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—RB and SSW

Shih-chi 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian), is a comprehensive history of China, which covers the 2500-year period from the reign of the mythical Yellow Emperor (traditionally, 2697-2599 B.C.) to the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han (140-87 B.C.). The *Shih-chi* is the first of the vast collection of historical texts known as *Erh-shih-wu shih* 二十五史 (The Twenty-five Histories). Although the general structure of

the *Shih-chi*, as well as certain portions of the text itself, may have been the work of Ssu-ma T'an 司馬談, Grand Astrologer of the Han court during the early years of Emperor Wu's reign, credit for the completed work is usually given to T'an's son Ssu-ma Ch'ien.*

The organization of the *Shih-chi*, which became the model for later Chinese dynastic histories, is distinct from that of the early historical writings of the West. The latter recount history in a continuous, sweeping narrative, perhaps influenced structurally by the Western epic, but the *Shih-chi* is broken into smaller, overlapping units. Jaroslav Prusek's important study of this subject describes this Western narrative style as *ununterbrochener Fluss* (uninterrupted flow) and contrasts it with the Chinese penchant for *Treppenabsatz* (segmented progress). As the following description of the structure of the *Shih-chi* shows, it is one of the clearest examples of Chinese "segmented progress."

The *Shih-chi*'s 130 chapters are grouped into 5 sections. These are, in order of occurrence: "Pen-chi" 本紀 (Basic Annals), 12 chapters; "Piao" 表 (Tables), 10 chapters; "Shu" 書 (Treatises), 8 chapters; "Shih-chia" 世家 (Hereditary Households), 30 chapters; and "Lieh-chuan" 列傳 (Memoirs), 70 chapters. The first of these sections, "Basic Annals," chronicles the major events involving the emperor and his ruling bureaucracy. The section begins with the "Basic Annals of the Five Emperors," an account of the mythical sagerulers of antiquity, and continues with one chapter per dynasty until the record reaches the Han dynasty, after which each chapter covers the reign of a single emperor. As this structure implies, the detail increases as the chronology draws nearer to Ssu-ma's lifetime. Thus, the "Basic Annals of Yin" is little more than a list of emperors, with very little historical information presented, whereas the "Basic Annals of Kao-tsu," which concerns the career of the founder of the Han dynasty, contains prolonged narrative sequences which dramatically recreate certain critical episodes in Kao-tsu's life. The antecedent

for the "Basic Annals" section of the *Shih-chi* is probably the Confucian classic the *Ch'un-ch'iu* (see *ching*), a text which Ssu-ma Ch'ien esteemed highly. However, while the great classic lists major historical events in the tersest chronicle form, the *Shih-chi* periodically interrupts the simple list of historical events with long and sometimes complex narratives.

The "Tables" section arranges chronologically the sequence of rulers, feudal lords, famous ministers, generals, and other noteworthies. It is useful both for its clear presentation of temporal relationships and for its proposed solutions to various problems of chronology. Edouard Chavannes suggests that the idea for a section of this type originated with Ssu-ma Ch'ien himself, but because so many early Chinese texts have perished, this assertion is difficult to prove. In the hands of Pan Ku,* the author of the second of the official "Twenty-five Histories," the "Tables" became an instrument not just to show temporal relationships but also to rank the moral worthiness of important persons.

The eight "Treatises" are topical discussions of a select number of institutions or practices that are particularly relevant to an understanding of ancient Chinese history. These include studies of ritual, music, the calendar, and the *feng* 封 and *shan* 禘 sacrifices. The idea for the "Treatises" might have derived from the topical essays of the philosophers and, still more directly, from the discussions of *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* (see *chu-tzu pai-chia*). Nevertheless, their valuable detail marks them as an important addition to the traditional Chinese historical text. Although "treatises" continued to be a part of official histories, with a tendency as time went by towards a proliferation of topics (the *Ming-shih* has thirteen subjects), the *Shih-chi* name for this section, *shu*, was replaced by the name *chih* 志.

The section entitled "Hereditary Households" is unique to the *Shih-chi* and was apparently included by Ssu-ma Ch'ien to deal with an important fact of Eastern Chou politics: the feudal lords typically exercised greater power than the titular Chou

sovereign. Ssu-ma also includes in this section the hereditary households of eminent Han families, even though they exercised much less independence than their Chou predecessors. This section chronicles major events in much the same way as the "Basic Annals," but here the feudal lineages, rather than the imperial line, occupy the narrative focus. Since "Hereditary Households" implies, by its very existence, a diffusion of sovereignty beyond the imperial line, it was not a part of later official histories.

The "Memoirs" is by far the largest section of the *Shih-chi* and, in terms of literary influence, the most important. The Chinese title *lieh-chuan* is often translated as "biographies," but the section contains not just accounts of individuals but also of groups such as the Hsiung-nu and the southwestern barbarians. Even where the focus is upon individuals, there is a tendency for two or more persons with perceived affinities to be placed in a single chapter. For example, Lao-tzu and Han-fei-tzu are discussed in the same chapter, indicating Ssu-ma Ch'ien's belief that Han-fei's legalism derived from Lao-tzu's Taoism.

Within the structure of the *Shih-chi* presented here, certain historically important persons are treated rather unusually. The two most discussed of these anomalies are the inclusion of Hsiang Yü, one of the rebels who brought the downfall of Ch'in and tried unsuccessfully to found a new dynasty, in "Basic Annals," and the treatment of Confucius "Hereditary Households" rather than in "Memoirs" with Lao-tzu, Mencius and other prominent Chou philosophers. Ssu-ma's treatment of Hsiang Yü presumably acknowledges the fact that the rebel, though never recognized throughout the realm as emperor, was for several years the most powerful man in China. The placement of Confucius among the "Hereditary Households" possibly derives from the belief, reported by Ssu-ma, that Confucius was the rightful heir to the throne of Sung and also from Ssu-ma's desire to honor the Master by setting him apart from other Chou philosophers.

