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THE PAST IS ETERNAL:
CHINESE PAN-HISTORICISM AS MANIFESTED
IN POETRY ON HISTORY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

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1996

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1996
To My Wife
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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is to examine one of the essences of traditional Chinese culture, that is, Chinese pan-historicism, as manifested poetry on history. The objective of the investigation is to explore and demonstrate how in this distinct genre of classical Chinese literature the Confucian intellectuals articulated their most fundamental world view and conviction about human life.

Like "history" in English, the word shih 文 in classical Chinese—its modern Chinese equivalent would be li-shish 历史—may be employed in two different senses: it may mean (1) all the events and actions that make up the human past, or (2) the accounts of that past. When used in the first sense, it refers to what actually happened, whereas in the second sense it refers to the record or description of what happened. While history in the first sense could never be altered once it took place, history in the second sense could be revised again and again. It is therefore crucial to always keep in mind the distinction, as well as the relationship, between the two
senses of the term in order to avoid possible confusion. In this dissertation, the term history will be employed in both senses, but great attention will be paid to rendering its meaning unmistakable in the specific context.

The term “historicism,” according to The Oxford English Dictionary, can have several different meanings as well. First, it can designate the attempt to view all social and cultural phenomena, all categories, truths, and values, as relative and historically determined, and in consequence to be understood only by examining their historical context, in complete detachment from present-day attitudes. Second, it can refer to the belief that historical change occurs in accordance with laws, so that the course of history may be predicted but cannot be altered by human will.1 Examples of historicism of this sort would be the evolutionary/revolutionary optimism of Karl Marx, and the devolutionary pessimism of Oswald Spengler.2 Thirdly, “historicism” can refer to an excessive regard for the institutions and values of the past. Although in some way associated with these meanings, the concept Chinese pan-historicism I shall use in this dissertation has its specific definition. It conceptualizes a deep-rooted conviction about, and a


fundamental attitude toward, history, shared by most Confucian intellectuals in traditional China, i.e., that history is the manifestation of the T'ien-tao 天道 (Way of Heaven), or Tao, on earth through regulating and judging all human activities, that if any human issue—be it political, moral, or social—is to be fully comprehended, such a historical perspective must be adopted, and that every human being faces a historical judgment as the “Last judgment” of his entire life on the earth, and to successfully pass this last judgment by history must be the ultimate concern of man. To a Confucian intellectual, pan-historicism means not that he frequently thinks about history, but that he always thinks in history, as he inescapably lives in history.

Many researchers have somehow felt that there seems to have existed in traditional Chinese culture an extraordinarily strong “sense of history,” unparalleled in any other culture in the world. This “sense of history” functions in various aspects of Chinese life: historian has been a highly respected position in the officialdom; the writing of history has been strictly controlled by court, as illustrated by the experience of Pan Ku 斐図 (32-92).3 Ever since the T'ang time, governmental institutions have been established

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3 The Later Han historian was once arrested on a charge of writing a history of the Former Han without the authorization of the court, and could have been executed for that, had his powerful younger brother Pan Ch'ao 斐超 not vindicated him before the emperor. See Fan Yeh 范烈, Hou-Han shu 後漢書 (Ssu-pu pei-yao 四部備要 edition, hereafter SPPY) 70A. 7ab.
under different names, in charge of compiling the official version of national histories, a tradition unbroken until the end of the Ch'ing dynasty, and unmatched in any other nation; a historical precedent has always been the most powerful persuasion that political or moral argumentation could ever employ; and even the utopian societies the Chinese have been longing for turn out to be not futuristic, as their Western counterparts usually are, but rather historical, or believed to be so, e.g., the "san-tai chih-chih" (the peace and prosperity of the Three Dynasties of Hsia, Shang, and Chou). That this "sense of history" has permeated so deeply in Chinese culture that it has become a "common sense" of it, however, might be better recognized in its special function in the everyday life of the Chinese, especially when contrasted with its Western near equivalent. When a Westerner—an American, for instance—says "it's history," what he is emphasizing is usually that "It has happened once, it therefore will never happen again." When a Chinese points out that something has once happened in history, however, what he is actually emphasizing is, almost without exception, that "It has happened once, it is therefore more likely to happen again." The historical was the factual, it has proved itself to be human, and could for that very reason be factual again in the present and future. To a Chinese, the past is eternal.

Admittedly, this dominant history-orientation of traditional Chinese culture has been touched upon by some scholars, Western as well as Chinese. For example, E. G. Pulleyblank once mentioned the
Chinese as the "most historically minded of all peoples." And in an article on the Ch'ing scholar Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng (1738-1801), P. Demiéville even used the term "pan-historicism" to summarize what seemed to him Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng's unusual belief that "all documents, no matter what they were, were worth mentioning in a bibliography of history." Sporadic notes and comments found here and there, however, are far less than sufficient to recognize the cultural significance of this distinct phenomenon. This dissertation is intended to be part of the long overdue effort to improve the situation. I am strongly convinced that a comprehensive investigation into the manifestations of this pan-historicism in various spheres and phenomena of traditional Chinese culture, and a penetrating analysis of how it functioned in a Confucian's value system that determined the way he led his life, must be undertaken. Only exhaustive inquiries of this sort can lead to an advanced comprehension and appreciation of traditional Chinese culture as a whole—although the limited scope of this project commands that, for the time being, my inquiry be focused upon how this Chinese pan-historicism manifests itself in a distinct literary genre, i.e., poetry on history.


Poetry on history (yung-shih shih 詠史詩) is a distinct genre of classical Chinese literature. It consists of poems written on historical events and personages. The Chinese concept shih 詩 is used here in its narrower sense, that is, it excludes other poetic forms such as tz'u 歌 (lyrics) and ch'ū 歌 (arias). Although there are works written in the tz'u and ch'ū forms with history as their main subject-matter, they have not been considered by traditional critics as works of yung-shih shih . Poetry on history consists of poems written in pentasyllabic verse, heptasyllabic verse, the lü-shih 禮詩 (regulated verse) or chüeh-chū 続句 (quatrain) forms. The extant poems in this genre number in the thousands, among which many have been widely known and highly regarded by readers throughout the past two thousand years.

Before particular poems can be analyzed in detail, however, it is necessary to fully establish the legitimacy of classifying these poems under "poetry on history" as a distinctive genre. Literally, the French word "genre" means type, sort, or kind. And this also seems to be all which various theories of literary genre can agree on, and all that can be nearly accommodated by the puzzling diversity of the world's literatures. Ever since the time of Plato, controversies have been ongoing about what features of a literary work should be viewed as generically defining while others should not, with no hope of an agreement of any kind in the foreseeable future. In his 1982 work *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the*
Theory of Genres and Modes, Alastair Fowler lists fifteen features that have been “generically organized,” including a work’s representational aspect, external structure, size, subject, values, mood (emotional coloration), attitude, character, action of a kind, and style. The practice of classifying genres by all these features has, with no surprise, produced a long catalog of literary genres extensively overlapping each other. But if it appears frustrating to theoretical neatness, it nevertheless proves quite convenient and beneficial to the practical study of literature. Even Benedetto Croce, the most radical rejecter of the genre concept in modern times, could not completely deny this. In light of this consideration, recognizing the genre of poetry on history, not only represents a prudent attitude toward a seasoned tradition of Chinese literary creation, appreciation, and criticism, but serves as a productive approach to the study of a special kind of poetic works, the uniqueness of which might otherwise be obscured. That this genre is defined to a great extent by a particular kind of subject-matter, i.e., historical events and personages, is not essentially different from many other “better” established genres, such as the kung-t’i shih 宮體詩 (palace-style poetry), shan-shui shih 山水詩

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(landscape poetry), pien-sai shih 遷塞詩 (frontier poetry) in classical Chinese literature, or tragedy, comedy, pastoral, cavalier lyric, detective story, science fiction, chronicle play and historical novel in Western literature. A generic classification like these can be fruitful, as long as it sheds new light upon some literary quality and cultural significance unique to works so identified.

The historical event and personage by which poetry on history is characterized, however, must have already been "historical" to the poet at the time he was writing on it. In other words, it must be not only our history, but also his history. Emphasizing the historicity of the subject-matter to the poet as a defining element of the genre, forefends the pitfall of confusing this distinctive genre with the application of a historical approach to studying a work of classical poetry. For instance, by employing a historical approach in studying Tu Fu's poetry, people have come to regarding the poet as a great shih-shih 詩史 (poetic historian), since they found in his poems rich information about the history of the T'ang time, especially in those poems believed to have "realistically" recorded what he personally experienced and observed during the An Lu-shan Rebellion. This application of a historical approach by a researcher, however, does not make those poems of Tu Fu—the famous "Shih-hao li 石壕吏" (The Officer at Shih-hao) is an

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8 See Ou-yang Hsiu 欧陽修 and Sung Ch'ı 宋祁, Hsin T'ang-shu 新唐書 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1975) 201. 5738.
example—poems on history. Although what is recorded in the poem has become historical to a researcher to-day, it was merely a current event to Tu Fu the poet when he was writing the poem. If we failed to make this critical distinction, all works of classical poetry would have to be taken as poems on history, and a distinctive genre would thus be obscured.

A question closely related to the historicity of the subject-matter might be raised here, that is, "how much" history does it take to sufficiently define a work as a poem on history? It sounds like an especially challenging question, given that historical allusion has been such a favorite of Chinese authors that it appears almost omnipresent in the vast universe of classical Chinese poetry and literature. The answer to the question, or the solution to the problem it presents, I believe, lies in acknowledging the unnecessariness, as well as impossibility, of quantifying literature study with mathematical precision, therefore adopting a more practical approach that makes a fruitful study achievable. As long as a poem treats history as its main subject-matter, as the focus that directly attracts the chief concern of the poet, thus rendering all of its other topics, themes, concerns and sentiments indirect, derivative, or subordinate, it could be treated as a poem on history, although it might be justifiable to view it at the same time as a poem in another genre as well. As a result, surrounding the territory of the genre thus defined will be a gray area, rather than a clear-cut boundary line—a phenomenon widely found in generic classification
in general. However, most works in poetry on history still possess sufficient features to indisputably claim for themselves this particular generic identity. An imperfect approach notwithstanding, it is essentially what literature study, if not all disciplines in the humanities, has currently in hand. Fortunately, as experience has demonstrated before, a fruitful study with this approach is still attainable, therefore worth pursuing.

