THE RELIABILITY OF CHINESE HISTORIES*

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THE world's greatest repository of historical information is to be found in the twenty-five officially approved Chinese standard histories. This collection begins with legendary ages and continues to the beginning of the Tsing or Manchu period. Because only parts of a very few histories have been translated, this collection remains almost completely unavailable, except to expert sinologists.[1] Altogether the histories have well over twenty million

* *Romanization.* This article uses a modification of the usual Wade-Giles system, and follows in most respects that of Dr. C. S. Gardner. To convert my spelling into Wade-Giles add an apostrophe after my initial *ch-*, *k-*, *p-*, *t-*, *ts-*; change my *j-*, *g-*, *b-*, *d-*, *dz-* to *ch-*, *k-*, *p-*, *t-*, *ts-*, respectively; change my *r-* to *j-*; my final *-zh* to *-ih*; my *tz*, *dz*, *sz* to *tz'u*, *tzu*, *ssu*, respectively; and, before *-i* or *-ü* (not before *-u*), change my *ts-*, *dz-*, *s-* to *ch'- ch-*, *hs-*, respectively; *Cf. Journal of the American Oriental society*, 62 (1942), 303, note 20. I also drop a final silent *-h* and use *yi* regularly for the syllable *i*.

Although the English letters *b*, *d*, *g* have, in some English words, the same sounds as those in Chinese, the Wade-Giles system fails to use these letters. Instead it uses *p*, *t*, and *k* with two different pronunciations. It also uses a medial *i* (in *-ih*) and a final *u* (in *tzu*, etc.) to denote a semivowel which has a quite different pronunciation from that of these letters in English. The result is frequently confusion and mispronunciation. My changes are merely designed to correct these deficiencies in Wade-Gilés. Otherwise this convenient system is left unchanged.

Bibliography. The works most commonly referred to in this article and the abbreviations used are as follows:

HFHD—The history of the Former Han dynasty by Ban Gu, translated by H. H. Dubs, which is a translation of some chapters of the *HS*.

HHJ—Hou-Han-ji or *Account of the Later Han dynasty*, by Yüan Hung (328–376); see Giles, *Chinese biographical dictionary*, no. 2551.

HHS—Hou-Han-shu or *History of the Later Han dynasty*, by Fan Ye (398–445); using the paging of Wang Sien-chien's edition, the *Hou-Han-shu dzi-jie*.

HS—Han-shu (usually called the *Tsien-Han-shu*) or *History of the [Former] Han dynasty*, by Ban Gu (A.D. 32–92); using the paging of Wang Sien-chien's edition, the *Han-shu bu-ju*.

LH—Lun-hung, by Wang Chung (A.D. 27–97), translated by A. Forke under the same title; quoted by pages of Forke's translation.

MH—Les memories historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien (5 vols.), a translation by E. Chavannes of about half the *SJ*.

Sargent—"Subsidized history: Pan Ku and the historical records of the Former Han dynasty," by Clyde B. Sargent, FAR EASTERN QUARTERLY 3 (1944), 119–143, to which the present article is largely a reply.

SJ—Shzh-ji or *Historical record*, by Sz-ma Tsien (*ca.* B.C. 145–80).

ST—Shzh-tung 史通 or *Historical perspectives*, by Liu Jzh-ji 劉知幾 (661–721).

Chinese characters for these works are either found in the Sargent article referred to or in A. Wylie's *Notes on Chinese literature*, pp. 16, 24.

[1] One of the most remarkable facts about occidental histories of historiography is their neglect of Chinese histories. H. E. Barnes, *A history of historical writing*, contains a section entitled "Oriental beginnings of historical writing" (p. 16), but fails even to mention Chinese histories,

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TREATISES IN CHINESE STANDARD HISTORIES

	The Historical Memoirs (*Shzh-ji*, *ca.* 90 B.C.) EIGHT BOOKS (*SHU*)		*The History of the Former Han Dynasty* (*Tsien-Han-shu*, *ca.* A.D. 84) TEN TREATISES (*JZH*)		*The Draft History of the Tsing Dynasty* (*Tsing-shzh-gao*, 1928) SIXTEEN TREATISES (*JZH*)
No.		No.		No.	
1.	Rites (only introduction written)	2.	Rites and music	5.	Rites
2.	Music (only introduction written)			6.	Music
3.	The Musical Tubes (quite brief);	1.	The Musical Tubes and the Calendar	3.	The Calendar
	includes a very brief section on war		Deliberately omitted	12.	War
4.	The Calendar (brief)				
5.	The Offices in Heaven (Stars, planets, & their astrological interpretation)	6.	The Ornaments of Heaven	1.	Astronomy
6.	The *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices (The state religion)	5.	The Suburban Sacrifices and State Offerings to the Spirits		
7.	Rivers and Canals	9.	Canals and Ditches	11.	Waterways
8.	Equalization and Standards (Economic developments)	4.	Food and Goods	10.	Economics
		3.	Punishments and Laws	13.	Justice
				7.	Sumptuary Legislation
		7.	The Five Agents (Portentous events and their interpretations)	2.	Calamities and Prodigies
		8.	The Principles of Geographical Arrangements (Administrative divisions & census)	4.	Geography
				15.	Communications
		10.	The Canons and Literature (An annotated catalog of the imperial library)	14.	Literature
			Part of the Memoir on the Forest of Literati	8.	The Selection of Officials by Examination
			The Table of the Many Offices	9.	Government Offices
			The Memoirs on the Huns, on the Southwestern Barbarians, and on the Western Frontier Regions.	16.	Foreign Relations

characters, the equivalent of at least forty-five million English words. If this series were translated with appropriate notes and printed in the same format as the parts of the first two that have appeared, there would be about 225,000 pages, making about 450 volumes of 500 pages each.[2] This translation is the greatest single task awaiting sinological scholarship today.

This great series of histories is arranged approximately on the plan used in the second one, the *History of the Former Han dynasty* (*HS*), which is recognized to be one of the best, possibly the very best of all. Its form was a development of that used in the *Shzh-ji* or *Historical record* (*SJ*). The continuity of Chinese historiography is indicated in the accompanying table, which summarizes the situation with regard to the chapters of these histories dealing with specific subjects. It indicates the way in which the *HS* derived from the *SJ* certain of its subjects and shows that the recent attempt at a similar history follows the same scheme (The *Tsing-shzh-gao* [Draft history of the Tsing dynasty, begun 1912], which has not yet been included among the twenty-five standard histories). A correct understanding of the *HS* is hence of great importance, because this work has been the model upon which subsequent Chinese historiography has been based.

This book was entitled the *Han-shu*, which phrase I have translated as the *History of the* [*Former*] *Han dynasty*.[3] In Han times, the Chinese word *shu* 書 meant "a writing." It was used to denote ordinary letters, memorials to the throne, imperial edicts, and the classical *Book of history* (the *Shang-shu* or "Revered *shu*"). Liu Jzh-ji, who was a keen critic of histories, states that Ban Gu, the author of the *HS*,[4] took the word *shu* from the title of the *Book*

although Chavannes' splendid translation (the *MH*) had been completed for more than a decade before Barnes wrote. J. T. Shotwell, *The history of history* (1939) equally ignores Chinese histories.

[2] These figures are based upon a count of the characters in an average chapter (*HS*, ch. 84, 6827 characters), calculating the average number of characters per page, multiplying by the number of pages in the Kai-ming Bookstore edition of the "Twenty-five histories," which prints the whole in a uniform format. Sargent's estimate of approximately ten million characters (p. 120) is much too low.

[3] Sargent, p. 119 and note 1 denies to the *HS* the character of a history and translates this title as *Han documents* or *Documents of the* [*former*] *Han dynasty*.

[4] There is no ancient evidence to support the statement (Sargent, 128) that Ban Gu's sister, Ban Jao, completed the *HS* and is responsible for chs. 13–20, 26, and possibly for ch. 99. The primary evidence indicates that she did little, possibly nothing at all towards the completion of this work. The primary evidence upon which the belief that Ban Jao completed the *HS* is found in her life by Fan Ye in *HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 74, p. 3b. "[Ban Jao's] elder brother, [Ban] Gu, wrote the *HS*, but when he died, the eight "tables" [i.e., chs. 13–20] and "The treatise on the ornaments of heaven (*Tien-wen jzh*)" [ch. 26] had not been completed. [So] Emperor Ho ordered [Ban] Jao to go to the Pavillion for Storing Writings in the Eastern Lodge [where historical work was being carried on] to continue and complete it." Here nothing is said about ch. 99 being lacking. I see no evidence

of history, which, Liu Jzh-ji says, "is a fine name for an examination of ancient events."[5] In Han times, *shu* did not specially denote "historical documents." That term was denoted by *ju$_a$-ji* 著記, *ju$_b$-ji* 注記 or *chi-jü-ju$_b$*

whatever to connect Ban Jao with that chapter. We are moreover *not* told that she really worked on the *HS*.

