THE WRITING OF HISTORY

The Song Confucian revival brought with it a heightened interest in history. We have already noted how many of the leading Song figures were engaged in the writing of history — the statesmen Ouyang Xiu and Sima Guang, for instance, and the philosopher Zhu Xi. The breadth of their historical vision reflected the wide range of intellectual inquiry in the Song and found expression in a variety of literary forms and genres. Some of these were new to the Song; others went back to the Tang or earlier.

In the field of historiographical criticism, the Tang led the way. The Understanding of History (Shitong) of Liu Zhijie (665–721) discusses the origin, development, and relative merits of various forms of historical writing in detail unmatched in the Song, but he was concerned with substance as well as form. His insistence that the historian should employ a tight, disciplined style in which every word counts is just one indication of the seriousness with which he regarded the task of the historian.

Encyclopedias (leishu) were both a product of historical inquiry and an aid to it. This type of work, first attempted in the Northern and Southern Dynasties period (fourth to sixth centuries) consisted of compilations of references to given subjects culled from all possible written sources and arranged by topics. They were designed primarily as handy references for students, writers, and government officials. Such encyclopedias, which have continued to be compiled up to the present, have also preserved in quotation parts of many books that have otherwise been lost.

A similar genre was the political encyclopedia as exemplified by the Comprehensive Institutions (Tongdian) compiled by the Tang dynasty scholar Du You (735–812). This work in two hundred chapters contains historical essays on such subjects as economics, warfare, bureaucratic systems, laws, geography, and so on, tracing each from its beginnings in the dawn of Chinese history down to the time of the writer, for the word tong in the title of this and other works excerpted in this section signifies linkage through time. The Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji) and later histories modeled on it often included essays treating various topics historically, but Du You was the first to undertake such detailed and comprehensive coverage, producing a history centered not on the ups and downs of political power but on the long and unbroken development of institutions.

The basic organization of the encyclopedias was by topics, but there were other ways to write history. Continuing in the tradition of the dynastic histories of combining political chronology and topical treatises was Ouyang Xiu, whose New History of the Tang Dynasty and New History of the Five Dynasties went beyond the government records that constituted the principal sources for earlier historical works to include works of fiction, belles lettres, and historical anecdotes. An ardent advocate of the prose style known as guwen or ancient prose, which had developed in the late Tang, Ouyang employed that style exclusively in his historical writings, even going so far as to rewrite quotations from earlier sources written in a different style. He also followed the tradition associated with the Spring and Autumn Annals of conveying moral meanings by the precise use of terminology.

As earlier, the Annals was considered the product of Confucius’ editing, late in his life, the records of his home state. In the Song context, perhaps in the Chinese context as a whole, it is hard to imagine any more authoritative exemplar for those engaged in historical projects. Yet, just what Confucius had accomplished remained in dispute, and interpretations of the Annals again, as during the Han, became vehicles for political thought and controversy, as well as for exploring the purposes of writing history. Wang Anshi even considered the Annals worthless.

A champion of the value of history and the dynasty’s most important and influential historian was Sima Guang (1019–1086), principal author of a chronological account of 1,362 years preceding the Song, with his own comments on events and principles inserted at various places. Compiled largely under official sponsorship, this work in 294 chapters was presented to the emperor, who conferred on it the title Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance (Zizhi tongjian). As reflected in this title, history remained predominantly political history and was seen as having a political purpose. The image of history as a mirror is an old one in China, where it occurs in the Classic of Odes, in the sense that history reflects the past truthfully just as a mirror does not lie, and also in the sense that by looking into it the emperor and his minister could discover truths about themselves and the issues of their own day. These truths could be moral as well as political: the mirror would reveal beauty and ugliness, qualities seen as inherent and not just in the eyes of the beholder.