The *Shih-chi* is not a continuous narrative, but a series of reports that supplement one another and are best studied through a system of cross-reference rather than by reading the chapters in sequence. For example, in the "Basic Annals of the First Ch'in Emperor" a reference to the Prime Minister Lü Pu-wei 呂不韋 is not followed by a long digression telling about this important historical figure; instead, such information is supplied in the "Memoirs" chapter dealing specifically with Lü (ch. 85). Or, to give a further example, a reference to a musical performance in one of the "Memoirs" may be given full context only by cross-reference to the "Treatise on Music" (ch. 24). The arrangement of the *Shih-chi* may not facilitate rapid comprehension of the full "story of history," in the manner of Herodotus or Thucydides, but it greatly facilitates the isolation and ready comprehension of a particular subject or an individual life.

Like all good historians, Ssu-ma Ch'ien drew upon earlier sources. Indeed, his extreme dependence upon previous works gives support to his description of himself as a "transmitter" and not a "creator," a description, incidentally, which is itself drawn almost verbatim from Confucius. For example, one scholar has estimated that fully half of Ssu-ma's material for the Warring States period (403-222) derives from the sources which Liu Hsiang* later collected in *Chan-kuo ts'e*.* Thus one recent article, which praises Ssu-ma Ch'ien's "brilliant use of language," cites example after example which Ssu-ma has demonstrably borrowed from elsewhere. Tracing the sources of the *Shih-chi* is a difficult task, because some of them, the *Ch'u Han ch'un-ch'iu* 楚漢春秋 being one of the most important, have perished, and because Ssu-ma rarely states the origin of passages cited in his history. Ssu-ma must not be judged too harshly on this account. As Chavannes notes: "A historical text [in China] is always considered as belonging to the public domain. One regards it as the strictest honesty to copy without changing anything, and one need not even give the source of the extract." Ssu-ma does, how-

ever, alter the language, and in a few places he introduces small changes to give the episode a slightly different interpretation. Nevertheless, any study of the narrative style of Ssu-ma Ch'ien the man, as opposed to that of the *Shih-chi* the text, must begin with the almost impossible task of defining precisely which portions of the *Shih-chi* were done by Ssu-ma Ch'ien.

While the authenticity of most of the present *Shih-chi* is accepted without question, there are some problems. In his *Han-shu* biography of Ssu-ma Ch'ien, Pan Ku notes that ten of the 130 chapters of *Shih-chi* had been lost (chs. 11, 12, 17, 23, 24, 25, 60, 98, 127 and 128), and some scholars argue that the texts of these chapters, as they appear today, are not the originals. Ch'u Shao-sun 褚少孫 (c. 30 B.C.) is often said to have forged the present version of these chapters by reference to other sources. In some cases there is even the suspicion that portions of today's text have been back-copied from the *Han-shu*. However, the noted Japanese *Shih-chi* specialist Kametarō Takigawa argues that Pan Ku's observation is incorrect; the disputed chapters, he asserts, do stem from the hand of Ssu-ma Ch'ien. It is unlikely that this problem will ever be satisfactorily resolved, but there is no doubt that the present text contains a number of minor interpolations. The most obvious of these might be the anachronistic reference to Yang Hsiung* in the "Memoirs of Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju" (ch. 117) and a quotation from Ch'u Shao-sun that appears in ch. 127.

As noted above, the *Shih-chi* had a profound impact upon the style and structure of much later Chinese historical writing, one that has extended to the popular Chinese genre of "historical fiction." Indeed, in the Chinese tradition the boundary between "history" and "fiction" is even less clear than it is in the West, and this ambiguity derives, in some measure, from the influence of the stylistic devices of the *Shih-chi*. The latter, for example, makes frequent use of dialogue and, at times, even monologue to both advance the plot and portray character, even though much of this speech could not have been overheard

by the recorder. The tendency away from the strictly mimetic and towards the symbolic portrayal of character is another "fictional element" that has impact upon later Chinese narrative, particularly that of such historical romances as the *San-kuo chih yen-i** and the *Shui-hu chuan*.* A few of these categories of characters might be the wise minister, the decadent king, the man who recognizes virtue in others, and the *femme fatale*. As with most "symbolic" characterization, as soon as a character is placed in a category, he acquires all the features of his category—his individuality dissolves into the symbol.

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Although there is no comprehensive Western-language translation, most of the *Shih-chi* has been translated in one source or another (there is a useful list of translations, complete up to 1969, in *Les Mémoires Historiques*, v. 6, pp. 123-146—see below).

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—SD

Shih-ching 詩經 (Classic of Poetry) is one of the six classics of the Confucian school and the fountainhead of Chinese literature. It is an anthology of 305 poems edited by Confucius (551-479 B.C.), as the traditional belief has it, on the basis of about three thousand compositions collected for the education of his disciples. The Confucian emphasis on the *Shih-ching* was so strong that the Master and his disciples were criticized by other philosophers of their time, notably the Mohists. The book, nevertheless, remained a classic and required reading for the literati for more than two thousand years; not until the turn of the twentieth century did it cease to be read as scripture and begin to be appreciated as a collection of poetic compositions.

The poems of *Shih-ching* may be dated from the twelfth century to the seventh century B.C. External and internal evidence attests that the earliest pieces of the corpus are the Chou hymns 周頌 (Nos. 266-296). But many of their stylistic qualities underwent modification until the time of Confucius, when these hymns, together with later poems (including the so-called