What she actually did was something different. The foregoing passage continues as follows: "When the *HS* first appeared, most [people] could not understand it, so Ma Rung, who came from the same commandery [as Ban Gu], prostrated himself below the Pavillion [For Storing Writings] and received from [Ban] Jao the [correct] understanding [of difficult matters]." In those days there were as yet no dictionaries giving the various meanings of words, so that it was necessary to have some person available to explain unusual chaiacters and difficult passages. Such was the regular practise with regard to the classics. Ma Rung (79–166) was then still a young man. He later became the outstanding scholar of the day, so that he was a quite suitable person to carry on the tradition about the meaning of the *HS*. A century later, in A.D. 221, we find that persons who wished to read the *HS* would seek out the teacher who possessed this tradition and read the book with him (*San-guo-jzh*, Wu, ch. 14, p. 1a).

There is moreover no statement concerning how much interpretation of the *HS* was given by Ban Jao. With such an unusual person as Ma Rung, the explanation even of difficult characters was probably quite unnecessary, so that Ban Jao may not have felt herself obligated to do that. There have however come down to us certain glosses attributed to Ban Jao, dealing with passages in *HS* ch. 100, the "Introductory memoir." These glosses deal particularly with Ban Gu's autobiography in that chapter. It is quite likely that Ban Jao did nothing more with the *HS* than to give the explanations that led to the making of these glosses. For biographical matters concerning Ban Gu she would be specially fitted.There is no ancient evidence that she actually did anything more. She was a favorite of the Empress Dowager *nee* Deng, who was then ruling as regent, and attended court with the Empress Dowager (*HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 74, p. 3b), so that she probably had no spare time for serious labor on her brother's work. She needed to achieve no fame.

Sz-ma Biao, who lived *ca.* 240–*ca.* 306, says definitely: "Ma Sü, [a younger brother of Ma Rung], wrote the Treatise on the ornaments of heaven" [From a note incorporated into *HHS*, Treatises, ch. 10, p. 2b.]. This evidence concerning the authorship of *HS* ch. 26, written a century and a half before Fan Ye's *HHS*, is clear and plain.

Yüan Hung (328–76), in his *HHJ*, tells about the completion of the *HS*, saying nothing about Ban Jao: "When Ban Gu composed the *HS*, seven 'tables' were lacking [prob. ch. 13–19], together with the 'Treatise on the ornaments of heaven.'" [The titles of these chapters] were recorded, but [the chapters] were without any writing. [Ma] Sü did the entire [work of] continuing and completing them" [*HHJ*, ch. 18, p. 3b]. Yüan Hung evidently believed that Ban Gu had composed the last of the "tables," which is the "Table of ancient and present personages" (ch. 20). The nature of that chapter corroborates this interpretation. Yüan Hung's evidence is half a century earlier than that of Fan Ye. The latter used the *HHJ* as one of his sources. Yüan Hung's statement is of high value.

Fan Ye (397–445) continues the passage translated above by illegitimately combining Yüan Hung's statement with the imperial edict ordering Ban Jao to complete the *HS*: "Afterwards there was also an imperial edict that [Ma] Rung's elder [*sic*] brother, [Ma] Sü, should continue [Ban] Jao's [work] and complete it" [*HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 74, p. 3b]. ("Elder brother" is here an error; Hui Dung [1697–1758], using a note in *HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 14, p. 23b, points out that Ma Rung was the elder of the two. The passage above, quoted from the *HHJ*, is preceded by a sentence in which Ma Sü is also mentioned as "[Ma Rung's] elder brother." This circumstance establishes that Fan Ye is here using the *HHJ* as a source.)

This clear evidence makes definite that Ban Jao had a minor part in completing the *HS*. She was a learned woman—the marvel of her age. The ancient evidence is merely that she was *ordered* to complete the *HS*. It is nowhere stated that she actually did so. It is also declared plainly that Ma Sü did so.

起居注.[6] In his title, then, Ban Gu implied that he was not merely recording events but was preparing a critical account from other documents.

Ban Gu divided his book into four parts: annals (*ji*),[7] tables (*biao*), treatises (*jzh*), and memoirs (*juan*). The word for the third division, *jzh*, is sometimes translated "monographs."[8] But these chapters are not monographs in the modern sense of that word. They are merely historical accounts treating of certain special subjects. Chinese bureaucrats early came to realize that matters of calendar, ritual and sacrifice, economics, law, water control, etc. were particularly important for the government. So they wrote accounts of events concerned with these matters. The word "monographs" indicates a specialist's thorough treatment and is entirely too dignified for the *HS*'s account. The word for the fourth division, *juan* 傳, is frequently translated "biographies," because most of these chapters contain biographies of the important personages of the era. Then the non-biographical *juan* are said to have been "inappropriately included."[9] But the word *juan* was used

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The "tables" in the *HS* were evidently copied out of the genealogical and chronological material in the imperial records—Ban Gu was probably too much of a poet for such drudgery. Ma Sü was a mathematician and hence well fitted to prepare an account of astronomy. Except for the first part of the "Table of the many offices" (*HS*, ch. 19, which may indeed have been prepared by Ban Gu), in which an account is given of the imperial bureaucracy, Ma Sü does not seem to have produced anything outstanding. *HS*, ch. 26 largely repeats what Sz-ma Tsien, who was himself an astronomer, says in the *SJ*. In comparison to the rest of the *HS*, the compilation of these eight missing chapters represents a quite minor amount of work.

[5] The passage is translated here: "Anciently the 'Canons of Yü [Shun]' and 'of Hsia [Yü]', [which are now parts II and III of the *Book of history*; *Cf.* Legge's translation in *Chinese classics*, pp. 29, 92] and the 'Announcements' of the Shang and Jou [dynasties, i.e., pts. IV and V; *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 173, 281] were called *shu*, hence [Ban Gu] took *shu* as the name [of his work], which is a fine name for an examination of ancient events" [*ST*, ch 1]. In his own introduction, Ban Gu refers to the *Book of history* as a model of historiography (*HS*, ch. 100B, p. 1a), so that Liu Jzh-ji is merely expressing what Ban Gu implies.

[6] *HS*, ch. 30, p. 18b, in the bibliography of the Imperial Private Library, lists the *Han* ju_a*-ji* (Han documents and records) in 190 rolls. Ban Gu collaborated with Ma Yen (A.D. 17–98) in writing the *Jien-wu* ju_b*-ji* (Documents and records of the Jien-wu period), that of Emperor Guangwu, the first ruler in the Later Han period. Later "Documents and records" were prepared for Emperor Ming (*Hsien-dzung chi-jü-*ju_b), the second ruler (*HHS*, Annals, ch. 10, p. 9a–b) and at least for Emperor Ling (*Ling-di chi-jü-*ju_b; mentioned in the *HHJ*) and for Emperor Hsien (*Hsien-di chi-jü-*ju_b in 5 rolls; listed in the *Sui-shu* bibliography, ch. 2, p. 9b). These books of source-materials for history can properly be called "documents" in the modern sense of the word. They were primary records of events observed and prepared by courtiers who attended closely upon the throne, so that they were in a position to know what happened.

[7] Ban Gu did not call the first part of his *HS* by the title "Imperial annals (*di-ji*)," as stated by Sargent (p. 120). He merely entitled them "annals(*ji*)." The word "imperial(*di*)" is a later and quite appropriate addition, just as is the *tsien* (former) usually placed before the ancient title of the *HS*. The oldest extant edition of the *HS*, that of 1034–35 (reproduced in the Commercial Press's "Bo-na ed.") does not have the word *di* in the titles of its "annals."

[8] As Sargent, 120, 123.