Another factor facilitating the definition and identification of poetry on history is that the poets themselves possessed a clear and intense generic consciousness when writing in it, and they endeavored to clarify this specific generic commitment in most of their works. The device used most frequently for this purpose is titling. Two types of title are employed: the general and the specific. Among the general titles Yung-shih 詠史 (Singing of History) is the one used most frequently in poems dealing with various historical topics. Tu-shih 讀史 (Reading of History) is of the same sort, but used less frequently. Sometimes a title like Huai-ku 懷古 (Meditating on the Past) or Lan-ku 遠古 (Glancing over Historical Place) would be used as well. As a rule, however, a typical Huai-ku (or Lan-ku) poem usually distinguishes itself from a poem on history by focusing upon expressing a more abstract (often philosophized) reflection on, or sentiment about, a generalized "past," rather than writing on certain specific historical event or personage. For this reason, most traditional critics preferred to treat the Huai-ku (Lan-ku included) poems as constituting a
separate genre of its own, although its kinship with the *Yung-shih* poetry is undeniable. The specific titles are those which directly designate the particular historical event or personage dealt with in a poem. Proper nouns thus become the most natural choice. The frequently used proper nouns are of three kinds: the first is the name of a historical personage who is the topic of the poem—like Chia I 賈誼 or Wang Chao-chün 王昌齡, the official title for a highly respected figure—like “Martial Marquis Chu-ke 諸葛武侯,” or the imperial title for even a good-for-nothing emperor—like “Sui Yang-ti [隋煬帝];” the second is the name of a historical place where the historical event at issue occurred, like “The Red Cliff [赤壁]” or “Ma-wei Slope [馬嵬];” the third is the name of a memorial building in honor of a historical personage, like “The Shrine of Master Ch’ü 屈子廟.” While delimiting the particular subject-matter for a specific poem, these various titles also serve to make unmistakable the poets’ generic commitment, which implies their clear consciousness of, and full confidence in, this particular genre. Yet as I shall demonstrate in a later chapter, even when titling is not used to indicate the genre, a scrutiny into the content of a poem can still determine whether it is a poem on history.

Written about historical events and personages, poetry on history could be viewed as having derived from the commentary section of traditional Chinese historical works. It was a cherished convention of traditional Chinese historiography to conclude the account of a historical figure with a brief commentary. Commentary
of this kind persisted as Chung-tzu yüeh (A gentle man would say) in the Tso-chuan 左傳 (Tso Documentary), as T'ai-shih-kung yüeh 太史公曰 (The Grand Historian remarks) in the Shih-ch'i 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian), as Tsan yüeh 肆曰 (In eulogy we say) in the Han-shu 漢書 (History of the Han Dynasty), and as Shih-ch'en yüeh 史臣曰 (The official historians remark) in many later dynastic histories. All these are usually summaries of the deeds of a historical figure as recorded, in brief and sometimes rhythmic language, with a moral praise or condemnation emphasized. Besides the end of every biography, commentaries of this kind also appeared in other sections of some works. As the T'ang historian Liu Chih-chi 劉知幾 (661-721) observes,

In the second half of the Postscript to the Records of the Grand Historian, Ssu-ma Ch'ien wrote about each chapter in turn, summarizing their significance. Later on Pan Ku [in his History of the Han Dynasty] changed them into poetic form, and called them the Summaries.

It merits our special attention that the well-known Later Han historian Pan Ku adopted a poetic form in writing commentarial summaries. Also worth noting is the same historian's innovation of

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9 Liu Chih-chi 劉知幾, Shih-t'ung t'ung-shih 史通通釋, annotated by P'u Ch'i-lung 濮起龍 (Taipei: I-wen yin-shu-kuan, 1978), 55. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.
setting up in his *History of the Han Dynasty* a distinctive chapter entitled "A Table of People Ancient and Contemporary [古今人表]," in which hundreds of historical figures are morally evaluated one by one, and ranked into a table of nine classes, ranging from *Shang-shang* 上上 (The highest of the high) to *Hsia-hsia* 下下 (The lowest of the low). Revealed in these practices are the historian's strong concern with evaluating and commenting upon historical personages, and his inclination to the art of poetry. It is therefore hardly surprising that Pan Ku turns out to be the first to write a pentasyllabic poem entitled "Yung-shih [史]" (Singing of History), thereby formally bringing into being the genre of poetry on history.

While many traditional Chinese poetic genres and subgenres—the *yüeh-fu* and *tz'u*, for example—had a folk origin from the "lesser tradition," poetry on history was from the start an exclusively elite genre, and has maintained this status ever since. Among the Confucian intellectuals it soon enjoyed a great

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12 Although they are translated into different terms in English, the title of this poem, "yung-shih ," was obviously the etymological origin of the genre “yung-shih shih .”
popularity, and has been continuously practiced by them generation after generation. Few, if any, important poets after Pan Ku have not written works in this genre. And among thousands of poems in the genre, many are widely known and highly regarded by the readers. It is undoubtedly one of the major genres of classical Chinese poetry.

As the genre developed, a number of literary devices were employed to process historical materials in it. By analyzing which device is used predominantly in a particular work—and again for the purpose of practical study only—we can further classify poems in this genre into the following four categories: history-narrating poetry, history-quoting poetry, history-dramatizing poetry, and history-criticizing poetry.

History-narrating poetry retells in poetic language the story of a historical event, often followed by a brief comment upon its moral significance. The narration constitutes the major part of the poem and contains sufficient details of the event at issue, enabling even an uninitiated reader to get a fairly complete picture of what happened. The first poem on history by Pan Ku was a history-narrating poem. Written in pentasyllabic verse, it retells in great detail the story of a Former Han girl named T'i Ying 提婴: how her elderly father was accused of committing a certain crime and thus faced cruel jou-hsing 肉刑 (corporal punishment) at the capital city Ch'ang-an; how the desperate old man whined about the uselessness of daughters in a situation like this; how the young girl, offended as well as heartbroken by her father's comment, accompanied him under
arrest to the capital, and appealed to the court for selling herself as a slave to the government so her father could be spared that cruel punishment; and how her filial self-sacrifice moved Emperor Wen so deeply that he not only pardoned the old man, but had corporal punishments abolished throughout the nation. The poem concludes with a couplet praising the girl for her filial piety and remarkable courage which make most men pale in comparison. Although this poem was regarded by the Liang critic Chung Hung as "plain, dull, and without literary grace," Pan Ku's pioneering practice was emulated by many later poets, such as Ts'ao Chih (192-232), Wang T'san (177-217), and T'ao Ch'ien (171-239). And the high achievement a history-narrating poem could obtain is demonstrated below in the excerpt from T'ao Ch'ien's "Singing of Ching K'e," a poem on the most admired assassin in Chinese history, based upon the moving description in Ssu-ma Ch'ien's *Shih-chi*.

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13 See *Han-shu*, 23.1097-99. The term *jou-hsing* (corporal punishment) here is used in a narrower sense, i.e., it consists of *ch'ing* (tattooing on the face), *yi* (cutting off the nose), and *yüeh* (cutting off a foot), but not flogging.


"A gentleman will die for one who knows his worth;  
With sword in hand I will leave Yen’s capital,  
My pallid charger whinnying through the streets  
As they escort me, filled with high resolve.”  
The hero’s hair thrusts through his high hat,  
His valor saturates the long capstring.  
A farewell cup beside the River Yi,  
Around him sit the heroes of the realm.  
Kao Chien-li strikes the sad guitar,  
Sung Yi sings the high-pitched mournful song.  
A plaintive wind begins its lonely wail,  
The cold waves surge in the swelling flood.  
With the Shang mode tune the tears flow fast  
When the note yû is struck the hero is startled:  
He knows he will leave and never return  
But after him his name will live forever.  
He mounted his carriage and never once looked back.  
Canopy flying, he headed for the court of Ch’in.  

Although the man is long since dead and gone,  
After a thousand years he inspires us still.17

君于死知己，  
提剑出燕京。  
素騄鸣广陌，  
慷慨送我行。  
雄鬓指危冠，  
狂氣衝長鱗。  
飲瓢易水上。

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History-quoting poetry focuses upon enumerating historical figures to exemplify the poet himself. Analogy is often drawn between certain historical figures and the poet himself, in terms of virtues, talents, great ambitions, and the misfortunes suffered by both. The origin of quoting history to exemplify oneself, as a poetic device, can be traced back at the latest to some of Ch'ü Yüan's (c. 340–c. 278 B.C.) works, like "She-chiang [渃江]" (Crossing the

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River). But its development into a kind of poetry on history was much later than that. The famous "Eight Poems Singing of History [詠史八首]" by the Chin poet Tso Ssu (c. 250-c. 305) are an apt example of this category. The eight poems constitute a single organic unit. The first one, saying nothing about any particular historical event or personage at all, advertises the poet's own talent, integrity and ambition, and expresses his burning desire to obtain great political achievements before voluntarily retiring to a pastoral life. It serves as the theme song to the eight poems as a whole. In the next seven poems, historical personages are enumerated one by one to exemplify the poet himself. For example, the seventh poem reads as follows:

Before Chu-fu Yen became an official,  
All his family members slighted him.  
Chu Mai-ch'en was once a woodcutter,  
Thus abandoned by his wife.  
Ch'en P'ing had no wealth,  
In a hovel he sheltered himself.  
And when Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju returned to Ch'eng-tu,  
Four walls were all he got at home.  
Were these four worthies not great?  
Their achievements shine in the works of history.  
But before their times finally came,  
It seemed that they were to starve in a cesspit.  
Heroes would have their hardships—

19 See Ch'u-tz'u 楚辭(Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an 四部叢刊 edition, hereafter SPTK)4. 12a-13a.

20 See Ting Fu-pao, 1. 385-86.
It has been so since ancient times.  
What era doesn't have its geniuses?  
So often they are wasted in the wilderness.

主父官不達，
豈有相府薄。
賈臣困樵採，
仇魯不安宅。
陳平無產業，
歸來齋負郭。
長卿過成都，
壁立何寥廓。
四賢豈不偉，
遺烈彰篇籍。
當其未遇時，
憂在黮溝壑。
英雄有逸運，
由來自古昔。
何世無奇才，
遺之在草澤。21

Four historical personages are quoted in this poem, i.e., Chu-fu Yen 主父偃 (?-126 B.C.), Chu Mai-ch'en 朱賈臣 (?-115 B.C.), Ch'en P'ing

All the four are well known for their extraordinary talent, yet before establishing their fame in history they all suffered from a humble family background, poverty, and neglect by those in power—a painful experience the poet feels he himself is sharing with them presently. Quoting and praising these historical figures, the poet identifies himself with them, and this identification in turn assures himself as well as the readers that his time, like theirs, might someday come. A distinct feature of history-quoting poetry is the direct and explicit connection between history and the present. And the quoting is usually neither limited to a single historical figure, nor provided with great details. More often than not, materials from different ages are selected, tailored, and reorganized under a stressed leitmotif, which inspires and harmonizes the poet’s self-identification with history. The poet stands much “closer” to history here than he does in history-narrating poetry.

