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THE DEFINING CHARACTER OF CHINESE HISTORICAL THINKING[1]

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ABSTRACT

Imbued with profound historical consciousness, the Chinese people are *Homo historiens* in every sense of the term. To be human in China, to a very large extent, is to be historical, which means to live up to the paradigmatic past. Therefore, historical thinking in traditional China is moral thinking. The Chinese historico-moral thinking centers around the notion of *Dao,* a notion that connotes both *Heavenly principle* and *human norm*.

In view of its practical orientation, Chinese historical thinking is, on the one hand, concrete thinking and, on the other, analogical thinking. Thinking concretely and analogically, the Chinese people are able to communicate with the past and to extrapolate meanings from history. In this way, historical experience in China becomes a library in which modern readers may engage in creative dialogues with the past.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, China has been noted for its historical-mindedness, and its people and their society have lived under the tutelage of history. The founding emperors of imperial China always sought to legitimize their dynasties by reference to history. In the same vein, the Chinese people have always turned to history to justify revolutions in their politics and culture.

This article explores the peculiarities of Chinese historical thinking. Section II considers the significance of history in China; section III delves into the sense of time in Chinese historical thinking; section IV discusses two outstanding aspects of Chinese historical thinking; and section V contains some concluding observations.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORY IN CHINA

China has been imbued with the writing of history since as early as 841 BC. Ever since then, the Chinese people have been able to "look at the past from the present," to judge and shape the present in the light of the ideal past, and to judge the past in the light of the present ideals thus shaped. Such judgments were taken with absolute seriousness. To get at the real facts has been an all-consuming passion of Chinese historians, so much so that some of them sacrificed

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their lives in opposition to their rulers' pressures on them to write otherwise than what they believed to be true. For instance, in 548 BC (the twenty-fifth year of the reign of Duke Xiang 襄公 of the State Lu 魯), a "grand historian" in charge of historiography recorded that "Cui Shu 崔抒 assassinated his ruler." Angry, Cui Shu had this grand historian executed. Then his younger brother took over the office of grand historian and recorded the identical statement, and was likewise executed. Next came the second younger brother, who again recorded the identical statement, and so on, up to the fourth brother! At this point, Cui Shu had to give up the idea of rewriting or "erasing" history.[2] Historians in China are indeed the incarnation of conscience and as such devote their lives to recording and preserving the facts.

This is the reason that historians' words were taken quite seriously in traditional China. "To receive [the historian's] single word of praise is to be glorified beyond high emolument; to be accused by his slightest word of blame is to be punished beyond [hacking of] axes," asserted the literary critic Liu Xie (劉勰, 456?–520?) in his *The Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon* (*Wenxin Diaolong*, 文心雕龍).[3]

In traditional China, history is shaped by human pathos in reflective and often tragic living as the Chinese people integrated meaningfully or disintegrated pathetically with the vicissitudes of Chinese history. This is because, as the great historian of twentieth-century China, Qian Mu (錢穆, 1895–1990) said in his *The Spirit of Chinese History* (*Zhongguo Lishi Jingshen*, 中國歷史精神), "National history awakens the soul of a nation," for "history is the whole experience of our life, the whole life past. We can understand our life by referring ourselves to history. History can thus allow us to appropriately project our life into the future."[4]

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

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

2. Yang Bojün, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Taipei: Yüanliu Publishing Co., 1982), II, 1099. For an English translation, see *The Tso Chuan*, transl. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 147.