The Comprehensive Mirror inspired some historians to take the story back to the beginning of time and others, most notably Li Shao (1117–1184), to extend it beyond 950. Still others were moved to rework Sima Guang’s materials. One such was Yuan Shu (1131–1205), who, distressed at the way material relating to a single subject was broken up by the chronological form, compiled a work called Topical Treatment of Events in the General Mirror (Tongdian jishu benmen) that initiated a new genre. Most influential of all was the Outline and Details of the Comprehensive Mirror (Tongdian ganru) planned by the philosopher Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and compiled by his disciples. This work followed the tradition of the Spring and Autumn Annals in selecting and reordering the materials in such a way that they would clearly convey the moral lessons of history.

Aside from formal works of history, the Song sense of the past found expression in many areas of intellectual life. There was an efflorescence of scholarly study of classic texts. Among what we may consider historical subgenres was the study of ancient bronzes and their inscriptions began in the early Song and
including among its practitioners Ouyang Xiu, author of the oldest extant work of this kind. Another new, essentially historical, form was the annalistic biography (niangpu) providing an account of a person’s life year by year. From the very end of the dynasty comes China’s first annalistic autobiography (self-written niangpu), composed by the Song loyalist Wen Tianxiang (1236–1283), a reminder that historical works were written to connect the present not only with the past but also with the future.

LIU ZHIJI

Both of our selections exemplify the insistence of Liu Zhiji (661–724) that history be an accurate record, which includes accurate value judgments. That the historian should fulfill his mission even if it costs him his life is indicated in the first selection, for the South Historian (an office in the state of Qi) was prepared to lay down his life after three historians had been killed for refusing the ruler’s demand that they alter the record. The second selection comes from a chapter titled “Doubts About the Classics.” In his quest for accuracy, Liu Zhiji did not shrink from criticizing even Confucius’ editing of the Spring and Autumn Annals. The personages named in the first selection are all famous historians.

There are three ways for a history official to fulfill his duties. What are they? To celebrate the good, censure the evil, and confront the powerful, as did Dong Hu of Jin43 or the South Historian of Qi42; that is the best. To complete a history and hand down to posterity a great, imperishable work, as did Zuo Qiuming43 of Lu or Sima Qian of the Han dynasty; that is next best. To impress one’s age by one’s great talent and broad learning as did Shi Yi in the Zhou and Yi Xiang of Chu: that is the final way. If all three of these are lacking, how can it be done?

When a clear mirror reflects objects, beauty and ugliness are bound to be revealed. Should [the beauty] Mao Qiang have a blemish on her face, the reflection is not stopped. When empty space transmits sound, the clear and the murky are bound to be heard. Should [the singer] Mian Jun hit a false note in his song, the resonance is not halted. Now the history officer holding his tablets also belongs in this category. If he loves someone but understands his ugly aspects, hates someone but understands his good points, then good and bad are bound to be recorded. This is a true record.

[Shitong (SBCK) 10:6a–b, 14:3a — CS]

DU YO: PREFACE TO THE SECTION ON “FOOD AND GOODS” OF THE COMPREHENSIVE INSTITUTIONS

The Comprehensive Institutions (Tongdian) of Du You (735–812) reflects mid-Tang concerns over the decay of dynastic institutions, loss of control from the center, and weaknesses in fiscal administration, already shown in the tax proposals of Yang Yan and Lu Zhi in the eighth century.48 For Du You, any hope for political improvement had to be grounded in sound economic programs. Accordingly, he compiled his Comprehensive Institutions to provide a reference base in institutional history for dealing with systemic problems. Thereafter, his encyclopedic work became a model for a whole genre of institutional histories in late imperial China, which served as an important informational resource for later statecraft thinkers. In the following preface, Du explains why he gives the first priority in his work to material factors, as prerequisite to educating the people.

Although I engaged in the study of books from an early age, because I was a dullard by nature, I did not succeed in mastering the arts of number or astrological sciences, nor was I good at literary composition. Thus my Comprehensive Institutions actually amounts to no more than a compilation of various records that, if used in dealing with human affairs, might be helpful in governmental administration.