And he moves even closer when writing history-dramatizing poetry. Here the poet directly “enters” history as he presents a historical event in the first person. He assumes the role of a historical personage and acts out the experience of the latter before the eyes of his reader. Events that inspired poets to revive them once and again are usually those sentimental tragedies. It is therefore no surprise that the story of Wang Chao-chûn, the Han palace beauty who was given by the Emperor to the Hsiung-nu chieftain to marry, appeared to many poets an ideal subject-
The “Song of Wang Ming-chün [王明君辭]” by the Chin poet Shih Ch'ung 石崇 (249-300), for example, reads as follows:

I am a Han woman,
Yet will be married into the Hsiung-nu court.

Grief is hurting me deeply within,
My tears soak the red capstring.

I'm led to the huge tent,
Then dubbed the Yen-chih.²³
It's uncomfortable to live with people of a different race,
I don't feel honored at all by the nobility.
The father and the son degraded me in turn,²⁴
I'm so shamed and horrified.
Lacking the courage to kill myself,
I'm silently dragging out this miserable life.
This life is so unendurable,
Anger grips me again and again.

I tell you, people of later generations,
A marriage far away from home is unbearable.

我本漢家子，
將適單于庭。

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²² For Wang Chao-chün's story, see Han-shu, 94A. 3743-94.

²³ Yen-chih 闕氏 was the official title of the Hsiung-nu chieftain's wife.

²⁴ After the death of her husband, Wang Chao-chün was married to one of his sons from a previous marriage, as commanded by the Hsiung-nu custom at the time.
As demonstrated by this example, a successful history-dramatizing poem could present more vividly a historical event, in which the historical figure achieves a more affective and effective catharsis of his/her feelings and emotions—although part of these feelings and emotions in fact expresses the poet's own opinion and sentiment about the event.

25 In Ting Fu-pao, 1. 401-02.
The category that makes up the bulk of poetry on history, however, is what I shall call history-criticizing poetry. When writing this kind of poem, the poet would usually select a specific historical event or personage, and focus upon it in a single work. This event or personage, however, would neither be elaborately narrated nor empathically dramatized, but only briefly mentioned in the poem. The reader is presumed to know the details as well as the poet does. Otherwise, it would be his own responsibility to familiarize himself about the topic before reading the poem, in which the basics are not provided. Such a technical feature plainly bespeaks the cultural essence of the genre, that is, its elitism. Almost every word of the poem would be devoted to commenting on the issue. That results in a remarkably condensed poem concentrating upon a criticism—almost unexceptionally a moral criticism—on a specific historical event or personage. It is not accidental that as history-criticizing poetry became the mainstream of poetry on history, the intensified regulated verse and quatrain were more frequently chosen in favor over other longer and looser verses. A poem titled "Written at the Shrine of Madam Peach Blossom [题桃花夫人廟]" by the T'ang poet Tu Mu 杜牧 (803-c. 852), provides an illustrative example for this category:

The peach trees were blossoming in the Tiny-waist Palace,  

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26 The Tiny-waist Palace refers to the palace of the Ch'ü. It was recorded in the Mo-tzu 墨子, Hsün-tzu 孟子 and some other works that King Ling of Ch'ü was obsessively fond of women with very thin
How many springs had she spent without speaking a word?
Why had the State of Hsi been ruined after all?
Pitiable is the one who jumped from the tower in the Golden Valley!  

The poem is on Hsi Kui 桃 梅, also known as Madam Peach Blossom, the beautiful wife of the Hsi prince of the Spring and Autumn period. According to the Tso-chuan, the prince of the Ch'ū heard of her peerless beauty, annexed the State of Hsi, and made her his own waists. Many women in the Ch'ū palace therefore went on an extreme diet, and starved themselves to death in seeking the King's favor.

27 This refers to Lü Chu 桃 梅, a sing-song girl in the family of the Chin official Shih Ch'ung, famous for his enormous wealth and luxurious residence in the Golden Valley. A higher official Sun Hsiu 孫 秀 heard of Lü Chu's beauty and asked Shih to give her up to him. Shih refused, and Sun sent men for Shih's arrest. Shih and Lü Chu was at a banquet on a tower in the Golden Valley when the arresting soldiers arrived. Shih told Lü Chu that he had offended Sun for her sake. The girl wept and said she would die for Shih in return. She then jumped from the tower and killed herself. See Fang Hsüan-ling 房玄齡 and others, Chin-shu 春 秋, 10 vols. (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1974), 33. 1008.

28 Tu Mu 杜 牧, Fan-ch'uan-shih chi-chu 奉川詩集註, Annotated by Feng Chi-wu 馮集梧 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1962), 274-75.
wife. She accepted her fate, gave birth to two of his children, but never said a word to anyone for many years. When the bewildered Ch’u prince asked for an explanation, she replied, “As a woman, I have served two husbands due to lacking the courage to choose death—what is there for me to say anyway [吾一婦人而事二夫，絶弗能死，其又何言]?” Commenting upon this historical figure and her conduct, the poet Tu Mu casts a sharp (perhaps far too sharp) criticism of her marital chastity, compromised for fear of death. He contrasts this wife of a prince with a sing-song girl named Lü Chu, who bravely chose death in stead of dragging out a life of humiliating survival. While the morality advocated by the poet in this criticism seems at the first glance to be concerned with marriage only, the contrast between the wife of a prince, herself a political figure, and a girl of lower class but clearly her moral superior, carries with it an undeniable political overtone, or the political applicability of this particular historical experience. This poem is highly praised by critics like Hsü I as “a twenty-eight-word commentary on history [二十八字史論]” for its concise language, sharp idea, and pointed wit—all very characteristic of history-criticizing poetry.30

29 Tso-chuan 左傳 (SPTK ed.) 3. 6b-9b.

It is quite unique that generations of intellectuals of a nation are so “obsessed” by their history, as if they would never let the past go. Poetry on history is a poetic verification of this strong concern unparalleled in any other culture in the world. In this sense, it is not only a major genre of classical Chinese literature, but a distinct genre of world literature. And a phenomenon so vigorous in one culture, and so distinct among all cultures, must contain within itself some special significance that merits a searching academic inquiry.

However, the study of poetry on history has been hitherto quite inadequate. Although some articles on certain individual poets’ writing in the genre can be found in Chinese, no book-length work on this subject has been produced to the best of my knowledge. And it would not be incorrect to say that the study of this genre in English is still something of a vacuum. This inadequacy might have two major causes. The first could be that poems in this genre make abundant reference to Chinese history, thus demand its researcher to carry out an extensive investigation into that vast field, a task too time-consuming for some students of Chinese literature. The second cause could be that many researchers have not been convinced of the potential reward such a study could offer. As a genre combining history and poetry in one, it on the one hand does not present a history as “real” as what is available through the more “authentic” historiography, while its poetry on the other hand also fails to fit in those molds assigned to the Chinese—it does not sound “intuitive”
enough, for instance. If being controversial tends to exaggerate the genuine significance of an issue, being ignored simply makes the issue non-existent. But it is only ostensibly so. As we shall see in some later chapters, the consequence of neglecting poetry on history still has to be dealt with when we are confronted by various sweeping statements on classical Chinese poetry, individual poets, or literature as a whole.

This dissertation is to make the study of poetry on history as a literary genre shed light upon the study of the pan-historicism as one of the essences of traditional Chinese culture, and vice versa, so that our comprehension of both can be significantly advanced. The major goal of the project, however, is not to carry out an exhaustive genre study. Our investigation into poetry on history, therefore, will focus upon those of its aspects that will lead us to a clearer comprehension and profounder appreciation of Chinese pan-historicism.

In Chapter I, I shall discuss the Confucian account of the genesic connection between poetry and history, the identical moral functions of the two, and the special importance placed upon both in this predominant Chinese thought tradition. Then in Chapter II through IV I shall examine the six major approaches with which Chinese pan-historicism is articulated in poetry on history: moralization, symbolization, spatialization, eternalization, aestheticization, and religionization. All discussion will be based on solid evidence drawn from works in this genre, written by poets
throughout Chinese literary history. By so doing, I shall present poetry on history as a literary genre, through an elaborate investigation from the particular viewpoint of Chinese pan-historicism. Finally, the major issues will be summed up and presented systematically in a brief conclusion.
CHAPTER 1

HISTORY, POETRY, AND CONFUCIANISM

Mencius, the second most important figure of Confucianism, insists that a special genesic connection existed between two of the classics of this thought tradition, i.e., the Shih-ching (Book of Poetry) and Ch'un-ch'iu (The Spring and Autumn Annals): "The traces of sovereign rule were extinguished, and the royal odes ceased to be made. When those odes ceased to be made, then the Ch'un-ch'iu was produced."

According to Chu Hsi's interpretation, this statement means that after King P'ing transferred the Chou capital from Hao to Luo in 769 B.C., the sovereigns of Chou ruled in name but not in fact, as a consequence, no additions were made to the Ya —including the Hsiao-ya (elegantiae) and Ta-ya (odes)—section of the

1 Meng-tzu 孟子 (SPTK ed.) 8. 7b. The translations of the Meng-tzu in this dissertation are based on those of James Legge.
Shih-ching, and its function in everyday life severely declined. Confucius therefore produced his version of the Ch’un-ch’iu by editing on the existing Lu chronicle with the same title, to supplement this declining function of poetry. Both Mencius’s statement and Chu Hsi’s interpretation have been widely accepted among traditional Confucian intellectuals. Revealed in this wide acceptance is a confident belief shared by this cultural community, that the functions of history and poetry are to a great extent overlapping. Since this belief is of critical importance to our investigation, a more detailed survey is obviously called for.

First, we need to see what the function of poetry is from a Confucian viewpoint. Confucius himself once stated unmistakably that “All the three hundred poems [in the Book of Poetry] can be summed up in a single sentence—'morally flawless' [詩三百，一言以蔽之，曰：思無邪].” And he used the book as part of the curriculum for his disciples, commanding them to study the works in it,

Why do you boys not study the Book of Poetry? Poetry can be used to stimulate the mind, to observe people’s feelings, to connect yourself with the others, and to express your grievances. From them you learn the more immediate duty of


3 Lun-yü 論語 (SPTK ed.)1. 9b. The translations of the Lun-yü in this dissertation are based on those of James Legge and Arthur Waley.
serving one's father, and the remoter one of serving one's sovereign.

小子何莫學夫詩? 詩可以興, 可以觀, 可以群, 可以怨。道之事父, 道之事君。4

This function of poetry to “stimulate the mind,” as defined by the Ch'ing scholar Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng 賣學誠, is “to stimulate the mind to love the virtuous and despise the vicious [興起好善惡惡之心也].”5 This moral nature of its function is the reason poetry can contribute to maintaining the appropriate relationship between father and son, and that between sovereign and minister. It is therefore very clear that Confucius emphasized the moral function of poetry. However, Mencius believed that ever since the beginning of the Spring and Autumn period, this moral function of poetry in social life had almost completely vanished due to the current social chaos. And Confucius's major purpose in producing the historical work Ch'un-ch'iu, teaching it to his disciples, and passing it down to future generations was to supplement poetry with history in carrying out the same moral function:

The world fell into decay, and principles faded away. Perverse words and brutal conduct again arose. There were instances of

4 Ibid., 9. 5ab.

ministers murdering their sovereigns, and of sons murdering their fathers. Confucius was afraid of this situation, and made the “Spring and Autumn Annals.”