3. Fan Wenlan, *Wenxin Diaolong zhu* (Taipei: Kaiming Bookstore, 1968), IV, 1.

4. Qian Mu, *Zhongguo Lishi Jingshen* 中國歷史精神 (*The Spirit of Chinese History*), in *Qian Binsi Qüanji* 錢賓四全集, ed. Editorial Committee of Mr. Qian Binsi's Complete Works (Taipei: Lianjing Publishing Co., 1998), XXIX, 6. The nationalistic sentiment in Qian Mu's historiography reminds one of Jules Michelet (1798–1874) when he said in his introduction to his *The People* (1864) (transl. P. McKay [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973]), "This book is more than a book;—it is myself. That is the reason it belongs to you. Yes, it is myself; and, I may venture to affirm, it is you also. All our various works have sprung from the same living root.— The sentiment of France, and the idea of our country." See *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present*, ed. Fritz Stern (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 109. For a discussion of history as "national epic" in twentieth-century China, see Ying-shih Yü, "Changing Conceptions of National History in Twentieth-Century China," in *Conceptions of National History: Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 78*, ed. Erik Lönnroch, Karl Molin, and Ragnar Björk (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), 155-174.

principles of life. Ironically, this becomes most apparent when historical facts challenge our initial facile convictions. The Grand Historian Sima Qian (司馬遷, 145?–87? BC) was deeply troubled as he confessed in his classic, *Historian's Records* (*Shiji*, 史記):

> Some say, "Heaven's way favors none, but always sides with good men." Can men such as Bo Yi and Shu Qi be called good then, or bad? They accumulated such virtue, kept their actions this pure, and died of starvation.
>
> Of his seventy disciples, Confucius recommended only Yen Yüan 顏淵 as "fond of learning." But Hui 回 (Yen Yüan) was often poor, and did not get his fill of even rice dregs and husks, finally dying young. How then does Heaven repay good men?
>
> The Bandit Zhi 盜跖 killed innocent men daily, made delicacies from men's flesh, was cruel and ruthless, willful and arrogant, gathered a band of thousands of men and wreaked havoc across the world, yet finally died of old age. From what virtue did this follow?
>
> These are just the most notorious and best known examples. As for more recent times, men who do not follow what is proper in their actions, and do nothing but violate taboos are still carefree and happy for all their lives and wealthy for generations without end; men who choose carefully how they tread, wait for the right time to offer their words, in walking do not take shortcuts, and except for what is right and fair do not vent pent-up emotions, still encounter disaster and catastrophe in numbers beyond counting. I am deeply perplexed by all this. Perhaps this is what is meant by "the Way of Heaven." Is it? Or isn't it?[5]

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

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

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

5. *The Grand Scribe's Records*, ed. William H. Nienhauser, Jr. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), vol. VII, *The Memoirs of Pre-Han China*, 4.

6. "Address of Yü Ying-shih on the occasion of receiving the John W. Kluge Prize at the Library of Congress December 5, 2006," http://www.loc.gov/loc/kluge/docs/yu_kluge.pdf, accessed January 23, 2007.

Chinese people come to "praise the good and blame the evil,"[7] and formulate the heartfelt values, intrinsically and universally valuable, independently of what actually happens.[8]

This heartfelt feeling came, first, to be formulated explicitly, and then applied to actualities both of former times and the present situation. In this way, the so-called "hermeneutic circle" is actualized in traditional Chinese historical thinking. First, we get the sense of a universal principle, *Dao*, of justice from history, then we apply it to a particular historical situation, and this in turn enriches our sense of *Dao*; it is thus that the circle of the history of understanding is accomplished. Let us see how the procedure goes.

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

> After the influence of the true King came to an end, songs were no longer collected. When songs were no longer collected, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* were written. The *Sheng* of Jin, the *Tao Wu* of Chu and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* of Lu are the same kind of work. The events recorded concern Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin, and the style is that of the official historian. Confucius said, "I have appropriated the didactic principles therein."[9]

Ever since the time of Confucius (551–479 BC), Chinese historians have tried to appropriate didactic principles from history. This has been true especially since the tenth century. For example, Sima Guang (司馬光, 1019–1086), in his *Records of the Ancient History* (*Jigulu*, 稽古錄),[10] said, "The ruler's *Dao* is one, his virtues are three, his talents are five. . . . Since the beginning of peoples and throughout the ultimate recess of Heaven and earth, there is nothing other than these to ones who possess the state through its ups and downs." The neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130–1200) systematized the above informal expression in a more perceptive manner, by proposing *Li* (principle) that describes the Way things operate and prescribes the norm by which humanity should live. More often than not, philosophical argumentation in China was made possible by historical narration.[11]