The first priority in ordering things according to the Way lies in transforming the people through education, and the basis of education lies in providing adequate clothing and food.46 The [Classic of] Changes says that what attracts people is wealth. The “Grand Model” (chapter of the Classic of Documents) lists eight administrative functions, of which the first is food and the second the provision of goods.47 The Guanzi says: “When the storehouse is full, then people can understand rites and good manners; when there is a sufficiency of food and clothing, people can understand the difference between honor and shame.”48 The Master [Confucius] spoke of enriching people first and then educating them.49 All these sayings express the same idea.

To carry out education one must first establish offices, to establish offices;

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31. Grand historian of the feudal state of Jin under Duke Ling; see Zuoqian, Xuan 2; Burton Watson, trans., Two chuan, pp. 78–79.
32. Zuoqian, Xiang 25; Burton Watson, trans., Two chuan, pp. 443–47. This episode appears in an adapted form in ch. 6.
33. Reputedly the author of the Zuoqian.
35. See ch. 18.
38. “Shepherding the People,” Guanzi (GXJC ed.) 1.1.
one must recruit people with the requisite talents; and to recruit talent one must have an examination system, establish proper rites to rectify popular customs, and have music to harmonize people's minds-and-hearts. These were the methods employed by the early sage kings to establish proper governance.

It is only when there has been a failure in education that one resorts to laws and punishments, to commanderies and prefectures for local administration, and to fortifying the borders against barbarians. Thus “Food and Goods” come first [in this compilation]; official recruitment next; offices after that; then rites, music, punishments, and local administration, with border defenses last. Anyone who reads this book should keep in mind my reasons for arranging things in this order.

[Du You, *Tongdian* 131a, preface — THCL]

**Sima Guang: History as Mirror**

From the Latter Han dynasty it had become the practice to have official historiographers at court taking notes on the emperor's words and actions as he attended to state business. These matters were then written up and preserved in the archives as the *Diaries of Action and Repose* (*Qiju zhu*) to provide source material for later historians. Meanwhile, they impressed on the emperor that everything he said or did would be recorded for posterity. During the Tang it was still the practice to keep the records out of the reach of the imperial glance in order to assure objectivity. This was no longer the case in the Song, but memorialists continued to appeal to emperors to act in a manner that would ensure their posthumous reputation.

The year 642, summer, fourth month. The Emperor Taizong spoke to the Imperial Censor Chu Suiliang, saying, “Since you, Sir, are in charge of the *Diaries of Action and Repose*, may I see what you have written?” Suiliang replied, “The historiographers record the words and deeds of the ruler of men, noting all that is good and bad, in hopes that the ruler will not dare to do evil. But it is unheard of that the ruler himself should see what is written.” The emperor said, “If I do something that is not good, do you then also record it?” Suiliang replied, “My office is to wield the brush. How could I dare not record it?” The Gentleman of the Yellow Gate Liu Ji added, “Even if Suiliang failed to record it, everyone else in the empire would”—to which the emperor replied, “True.”

[[Zishi tongjian 196:42, no. 5; 3:675 — CS]

Sima Guang’s history was centered on emperors, and emperors needed to hear the truth about themselves face-to-face as well as having it recorded for posterity. The emperor in the following anecdote is Taizong, the de facto founder and second emperor of the Tang. Sima Guang’s comment is clearly addressed to his own emperor.

The Confucian Revival in the Song

The emperor, troubled that many officials were taking bribes, secretly ordered his attendants to test some of them with bribes. When a registrar in the Board of Punishments took a roll of silk and the emperor wanted to have him executed, Minister of the Treasury Bei Zhu remonstrated, “An official taking a bribe should be punished by death, but Your Majesty entrapped this man by sending someone to give it to him. This, I fear, is not leading the people by virtue and restraining them by the rules of decorum.” Delighted, the emperor summoned all officials above the fifth rank and told them, “Bei Zhu was able to contest this case forcefully at court and did not pretend acquiescence. If every matter is handled this way, what cause will there be to worry about misgovernment?”

Your official Guang comments, The ancients had a saying that if the ruler is enlightened, the ministers will be honest. That Bei Zhu was given to flattery under the Sui dynasty but to loyalty under the Tang was not because his personality changed: a ruler who resents hearing of his faults turns loyalty into flattery, but one who is pleased by straight talk turns flattery into loyalty. Thus we know that the ruler is the gnomon [or post for measuring the height of the sun], the minister the shadow. When the gnomon moves, the shadow follows.