Confucius was afraid of this situation, and made the “Spring and Autumn Annals.”

Mencius not only insisted on Confucius’s editing the Ch’un-ch’iu and his intention in doing it, but analyzed his method and emphasized its effect. As to the method, he pointed out, “The subject of the Ch’un-ch’iu was the affairs of Huan of Ch’i and Wen of Chin, and its style was the historical. Confucius said, ‘Its righteous decisions I ventured to make’ [其事則齊桓晉文，其文則史，孔子曰：其義則丘竊取之矣].” The term i 義 here refers to what the later Confucians took as the soul of the Ch’un-ch’iu, i.e., Confucius’s praise and condemnation (pao-pien 褒貶) of historical figures and their conducts by his own moral standard. That is, by recording historical events of the Spring and Autumn period, Confucius upheld and advocated his moral standard about what is virtuous and what is vicious. As to the effect of this historical work, Mencius claimed that it did apply a great moral pressure to its contemporary society:

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6 Meng-tzu , 6. 13a.

7 Ibid ., 8. 7b. James Legge’s translation, with its romanization of the Chinese names revised to be consistent with the Wade-Giles system adopted in this dissertation.
When Confucius completed the *Ch’un-ch’iu*, all rebellious ministers and villainous sons were struck with fear [孔子成《春秋》而亂臣賊子懼]. 8 Just like poetry, history is highly valued by Confucianism primarily for its moral function.

The belief that history and poetry have the identical function of maintaining morality understandably led to stressing the necessity of grasping the spirit of the one in order to truly comprehend the other. In the chapter titled “The Morality of a Historian (史德)” in his famous *Wen-shih T’ung-i* 文史通義 (General Meaning of Literature and History), Chang Hsüeh-ch’eng asserted,

Master Ch’eng Hao once said that one must understand the meaning of poems like “Kuan-chü” and “Lin-chih-chih” to implement the institutions recorded in the *Chou-kuan*. 9 And I would say that one must comprehend the spirit of the “Six principles of poetry,” including metaphor and allusion, 10 to talk

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9 “Kuan-chü” and “Lin chih chih [麟之趾]” are two poems in the *Shih-ching*, traditionally interpreted as conveying a moral teaching. The *Chou-kuan* (or*Chou-li* 周禮) is one of the Confucian classics, believed as having recorded the early Chou system of political institutions. For Ch’eng Hao’s statement, see Mao Hsing-lai 茅星來 ed. *Chin-ssu-lu chi-chu* 近思錄集注 (*Ssu-K’u ch’üan-shu* 四庫全書 ed.) 8. 18ab.

10 The “Six principles of poetry” refer to *feng* 風 (songs), *ya* 稚 (elegantiae and odes), *sung* 頌 (hymns)—three subgenres of poems in the *Shih-ching*, and *fu* 賦 (narrative), *pi* 比 (metaphor), *hsing* 興 (allusion)—three major poetic devices employed in these works. The *pi* and *hsing* are interpreted by later Confucian literati as the
about the book of *Ch’ün-ch’iu*, which records events in the Chou Kings’ years.\(^1\)

"程子嘗謂有關雎麟趾之義，而後可以行周官之法度。吾則以爲通六義比興之旨，而後可以講秦正月之書."\(^2\)

To comprehend the spirit of the poetry is to grasp its moral significance in social life, and this is also how history should be understood, and political practice should be carried out.

It was no accident that Pan Ku, the Later Han historian who prided himself on being a more orthodox Confucian moralist than his Former Han predecessor Ssu-ma Ch’ien,\(^3\) turned out to be the first to inaugurate the genre poetry on history. The conduct of the filial girl T’i Ying was recorded in Ssu-ma Ch’ien’s *Shih-chi*,\(^4\) Pan Ku elaborated on it in the “Treatise of Law [刑法志]” in his *Han-shu*,

major devices that the *Shih-ching* poets employed to convey their moral teachings.

\(^1\) In the *Ch’ün-ch’iu*, Confucius recorded events of individual states in the Chou Kings’ years. This was interpreted as his effort to uphold the authority of the Chou court.

\(^2\) *Chang Hsüeh-ch’eng i-shu*, 40.

\(^3\) See biography of Ssu-ma Ch’ien in Pan Ku’s *Han-shu*, 62. 2707-40. In it Pan Ku accused Ssu-ma Ch’ien vehemently, because “his moral judgments were very much opposed to those of the Sage Confucius [其是亦顛倒於聖人].”

\(^4\) See *Shih-chi* 史記, 105. 2795.
praising Emperor Wen’s benevolence as well as the young girl’s filial piety. The historian, however, seemed to feel that this had not done justice to such high moral conduct, therefore impelled to praise the girl one more time with poetry. That resulted in the first work in the genre, his “Singing of History.” Yoshikawa Kojiro suggested that Pan Ku might have written a series of poems on history in pentasyllabic verse. Although further evidence is needed before it can be taken as more than a hypothesis, the suggestion calls due attention to the poet’s strong generic awareness as reflected in the work. It might well be possible that Pan Ku was also inspired by Mencius’s notion about the special relationship between history and poetry. Whatever the fact might have been, ever since Pan Ku brought into being, poetry on history has been flourishing along with history itself. The supplementary relation between poetry and history in the first place, as described by Mencius, has developed into a complementary one, in which the two operate together to carry out a common moral function.

This brief account of the genesic development from poetry to history, given from a Confucian viewpoint, points to the underlying belief in the identical moral function of history and poetry. Such a

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15 See Han-shu, 23.1097-99.

belief, in turn, bespeaks a more profound conviction about the essence of the two. Only an in-depth theoretical analysis of the special significance that history and poetry respectively possess in the Confucian cosmological symbolism can shed light upon this deep-rooted conviction. And this is exactly what we shall pursue in this chapter.

History has occupied in Confucianism an extraordinarily important place from the start. A profound comprehension of this importance, therefore, must begin with an investigation into the genesis of this thought tradition. Although Confucianism was not founded until the end of the Spring and Autumn period, some six hundred years after the Chou dynasty had been established, it was based upon early Chou thinking as reflected in the Shih-ching and Shang-shu (Book of Documents). Its emphasis upon the importance of history directly drew inspiration from the political practice of those founders of the new dynasty. As Wang Kuo-wei points out, the overthrow of the Shang dynasty by the Chou represented profound political and cultural changes hitherto unprecedented in Chinese history. It seems that for a while even

the Chou founders themselves were amazed at how their humble "hsiao-pang Chou [小邦周]" (small tributary state Chou) should have displaced that formidable "ta-kuo Yin [大國殷]" (great suzerain Yin). A lot of thinking was done, with direct reference to their own historical experience. In the eyes of the Chou founders, the rulers of the Shang were obviously overconfident of the blessing showered upon them from Heaven. They called their god the Ti 帝, or Shang-ti 上帝, a superhuman entity who alone would determine the fate of their dynasty. And they believed that the most effective way to secure the mandate of ruling from that god was to please him with elaborate sacrificial ceremonies (祀). When presenting sacrifices to the god, they also offered great worship to the ghosts of their own ancestors. As later summed up in the Li-chi 禮記(Book of Rites):

The Yin [Shang] rulers revered their god most, led the people serving the god, and put ghosts before the rites.

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The exclusive concern with the god, ancestors, ghosts and sacrificial ceremonies, bespeaks the Shang rulers' uncritical belief in, and excessive reliance on, the superhuman. There was a

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18 See Shang-shu 尚書 (SPTK ed.) 7. 12b and 8. 13b.

19 Li-chi 禮記(SPTK ed.) 17. 5b–6a.
predominant theistic emphasis in the Shang cosmological symbolism. And when they calculated that bountiful sacrifices had been offered to please that superhuman entity and the ghosts above, they took their mandate of ruling as irrevocable—at least so it seemed to the Chou rulers, as illustrated in their portrait of the last Shang king, the malevolent Chou Hsin 賢辛, in the *Shang-shu*: upon hearing the warning of one of his subjects that his dynasty was collapsing due to his corrupt behavior, the King was simply unable to get the message:

The King said: “Alas, don’t I have a fate that only Heaven above can determine?”

王曰: “嘆! 我生不由命在天?”

The Shang, however, did collapse. And if such a heavy sacrifice to Heaven eventually failed to save it, it seemed impossible for those Chou founders, the very people who just toppled the Shang with their own hands, to retain the old belief anymore. The excessive reliance upon Heaven collapsed along with the Shang dynasty itself. The Chou founders’ own historical experience bred deeply in their psyche a strong distrust of Heaven. They felt that “Heaven cannot be trusted [天不可信].”

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20 *Shang-shu*, 5. 14a.

could change so dramatically, something underlying this changeability must be discovered. And the only way to carry out this investigation was to study the historical experience available to them at that time. A reconstruction and examination of the history from the Hsia dynasty to the contemporary time were thus conducted, which eventually reached the following coherent reinterpretation: Heaven first gave the mandate to the Hsia. But when the Hsia rulers mistreated the people, Heaven immediately found for the latter another qualified ruler, namely Ch'eng T'ang 成湯, and awarded him the mandate to replace the Hsia with the Shang. The Chou founders acknowledged that the Shang regime too had once deserved mandate of heaven before it abandoned (or was abandoned by) the people: “Before the Yin [Shang] lost the people/ It had deserved [the blessing] of the Shang-ti [殷之末喪師，克配上帝].” However, the last Shang king did the same thing to the people as the Hsia rulers had, thus Heaven once again revoked the mandate, and this time granted it to the Chou. Therefore as a matter of fact, “Heaven did not abandon the Hsia, neither did it the Yin [非天無釋有夏，非天無釋有殷],” it simply did what the rulers of the two dynasties themselves asked for. What had made Heaven revoke its mandate from the Shang was the failure of the latter to live up to the moral

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22 Mao-shih 毛詩 (SPTK ed.) 16. 2b.

23 Shang-shu ,10. 9a.
standard it set. And it was the high moral standing of the Chou founders—the King Wen, King Wu, and the Duke of Chou—that had won over the mandate for the new dynasty. That is what was meant by “Heaven recognizes no kinship, it helps the virtuous only [皇天無親，惟德是輔].”