7. This is as Sima Qian quoted Dong Zhongshu's (c. 179–104 BC) words in Sima's celebrated Preface to *Historian's Records* (*Shiji*). See Sima Qian, *Shiji* (Taipei: Taishun Bookstore, Photo-reproduction of new punctuated edition, 1971), CXXX, "The Grand Scribe's Preface," p. 3297. The very process of quotation here is history. Sima personally experienced this sentiment when he received a tragic punishment (castration) for his honestly assuring the emperor of his devoted friend's loyalty to the state, who then ended up capitulating to the enemy. His punishment occasioned the writing of the *Shiji*, which is the Chinese version of Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum*, to vindicate his sense of "historical justice."

8. Sima Qian quibbled, after reviewing the records of the noble men who had vanished, "All these men had a rankling in their hearts, for they were not able to accomplish what they wished. Therefore they wrote of past affairs in order to pass on their thoughts to future generations." See *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, ed. William Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), I, 372.

9. *Mencius*, transl. D. C. Lau (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1979, 1984), II, Book 4:B, 165. B refers to the later part of the book.

10. Sima Guang 司馬光, *Jigulu* 稽古錄 (Records of the Ancient History) (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan photo reproduction of *Xuejin taoyuan* 學津討源 edition, 1965), juan 16, p.75-78.

11. See my "The Philosophical Argumentation by Historical Narration in Sung China: The Case of Chu Hsi," in *The New and the Multiple: Sung Senses of the Past*, ed. Thomas H. C. Lee (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2004), 61-106.

Second, the *Li* or *Dao* obtained by observing history became the concrete general norm and lever whereby historians judged, admonished, and even remonstrated with rulers, both in the past and at present. Zhu Xi boldly declared:

> Fifteen hundred years are all like this, going through days merely patching and fixing the status quo. During this period, [days of] "small peace" were not lacking, but not a day passed without the Way transmitted by Yao, Shun, Three Kings, Duke Zhou, and Confucius being neglected in practice in the world. Yet, nobody has anticipated the permanent presence of the Way. This is the only thing that has been everlasting, in ancient days and today, always present, never perishing, indestructible despite fifteen hundred years of deeds of destruction by humans.[12]

> Although worldly affairs are in the thousands and hundreds of thousands, really there is but one single Way or Principle. This is what is called "Principle One, manifestations many."[13]

According to Zhu Xi, the *Li* derived from history became the standard for the critique of history, past and contemporary. The standard embodies historical flesh and blood, filled with tears of suffering people, labor of workers in the searing sun, lived devotion of loyal subjects and filial sons, brutalities of insensitive officials, virtuous ladies' courageous chastity, and so on. The law and principle are both solidly based on the facts of history and are universally applicable as norms of humanity and dynasties. In China, politics as an academic subject is basically history; strategic deliberation, too, is based on history. Legal decisions in the court must consult records of precedents in history. Therefore, the writing of history in traditional China is nothing but an act of political and moral criticism.[14]

It was thus that the "circle of understanding and interpretation" came about. Historians in China observed historical processes intently to obtain from them some universal principles — both descriptive and prescriptive — so as to apply them as prescriptions and judgments to history itself, both in the past and at present. This circle is called the "hermeneutic circle" that solidifies our concrete universal "historical thinking," which guides the daily comportment of each individual on the one hand, and the vast cosmic activities of the entire world on the other. This expresses the ultimate essential importance of history in China.

III. THE SENSE OF TIME IN CHINESE HISTORICAL THINKING

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

12. Zhu Xi, *Hui'an xiansheng Zhu Wengong wenji* 晦庵先生朱文公文集 (Taipei: Zhongwen Chubanshe photo-reproduction of the *kinsi kanseki sokan* 近世漢籍叢刊 edition, 1972), juan 36, "Da Chen Dongfu 答陳同甫," p. 2306.