[[Zishi tongjian 196:626, no. 16; 3:629 — CS]

Sima Guang has been much criticized for his defense of the “hegemons” (ba), leaders who during the Eastern Zhou were able to prevail for a time but none of whom succeeded in unifying China. Mencius had charged that these rulers, in contrast to genuine worthies, only pretended to virtue [7A:30] but Sima holds that they met the needs of their time. This, however, does not make him a historical relativist, for he stresses that there is only one Way.

Sima dates the following exchange, which he recapitulates as a basis for his own comment on the subject of the king and the hegemon, to 53 B.C.E. during the Former Han dynasty. The speeches are the heir apparent and future emperor Yuan (r. 49–33 B.C.E.) and his father, the reigning emperor Xuan (r. 74–49 B.C.E.). The heir apparent appeals to his father to employ more Confucian scholars and fewer Legalists in his government.

The heir apparent was soft and humane. He liked scholars but observed that many legal officials employed by the emperor used punishments in order to control subordinates. Once at a banquet he let himself go and said, “Your Majesty relies too heavily on punishments. It would be appropriate to employ scholars.” The emperor changed expression, “The House of Han has its own system based on mixing the way of the hegemon and that of the king. How

60. Analects 2.5.
could we possibly rely solely on moral instruction and employ Zhou governance? Moreover, ordinary scholars do not understand the needs of the day but like to affirm antiquity and deny the present, causing men to confuse name and reality so that they don’t know what to hold on to. How can they be entrusted with the state?" 61

Your official Guan comments, There are not different ways for king and hegemon. Of old when the Three Dynasties flourished and “rites, music, and punitive expeditions proceeded from the Son of Heaven” 62 [the ruler] was called “king.” When the Son of Heaven became weak and was unable to control the lords, there appeared among them those who could lead allied states to punish false states, thereby honoring the royal house: these were called hegemons. Their conduct in both cases was based on humaneness and founded on righteousness. They entrusted the worthy and employed the capable, rewarded the good and punished the evil, prohibited cruelty and executed the rebellious. Therefore, they differ in the honor or pettiness of their status, in the depth or shallowness of their virtue, in the greatness or insignificance of their achievements, in the breadth or narrowness of their governmental orders, but they do not contradict each other like white and black or sweet and bitter.

The reason why the Han could not return to the government of the Three Dynasties was because the rulers did not do it and not because the way of the former kings could not again be carried out in later ages. Among scholars there are superior and petty men. Ordinary scholars truly are not qualified to participate in government. But why could the Han not have sought for genuine scholars and employed them? Ji, Xie, Cao Yao, Boyi, Yi Yin, 63 the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius were all great scholars. Had the Han employed men such as these, the glory of its accomplishments would not have been as limited as it was.

[Zishi tongjian 27:53 b.c.e., no. 3, 1:880–81 — CS]

SU CHE: THE AUTHORITY OF THE HISTORIAN

The reputation of Su Che (1039–1122) has been overshadowed by that of his brilliant brother Su Shi, but he was a prolific writer as well as a prominent political figure. His political writings were much admired, he contributed to classical studies, and he was the author of a History of Antiquity (Gushi), dealing with history down to the Qin unification and highly critical of Sima Qian.

Su Che was a forceful writer with an unusually strong view of the responsibilities

61. The difference in outlook between these two Han rulers has already been discussed by Fan Ziyu. See p. 651.
62. Analects 16:2.
63. All exemplary and semi-legendary ministers.

of the official historian and, by extension, of historians in general, but something of his sense of the solemn obligations and the elevated role of the historian as ultimate judge informed the work of many practitioners through the ages.