A conceptualization of Heaven like this represents a significant shift of the focus from god in the Shang cosmological symbolism to man in that of Chou. In the final analysis, the Heaven thus conceived of has neither will nor agenda of its own, except for working as an agent for human morality. The god of the Shang rulers was, in the hands of the early Chou rulers, deanthropomorphised in form, but humanized and moralized in content. The god-centered Shang cosmological symbolism was thus transformed into the man-centered and morality-centered Chou cosmological symbolism. And this early Chou morality, expressed as te 德 (virtue), was measured not by how much sacrifice the rulers offered to Heaven above, but by how well they treated the min 民 (people) down on earth, for “Heaven looks the way people look, and listens the way people listen [天視自我民視，天聽自我民聽].”

That is, Heaven judges the way people judge.

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24 Shang-shu, 10. 6a. Although the chapter containing this statement was added to the book later by some unknown author, the statement summarizes the thought of the early Chou rulers accurately. And it was also quoted in the Tso-chuan, 5. 7a.

25 Ibid., 6. 4a. This statement is contained in another chapter added to the original book, but it was also quoted in Meng-tzu 孟子, 9. 10b. It is consistent with the thought of the Chou rulers.
As the blessing of Heaven is guaranteed as long as the rulers keep behaving morally and treating people well, it becomes virtually a service by Heaven which humans can order and secure with their own high moral standing. In this way, the Chou constructed a humanistic cosmological symbolism of its own. Despite its continuous use of words like Ti and Shang-ti, and practice of worship and sacrifice, what we see here is essentially a kind of humanism, as opposed to the Shang’s extreme theism. Its focus is now on man. As Confucius later stresses, “To devote oneself to what is right according to the principles of humanity, and, while respecting ghosts and gods, to keep them at a distance, may be called wisdom [務民之義，敬鬼神而遠之，可謂知矣].”

Derived from the reconstruction and reinterpretation of the history from the Hsia to early Chou, this humanism underlay the establishment of the entire system of Chou political institutions. In a sharp contrast to the Shang’s emphasis on the god, ancestors, ghosts and sacrifice, the focus of the Chou institutions shifted to the li (rites):

The Chou rulers emphasized rites and giving, served the ghosts and revered gods while keeping them at a distance, focused on human affairs and stressed loyalty.

周人尊禮尚施，事鬼敬神而遠之，近人而忠焉。  

26 *Lun-yü*, 3. 16b-17a.

27 *Li-chi*, 17. 6a.
Wang Kuo-wei makes a very insightful analysis of this Chou emphasis on virtues, rites, and people:

It is not that the sages of the ancient times had no concern in mind with the long-term happiness of their own clans. However, they understood that the long-term happiness of their own clans was the same as that of the people, and that the long-term happiness of both was the same as the morality of the rulers. Therefore what they relied upon to beseech an enduring mandate of heaven was only two words: virtues and people. . . . Here lie all the essential and fundamental principles of King Wen, King Wu, and the Duke of Chou to rule the country. Therefore we can understand that all the institutions and rites of the Chou were established for the sake of morality, and even those institutions and rites that concern junior and senior officials and those above them only, were not established without the people as the purpose.

This analysis throws light upon the fact that while Confucius enumerated various kinds of social problems of his own time, his prescription to them all was nevertheless quite simple: “If

[everyone] can restrain himself and restore the rites, the entire nation will return to Goodness overnight [一日克己復禮，天下歸仁焉]." Later on Hsün Tzu also unequivocally stated “The rites are the ultimate principle of humanity [禮者，人道之極也].” To him, proper rites are the only thing that could enable humans to maintain a stable society, in which everyone knows his place, and how he should coexist and interact with the others. Only within this frame of rites can human beings survive in such a harsh natural environment, and distinguish themselves from animals. The great emphasis on the rites in the Chou culture attests the extensive institutionalization of its humanism.

And all these phenomenal changes were made possible only because they were based upon the Chou founders’ reflection on their historical experience—exactly what the Shang rulers should have done. “The mirror for the Yin (Shang) was not far away! It was in the end of the Hsia [殷鏡不遠，在夏后之世].” Unfortunately (or fortunately?), the Shang people had not realized it, or had simply forgotten it. Thus they were now history themselves. If the new Chou dynasty meant to avoid the same fate, the only thing its rulers


30 *Hsün-tzu* (SPTK ed.) 13. 8a.


32 *Mao-shih*, 18. 3a.
could do was to learn from history: “We must use the Yin as our mirror/ [Learning from it how] to secure the great mandate[雲鑒于殷, 謂命不易].”

History turns out to be the only place where humans can observe the operation of Heaven (The Way of Heaven, or Way), as it is the manifestation of the Way on earth by regulating and judging human activities.

Similar reflection on history was undertaken in the West, though it led to a very different conclusion. The capture and sack of Rome by the Goths in 410 compelled Saint Augustine (354-430) to reflect on the event, and write The City of God, the most important of his works. In this work, the collapse of the Roman Empire is taken as God’s punishment for its practice of non-Christian religions. Christianity, accused by many at the time of being responsible for the collapse, is ardently defended and further elaborated into a systematic Augustinianism. Unlike the shift of focus to man in the Chou humanism, however, the construct of the “two cities” in Augustinianism renders the life in human society (Babylon the earthly city) totally insignificant, compared with the spiritual life of Christianity (Jerusalem the city of God). It represents a complete denial of the secular life and an exclusive devotion to religious life. Theology is its focus, and virtually its

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33 Ibid., 16. 2b.
sole content. "His world picture accepts the Christian version of determination: everything follows God's *a priori* design." The Chou humanism puts the ultimate determination of human affairs, albeit via the agency of Heaven or the Way of Heaven, into the hands of humans, who have the freedom of choice in the moral realm. The lessons provided by history are therefore always invaluable to the Chinese, who must make right moral decisions on future occasions. With Augustinianism, however, history is considered once, only to reach the conclusion that everything has been predestined by God, without whom all human life on this planet is totally meaningless, nothing is left for man to do in order to control his life, however well he manages to know his own history. This is basically what makes G. L. Keyes declare that "Whatever one may think of St. Augustine's religious faith as an expression of Christianity, it was, and can still be, disastrous for the study of history." Augustine's negative influence on medieval historiography can be discerned in the following observation by R. G. Collingwood in his well-known *The Idea of History*:

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36 G. L. Keyes, foreword to *Christian Faith and the Interpretation of History: A Study of St. Augustine's Philosophy of History*, viii.
Thus, in medieval thought, the complete opposition between the objective purpose of God and the subjective purpose of man, so conceived that God's purpose appears as the imposition of a certain objective plan upon history quite irrespective of man's subjective purposes, leads inevitably to the idea that man's purposes make no difference to the course of history and that the only force which determines it is the divine nature. . . . The work of providence in history is recognized, but recognized in a way which leaves nothing for man to do.37

For the next one thousand years, it was primarily in this sense that The City of God provided the Middle Ages with a political theory and ideal, with its emphasis on God and religion further reinforced. On the other hand, the early Chou tradition of humanism and its emphasis on history were creatively developed by a great thinker and his successors into Confucianism, which was to function as the predominant political theory and ideal in China for the next two thousand years.

The critical importance granted to history, therefore, was in the first place the foundation of the humanistic cosmological symbolism of the early Chou dynasty, and the very core of it as an organic system. As this humanistic tradition was further developed into Confucianism, history accordingly acquired more significance. The fundamental approach that Confucius employed in advocating his

political agenda was primarily a historical one. His political ideal was the early Chou dynasty: "The Chou had drawn lessons from the two preceding dynasties, and had a great culture. I follow upon Chou [同監於二代，郁郁乎文哉，吾從周]." The Chou referred to here was not that of Confucius's own time, when in his eyes everything was falling down and coming apart, but the dynasty as just founded. The reason for Confucius's following its tenets lay in his belief that the early Chou had drawn invaluable lessons from the experiences of the preceding Hsia and Shang dynasties, and incorporated what it had learned from history into establishing its own perfected system of political institutions and culture. To Confucius, the contemporary situation was intolerable because everything had deviated, and deteriorated, from the early Chou standard—even a cornered vessel (ku 甗) had a weird shape in his day. Facing such a corrupted reality, he turned back to history—to the past rather than the future—for his ideal: "If anyone entrusts me [with administration], I can make 'a Chou in the east'[如有用我者，吾其為東周]." To him, the tomorrow of his home state of Lu lay in the yesterday of the Chou. When Confucius was upholding the "used-to-be" early Chou as

38  *Lun-yû*, 2. 5b.

39  See *Lun-yû*, 3. 17b-18a.

40  *Ibid*, 9. 3a. Confucius's state, the State of Lu, was in the east of the Chou court, present-day Shan-tung province.
what the society of his own day "ought to be," he was upholding past history against present reality—history as the judge who found present reality guilty of imperfection. He took as his own mission to elaborate on early Chou institutions. With this historical approach, Confucius defined his own effort as merely transmitting theoretically what the early Chou founders had accomplished in practice—declaring himself to be "transmitting but not creating, believing in and loving the Ancients [述而不作, 信而好古]." This historical approach has been later developed into a paradigm that is so characteristically "Chinese." Western utopias, for example, are usually ideals projected either into certain "nowhere" in an unspecified time, as in Thomas More's *Utopia*, or into a distant future, as in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000-1887*. Chinese utopias—the perfect societies under Sages Yao, Shun, Yu, and the righteous rulers of the Hsia, Shang and early Chou dynasties—are ideals reportedly discovered in a remote, but nonetheless historical, past. Even when Tao' Ch'ien placed his utopia, The Peach Blossom Fount (桃花源), in his current time, i.e., the Chin dynasty, he painstakingly made sure it was completely


insulated against the rest of the contemporary society, so that its inhabitants could securely live in their own ancient past—"When asked what dynasty it was now, they even didn't know that there had been a dynasty called Han, not to mention the Wei and Chin (問今是何世，乃不知有漢，無論魏晉)." While Western utopias appeal to the authority of idealized human reason and imagination, Chinese utopias appeal to the authority of substantiated historical factuality. Presented in this manner, practicality was never questioned—history saw it before, and this is why history should, and will, always have the final say. Reconstructing and reinterpreting history became the major approaches with which the Confucians advocated their political agenda and moral standard. On the one hand, it was believed the perfect society only existed during the period from Yao and Shun through the "Three dynasties," all later times fell short of it. On the other hand,

The eternal existence of the Tao is not something that humans can change—it is what has existed since the time immemorial and will never vanish. Although it has been tampered with by the later rulers for the past one thousand and five hundred years, still it could not be destroyed.

44 See T'ao Ch'ien 邵, Ching-chieh hsien-sheng chi 靖節先生集 (SPPY ed.) 6. 1a-4a.

In the last analysis, the history of the times since Yao, Shun, and the "Three dynasties," as the result of the interaction between the Way and humans, is still the manifestation of the Way. It is necessary that humans examine it thoroughly "so that the universal laws between heaven and earth and the eternal principles from the ancient through the present can be recognized [庶幾天地之常經，古今之通義，有以得之]." Thus Confucius was reported to have compiled the *Spring and Autumn Annals* for the very purpose of conveying the Way:

I would have liked to convey it [the Way] through airy formulations, but that would not be as profound, relevant, and clear as illustrating it with past events.