[9] Sargent, 123. The placing of the "Memoir of the imperial relatives by marriage" (*HS*, ch. 97) and the next two chapters (*cf.* Sargent, 124) near the end does not mean that Ban Gu thereby "in-

in Han times as a general term for any written work that from age to age was transmitted (*chuan*, written with the same character as *juan*). This word became equivalent to the English "book." It meant merely "accounts of." I have preferred the translation "memoirs." This latter term enables us to include under the same name all the chapters in this division.[10]

The *HS* has been criticized as not a genuine history, but merely a compilation of documents.[11] Whether it is history or merely a collection of documents depends upon our conception of history. If we mean by "history" only that

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tentionally indicated his disapproval of the persons treated" in this chapter (Sargent, 124). The empresses and important imperial concubines, together with their male relatives, were by no means all wicked and contemptible persons. One of them was Ban Gu's own great-aunt, the Favorite Beauty *nee* Ban, who was a highly admirable person. Ban Gu was a Confucian, so obviously placed this chapter near the end in order to indicate the lack of governmental importance that *ought* to characterize women. The current Confucian principle was "Women should not take part in governmental matters" (translated in *HFHD*, vol. 2, p. 31, note 2.11). Fan Ye, who was not a staid Confucian, in his *HHS*, indicates the actual importance of these women by including his account of them among his "annals." He did not thereby approve of their deeds, for he points out that their rule brought calamity upon the dynasty.

HS ch. 98, "The memoir of the Empress of Emperor Yüan," i.e., the Empress Dowager *nee* Wang, the great-aunt of Wang Mang, is not "entirely devoted to a woman" (Sargent, 124–25). It begins by quoting the genealogy Wang Mang fabricated for himself, tells about Wang Mang's ancestors, then recounts the lives of Wang Mang's grandfather and various great-uncles, who successively dominated the government for a whole generation. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to these great-uncles. The name of his great-aunt, the Empress Dowager, is used as the title because these ministers attained their positions through their relation to her. The chapter is really an account of the whole Wang clan and not merely of the Empress Dowager. This chapter portrays the rise of the Wang clan to power, thereby laying the foundation upon which Wang Mang raised himself still higher. Sargent (p. 125) declares, "The evidence suggests that Pan Ku [whose name I spell "Ban Gu"] felt that the persons treated in these three chapters deserved his disapproval." But the last sentence in ch. 98, which is part of the historian's judgment upon the persons discussed therein, indicates that Ban Gu and his father both *approved* of the Empress Dowager: "But the Empress [Dowager *nee* Wang of Emperor] Yüan was entirely devoted [to the Han dynasty], and still grasped firmly the one imperial seal [considered to convey the imperial power; this incident is recounted in *HS*, ch. 98, p. 13a, b] and did not wish to give it to [Wang] Mang. [She exhibited] the perfect virtue of a wife. Alas [her relatives did not possess the same devotion]!"

[10] Sargent (121) divides the fourth part of the *HS*, the *juan* or "memoirs," into two parts, separating as the second part "a group of essays on 'foreign affairs' (chapters 94–96)," e.g., "The memoir concerning the Hsiung-nu [or Huns]." But these are not "monographs," which are "systematic expositions of one thing" (the *Desk standard dictionary's* definition), but historical accounts, quite similar to such a chapter as no. 88, "The memoir concerning the forest of literati (*Ru-lin juan*)," which recounts the erudits (*bo-shzh*) and their outstanding disciples, together with the development of the Confucian canon upon which they specialized.

[11] Sargent concludes, "Pan Ku was not primarily an historian or a critical scholar; he was a careful compiler" (p. 132). "The work really is not a 'history' but is primarily a collection of documents" (p. 119, note 1). "The compiler . . . was completely unable to present a synthesis of the entire picture" (p. 139). Again, on page 132, Sargent also states that Ban Gu "did not have judgments; he did have impressions." I find nowhere in the article the precise distinction between a "judgment" and an "impression." Sargent, however, states that Chinese history is "a planned presentation of the compiler's estimate of the events themselves" (p. 135), which statement itself implies that the "compiler" did have a judgment upon the events.

which results when a "historian collects his data, analyzes them, discovers a condition or tendency from which he selects a thesis, and then uses his data to develop his thesis,"[12] then of course the *HS* is not a "history." But then we should be compelled also to declare that Herodotus, the "father of history," was no historian, nor was Livy; in fact that practically no histories were written anywhere until modern times! It is unfair to expect other ages or regions to conform to our present ideals. It is today recognized that the Roman historians had different conceptions of history from ours and that it is erroneous to criticize them for failing to meet our ideals. We should not think that our present conceptions of history are the only correct ones. While Ban Gu did not, of course, have our ideals of history today and the *HS* is not a modern history, we can only criticize him fairly for failing to attain the standard of what in his own day was considered to be history.

The classical Chinese conception of history has been that it is a *record* of events. The interpretation of events, which is today considered the main function of the historian, would have been rejected by classical Chinese historians as something quite distinct from history. For such an interpretation must be subjective, whereas history, as such, was expected to be entirely objective. Chinese historians would probably have condemned modern occidental histories as being subjective essays rather than objective histories.

Chinese writers did sometimes undertake an extended interpretation of historical events. But this interpretation was considered as belonging to the field of the essay, not that of history.[13] Chinese historians were however human, so could not refrain from stating their judgments. But they distinguished these judgments from the strictly "historical" parts of their works by introducing them under special rubrics. In the *Dzo-juan* (probably written about the end of the fourth century B.C.), such statements are prefaced by "A superior man says."[14] The *Guo-yü* (early third century B.C.) does the same.[15] Sz-ma Tsien regularly appends to the chapters of his *SJ* a similar judgmental passage prefaced by "The Lord Grand Astrologer [an honorary title for himself and/or his father] says."[16] Ban Gu in the *HS* merely uses "In eulogy we say 替曰."[17] Because these interpretations and judgments did

[12] Sargent, 132.

[13] For example, Jia Yi (200–168 B.C.) wrote an essay on the causes for the downfall of the Tsin dynasty, which Sz-ma Tsien transcribed into the judgmental part of his chapter that treats of this dynasty (translated in *MH*, vol. 2, pp. 219–36).

[14] *Cf.* Legge's translation of the *Dzo-juan* (he spells it Tso Chuen) in *Chinese classics*, vol. 5, pt. 1, p. 2 line 12 and p. 6a, *et passim*.

[15] *Guo-yü*, ch. 7, p. 5b, 12a, *et passim*.

[16] *MH*, vol. 1, p. 94, *et passim*.

[17] *HFHD*, vol. 1, pp. 146–50, *et passim*.

not belong to what was considered history, they were usually kept brief. But Sün Yüe (A.D. 148–209), who wrote an annalistic condensation of the *HS*, entitled the *Han-ji* (usually now called the *Tsien-Han-ji*), in addition to appending "eulogies," frequently interrupts his accounts with a discussion prefaced, "Sün Yüe says 荀悅曰," which sometimes extends to several pages. Fan Ye in the *HHS* reserves his "eulogies" for brief, sententious, poetic summaries and frequently precedes them by a brief essay labelled, "In discussion we say." Later histories sometimes elaborated these judgmental passages to considerable length. The practise of separating interpretations from factual accounts has been a constant feature of Chinese histories. These interpretative and evaluative judgments were highly prized. Collections of them were made. But they were not considered the really important feature of history proper, which was confined to a recital of objective events.[18]

Much more interpretation and analysis is to be read into these judgmental passages than appears at first glance. Confucius demanded of his students that they must be able to draw the inferences implied in his statements.[19] These judgments must similarly be considered along with the factual material and the consequent inferences drawn. Thereby a keen analysis is frequently discovered. This circumstance was not accidental. Sz-ma Tsien, in his letter to Ren An, speaking of his *SJ*, wrote as follows: "I have examined how affairs are conducted and I have sought the principles of success and failure, of rise and ruin."[20] Unfortunately the nature of the causal analysis made by Chinese historians was however limited by the current philosophy. Frequently only principles of individual morality or fate are mentioned. It is incorrect to declare that Chinese historians attempted no analysis or synthesis. They merely did not do the same as we would today.

[18] A similar reply may be given to Sargent's criticism (p. 139) that there is a "general absence of cross references and the complete absence of indices." But Ban Gu gives many cross references: *Cf. HFHD*, vol. 1, pp. 192, 210 (two), 222 (two), 255, 258, 259, 325; vol. 2, pp. 151, 165 (two). 199, 201 (two), 204 (two), 209, 242, 385, 406. Twenty-one cross references in ten chapters may not be as many as Sargent wants, but that is a larger number than is found in ancient occidental histories. When we remember that the *HS* was written on rolls of silk, so that there could be no page references, it is remarkable that we find any cross-references at all. Indices were impossible, because an alphabet was lacking to give order to words. The radical system and the systematized rime scheme had likewise not yet solidified. It is consequently quite correct to emphasize "the student's necessity of having a complete and detailed familiarity with the entire work in order to study any single phase of Han history" (Sargent, 139). But such knowledge is no more than what genuine scholarship ought to demand.