There are three authorities in the land: Heaven, the sovereign, and the historiographer (shiguan). The sages used these three authorities to govern right and wrong in the world and had them assist each other. Now, only the authority of Heaven can bestow long or short life, good fortune or calamity on the people, allow the virtuous to avoid an untimely death and dire poverty, and deny the good fortune of wealth, honor, and long life to the unworthy. But Jici and Yuan Xian, 64 though called worthy in antiquity, yet suffered in a mean alley without clothing or porridge, while Robber Zhi and Zhuang Jiao, who ran wild in the world and made a meal of people's livers, died at home of old age without meeting a violent death. Thus at times there are cases not reached by the authority of Heaven. Therefore the sovereigns applied their authority over rewards and punishments to the cases Heaven did not reach in order to help Heaven achieve order. Yet how could rewards and punishments exhaust the rights and wrongs in the world? Still, fearing that the rewards and punishments of one time will not be clearly visible for myriad generations, the sovereign entrusted this to an official whom he called the historiographer. Now, the authority of the Official Historian is equal to that of Heaven and the sovereign. Generally the three mutually assist each other so that right and wrong in the world will not be lost.

[Luanzheng ji yingzhao ji (SBCK) 11:30a–b — CS]

LÜ ZUQIAN: HOW TO STUDY HISTORY

Lü Zuqian (1157–1281), historian, classical scholar, and friend of Zhu Xi, wrote extensively on the Zuo-chuan but became ill before he could complete his projected history covering the period from the end of the Spring and Autumn Annals era to the Song. In the following short essay he makes two important points. The first is that history must be viewed not as a collection of miscellaneous facts but as the continued record of organic growth and change. This was the concept that inspired Lü and others of his time to undertake the writing of giant histories covering all the past.

The second point is that by thinking oneself into the past and weighing the options available at that time a person can exercise a sense of judgment and thus gain in understanding. Here the traditional Confucian teaching that one should place oneself

64. Both were disciples of Confucius. Jici was an alternate name of Congxi Ai, who, in contrast to other disciples of Confucius, never served in office. After Confucius died, Yuan Xian lived as a hermit and was very poor. Entries on the two are found in Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji), ch. 67.
in the position of another acquires a historical dimension. Furthermore, there is a sense not only that history provides models of conduct but also that the study of history provides opportunities for intellectual growth.

Chen Yingzhong [Chen Guan] once remarked that the General Mirror is like Medicine Mountain: anywhere you pick you always are sure of getting something. But though it may be Medicine Mountain, you must know how to select, for if you do not know how to select, you will end up with nothing more than a vast collection of facts crammed into your memory. Hu Qizhi once asked Liezi why he liked to travel. He replied, "Other men travel in order to see what there is to see, but I travel in order to observe how things change." This might be taken as a rule for observing history. Most people, when they examine history, simply at periods of order and realize that they are ordered, periods of disorder and recognize their disorder, observe one fact and know no more than that one fact. But is this real observation of history? You should picture yourself actually in the situation, observe which things are profitable and which dangerous, and note the misfortunes and ills of the times. Shut the book and think for yourself. Imagine that you are facing these various facts and then decide what you think ought to be done. If you look at history in this way, then your learning will increase and your understanding will improve. Then you will get real profit from your reading.

[Lu Donglai wenji (CSJC) 19:431 — BW]

THE CHENG BROTHERS: CYCLICAL AND LINEAR CHANGE

Interest in history was not limited to scholars engaged in historical projects but was shared widely in the intellectual world. Song scholars generally saw in the past both evidence of the cycles of dynastic change and examples of long-term linear change. The Cheng brothers and, later, Zhu Xi were primarily concerned with philosophical truths unaffected by the ebb and flow of time, but this did not mean that they were insensitive to history. On the contrary, their awareness of change provided the background that set off in high relief the nobility of the enduring values and principles to which they devoted themselves.

The following discussion by one of the Cheng brothers is in response to a query asking why modern people do not live as long as did the ancients. It is consistent with the view that the qi (energy, breath) had undergone long-term decline.