That explains why in the eyes of later Confucians like Chu Hsi, this sacred mission of conveying the Way acquires for the *Ch'un-ch'iu* a highest significance— "Nothing among what Confucius did was more

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48 See *Shih-chi*, 130. 3297.
important than the *Ch'un-ch'iu* [孔子之事，莫大於春秋].” According to Mencius, even Confucius himself anticipated that this historical work would be the single most consequential thing he had done on earth: “Some people would appreciate me only because of the *Annals*, and others would condemn me only because of the *Annals* [知我者其惟春秋乎，罪我者其惟春秋乎]!” This is because when presenting events in a historical work, Confucius was in effect demonstrating how the Way of Heaven manifests itself through human activities—nothing could be solemner than it in the entire Confucian cosmological symbolism.

The conviction that history is the manifestation of the Way of Heaven on earth through all human activities means much more than it appears at first glance. Apparently it seems to regard human history as a process determined by a supreme, and superhuman, being. This supreme being, however, is not an anthropomorphised god like in the Hebraic and Christian traditions, but something metaphysical, though still somewhat intentional—that is, Heaven, or the Way of Heaven. And unlike those naughty Greek gods of Homer who display every human foible, the Way of Heaven determines human history in a highly responsible and consistent manner. It imposes a mandatory system of moral standards upon human

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50 See *Meng-tzu*, 6. 13a.
behavior, then metes out rewards or punishments, according to how humans have conformed to these standards. History is the result of this dynamic interaction between the Way of Heaven and man. Since the Way always carries out its determination and judgment through history, history becomes the sole manifestation by which humans are able to recognize the operation of the Way. And since how well a human being has behaved in the “eyes” of the Way can only be measured by how well he has fared in history, saying that human beings are judged by history becomes the same as saying that they are judged by the Way of Heaven. History thus acquires the same ontological authenticity and authority as the Way possesses.

This judgment, or trial, of humans by history, however, is far more complex than a pragmatistic counting of successes vis-à-vis failures. The concept of “history” applied here means more than a factualistic bookkeeping procedure, in which one’s account is closed and balance calculated at the moment he dies. The historical fact that Ch’iin Shih-huang-ti (259-210 B.C.) died on the throne as an all-powerful ruler who had crushed every adversary of his, for instance, by no means indicates that what he did was sanctioned by the Way of Heaven, or approved by history. On the contrary, he has been almost unanimously labeled the most monstrous ruler in the entire Chinese history, and few people have ever aspired to be identified with a figure so disgracefully convicted by history. A historical judgment means not only how well one has fared factually in the limited lifetime of his own, but more importantly, how he has turned out
morally when put in the broader perspective of the human history. The narrower perspective of individual life-span tends to nurture a cynical amoralism, as it has been long discovered that happiness or suffering proportional to man's moral standing is rarely, if ever, distributed to him during his lifetime. Various kinds of approach were thus contrived in order to sustain morality in human societies. Among them two have been widely employed. One is the religious speculation about the "afterlife," as in Christianity or certain variations of Buddhism. According to beliefs of this kind, life goes on after death, and all the injustices in this life will be redressed and compensated for then and there, and by a superhuman judge. The humanistic approach of Confucianism represents another approach. The uniqueness of this mainstream of traditional Chinese thoughts lies in that it breaks through the narrowness of individual life-span, without having recourse to the esoteric territory of an "afterlife." This is achieved by introducing the perspective of history as the continuance of the collective behaviors of the human community. A value much higher than individual success and failure, i.e., the interest of the human community (a nation, people, or even the entire mankind) could be thus explored and established. The judgment by history turns out to be the "Last judgment" on every human being, in this interest of the human community, by a consistent system of moral standards. Furthermore, there is nothing enigmatic or abstruse about the moral standards applied in this judgment by history. They are believed to have been fully recognized
and formulated in the Confucian morality, under categories such as Jen 仁 (Benevolence), I 義 (Righteousness), Li 禮 (Propriety), Chih 智 (Sagacity), Hsin 信 (Trustworthiness), Chung 忠 (Loyalty), Hsiao 孝 (Filial piety), Chieh 節 (Incorruptibility), Yung 勇 (Valor) and the like. And this Confucian morality is apparently also believed to be the human morality, by which the Way determines man’s fate and judges him through history. By comprehending and complying with it, man takes the complete control over his fate back into his own hand.

It is in this sense that writing of history in traditional China acquired a critical importance. A human effort as it was, it nevertheless assumed a sacred mission. It took as its obligation to clarify the operation of the Way by truthfully documenting historical events, and appropriately carrying out moral praises and condemnations. As declared by Ssu-ma Ch’ien, the ultimate motive that inspired himself to devote his entire life to writing the Records of the Grand Historian was that “to explore [the interaction] between Heaven and human [究天人之際], and the only way for man to do that is “to search through the changes from the ancient time to the present [通古今之變].” And by so doing, the writing of history in fact becomes part of this grand operation of the Way, since as the only way to demonstrate and interpret it to humans, it alone makes

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51 See Han-shu, 63. 2735.
possible for man to recognize the Way, and therefore interact with it appropriately.

How Confucianism, merely one among the “one hundred schools” of the pre-Ch’ in era, was eventually institutionalized as the state orthodoxy, further testifies to the extreme importance of history to Chinese culture as a whole. This institutionalization was accomplished during the years of Emperor Wu of the Former Han (r. 140-87 B.C.), and was in the final analysis accomplished by appealing to the authority of history. The pivotal figure of this event, Tung Chung-shu 董仲舒 (179-104 B.C.), was first known as a master of the Kung-yang 公羊 school of the Ch’un-ch’ iu. When in the year of 143 B.C. the Emperor sought from all his learned subjects “the essential of the great Way and the utmost of the profound idea [大道之要，至論之極],” Tung submitted the famous “Three theses on the Relationship between Heaven and Man [天人三策].” As an organic unit, the three theses are based on the Kung-yang interpretation of the Ch’un-ch’ iu. The first one begins with the statement that “I carefully studied the Ch’un-ch’ iu, and found that by examining the past events of the previous dynasties recorded in it, [one can] observe the interaction between Heaven and man. And this relationship is very awe-inspiring [臣謹按春秋之中，視前世已行

52 Scholars of the Kung-yang school concentrated on its “great meaning [大義]” in interpreting the Ch’un-ch’ iu.

53 See biography of Tung Chung-shu in the Han-shu, 56. 2495-2528.
He then proceeds to construct in the main body of the three theses his t'ien jen he-i (Heaven-man harmony) cosmology, substantiating it with historical events recorded in the Ch'un-ch'iu and other works. And finally, he concludes the third thesis by going back to the Ch'un-ch'iu again:

The great unity advocated in the Ch'un-ch'iu is the universal law between Heaven and Earth, and the permanent order throughout the ancient and present. . . . I believe that whatever is not part of the Six disciplines of the Confucian school should be banned, not permitted to advance along with Confucianism. Only when all distorted ideas are extinguished, can the principles be unified and laws clarified, and will the people know what to follow.

春秋大一統者，天地之常經，古今之通誼也。. . . .臣愚以爲皆不在六藝之科孔子之術者，皆絶其道，勿使並進。邪辟之說誠息，然後統紀可一而法度可明，民知所從矣。54

This approach of Tung Chung-shu in advocating his political ideal and contending for its hegemony, was exactly that of Confucius, i.e., to convey the Way as he comprehended by demonstrating it with historical events.55 The only difference is that while Confucius did it by editing the Ch'un-ch'iu, Tung Chung-shu did it by

54 See Ibid.

55 See Chou Fu-ch'eng 周輔成, Lun Tung Chung-shu ssu-hsiang 論董仲舒思想 (Shanghai: Shanghai jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1962), 14-18.
reinterpreting that historical work. As pointed out by Fung Yu-lan in his *A History of Chinese Philosophy*:

After his [Confucius's] death the work [the *Ch’un-ch’iu*] became increasingly favored by the Confucian school, which offered interpretations more and more elaborate of what it believed to be its hidden inner meaning. It was only with Tung Chung-shu, however, that this “esoteric meaning” received its most systematic treatment.5 6

The interpretation of the *Ch’un-ch’iu* occupies the first seventeen of the total seventy-nine chapters in the extant *Ch’un-ch’iu fan-lu* (Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals), and serves as the foundation on which Tung Chung-shu constructs his Heaven-man harmony cosmology.5 7 This cosmology sanctions Confucianism with the celestial authority of Heaven by defining Heaven with the Confucian humanism, and all this is accomplished by appealing to the unquestionable authority of history. And this historical approach obviously worked well with the Emperor who, according to a statement of his own, also deeply believed in the persuasion and applicability of history: "He who truly knows to talk about Heaven can always corroborate his ideas with human affairs; he who truly


5 7 See Tung Chung-shu 董仲舒, *Ch’un-ch’iu fan-lu* 春秋繁露 (SPPY ed.).
knows to talk about the past can always evidence his ideas with the present [善言天者必有徵於人，善言古者必有徵於今].”58 As this cosmology was adopted by Emperor Wu as the state ideology, Confucianism for the first time secured for itself a political predominance in Chinese society.59

And this importance of history to the thought tradition of Confucianism has not been challenged or questioned ever since. Even in the Sung period when the Neo-Confucianism leaned heavily toward tsun te-hsing 尊德性 (emphasizing the morality) at the expense of concrete knowledge, august historical works, such as the Tzu-chih t'ung-chien 資治通鑑 (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government) by Ssu-ma Kuang 司馬光 (1019-1086) and the T'ung-chien kang-mu 通鑑綱目 (Abridged View of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government) by Chu Hsi, also made their appearance. And when the Confucians in the Ch'ing era turned back to tao wen-hsûeh 道問學 (emphasizing concrete knowledge),60 scholars like Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng even contended that history is all a Confucian really needs to know, as there is nothing else in the literature at all: “The six

58 See biography of Tung Chung-shu in the Han-shu, 56. 2495-2528.

59 See Ibid.

classics are all history [六經皆史也].”\(^{61}\) However radical it may sound, this statement remains in spirit consistent with the mainstream of Confucian tradition. As pointed out by David Nivison:

Indeed, the Classics by themselves, Chang thinks, are not sufficient to reveal the tao fully. For what they do reveal, they reveal by showing what has been and what has happened in the past. Ultimately it is history itself, the course of events, that reveals the tao, and obviously only a part of this. And so from time to time the labors of the historian are needed to enable us to complete our understanding. in doing this, his work preserves the virtue of the Classics: it does not state the tao in “empty” words but exhibits it “in doings and in things.”\(^{62}\)

Accordingly, sufficient knowledge and appropriate comprehension of history became an indispensable component of the self-cultivation of every Confucian intellectual. Meanwhile a phrase like “learned in history as well as the classics [熟讀經史]” became the evaluation a competent scholar-official had to obtain. What we witness here is a typical case of what happened, as Benjamin Schwartz observes, in many higher civilizations:

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\text{[T]he search for new meanings in all these civilizations continues to be refracted through preexistent cultural orientations. . . . the movements of thought which emerged}
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\(^{61}\) Chang Hsūeh-ch'eng i-shu , 1.

during the axial age were profoundly to shape, both directly and indirectly, the entire subsequent history of all these cultures. The problematiques posed by the axial age were in intricate and often unanticipated ways to enter into the subsequent history of human culture in all the higher civilizations.\textsuperscript{63}

It was from the extraordinary significance placed on history that the thought of the Chou founders had acquired its humanistic character. And this humanism in turn formed the foundation for the further development of this history-orientedness in Confucianism. From early Chou's te (virtue) and li (rites) to Confucius's emphasis on jen (humanity or benevolence), the true focus of this thought tradition remained human morality. And its humanistic concern with morality makes history a core in Confucianism. To a Confucian, history is always a serious matter. Whenever history is concerned, it is his fundamental conviction, his highest value, ultimate meaning of life, and the security of his entire cosmological symbolism that are the real issues. And this is one of the basic reasons why poetry on history should turn out to possess such a profound cultural significance.