[19] *Analects* VII, viii.

[20] *HS*, ch. 62, p. 24a; also translated in *MH*, vol. 1, p. ccxxxvii. I see no reason for doubting the genuineness of this letter. Whether it is genuine or not, this ideal of historical judgment was expressed.

Chinese histories were written by bureaucrats attached to the central government and for the use of such bureaucrats. Official position was the almost universal goal of literary study, so that this orientation was inevitable.[21] Ban Gu came of a clan that had at one time been very important in the central government.[22] He was given the bureaucrat's classical education. He wrote in the imperial palace, where the bureaucracy and the huge imperial entourage would be sure to remind him of their interests. His predecessor, Sz-ma Tsien, ranked just below the high ministers.[23] Both by training and by tradition, the interests of Ban Gu were those of the bureaucracy. Historians knew that few emperors would read their extensive works. Hence the *HS* contains the features bureaucrats needed to know: the names of the administrative divisions of the empire, important new legal enactments, economic and social experiments of the government, regulations for new currencies, changes in the Confucian canon,[24] details of military campaigns, and extensive extracts from literary works, as well as the genealogy of the imperial clan and descriptions of the adornments in the imperial harem.

Since Chinese histories were written for bureaucrats, the conditions of the common people find little mention. Such matters are rarely discussed in ancient occidental histories. They are not however neglected in Chinese history,[25] for the bureaucracy realized that it depended upon the people for its supplies. Large famines, floods, etc. are regularly mentioned. The court at intervals sent persons about the country to inspect social conditions and

[21] The *HS* is not restricted to "an imperial political history of the reigning family of Liu during the former Han dynasty" (Sargent, 143) nor does it show an exclusive "concern for historical events affecting the fate and fortune of the imperial family" (*ibid.*, 140). Its interests were as broad as those of the bureaucracy.

The interests of the reigning family were of course quite restricted. Several emperors were playboys who cared for little beyond their favorites and their harem. Only a very few exceptional rulers anywhere have ever been interested in the whole scope of the matters with which the central government must deal. Emperors, unless they were real statesmen, would not be interested in such subjects as those treated in *HS* ch. 91, "Producers of wealth" or ch. 92, "Traveling redressers of wrongs."

[22] *HS*, ch. 100A, p. 6a.

[23] He was the grand astrologer (*tai-shzh*), whose rank is given in *HS*, ch. 19A, p. 6b.

[24] *Cf.* note 10.

[25] Sargent declares, "The masses of the people, as well as general social and economic conditions, are generally ignored unless they materially affect the throne or the court. An insurrection or revolution, for example, is conspicuously noted only when its vibrations threatened stability of the dynasty" (p. 140). *Every* insurrection, of course, potentially threatens the dynasty. But among the many dozens of rebellions in the first ten chapters of the *HS*, the following did not actually threaten the stability of the dynasty: in 195 B.C. (*HFHD*, vol. 1, p. 141), in 183 (*ibid.*, 198) in 174 (*ibid.*, 250), in 164 (*ibid.*, 260), in 122 (*ibid.*, vol. 2, p.58), in 121 (*ibid.*, 61), in 122 (*ibid.*, 79) in 111 (*ibid.*, 82), in 108 (*ibid.*, 93), in 86 (*ibid.*, 155), in 83 (*ibid.*, 158), in 80 (*ibid.*, 163), in 78 (*ibid.*, 168), in 67 (*ibid.*, 216), in 62 (*ibid.*, 238), in 61 (*ibid.*, 241), in 52 (*ibid.*, 256), in 42, (*ibid.*, 322), in 22 (*ibid.*, 391), in 17 (*ibid.*, 399), and in 13 (*ibid.*, 406).

report. It is stated, for example, that Wang Mang sent an army into a famine region where it consumed the food of loyal people needed to preserve their lives.[26] We are of course not told all we should like, but we are told many incidental matters[27] from which we can infer much about social and economic conditions. We have no right to complain at the lack of the information we want—we ought not to expect the historiography of a different age to have precisely our ideals. The *HS* was anciently criticized as too long—it employs three quarters of a million characters in recounting the events of two and a quarter centuries. We should be thankful we have so much, instead of wishing for something else.

Ban Gu possessed abundant documentary sources. In addition to the *SJ* and the well-known works of Lu Jia, Liu Hsiang, and Liu Hsin,[28] there were many other written materials then available. Yang Hsiung (53 B.C.–A.D.18) wrote an account of the period 73 B.C.–A.D. 6.[29] The list of books in the Imperial Private Library of Former Han times (*HS* ch., 30) includes a *Continuation of the Lord Grand Astrologer's Book* [the *SJ*] by Feng Shang (lived at the end of first cent. B.C. 馮商所續太史公書 in seven fascicles.[30] The *Han documents and records* in 190 rolls[31] is said by Yen Jou Shzh-gu (581–645) to have been "like the present documentary chronicles (*chi-ju-ju*$_b$)" and must have been a very valuable source. There were also *The yearly annals of the Han emperors* 漢帝年紀 in five fascicles.[32] Liu Jzh-ji, who read widely in works now lost, states that after the *SJ* had been written:

Liu Hsiang, his son [Liu Hsin], together with various persons who loved such matters, such as Feng Shang, Wei Hung [lived at the end of the Former Han period], Yang Hsiung, Shzh Tsen [fl. A.D. 4–23],[33] Liang Shen [unknown], Sz Ren [unknown], Dzin Ping [fl. A.D. 58],[34] Duan Su [fl. A.D. 58],[35] Jin Dan [fl. A.D. 25],[36]

[26] *HS*, ch. 99C, pp. 16a, 17b.

[27] We are told, for example, that the usual rate of interest was 20 per cent; also the rates of income on various types of property (*HS*, ch. 91, pp. 6a–8b).

[28] Mentioned by Sargent, pp. 129, 130.

[29] *LH*, vol. 2, p. 224.

[30] *HS*, ch. 30, p. 18a. Wei Jao (197–273) glosses that this work was prepared at the imperial command. A fascicle (*pien* 篇) was a set of narrow bamboo or wooden writing tablets, plaited together by strings in accordian fashion, so that they could be folded together or spread open on a table for writing or reading. It was the common form of writing material before the invention of paper. The roll (*jüan* 卷) was of silk, hence expensive and usually limited to works financed by the imperial treasury.

[31] *Cf.* note. 6.

[32] *HS*, ch 30, p. 18b.

[33] *HS*, ch. 18, p. 15b; *HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 70A, p. 7b.

[34] *HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 30A, p. 6b.

[35] *HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 30A, p. 7a.

[36] *HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 3, p. 6a.

Feng Yen [fl. A.D. 22–58],[37] Wei Rung [unknown], Siao Fen [unknown], Liu Sün [unknown], and others, successively composed continuations.[38]

In Liang, Sui, or Tang times, collections of works by many Former Han worthies were still extant. In the bibliographies of these histories we find listed the works of no less than 29 Former Han worthies in 92 rolls.[39] There was also the *Memoirs of various gentlemen* 列士傳 by Liu Hsiang, in 2 rolls. In Liang times (fifth century) there was the *Edicts personally issued by the Eminent Founder of the Han dynasty* (Emperor Gao) 漢高祖手詔 in 1 roll, also Jang Chien's *Treatise on going outside the frontier*, in 2 rolls, and Huan Tan's (d. A.D. 56) *New discussions* (*sin-lun*), in 17 rolls, which contains many Former Han incidents.[40] From these literary documents much historical material could be gathered. Ban Gu quotes samples of these authors' writings in his "memoirs."

The one work that Ban Gu did not use was Wang Chung's *LH*.[41] Wang Chung lived his active literary life in the Yangdz delta, far from the imperial capital. His book was unknown at the capital until Tsai Yung (133–192) discovered it and brought it back to the capital with him.[42]

The most important earlier history used by Ban Gu was the work of his own father, Ban Biao, entitled *Later accounts* 後傳. Liu Jzh-ji states that it had 65 chapters.[43] This book did not circulate. I can find extremely few cases of anyone who read or saw it.[44] Ban Gu incorporated its material into his *HS*,[45] and thereafter it disappeared. Wang Chung, in his younger days, studied with Ban Biao.[46] His *LH* contains much historical information, which

[37] *HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 18.