The cycle of rise and fall is hard to understand. In terms of generations, the [age of] the Two Emperors and Three Kings was [the time] of rise, and the later ages that of decline. In terms of a single age, Kings Yi, Wen, Cheng, and Kang [of the Zhou] were [the time] of rise, Yu, Li, Ping, and Huan that of decline. In terms of a single sovereign, the Kaiyuan reign period (713–741) was [the time] of rise and the Tianbao reign period (742–756) that of decline. In terms of a year, spring and summer are [the time] of rise, fall and winter that of decline. In a month the first ten-day period is rise and the last is decline. In a day the hours yin (3–5 A.M.) and mao (5–7 A.M.) are rise, xu (7–9 P.M.) and hai (9–11 A.M.) decline. The same holds for an hour. Thus in, for example, the hundred years of a human life those before fifty are rise, those after that, decline. Thus there are cases of decline and revival and cases of decline without return.

If we discuss this in terms of the great cycle, the [period of] the Three Royal Houses [Xia, Shang, and Zhou] did not rise to the height of the Five Emporers; the two Han dynasties did not rise to the height of the Three Royal Houses, and, again, those who came later did not rise to the height of the Han. In this process there were some rises and declines—for example, the Three Royal Houses declined and the Han rose, the Han declined and the Wei rose. These are cases of the principle of decline and revival like the moon after its last days being reborn or the passing and return of the seasons.

If we discuss the great cycle of Heaven and Earth in terms of the great substance, then there is the principle of daily decline and diminution. It is as in the hundred years of a human life: even for a baby just born, each day that passes is one day lost [from its life span]. The natural growth of its body and the natural loss in the number of days left to live do not impinge on one another.

[Er Cheng yishu (SBBY) 18:141 — CS]

ZHU XI: HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY IN TANDEM

Zhu Xi, as a student of history and author of the well-considered historical works Words and Deeds of Eminent Ministers of Eight Courts (Bazhou mingchen yaoxing) and Record of the Origins of the School of the Two Changes (I Luo yuanyuan lu), did not minimize the importance of history. At the same time that he gave priority to the study of enduring principles in the classics, his thinking about issues of his time was informed by a sense of history.

Zhu Xi’s attitude toward history was more nuanced and complex than one would think if one read the following guidelines for the compilation of his Outline and Details of the Comprehensive Mirror only as an attempt to contain history in a moral straitjacket. The wide readership of the resulting work suggests that the effort to condense, simplify, and structure the record on the basis of defined criteria served an educational purpose for many.


66. I.e., Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang.
The legitimate dynasties are Zhou, Qin, Han, Jin, Sui, and Tang. Feudal states are those that have been enfeoffed by legitimate dynasties. Usurpers are those who usurp the throne, interfere with the legitimate line of succession, and do not transmit their rule to their heirs; the periods in which there is no legitimate line occur between Zhou and Qin, Qin and Han, Han and Jin, Jin and Sui, Sui and Tang, and during the Five Dynasties period. Rulers of legitimate dynasties: those of Zhou are called “kings,” those of Qin, Han, and after are called “emperors.” Rulers of feudal states: those of Zhou are referred to by state, feudal rank, and name. Those who unlawfully usurped the title of king are referred to as “so-and-so, the ruler of such-and-such a state”; those of Han are referred to as “so-and-so, the king of such-and-such.” Those who usurped the title of emperor are referred to as “so-and-so, the lord of such-and-such.” Those who revolted and usurped the throne of a legitimate dynasty are referred to by name only.

Ascending the throne, legitimate dynasties: when the Zhou kings passed their rule on to their heirs, write: “his son so-and-so was set up” and note that this person then became king so-and-so. When the succession is by natural heir, write: “so-and-so succeeded to the throne.” When someone establishes a state and sets himself up as ruler, write: “so-and-so set himself up as king of such-and-such.” If someone else sets him up, write: “so-and-so honored so-and-so with such-and-such a title.” When someone usurps a state and begins to style himself emperor, write: “so-and-so (title, family, and personal name) styled himself emperor.” When the rule of a state is transferred to a brother of the ruler, this is called “transmission”; when to someone else, it is called “cession.”

In the following conversation Zhu Xi tells a disciple that the study of history requires much preparation, that to turn to history too soon is futile but never to turn to it misses the whole purpose of study.