Poetry, another element synthesized in the genre poetry on history, also occupies a special position in Confucianism. For this

reason, before analyzing in detail how poetry is employed by the Confucian intellectuals to convey their fundamental conviction about human life, we need first to understand why it is employed at all. Poetry, or understood in a broader sense as the concept is frequently used metonymically in Confucian discourse, literature and art, is granted an extraordinary importance in the Confucian thought tradition. And this importance should be investigated from three different, yet closely interconnected, points of view.

The first is that of ontology. Literature was believed by many in traditional China to have originated from the Tao 道, the ultimate principle of the universe. As pointed out by James Liu in his Chinese Theories of Literature, this notion can be found in Confucian classics such as the I-ching (Book of Changes) and Li-chi (Book of Rites). The most systematic theorization of this metaphysics of literature, however, is to be found in Liu Hsieh's Wen-hsin tiao-lung 文心雕龍 (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragon), the single most important work of Chinese theory of literature, written in the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries. The first three chapters of this fifty-chapter work are exclusively devoted to elaborating on a Confucian version of the “metaphysical” (James Liu’s term) theory of literature. Since both t’ien (heaven) and ti 地 (earth) have their respective wen 文 (configurations or

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patterns of phenomena), Liu Hsieh claims, it is only natural that jen 人 (human), as one of the san-ts'ai 三才 (three talents) which together constitute the universe, will have the wen of its own. And since human is the hsin 心 (mind or heart) of the universe, its wen is accordingly unique compared with that of heaven and earth. It is the pattern and configuration of language, i.e., literature: "Once mind was born, language was established; once language was established, wen [patterns of language/literature] shone forth [心生而言立，言立而文明]."65 Although this human wen is directly created by the sages, thus in this sense not a natural phenomenon like the wen of heaven and earth, it nevertheless possesses the same ontological authenticity as do the other two: "Hence we know that the Tao displays wen through the sages, and the sages reveal the Tao by the means of wen (literature) [故知道以圣以垂文，圣因文而明道]."66 There is no question that the Tao here, taken as the ultimate source of all human wen —literature, is the Confucian Tao. It is evidenced not only by Liu Hsieh's taking the Confucian Liu-ching 六經 (Six classics) as examples of how the sages revealed the Tao through wen in Chapter One "Yüan Tao[原道]" (Tracing the Origin of Literature to the Tao), but by his glorifying Confucian sages as the


66 Ibid .., 3.
perfect literary writers in Chapter Two "Cheng-sheng [程聖]" (Judging Literature by the Sages' Writings), and his upholding Confucian classics as the supreme models of all literary genres in Chapter Three "Tsung-ching [宗經]" (Modeling after the Confucian Classics).

This belief in the ontological authenticity of literature is a very influential one in Chinese literary history. As James Liu points out, it was also voiced by important critics, scholars, and poets such as Ying Yang (d. 217), Chih Yu (d. c. 312), and Hsiao T'ung (501-531), among many others.67 And while James Liu views this "metaphysical" notion as one of the several parallel notions about the nature of literature—among which are the "expressive," "pragmatic," "aesthetic," and "technical" notions—with equal theoretical status, it should be noted that these latter notions are actually not as theoretically exclusive of the "metaphysical" one as one might have assumed. For instance, viewing literature as the expression of the author's feelings and emotions, does not necessarily invalidate the feasibility of viewing all "legitimate" human feelings and emotions as, in the last analysis, coming from an ultimate source in the universe. Therefore as far as the fundamental nature of literature is concerned, the "expressive" notion could be considered subsidiary to the "metaphysical" one. Again, the emphasis of the "pragmatic" notion

on the proper social function of literature, is more often than not based on the belief that the only way literature can carry out this function is to convey the ultimate truth of the universe, i.e., the Tao. Liu Hsieh made it very clear: "The reason words can move the people throughout the country, is that they are the *Wen* of the Tao [辭之所以能鼓天下者，乃道之文也]." 68 In other words, the "pragmatic" notion should be better regarded as an application of the "metaphysical" notion about the nature of literature. Only with this comprehension can we explain why the most characteristic doctrine of the pragmatic school has been nothing but "wen i tsai-Tao [文以載道]" (literature is to convey the Tao). James Liu observes that in the T'ang and later periods a shift from the metaphysical concept of Tao to the moralistic one accompanied the shift from the metaphysical notion of literature to the pragmatic.69 What we should bear in mind is that only the Taoist concept of Tao can be viewed as having an amoral overtone, in the sense that it refutes the Confucian morality without presenting a morality of its own, at least a morality as usually understood, i.e., a doctrine or system of morals. But as far as the Confucian tradition is concerned, the "metaphysical" from the start implied the moralistic and pragmatic, while the "pragmatic" presupposes, and is based on, the


69 See *Chinese Theories of Literature*, 29
metaphysical. It is this Confucian tradition that played a predominant role in the realm of literature and art, as in that of polity and ideology. And that is the object of our investigation in this project. While the existence of other notions about literature, such as the “expressive,” “pragmatic,” and “technical” ones, should not be denied, greater attention must be called to the “metaphysical” notion, so that its profound theoretical implication can be fully explored.

A comparison of this Confucian view on literature and art with the Platonic view immediately reveals a fundamental difference between these two influential ancient philosophies. To Plato, poetry and art are the imitation by poets and artists of the material world, which itself is an imitation of the Forms (or Ideas). Poetry and art are therefore three (should be two) removes away from the truth. This ontological unauthenticity renders poetry and art unredeemably insignificant. In the Confucian view, however, literature is the manifestation of the Tao via the sages. To put in trendy jargon, the sages do not “speak” literature, literature “speaks” them. The intermediation of the sages in this process of manifestation does nothing to nullify or even diminish the ontological authenticity of literature. And it is this believed ontological authenticity that underlies the great attention paid to literature and art in the Confucian tradition.

The second viewpoint, from which we are to examine the Confucian emphasis on literature and art, is one of philosophical
anthropology. Here a clarification of the term philosophical anthropology as employed in this dissertation should be provided first. Etymologically, anthropology means "the science of man." Yet it would be more accurate today to view it as one of the sciences of man. There are three kinds of anthropology most frequently referred to today: physical anthropology, cultural anthropology, and philosophical anthropology. Both physical anthropology and cultural anthropology are basically empirical and descriptive disciplines. Physical anthropology seeks to determine man's place in nature, to compare him with other primates, and to interpret the physical differences among the various races. Cultural anthropology, on the other hand, inquires into the customs, beliefs, behaviors, and organizations of various human societies. Physical anthropology asserts itself as a natural science, whereas cultural anthropology claims itself as a social science. Unlike either of the two, philosophical anthropology belongs to the humanities, and focuses on exploring the value aspect of human existence. A clear definition of philosophical anthropology is provided by Nicholas Rescher in his 1990 book *Human Interests: Reflections on Philosophical Anthropology*. It is quoted below at length to adequately draw the perspective for our further examination of the Confucian emphasis on literature and art.

Philosophical anthropology is a fundamentally normative discipline whose mission is to study what is involved in "the good life." . . . The prime aim of the subject is to identify and
clarify the things that people should give attention to because to neglect them impoverish their lives. Its concern is with the matters that people should—and, if sensible, would—seek to employ as governing principles in the management of their lives. Accordingly, philosophical anthropology treats primarily the value aspect of human existence, inquiring into what is of particular interest to us and what is of particular importance for us. . . . It does not deal with one's idiosyncratic views, preferences, reliefs, predilections. Rather, it seeks to examine and clarify the general aspects of the human condition that hold good for everybody, addressing the issues that any sensible person should confront because they represent matters of importance and concern for people at large. The business of philosophical anthropology is thus with the universal principles that should lie at the basis of one's own particular approach to life. . . . [It ] is concerned with evaluative deliberations about the good life—with ideals and with normative questions about how people ought ideally to live.\(^0\)

It is in this sense philosophical anthropology is believed to have occupied the center of attention of those philosophers of Greek antiquity—and we should add, those of the ancient China.\(^1\) That is why the Confucian notion about literature and art must also be understood from this point of view. As far as its theoretical organicity is concerned, the anthropological significance of literature is directly derived from its ontological authenticity. The necessity for the Tao to manifest itself in literature through human


\(^1\) See *Ibid*., 1.
agency makes it mandatory that humans be able to fulfill this cosmic function. It is at least partly due to its faculty to do so that "human" is not only included as one of the "three talents," but held to be the best among them—the mind or heart of the universe. Failure to perform this cosmic function will disqualify one as a wholly realized human. Literary cultivation and artistic refinement, as a man's aesthetic sensibility and competence, are thus in Confucianism far from cosmetic or ancillary for the gentleman. They are regarded as the defining essence of human nature. The ontological authenticity of literature and art makes aesthetic sensibility the anthropological prerequisite for human. Only from this point of view can we fully comprehend that seemingly iron-clad rule Confucius sets for the cultivation of his own son:

He who has not studied the poetry [in the Book of Songs ], can't, and shouldn't, speak.

不學詩，無以言.72

This statement on poetry parallels another on the rites, in which Confucius insists "He who has not learned the rites, can't stand among other humans [不學禮，無以立]."73 Cultivating one's aesthetic sensibility is regarded as having the same importance as abiding by

72 Lun-yū, 8. 18a.

73 Ibid.
the proper rites—the outward concretization of one's inner humanity (Jen 4). A statement with such a stress immediately sheds light on all those consonant assertions, by which great importance is once and again placed by Confucianism upon literature, music, and art.