[38] *ST*, ch. 12, pp. 5b, 6a (Wai, ch. 2, "*Gu-jin jeng-shzh*"). Jeng Tsaio (1104–62), in a famous and libellous criticism of Ban Gu, which is so bad that it is plainly biased and unreliable, says: "For the whole of the six reigns from Emperor Jao to Emperor Ping, [Ban Gu's] material came from the writings of Jia Kuei (A.D. 30–101] and Liu Hsin." (From the preface to his *Shzh-tung* or *General history*, p. 3a.) Jia Kuei's work may be another of Ban Gu's sources. It is not mentioned elsewhere, so far as I know.

[39] These twenty-nine persons were: the Favorite Beauty *nee* Ban, Chao Tso, Chen Tang, Du Ye, Dung Fang-so, Dung Jung-shu, Gu Yung, the King of Huai-nan, Jang Chang, Jai Yi, Kuang Heng and Wang Feng, Kung Dzang, Li Sün, Li Ling, Liu Hsiang, Liu Hsin, Mei Sheng, Shzh Dan, Shzh Tsen, Si-fu Gung, Sz-ma Siang-ru, Sz-ma Tsien, Tang Lin, Tsui Juan, Wang Bao, Wei Siang, Wei Hsüan-cheng, Wu-chiu Shou-wang, Emperor Wu, and Yang Hsiung.

[40] *Cf. HFHD*, vol. 1, p. 116, note 2.

[41] Sargent (p. 130) says otherwise, seemingly without any evidence.

[42] *LH*, vol. 1, p. 185.

[43] *ST*, ch. 12, p. 6a; *LH*, vol. 2, p. 304 states it contains more than a hundred chapters. This number probably represents the design rather than the execution. Jeng Tsiao (*op. cit.*) states that Ban Biao's "book cannot [now] be secured and read."

[44] The only case I know is a reference by Wei Jao in a note to *HS*, ch. 30, p. 18a.

[45] *Cf. HFHD*, vol. 2, p. 336 and note 13.5; p. 418, note 16.2.

[46] *LH*, vol. 1, p. 184.

could have come only from the capital. The inference is plain: Wang Chung possessed Ban Biao's book or at least extracts from it. Or he may be quoting from memory. (He was able to repeat a book after once reading it.) We may then gain some conception of Ban Biao's work from the historical information in the *LH*. But the material Wang Chung has is far inferior in richness and detail to what we find in Ban Gu's work. The *LH* is sometimes contradicted by the *HS*—the son must have possessed far more elaborate sources than did the father.

Besides these books, Ban Gu had access to the imperial archives. He was allowed even to work all night in the Imperial Private Library, which was in the Forbidden Apartments, to which ordinary persons had no access.[47] It is, however, asserted that the imperial archives of the Former Han dynasty were scattered and lost and probably many were burned in the general conflagration of Chang-an at and after the downfall of Wang Mang in A.D. 23.[48] But Fan Ye contradicts that supposition: "When [Emperor] Guang-wu removed [the capital, himself] returning to Lo-yang, the tablets of classics and imperial private books were borne in more than 2000 carts. From this time and afterwards, they were six times what they had been formerly."[49]

From a study of the *HS*, we can infer certain written sources that must have been available to Ban Gu. There must have been collections of imperial messages and edicts, also a file of the memorials to the throne, especially of those approved for enforcement by the emperors (which then became imperial edicts). Some at least were preserved of the memorials that had been laid aside, for Ban Gu quotes them.[50] There were certain annals kept at the palace, recording imperial progresses, visits to places outside the capital and

[47] *HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 30B, p. 8b.

[48] Sargent, 130–31.

[49] *HHS*, Memoirs, 69A, p. 3a. Wang Chung's statement that the Former Han imperial library was scattered and lost (Sargent, 131) must be discounted in view of Fan Ye's explicit statement. The account in the *HHS* is confirmed by the large amount of Former Han material listed as available in Sui and Tang times, evidenced in the bibliographies of the *Sui-shu* and two *Tang-shu*. Chinese palaces have been quite spread out affairs, so that, although Ban Gu says "the Wei-yang Palace had been burnt" and "the Red Eyebrows burned the palaces . . . in Chang-an" (*HS*, ch. 99C, p. 29a), this does not mean that every pavillion in every palace was burned. The illiterate Red Eyebrows would moreover hardly find worth looting a library, with its piles of bamboo writing tablets. There is hence no reason to understand the foregoing two statements about the burning and looting of the imperial palaces to imply that the imperial archives were necessarily also destroyed, especially in view of Fan Ye's explicit statement. The Former Han library may not have been moved to Lo-yang until A.D. 32, when Emperor Guang-wu returned from Chang-an (*HHS*, Annals, ch. 1B, p. 5b).

[50] Ban Gu states that a book of revelations written by Gan Jung-ko (who died in prison) was stored in the imperial archives and brought out again in A.D. 5, fourteen years later (*HS*, ch. 75, p. 31b).

dates of the imperial return to the capital. Lists were kept of eclipses and other portentous events, both auspicious and unfavorable. All capital sentences had to be reported to the throne and the imperial approval secured before the sentence could be carried out. These reports naturally included abstracts or transcripts of the testimony upon which that sentence was based. Even conversations were thus sometimes reported. Ban Gu's biographies are frequently somewhat vague until its hero gets into trouble, whereupon the account becomes quite detailed and full. Some political pamphlets were also preserved, many of which formed part of memorials to the throne. With this huge mass of material to control, from which to select the important items, and which needed drastic condensation, it is not surprising that Ban Gu required "more than twenty years"[51] to complete his work.

The reliability of the *HS* is also placed in question. Ban Gu is charged with bias, particularly with being required to show an absolute loyalty to the Liu house, which was on the throne when he wrote, so that no criticism of the Former Han emperors was allowed.[52] Now Gan Bu was a thoroughgoing Confucian, in that respect following his father's teaching. It is hence pertinent to discover the Confucian standard of historiography. This ideal is expressed in Confucius' saying: "I can still remember when a clerk would leave blank spaces [when transcribing an illegible text]. . . . Now alas! such things are no more."[53] It is also to be found in the famous incident of the three brothers who were the hereditary historians in the state of Tsi, each of whom successively wrote on the state records, "The Duke assassinated his prince," knowing well that they would be killed for doing so. After two had been successively executed, and before the Duke in despair pardoned the third, a fourth historian came forward, ready to make the same record.[54] With such ideals to guide him, we should hardly expect Ban Gu to exhibit an "enforced loyalty to the Liu sovereigns," even under the threat of a "prison sentence."[55]

[51] *HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 30A, p. 8b. The circumstance that "the compiler" Ban Gu was willing "to make only partial quotations from his available archive materials" (Sargent, 139) is to be explained simply by the extraordinarily large amount of archive material available. The *HS* is quite long, but what would it have been with complete quotations from its materials!

[52] Sargent, 142: "Pan Ku's inevitable loyalty to emperors of the Latter Han necessarily included loyalty to emperors of the Former Han; and obviously this would confuse even conscientious efforts at objectivity and undoubtedly did color many of the general interpretations found in the *Han documents*" [i.e., the *HS*].

[53] *Analects* XV, xxv.

[54] *Dzo-juan*, Duke Siang, yr. XXV, Legge's translation in *Chinese classics*, vol. 5, pt. 2, pp. 510, 511, 514b, 515a.