If people today who have not yet read many books, nor attained an integrated understanding of moral principles, go and read history in order to examine past and present, order and disorder, and to comprehend institutions and statutes, the situation will be like building a pond to irrigate fields. Only if you drain the pond after it is already full can the water flow and nourish the crops in the fields. If the pond holds only a foot of water and you drain it in order to irrigate the fields, it will not only fail to benefit the fields, but the foot of water will also be lost. If someone has already read many books, thoroughly understands moral principles with the details clear in his mind, does not read history, examine past and present, order and disorder, comprehend institutions and statutes, it is like a pond being full and failing to open it to irrigate the fields. But if one who has not read many books, nor attained an integrated understanding of moral prin-

ZHCING QIAO: HISTORY AS A CONTINUOUS STREAM

Zheng Qiao’s Comprehensive Treatises (Tongzhi) was divided into annals, chronological tables, treatises, and biographies. Five of the twenty treatises were on topics treated here for the first time as independent categories: family and clan, philosophy, phonetics, capitals, and flora and insects. The annals and biographies run from antiquity to the end of the Sui, while the other two parts also include the Tang.

In his preface Zheng Qiao (1008–1166) argues vigorously for treating history as a continuous stream, as had Confucius and Sima Qian, and denounces Ban Gu, whose History of the Former Han Dynasty (Qian Han shu) began the tradition of more-limited dynastic histories, which violated and obscured the grand continuity of the historical landscape.

The many rivers run each a separate course, but all must meet in the sea; only thus may the land be spared the evil of inundation. The myriad states have each their different ways, but all must join in the greater community of our multifarious land; only then may the outlying areas be spared the fears of stagnation. Great is this principle of meeting and joining!

From the time when books were first invented, there have been many who set forth their words, but only Confucius was a sage given full scope by Heaven. Therefore he brought together the Odes and Documents, the Rites and “Music,” and joined them by his own hand such that he could standardize the literature of the world. By penetrating the deeds of the two emperors Yao and Shun and the kings of the Three Dynasties, he created one school of philosophy such that he could fully comprehend the evolution of past and present. Thus was his Way brilliant and enlightened, surpassing all the ages before and all ages after him.

After Confucius passed away, the various philosophers of the hundred schools appeared, and, in imitation of the Analects, each composed a book setting forth his general principles. But no one undertook to carry on the record of the historical facts of ensuing ages. Then in the Han, around the year 140 and later, Sima Tan and his son Sima Qian appeared. The Sima family had for generations been in charge of documents and records, and they were skilled in compilation and writing. Therefore they were able to understand the inten-

67. Based on Analects 9.6.
tions of Confucius, to join together the narratives of the Odes and Documents, the Zuo zhuan, the Narratives of the States, the Genealogical Origins, the Intrigues of the Warring States, and the Spring and Autumn Annals of Chu and Han, covering the ages from the Yellow Emperor and Yao and Shun down to the Qin and Han, and to complete one book. . . .

Zheng Qiao goes on to praise the Records of the Grand Historian (Shi ji) and denounce Ban Gu. In his conclusion he again invokes Confucius.

Confucius said, “The Yin (Shang) dynasty followed the rites of the Xia; wherein it took from or added to them may be known. The Zhou followed the rites of the Yin; wherein it took from or added to them may be known.” This is what is known as the continuity of history. But from the time when Ban Gu wrote the history of only one dynasty, this principle of continuity has been ignored. Thus although one be a sage like Confucius he can never know what was taken away or added in each period. The way of meeting and joining was from this time lost.

[Zheng Qiao, Tongzhi 1 — BW]

MA DUANLIN: INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

In the preface to his Comprehensive Study of Literary Remains (Wenxian tongkao), Ma Duanlin (1554–?) reiterated the importance of continuity as well as comprehensiveness and the special need to study institutions from a long, multi-dynastic perspective. Clearly, many Song advocates of institutional change had viewed them in historical perspective, and Zheng Qiao too had paid them much attention, but Ma Duanlin’s work was the most far-reaching and remains a major source for the study of institutional history. His introduction to this section on the land tax illustrates the scope and methodology of his work. In it he discusses changing historical circumstances as they relate to the perennial issues of land distribution, the well-fields, enfeoffment system, centralization of administration, and so on, as debated by previous writers in the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties.

