ibid, preface, p.4.

not enjoy the advantages that came from personal knowledge of a subject, nevertheless such works did indicate the potential richness that might come from a greater attention to detail in the narrative account of historical lives.

While there was still much ambiguity as to the exact nature of the modern biographical monograph, the work of writers such as Zhang Mosheng suggested that there should be more to this biography than simply a dour account of the main events of a life. Thus, while the monographic form of modern biography had emerged by the early 1940s, the potential existed for a considerable diversity of writing within that form. And it was from such potential diversity that modern historical biography finally began to take shape.

The patriotism engendered by the war against Japan saw the publication of a number of biographies during the early 1940s which signalled the arrival of modern historical biography. Various publishing companies commissioned biographies, but the most influential was a series of monographs put out under the auspices of the Guomindang government and entitled *Zhongguo lidai mingxian gushi ji* 中國歷代明顯故事集 (A collection of stories of celebrated and outstanding people in Chinese history). This series was directed at a wide readership and was first undertaken by the Shengli Publishing Company. The project was divided into three sections and prominent historians were commissioned to write the biographies. The first section was devoted to major political figures, particularly prominent emperors such as Qin Shihuangdi 秦始皇帝 (259–210 BC), but it also included other major figures like Confucius and Sun Yatsen 孫中山 (1866–1925).[137] The second section comprised biographies of prominent individuals such as Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234), Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–83), Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (1624–62) and Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1814–64).[138] The final section was devoted to scholars and thinkers and included biographies of Mozi 墨子 (c.490–c.403 BC), Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), Wang Shouren 王守仁 (1472–1528), Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–72) and Liang Qichao.[139] With this series Liang Qichao's suggestion regarding the need for a number of biographies of major figures from the Chinese past was brought to fruition, and the whole project marked a significant contribution toward the establishment of the biographical monograph as part of modern Chinese historiography.[140]

But the finest modern historical biography to appear at this time did not come out of this project. This was Zhu Dongrun's 朱東潤 biography of the sixteenth century scholar and statesman Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525–82), a self-conscious attempt to establish a new form of biographical writing in China.[141] The transition to the modern biographical monograph was already well established by the time Zhu published this biography in 1945, and it was perhaps not as innovative a work as he himself imagined, yet both the detailed portrayal of the subject and the overall coherence of the biography mark it as clearly superior to the other biographical writing of the time. The

137 Included amongst these biographies were Gu Jiegang's *Qin Shihuangdi* [Emperor Qin Shihuang] (Chongqing: Shengli Chubanshe, 1944), and Wu Han's *Ming Taizu* [The founder of the Ming dynasty] (Chongqing: Shengli Chubanshe, 1944). A modern and revisionist biography of Qin Shihuang published a few years before was not part of this series; see Ma Yuancai, *Qin Shihuangdi zhuan* [A biography of emperor Qin Shihuang] (Chongqing: Commercial Press, 1941). Admiration for Sun Yatsen had resulted in a number of earlier reverential biographies, such as Xu Quxuan's *Sun Zhongshan shenghuo* [The life of Sun Yatsen] (Shanghai: World Press, 1929), and Cai Nanqiao's *Zhongshan xiansheng zhuanji* [A biography of Mr Zhongshan] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1937).

138 Another biography from this section was Deng Guangming's *Yue Fei zhuan* [A biography of Yue Fei] (Chongqing: Shengli Chubanshe, 1945).

139 Zhang Mosheng's *Laozi* (Chongqing: Shengli Chubanshe, 1944) was also part of this section.

140 A previous work inspired by Liang Qichao's suggestion was the compilation put together by Chen Qitian and entitled *Zhongguo renwu zhuan xuan* [A selection of biographies of Chinese figures] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1935). But this was simply a compilation of *liezhuan* from the dynastic histories and thus did not fulfil Liang's suggestion for a series of independent biographical monographs.

141 Zhu Dongrun, *Zhang Juzheng dazhuan* [A major biography of Zhang Juzheng] (Chongqing: Kaiming Shudian, 1945).

142 For more detailed analysis of this and other of the historical biographies mentioned here see Brian Moloughney, *History and biography in modern China* (PhD diss., Australian National University, forthcoming).

potential richness of the modern biographical monograph for a truly historical figure was shown for the first time.[142] Thus, the publication of this biography in 1945 can be seen as marking the end of the transition from the biographical history of the *liezhuan* to the modern historical biography of the *zhuanji*.[143] Of course, the changed political circumstances that came a few years later required that the whole relationship between history and biography be reassessed once more in light of the new perceptions of the role of the individual in history which were imposed under the PRC. The very nature of a biographical perspective on the past was called into question and few biographies were produced. But the resurgence of biographical writing in the 1980s has seen the emergence once more of the *zhuanji* form of historical biography, now the dominant form of biographical writing in China.

[143] The transition with regard to literary biography only really ended in 1952 with the publication of Feng Zhi's *Du Fu zhuan* [A biography of Du Fu] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1952). But by this time the very writing of biography itself was being called into question.

Brian Moloughney
Department of History
University of Otago
Dunedin, New Zealand