[55] Sargent, 135, note 57. It is not true that "early in his literary career Pan Ku had several years in prison to meditate upon the cost of independent writing" (Sargent, 142). The circumstances are as follows: When Ban Gu as a young man was at home near Chang-an working on the *HS*, some-

His own grandfather, Ban Jzh, had risked death rather than falsely report auspicious portents to flatter Wang Mang.[56]

The Later Han dynasty was descended from Emperor Wu of the Former Han dynasty, so that this great ruler ought, according to the accusation, to have been represented in the *HS* as a great and good ruler. Yet Ban Gu quotes Hsia-hou Sheng's accusation, made in 72 B.C.:

Emperor Wu . . . executed many gentlemen and commoners [in his legal processes], exhausted the wealth and strength of the common people [by his continual wars], was boundlessly extravagant, so that the empire was empty and exhausted and the people became vagabonds, leaving [their homes]. More than half of them died. Locusts arose in great [numbers] and denuded the land for thousands of *li*, so that some people became cannibals. The stores [of food] have not been restored to this day. He was without virtue or beneficence towards the common people.[57]

Ban Gu not only quotes this charge, he accepts its correctness,[58] in spite of the fact that Hsia-hou Sheng was imprisoned for making it.[59] Ban Gu also

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body accused him to the throne of "privately altering the historical records." He was ordered arrested. His younger brother, Ban Chao, thereupon galloped to the capital at Lo-yang and sent to the throne a memorial explaining the situation. He was summoned to an imperial audience and reported to the Emperor what were Ban Gu's real plans. Ban Gu's writings had also been sent to the capital by the officials. When Emperor Ming read them, he was highly pleased. He not only freed Ban Gu but also gave him a position in the imperial entourage where he was set to work writing history (*HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 30A, p. 7b). The accusation against Ban Gu was either spite-work or a clever but dangerous publicity stunt by the Ban family.

Ban Gu could not have been held in prison long, for the accusation was not made until after A.D. 58 (*HHJ*, ch. 13, p. 10a). Before 62, when he was promoted (*HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 37, p. 1a; ch. 30A, p. 8a), Ban Gu had already completed a history of Emperor Guang-wu's reign. My own guess is that he was not imprisoned more than a very few months at most, possibly only the few weeks necessary for Ban Chao to reach Lo-yang and for the imperial order of release to get back to Chang-an. The fortunate outcome, placing the orphaned Ban Gu and his family on the imperial payroll, more than cancelled any sufferings Ban Gu may have undergone.

It is furthermore not true that later Ban Gu "fell across the path of imperial wrath and for a second time was thrown into prison," "for incompetence as a military commander" (Sargent, 128 and note 26). In A.D. 89, Ban Gu joined the notorious Dou Hsien on his military raid into Mongolia, with the title, Staff Commissioner of the Army. While Dou Hsien was away from the capital, there was discovered a plot to murder the emperor made by some of Dou Hsien's subordinates, in which Dou Hsien was implicated. Upon his return, he was arrested with his followers, sent out of the capital, and forced to commit suicide (*HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 13, pp. 15b–17a). Ban Gu's slaves had previously offended the prefect of Lo-yang. In the turmoil when Dou Hsien's adherents were being arrested, this prefect revenged himself by arresting Ban Gu, who thereupon died in prison. When the Emperor discovered this fact, this prefect was executed (*HHJ*, ch. 13, p. 9a). The Emperor thus had nothing to do with Ban Gu's second imprisonment and his military ability or inability was not concerned.

[56] *HS*, ch. 100A, p. 5b. Ban Jzh was impeached "for having refused to send on an auspicious report" and "having [thereby] committed an inhuman [capital] crime." He was only saved from death by the intercession of the Empress Dowager *nee* Wang.

[57] *HS*, ch. 75, p. 4a.

[58] *HFHD*, vol. 2, p. 175 and note 10.5. This passage is quoted below, *super* note 65.

[59] *HS*, ch. 75, p. 4a–b.

records that Wang Wen-shu, when a commandery official, condemned to death in one trial the members of more than a thousand households and that, upon the prompt confirmation of his sentence by Emperor Wu, blood flowed for more than ten *li;* that Emperor Wu considered him an able person and promoted him;[60] and that when Emperor Wu did not have enough laborers to build a terrace, Wang Wen-shu petitioned the Emperor for permission to retry the cases that had come before him while he was in office, and by that means sentenced "several ten-thousands of persons to work" on that building.[61] In one judgmental summary, Ban Gu writes:

The expense of [Emperor Wu's] armies was measureless. [It was] so great that [the state's] income was insufficient, so [the Emperor] monopolized [the manufacture] and sale of intoxicating liquors, monopolized salt and iron, cast white metal [fiat money], created leather currency, exacted poll-taxes even upon carts and boats, and taxed even domestic animals,[62] so that the strength of the common people was used up and their wealth and supplies were exhausted. Because of that, there were bad harvests, robbers and bandits arose simultaneously [at various places], the highways and roads were blocked, and special Commissioners were for the first time sent out, wearing embroidered garments and bearing axes, to sentence and execute [anyone, no matter of what rank] in the commanderies and kingdoms [on their own authority], and only thus were [the evil-doers] conquered.[63]

In his judgment upon Emperor Wu, Ban Gu writes: "If Emperor Wu, with his superior ability and great plans, had not departed from the modesty and economy of [Emperors] Wen and Jing, and if, by means of [their principles] he had helped the common people, in what respects could [any of] those [heroes who are] praised in the *Book of Odes* or the *Book of History* have surpassed him?"[64] In his judgment upon Emperor Hsiao-jao, he amplifies

[60] *HS*, ch. 90, p. 8a–b.

[61] *HS*, ch. 90, p. 9b; *cf.* my summary in *HFHD*, vol. 2, pp. 2, 11–13, 16–17.

[62] *Cf. HFHD*, vol. 2, p. 167, note 7.1.

[63] *HS*, ch. 96B, pp. 38b, 39a; for the details of Emperor Wu's economic measures, *cf. MH*, vol. 3, pp. 546–600, which material is repeated in *HS*, ch. 24. It describes the ruin and impoverishment of a prosperous country by Emperor Wu's continual drain upon its resources and by his oppressive measures. In his old age, Emperor Wu seems to have repented for his oppressive measures (*HS*, ch. 96B, pp. 17a–20a quotes a repentant edict; *Dz-jzh tung-jien* [Sz-bu tsung-kan ed.], ch. 22, pp. 11b, 12a, sub 89 B.C., quotes an even stronger statement of repentance by Emperor Wu), so that in his judgmental summaries to chs. 24 and 96 Ban Gu does not condemn Emperor Wu severely. Ban Gu nevertheless recounts Emperor Wu's evil deeds, in order to enable the reader to make his own judgments.

He moreover gives evidence to prove that Emperors Wu (*HS*, ch. 93, pp. 3b, 4a), Cheng (*HS*, ch. 59, p. 12a), and Ai (*HS*, c. 93, p. 8b) indulged in homosexuality and that the latter did not care for women. Emperor Cheng's infanticides of his only sons are recounted from the testimony of eye-witnesses (*HS*, ch. 97B, pp. 11b–14a; summarized in *HFHD*, vol. 2, pp. 369–72; translated in C. M. Wilbur, *Slavery in China* [Chicago: Field Museum, 1943], pp. 424–32). How can Ban Gu be said to have upheld "the justice and virtue of the throne"?

[64] *HS*, ch. 6, p. 39b, translated in *HFHD*, vol. 2, p. 120.

this charge: "[Emperor Hsiao-jao] inherited the evils of extravagance and indulgence remaining from [the rule of Emperor] Hsiao-wu [i.e., Emperor Wu,] and his military expeditions. [The country] within the [four] seas was depopulated and exhausted, and the population was reduced by half."[65] Ban Gu's eulogy upon Emperor Wen[66] is largely a criticism of Emperor Wu, for Emperor Wen is represented as doing just the opposite of Emperor Wu. How does this correspond with the notion that Ban Gu judged rulers "exclusively on moral standards requiring unconditional loyalty of a subject to a sovereign (irrespective of whether or not the sovereign merited loyalty)"?[67] There is no better test than his treatment of Emperor Wu, who was popularly considered the greatest ruler of the Liu dynasty and who was a direct ancestor of the Later Han rulers. Ban Gu was no muck-raker who puts his criticisms in the most prominent places and neglects to report the good deeds of evil men. He reports the evil deeds of the highest personages, no matter who they were.

Whether he is considered to have been prejudiced will depend, perhaps more than anything else, upon a person's opinion of Wang Mang. If this usurper is conceived as an enlightened ruler, Ban Gu must have been prejudiced. Wang Mang is, however, a subject of controversy,[68] and, outside of

[65] *HS*, ch. 7, p. 10b, translated in *HFHD*, vol. 2, p. 175.

[66] *Cf. HFHD*, vol. 1, pp. 272–75.

[67] Sargent, 135.

[68] Hu Shzh, "Wang Mang, the socialist emperor of nineteen centuries ago," *Journal of the north China branch of the royal Asiatic society*, 59 (1928), 218–230, approves of him. So does Mr. Sargent. I agree with Ban Gu that he was evil.