The rulers of ancient times did not regard all-under-Heaven as their own private possession. Therefore the land of the Son of Heaven was a thousand li square, while that of the dukes and marquises was a hundred li square. Earls held seventy li, barons fifty li, and within the area of the king’s domain the high ministers and officials were granted lands and villages from which they received emoluments. Each of these held possession of his own land, treated its inhab-

Itants as his personal charges, and passed it down to his sons and grandsons to possess. He regarded questions of the fertility and depletion of the land, and the abundance or want of the peasants, as of immediate concern to his own family. He took the trouble to examine and supervise things himself so that there was no room for evildoing or deception. Thus at this time all land was under the jurisdiction of the officials, and the people provided support for the officials. The peasants who received land from the officials lived by their own labor and paid revenue. In their work of supporting their parents and providing for their wives and children, they were all treated with equal kindness, so that there were no people who were excessively rich nor any who were excessively poor. This was the system of the Three Dynasties.

The rulers of the Qin were the first to consider all land as their own possession and to exercise all power by themselves. The men who filled the posts of county magistrates were shifted about frequently so that they came to regard the land of the county where they were posted as no more than a temporary lodging. Thus no matter how virtuous or wise a magistrate might be, it was impossible for him to know fully the true situation in the villages and hamlets he was supervising. The appointments and terms of office of these local magistrates were subject to time limitations, while evil and corrupt practices in connection with the transfer and holding of land multiplied endlessly. Therefore, from the time of Qin and Han on, government officials no longer had the power to grant land, and, as a result, all land eventually became the private possession of the common people. Although there were intervals, such as the Taihe period of the Wei (227–232 C.E.) or the Zhengguan period of the Tang (627–649), when some effort was made to return to the system of the Three Dynasties, it was not long before their reforms became ineffective. This was because without a revival of the enfeoffment of land, it was impossible to restore the well-field system.

Before and during the Three Dynasties, the Son of Heaven could not hold private possession of the country, but the Qin abolished the enfeoffment system and for the first time made the entire country the domain of one man. In the Three Dynasties period and before, the common people could not claim the produce of the land as their private possession, but the Qin abolished the well-field system and first granted people the right to the produce of their land. Therefore, the Qin took away from the feudal lords what it properly ought to have granted and granted the people it properly ought to have taken from them. But this process has already gone on for such a long time that it would be exceedingly difficult to return to the old ways. If one were to try to revive the enfeoffment system, it would mean dividing and parceling out all the land again, and this would provoke confusion and strife. If one attempted to restore the well-field system, it would mean forcibly seizing people’s land and inviting resentment and bitterness. This is why the theories of scholars who recommend such a revival cannot be put in to practice.

68. Analects 2:23.
The system of taxing the landholdings of the people but putting no restriction upon the size of their holdings began with Shang Yang (d. 338 B.C.E.). The system of taxing people for the land they held but taking no consideration of the number of adult or underage persons\(^6\) began with Yang Yan (727–761). Thus Shang Yang was responsible for abolishing the excellent well-field system of the Three Dynasties, and Yang Yan was responsible for the abandonment of the superior tax system of the early Tang. Scholars have been very critical of the changes made by these two men, but all later administrations have found it necessary to follow their methods. If they attempted to change back to the old ways, they found that, on the contrary, they only ended up in worse difficulty and confusion and both the state and the people suffered. This is because the things appropriate to the past and those appropriate to the present are different. Thus I have devoted the first of my surveys to the land tax, tracing the development of the land tax systems throughout the ages and adding to it a study of water control and of military and government farms, making seven chapters in all.

\[\text{Weizhuan tongkao, author's introduction, 3e–4a — HLC}\]

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6. That is, by incorporating the old labor tax, under which such persons were exempt, into the land tax.