13. *Zhuzi Yülei* 朱子語類, ed. Li Jingde 黎靖德 (Beijing: Zhonghua shujü, 1981), juan 136, p. 3243.

14. Cf. Yü Ying-shih, "Reflections on Chinese Historical Thinking," in *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate*, ed. Jörn Rüsen (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 152-172, especially 161.

to understand Chinese culture, and how peculiar it is, it is important to understand what history is, and how historical thinking works.

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

Such a definite direction gives us the prospect and purpose of living. Chinese people are particularly sensitive to this sense of time. To have this sense of time is to have purpose in life. Confucius (551–479 BC) stood at the bank of the "river of time," and sighed, "Oh, how it flows day and night, without ceasing!"[15] In contrast, to lose this sense of time-direction is to be exiled out of living itself, to feel "out of place," unspeakably lost and lonesome in the world. Chen Zi'ang (陳子昂, 662–702) of the T'ang Dynasty (618–907) gave a long sigh, saying, "Beholding no ancients/ Beholding no one's coming/ Vainly thinking how vast the skies and broad the earth/ Being alone, I lament, shed tears."[16]

In the Chinese tradition, then, the sense of history is the warp and woof of life, and is an important indicator of how society should be managed and how politics should be conducted for social stability and prosperity. Concretely, every time a dynasty replaced another, often with considerable bloodshed, a question about the legitimacy of the new regime was earnestly raised in terms of history. "Why did the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC) lose the world, why did the Han Dynasty get it?" was hotly debated at the dawn of the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD).[17] At the same time, based on this legitimacy with the concrete causes of Qin losing the "Mandate of Heaven" and Han obtaining it, people in and out of the royal palace eagerly discussed concrete measures as to how best and most appropriately the new regime should govern and manage the world.

In all these debates and deliberations, history served as an important weathervane and concrete guide. History justified the legitimacy of Han to overthrow Qin,[18] and history provided guidance to the newly installed Han administration to back up its legitimacy by "good governance"; history, too, provided a watchful eye over the rulers to make them stick to their vows and declarations to enforce good governance. Since the Tang Dynasty, such historic responsibilities of watching over and warning the throne fell to the writing brushes of the Office of the Historiographers who compiled the Emperor's *Qijü zhu* (diaries of activity and repose, 起居註). The historiographers kept this daily journal of comments in strict

15. Confucius, *The Analects*, transl. D. C. Lau (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1992), Book IX, chapter 17, p. 81.

16. Chen Ziang 陳子昂, "Deng Youjiutai ge" 登幽州台歌 (Song on Mounting the Youzhou Tower) in *Quan Tangshi guangxuan xinzhu jiping* 全唐詩廣選新注集評 (New Commentaries on the Complete Tang Poetry) (Liaoning: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 2001), I, 508.

17. Sima Qian, "Biographies of Li Sheng and Lu Jia," in S*hiji* (Taipei: Taishun Bookstore Photo-reproduction of new punctuated edition), p. 2699.

18. See my "The Ch'in Unification (221 BC) in Chinese Historiography," in *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-cultural Perspective*, ed. Q. Edward Wang and Georg G. Iggers (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 31-44.

confidence and with meticulous conscience. They never wavered in their duty, sternly kept the comments away from the Emperor's eye, and literally devoted their lives to fulfilling their duty. Such has been the Chinese utter devotion to history.

In short, we are warranted in saying that in China, the society, the people, the culture, the politics, all are history. To contact the Chinese and their culture is to contact their history. Their history constitutes their flavor, their atmosphere—in fact, the very existence of China. The people, politics, and culture of China are its history. China is the place where we see most clearly that the human being is *homo historiens* through and through. By "homo historiens" I mean that the Chinese people are both shaping and being shaped by history, just like the spiders working the web of history that crisscrosses the globe. This strong historical consciousness in China manifests itself in the writing of Qian Mu. Qian powerfully insisted that studying bits of historical information will miss the spirit of historiography, that is, the intimate relation between historical knowledge and the actualities of life, the knowledge of the facts about how our civilization changed and grew, and how it transpired.[19]

IV. TWO OUTSTANDING ASPECTS OF CHINESE HISTORICAL THINKING

Now we are in a better position to appreciate the defining characteristics of Chinese historical consciousness. In traditional Chinese historical thinking, history is formed as the people think *analogically* and *concretely* about the events of life. Let me now proceed to explicate these two salient aspects of Chinese historical thinking.