Sargent uses the account of Wang Mang as proof for Ban Gu's perversion of the facts. He states that "Wang Mang . . . saw that the relation between plebeian and capitalistic interests had to be adjusted to avert a major social revolution" (p. 135). For Wang Mang's agrarian reforms, [Ban Gu] "gives only the superficial aspects. . . . He does not point out any specific relation between the conditions of land tenure and Wang Mang's reforms" (p. 133). Ban Gu "makes no mention of the new conditions that made a more elaborate currency necessary in an expanding economy" (p. 133). "Wang Mang . . . tried far harder than Kao-Tsu or any other intervening emperor to carry out the ruler's function of adjusting social and economic conditions in the country to benefit the livelihood of the people" (p. 136).

In Sargent's brief article, these assertions are left without proof. I cannot agree with his views. But a disproof would require a detailed account of Wang Mang's deeds. I have attempted something of that sort in "Wang Mang and his economic reforms," *T'oung pao*, 35 (1939–40), 219–65. Here I can merely point out certain facts that make unlikely Sargent's conclusion.

Wang Mang did not *actually* succeed in improving the lot of his people, if he ever tried to do so. Popular rebellions and widespread banditry in China are an almost infallible sign of misgovernment. There were such rebellions (not including those of the Liu clan) in A.D. 14 (*HS*, ch. 99B, p. 26a), 17 (99C, 2a), 18 (99C, 4a), 19 (99C, 4b, 5b), 20 (99C, 10a, b), 21 (99C, 12a, b, 13a, 14a, b, 15a), 22 (99C, 17a, 18a, b, 19a) and 23 (99C, 19b, 24b). This banditry gradually increased during the last years of his reign, spreading to all quarters of the empire, and even to the capital region. These bands became so large that they defeated imperial armies in battle. The Red Eyebrows were merely one among many bandit bands, each of which dominated some area of the

the *HS*, there is practically no other primary source by which to check Ban Gu's statements. Because of that fact, any evidence for prejudice in the *HS*, arising from the circumstances connected with Wang Mang, has very little, if any, real probative value.

The important circumstance is that Ban Gu actually tried to give a balanced picture of Wang Mang's life and deeds.[69] Ban Gu had personal reasons to hate Wang Mang. His grandfather's close escape from death,[70]

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country. Thus Wang Mang's own government itself broke down. Corruption was rife in his bureaucracy (*HS*, ch. 99B, pp. 23b, 27a and 99C, pp. 3a, 14a, b). Wang Mang was killed in an attack upon the capital, not made by professional soldiers, but by a mob of common people (*HS*, ch. 99C, p. 26a). The generals arrived after it was all over (*HS*, ch. 99C, p. 28a). Wang Mang was then widely hated by the common people and was overthrown by a popular uprising, not by the intrigues of ambitious politicians. These facts indicate a complete failure on the part of Wang Mang to adjust social and economic conditions to benefit the people.

In his changes of the currency, he seems to have made no real effort to make these new coins a means of facilitating business transactions, for nothing was done to maintain the value of the higher denominations (*cf.* Dubs, *op. cit.*, p. 237). Ban Gu says that Wang Mang's currency "did not circulate" (*HS*, ch. 24B, p. 23a), as it would if a more elaborate currency had been necessary. He declares that the overt purpose of these coinages was to follow classical precedents (*HS*, ch. 24B, pp. 21a, 23b). Wang Mang's deepest purpose was to profit the government by issuing fiat money. In this respect he was highly successful (Dubs, *op. cit.*, pp. 237–38, 240).

As to the adjustment of plebeian and capitalist interests: the most important capitalist investments were in land. Wang Mang did limit the amount of land any individual could own, but that matter had been urged upon rulers by Confucians for more than a century (*ibid.*, p. 245). Wang Mang moreover rescinded his agrarian reforms within two years, probably because his own relatives objected, so that these reforms were ineffective (*ibid.*, pp. 243–47, 249–51). No wonder Ban Gu tells only their "superficial aspects." They were themselves superficial.

In Wang Mang's reforms, he adopted the program of the Confucian party that put him in power. He had to do so because of the way he secured the throne. He exhibited no originality in devising a beneficent economic or social program. He was cruel, unnecessarily harsh, ready to execute people by the hundreds (*HS*, ch. 99A, p. 16b), to exile commoners by the thousands (*HS*, ch. 99A, p. 24b), and to enslave them by the hundred thousands (*HS*, ch. 99C, p. 12b). I can find in Wang Mang no real statesmanship or genuine concern for the interests of the common people.

[69] Sargent finds the chapter on Wang Mang somewhat difficult to understand. He writes: "Conspicuous examples of these incongruities [present in the *HS*] are found in the chapter on Wang Mang. Apart from several open contradictions of documentary material by the author's personal comments, the entire chapter, in some ways, is a contradiction. This is particularly conspicuous in Part I [my part "A"] of the chapter in which the documentary material is nearly all most favorable to Wang Mang while the author's personal comments and the general impression created are exactly opposite" [p. 131, note 50].

Since Sargent does not list these "open contradictions," there is no way of checking them. I suspect that the "contradiction" is between Sargent's theory that Ban Gu is prejudiced and Ban Gu's own presentation of Wang Mang's virtues. By "the author's personal comments," I suppose Sargent means the "eulogy," of which more below.

Ban Gu actually looked favorably upon the first part of Wang Mang's life, especially of that phase recounted in the earlier half of part A in ch. 99. My own "general impression" of it, contrary to that of Mr. Sargent, is that Ban Gu gives a quite favorable view of Wang Mang. This "usurper" is represented as living up to Confucian ideals, even going beyond them in some respects (e.g., his monogamy; *cf.* *HS*, ch. 99A, p. 2a).

[70] *Cf.* note 56.

his clan's enforced retirement from political life and its impoverishment were traceable to Wang Mang. The really remarkable circumstance is that Ban Gu tells so many good things about Wang Mang. This "usurper" is not painted in pure black, as should have been the case had Ban Gu really been prejudiced. He does not charge Wang Mang with regicide, then considered the worst of all crimes. He merely quotes certain rebels as having alleged that Wang Mang poisoned Emperor Ping.[71] He moreover recounts that, when this Emperor was fatally ill, Wang Mang asked the spirits to take his own life in place of the Emperor's,[72] and that when Wang Mang's great army was defeated, he brought out the document in which he had made that request and exhibited it to the court.[73] In that superstitious age, such offers were not taken lightly. These facts seem to clear Wang Mang of that murder. More than half of the very long chapter on Wang Mang consists of quotations from the memorials and edicts of the period, the longest being an elaborate and detailed laudation of Wang Mang. These were the best literary works of the period, and so Ban Gu, who was interested in literature, quotes them. A genuinely prejudiced historian would have omitted any such praise of an "evil usurper." Their presence is strong proof of Ban Gu's objectivity. He moreover gives an outline of Wang Mang's long book of propaganda and quotes its conclusion at length, without attempting any rebuttal.[74] He does not recount all the early revolts against Wang Mang,[75] as he would if he were attempting to make a case against a usurper.

In my opinion, on a first reading of this "memoir," Wang Mang indeed appears, in the period before he ascended the throne, as an unusually able and upright person, ambitious perhaps, but of uncommon high-mindedness. He outdoes his age in scrupulous morality. Even his execution of his son, Huo, appears as sheer uprightness. This appearance was moreover no accident. In his judgmental "eulogy," Ban Gu writes:

> Wang Mang first arose [because he was one of] the maternal relatives [of Emperor Cheng]. He subdued his will and acted energetically, in order to seek for fame and reputation, so that his ancestral clan praised him as filial and his teachers and friends attributed benevolence [or "perfect virtue," *ren*] to him.
>
> When he occupied [a high] position and acted as [the chief] assistant in the gov-

[71] *HS*, ch. 99A, p. 30a.

[72] *HS*, ch. 99A, p. 24b.

[73] *HS*, ch. 99C, p. 22b. This procedure was in imitation of the similar deed recounted of the Duke of Jou in the *Book of history* V, vi, Legge's translation in *Chinese classics*, vol. 3, pt. 2, pp. 351–60. Wang Mang believed in spirits (*HS*, ch. 99C, p. 13b), so that this act could hardly have been a deceit, for the spirits would punish him severely.

[74] *HS*, ch. 99B, pp. 9a–11a.

[75] They are mentioned in a memorial quoted in *HS*, ch. 99B, p. 13b.

ernment, [during] the time between [the reigns of Emperors] Cheng and Ai, he toiled diligently for the state, [understood] the straight path and trod it, [so that whenever he] acted, he was praised and talked about.[76]

It is only when we read the account of Wang Mang to the end that this "uprightness" is seen to have been superficial.[77] We find that when he reached his goal, the throne, he ruthlessly crushed those followers who had brought him to that goal. His own grandson and a son plotted against his life and were executed. At the end, even his three highest officials, including his own cousin, plotted against him and were exterminated with their clans. These are objective events and cannot be explained away as due to Ban Gu's "prejudice," so that Wang Mang can hardly be praised as an enlightened or self-sacrificing ruler. There is, in my opinion, every evidence that Ban Gu really tried and largely succeeded in giving an objective and reliable account of Wang Mang. At least, he gave a remarkably balanced account, in which he quotes important documents defending and praising Wang Mang.[78]

[76] *HS*, ch. 99C, p. 29a.

[77] The remainder of Ban Gu's "eulogy" (which is placed at the very end of the whole account) points out that fact.

[78] The circumstance that Ban Gu "never refers to Wang Mang by his dynastic title" (Sargent, 136; I suppose he means, by entitling him "Emperor So-and-so") is to be explained simply. Because Wang Mang had no successor to give him a posthumous name (such as the "Wu" in the designation "Emperor Wu"), Wang Mang had no distinctive imperial name. He could not be called "Emperor So-and-so" because he was never given a "So-and-so." The given name of a Chinese emperor has never been used with the imperial title, for the use of that given name constituted lese-majesty, so that the occidental practise of calling a ruler by such a designation as "King George" has been impossible in China. Wang Mang moreover could not be called by his year-period, as was Liu Hsüan, who is called "the Geng-shzh Emperor." Since Wang Mang reigned long enough to have several year-periods, he could not be called by any one of them. (*Cf.* my "Chinese imperial designations," *JAOS*, 65 [1945], 28–30. Sargent seems not to have understood the nature of these imperial designations, for he speaks of Geng-shzh as Liu Hsüan's "dynastic title" [p. 126, note 19]. It was merely the name he used for the years in his reign.) Wang Mang's subjects merely called him "the Emperor." If Ban Gu had used that designation, it would have been ambiguous. Its use would moreover have constituted an implication that the rulers of the Later Han dynasty were illegitimate, for they claimed to continue the Former Han line. The omission of the term "emperor" for Wang Mang really means little. It was a matter of protocol, rather than a moral judgment upon Wang Mang.

Sargent's statement that "almost invariably the last ruler of a deposed dynasty was portrayed as a scoundrel" (p. 136) has important exceptions. The last king of the Jou dynasty is not made out to be wicked, but merely weak (*MH*, vol. 1, pp. 317–18). King Jao of Tsin is however warned not to attack the Jou ruler, for, if he did so, he would be abhorred by the rest of the country (*MH*, vol. 1, p. 315). Emperor Ping, the last ruler of the Former Han dynasty, died before he attained his majority, so that he could not be and was not blamed for the fall of the dynasty. Emperor Ling, the last of the Later Han emperors, was an imbecile and never really governed, so that he too was not condemned. Fan Ye merely states that the mandate of the Han dynasty had run out (*HHS*, Annals, ch. 9, pp. 12b–13a). Here the last rulers in the three greatest of five successive dynasties are not condemned. (The other two dynasties, the Tsin and the Sin [Wang Mang], ruled only a few decades each; these two were not included by Chinese philosophers among the list of "genuine

According to modern canons of historical judgment, in order to establish prejudice on the part of a historian, something more is necessary than appeals to general principles, such as to a Confucian "orthodox political morality," with its "praise-and-blame principle" and its "principle of let-the-descriptive-word-fit-the-reality."[79] These principles were held by some philosophers, but they were countered by the equally Confucian principle of historical accuracy.[80] A general indictment against a whole set of histories is rarely reliable, when these histories have been written by different persons in different ages and under different circumstances. If there is prejudice, it ought to be established by concrete examination of particular cases. When a historian is genuinely prejudiced, as with the Roman historians of the empire, that prejudice can be substantiated by contradictions between the facts recorded and other statements of the historian. Such contradictions have been found at places in other Chinese histories. In the case of the *HS*, sceptical Chinese have searched for contradictions with a fine tooth comb. They have found nothing serious. In such a large work, deriving from various sources, it is of course impossible to avoid all discrepancies. Many of the contradictions alleged by Chinese critics can be resolved by a more careful study of the available evidence.[81] The fact that Ban Gu points out so many good qualities in even his worst characters, such as Wang Mang, is no evidence of contradiction or prejudice. Rather it indicates an unusual degree of freedom from bias.

It is well to be suspicious about a history. But until that suspicion is substantiated by concrete cases of genuine and important contradictions in the *HS* or between it and other good evidence, we have no right to charge the author of that history with prejudice. I have searched widely and in detail for such evidence and have found none. Sargent has presented a philosophical theory of "orthodox political morality," but, except in the disputed case of Wang Mang, he has not shown that this doctrine actually biased Ban Gu.

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dynasties.") Whatever may have been the "orthodox political morality," the great Chinese historians were realists. Sargent's theory about Chinese history does not apply to the really great histories and has important exceptions in the case of the others.

[79] Sargent, 134. Sargent sums up his criticism as follows: "This attempt to justify imperial policies and actions and to harmonize accomplished historical events and orthodox political morality, represents the supreme objective of the orthodox compiler of historical docments, which were drawn together less for factual enlightenment than as a guide to political ethics for rulers" [p. 138].

[80] *Cf.* the quotation from the *Analects*, *super*, note 53.

[81] For such resolutions of apparent contradictions, *cf.* *HFHD*, vol. 1, pp. 154–60; p. 310, note 3.2; p. 326, note 8.6; vol. 2, p. 230, note 12.1; p. 233, note 13.4; p. 412, note 14.4, n. 415, note 15.2. For genuine contradictions, *cf.* *HFHD*, vol. 1, p. 317, note 5.6; vol. 2, p. 71, note 17.9; p. 76, note 20.4.

The reliability of the *HS* is moreover evidenced by the unanimous approval of early historians:

The compositions by Sz-ma Tsien, Ban Gu, and their fathers [on the basis of] the recordings and documents by official historians [follow] right principles and are outstandingly brilliant. Those who discuss these matters all praise these two gentlemen as having the ability of good historians.[82]

And:

When Ban Gu recounts matters, he does not praise or blame nor does he degrade or promote, [according to his private opinions, the persons he recounts. His history] is rich yet not verbose, detailed yet maintaining its form, so that it causes the reader to make great efforts and not to be tired. In truth this was the reason he was able to become famous.[83]

These writers had available abundant historical material now lost, by which to check the accuracy of the *HS*. They do criticize Ban Gu, but on philosophical grounds unrelated to his historical reliability. These writers moreover lived in a period when Confucianism, with its "orthodox political morality," was in eclipse, so that they did not share his presuppositions. Their judgments must carry very great weight. Nothing that has so far been brought forward justifies in my opinion, any other conclusion than general approval of Ban Gu and the *HS*.

To summarize: The twenty-five Chinese standard histories constitute the world's greatest treasurehouse of unexplored historical information. They were modeled on what is almost surely the best one, the *History of the Former Han dynasty*. This work and the whole series has been attacked as being unhistorical and fundamentally biased. In the case of the *HS*, that charge is shown to be ill-founded and almost surely false. Ban Gu's reliability is confirmed by early Chinese historians who were in a position to check his statements, and I know of no evidence that would compel us to hold any different view today. The extraordinarily high Confucian ideal of historical accuracy has kept the best Chinese histories up to a high standard of reliability.

[82] This passage is found in Fan Ye's (398–445) *HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 30B, p. 16a, and is taken from Hua Chiao's (fl. 270–93) *Hou-Han-shu*.

[83] From Hua Chiao's *Hou-Han-shu* (quoted in *Dz-jzh tung-jien*, ch. 48, p. 3b), repeated by Yüan Hung (328–76) in *HHJ*, ch. 13, p. 11b and by Fan Ye in *HHS*, Memoirs, ch. 30B, p. 16a. The most violent Chinese attack upon Ban Gu is that of Jeng Tsiao (a portion of which is quoted in note 38) but it does not charge him with prejudice.