In the first place, the Chinese believe that history is formed in and by *analogical thinking*. Analogy is not an abstract logic that cuts us off from concrete details. It is neither wild imagination that is baseless and haphazard, nor sporadic reports of isolated events without rhyme or reason. Analogy is instead concrete, systematic, open-ended, and comprehensive. Analogy has two features: it is metaphorical and it takes a part for the whole (*pars pro toto*).

First, analogical thinking is "metaphorical." Liu Xiang (劉向, 77–76 BC) of the Han Dynasty in his *Shuo Yüan* (說苑) quoted the famous logician Hui Shi (惠施, 380–305 BC) as saying, "Pi (辟) is to analogize the unknown by the known."[20] As the "Appended Remarks" of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*, 易經) says, "taking what are close by our bodies, taking things from afar" (近取諸身，遠取諸物)[21] to know and judge things far and unknown.

The Chinese people keep to representative historical cases in drawing generalizations. The factual case is the "knot" of the "cord" of actuality. This contrast shows a different usage of "exemplum," that is, a short story as metaphor. Whenever

19. Qian Mu, *Guoshi Dagang* 國史大綱 (An Outline of the National History), in *Qian Binsi xiansheng quanji*, vol. 27, pp. 29-30.

20. Liu Xiang 劉向, *Shuoyuan* 說苑 (Collection of Discourses) (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan: photo reproduction of the Sibu congkan chubian suoben 四部叢刊初編縮本 edition, 1965), juan 11, p. 51.

21. Gao Heng, *Zhouyi Dazhuan jinzhu* 周易大傳今注 (Jinan: Jilu shushe, 1979), juan 5, pp. 558-559.

Chinese thinkers want to "argue" some universal principles or draw some moral codes, they always return to concrete historical examples or experience. Mencius (371–289? BC) is a good representative thinker in this context. In "articulating" his moral philosophy, Mencius cited many historical examples of famous people, such as Shun (舜), Fu Yüe (傅說), Jiao Ge (膠鬲), Guan Zhong (管仲), Sun Shu'ao (孫叔敖), and Boli Xi (百里奚). Then he said that Heaven exhausts one's frame in starvation, hardship, and frustration before placing on one a great burden and thereby provoking innovation.[22] Exempla in the West are used as illustrations of an abstract thesis, and as such are dispensable and merely decorative. In contrast, Chinese notions collapse when abstracted from the exempla to which they point. For example, Zhuangzi's (399?–295? BC) "double walk" (*liang xing*, 兩行) is senseless without the monkey story that gives it its meaning. In the story, the Monkey Keeper proposes the rule, "morning three, evening four" bananas but it is booed by the monkeys so the Keeper switches to "morning four, evening three," to win their approval; in this way he did the "double walking" of fulfilling both desires, his and the monkeys'.[23] This concrete story indispensably "knots" the "cord" of actuality as no abstract concept can.

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

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

Again, the West often takes argumentation as "war," as "winning" or "losing" an argument. Such an attitude disregards argument as midwifery dialogue[24] or exhortation and persuasion with metaphors, as often happens in China. In general, Chinese historians instinctively think from one perspective, picking one perspective to comprehend all—the whole situation—and so, in the Western mode of thinking, their comprehension would seem inevitably restricted to one aspect of the situation highlighted by that perspective (argument as war), and the analogous effects (argument as midwifery, as persuasion) are largely ignored.

22. *Mencius*, transl. Lau, Book 4:B, 261-263.

23. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, transl. Burton Watson (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968), chapter 2, "Discussion on Making All Things Equal," 36-49, esp. 40-41.

24. Cf. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3-13.

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

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

V. CONCLUSION

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

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

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