Once again, a comparison with Plato's idea on aesthetic sensibility as part of human nature turns out to be quite interesting. Acknowledging man's inclination to delight in poetry and art, Plato nevertheless looks down upon it as the weakness of human nature. Activated and gratified in the appreciation of poetry and art is the "mindless part" of the human soul that is sensory, appetitive, emotional, and essentially deceiving, with its focus on images, appearances, excessive feelings and emotions.74 A perfected human nature is, to Plato, one that has purified itself by repressing or purging all these lower properties. The Platonic perfection of human nature is primarily a process of subtracting and excluding, which eventually privileges philosopher—the lover of truth who has learned "to consort with reality [Forms or Ideas], and not to remain living among the multiplicity of particular things"—as the only man suitable to be the king.75 This line of thinking later reached its zenith in Hegel's gigantic philosophical system. Hegel arranges religion, art, and philosophy into a scheme, presented as a


75 Ibid., 147.
valuational hierarchy as well as a genetric order, in which both religion and art are eventually to be displaced by philosophy as the final and perfect realization of the Absolute Spirit in human mind.\textsuperscript{76} An ontology of this kind, when “anthropologized” as Hegel did in his \textit{The Philosophy of History}, becomes the conviction that “man’s existence centers in his head, i.e., in Thought, inspired by which he builds up the world of reality.”\textsuperscript{77} "Hegel’s stubborn maintenance of reason as the sole dominating principle in the intellectual world—an attitude that could appropriately be called his totalitarianism of reason” is the inevitable result of the development of this age-old Western philosophical anthropology,\textsuperscript{78} the anti-literary and anti-artistic prejudice of which is not deniable.

In sharp contrast to this line of Western philosophical anthropology, the Confucian notion of the perfection of human nature is essentially one of nurturing, enriching, and fulfilling. Literary refinement and aesthetic sensibility are not something to be repressed, purged, or replaced, but properly cultivated. Confucius is


\textsuperscript{78} See Ernst Behler, Introduction to \textit{Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings} by Hegel, xi.
well aware of the fact that poetry exerts a powerful influence on human feelings and emotions, and welcomes it exactly for that:

Why do you boys not study the *Book of Poetry*? Poetry can be used to stimulate the mind, to observe people's feelings, to connect yourself with the others, and to express your grievances.

This power of poetry to affect humans emotion is precisely why it is so serviceable; it can be utilized to nurture what it affects, which are vital parts of what is totally human. Compared with Plato, Confucius holds a quite genial standard in judging poetry. As have been noticed above, he unhesitantly declares that all poems in the *Book of Songs* are morally flawless. Read against the astonishing variety of the themes and sentiments expressed in those poems, the open-mindedness of this judgment by the founder of Confucianism is very impressive.

Besides poetry and literature, music is another realm where this Confucian emphasis on man's aesthetic sensibility can be observed. The typical Confucian definition of the nature of music is given by Hsün Tzu in one single sentence:

Music is delight, and it is what human nature cannot do without.

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79 *Lun-yü*, 9. 5ab.
If it is part of human nature, the question then becomes not how to eliminate it, but how to cultivate it properly. It is no surprise that music was among those subjects required of Confucius’ disciples. Since “music is what cultivates the human heart [樂以治心],”81 “a man cannot part from the rites and music even for an instant [禮樂不可斯須去身]” —just as he cannot for an instant part from his own heart.82 Again, the profound reason for an imperative like this lies in the Confucian belief that aesthetic sensibility is a vital ingredient of human nature. In his explication of Confucius’s somewhat cryptic commentary on Tzu-sang Po-tzu 子桑伯子 as chien 簡 (lax),83 the famous Confucian scholar Liu Hsiang 劉向 (c. 79-c. 6 B.C.) of the Former Han dynasty elaborates on this belief as follows:

To be lax is to be crude and barbarous; to be crude and barbarous is to be lacking in rites and beautification. . . . Substance without wen (ornamentation / beautification) is called crude and barbarous. Tzu-sang Po-tzu was crude and

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80 Hsün-tzu, 14. 1a.
75 Li-chi, 11. 19b.
82 Ibid.
83 See Lun-yū, 3. 10b.
barbarous—he wanted to equate human nature with the nature of cow and horse.

簡者，易野也，易野者，無禮文也。......有質而無文，謂之易野。
子桑伯子易野，欲同人道於牛馬。84

No matter in how broad a sense the concept wen is used here, its essence is undoubtedly the cultivation and exercise of man's aesthetic sensibility. In the Confucian tradition, it is part of what differentiates man from beasts, part of what defines the human as unique and best among all beings in the universe. Therefore if man is to live a genuinely human life, he must strive to cultivate his aesthetic sensibility by engaging in the spirited study and practice of poetry, literature, and music.

The third viewpoint we are to adopt in examining the Confucian stress on literature and art is that of ethics. Another reason that literature, art, and aesthetic sensibility occupy a position so critical in Confucianism is that they are believed to be able to lead man onto the moral path. And here again, our attention is immediately caught up by the poignant contrast it forms to certain influential traditions in Western thought. To Plato, for instance, poetry and music are obstacles to man's recognition the Good, fundamentally due to their ontological unauthenticity and

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84 Liu Hsiang 劉向, Shuo-yūan 説苑 (Pai-pu ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng 百部叢書集成 ed.) 19. 15b.
anthropological deficiency. The Good is the highest knowledge and accordingly can be known only with the highest part of the human soul, i.e., his understanding (noesis). Art appeals to man's imagination—the lowest part of the soul. By activating the sensory, appetitive, emotional and deceiving part of the human soul, art blocks the vision of man's intelligence, the most important function of which is to recognize the Good, the highest knowledge. Literature and art thus turn out to be a kind of immoral activity, harmful to the moral cultivation of an individual and the maintenance of morality in a society. Therefore if the precondition to personal cultivation is to repress the lower part of one's soul, such as imagination and emotion, the precondition to a healthy society is to drive away the poets.

If Plato condemns literature and art for being immoral, another influential Western aesthetics tradition, that of Immanuel Kant, did nothing more than dismiss them as amoral. Kant stresses the independence of aesthetic judgment, i.e., its neutrality and irrelevancy to utility and morality. The aesthetic is to Kant essentially neither harmful to morality, nor useful. It is simply irrelevant. Morality has nothing to do with the emotionality and delicacy of one's aesthetic sensibility. It pertains to the clear-cut reason only. A thorough critique of the pure practical reason would be sufficient to clarify and establish the "categorical imperative."

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85 See Plato's Republic, 164-66.
For man to be self-assured about the guaranteed “second element of the highest good, i.e., happiness proportional to that morality,” all that reason needs to do is to postulate the existence of a Christian God Who will eventually mete out rewards and punishments according to the moral standing of everyone.\textsuperscript{86} The same holds true when it comes to the practice of this reasoned-out morality, “since nothing but reason is required in order to impose them [moral actions] on the will.”\textsuperscript{87} Kant isolates ethics from aesthetics also because he believes that moral behavior is dutiful, but never can, nor should, be delightful. As he unequivocally states, “These [moral] actions need no recommendation from any subjective disposition or taste in order that they may be looked upon with immediate favor and satisfaction, nor do they have need of immediate propensity or feeling directed to them.”\textsuperscript{88} Therefore Kant’s moral man acts according to the “categorical imperative,” accepting suffering or even self-sacrifice as an obligation, but without any spontaneous inclination or gladness. To act morally without suffering would imply a “perfect purity of the disposition of will”—something only


\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Ibid}. 
God can possess. For a human to act not only morally, but “from a spontaneous inclination or from an endeavor unbidden but gladly undertaken,” is to Kant “nothing but blatant moral fanaticism and exaggerated self-conceit.” A defining line is uncompromisingly drawn between man and God. This is quite characteristic of the Christian tradition with its concept of “original sin,” and its hard and fast distinction between the divine and the human. It is no surprise that even Jesus Christ, due to the fact that he was also a "Son of Man," turned out to be unable to transcend this limit. On the eve of his predetermined arrest and crucifixion, he pled three times to God that “If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.”

In the tradition of Confucianism, however, literature, art, and the aesthetic are neither immoral (Plato), nor amoral (Kant). They are inextricably interwoven with man’s moral cultivation, about the goal of which Confucianism maintains a faith substantially different from the Kantian or Christian ones.

As to how high a state man can reach in his moral cultivation, a significant difference between the Western and Chinese beliefs is pointed out by Professor Chang Hao in his Yu-an i-shih yū min-chu ch’uan-t’ung (The Consciousness of the Darkness and the Democratic Tradition). Professor Chang employs the concept

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89 *Critique of Practical Reason*, 88.

90 Ibid.
of "consciousness of the darkness" to explore how the dark side of human nature was differently recognized and dealt with in traditional Western and Chinese cultures. The consciousness of this dark side of human nature, according to Professor Chang, had been deeply rooted in the ancient Hebrew religion, and was later inherited and further developed by Christianity. Man is believed to have alienated himself from his Creator and therefore is sinful and corrupt. He can be salvaged, but never be perfected, never be as good as God. In Confucianism, Professor Chang then observes, there is a seemingly similar yet fundamentally different consciousness of this dark side of human nature, and it in the final analysis necessarily leads to man's aspiring to, and striving for, his moral perfection, instead of summarily ruling out its possibility in advance. The predominant Confucian conviction is an optimistic one, i.e., that everyone is capable of achieving the sagehood characterized by moral perfection. Professor Chang believes that this difference at least partly accounts for the two different approaches adopted to political practice. That is, while Western democratic tradition has striven to construct a political system of separated powers to control politicians and leaders who will be morally imperfect anyway, Confucian tradition has been always longing for that perfect sage to be the virtuous ruler.91 It should be pointed out that this

91 See Chang Hao 張 Hao, Yu-an i-shih yü min-chu ch'uan-t'ung 幽暗意識與民主傳統 (Taipei: Lien-ching ch'u-pan shih-yeh kung-ssu, 1990), 3-32.
observation is also quite illuminating to the two different approaches accordingly adopted to personal moral cultivation. On the one hand, the presence in Western culture of an anthropomorphised God clearly demarcates the potential of man's moral cultivation, thus defining man as a being that can never achieve moral perfection. As reflected in Kantian ethics, man is even obliged not to strive for it. The best he can, and should, do, is to be constrained by the moral law, while only "a holy will" is capable of being "necessarily in unison with the law."\(^{92}\) On the other hand, the absence in the Confucian tradition of such an anthropomorphised God leaves the sky to be the limit to the ascent and transcendence of human morality and spirituality. Everyone is entitled to perfect himself morally, and urged to do so, until he eventually achieves sagehood. The criterion of this consummation of personal cultivation is man's achievement of a "state-of-the-art" mastery of the moral law, which then does not constrain him, but functions "in unison" with him. This is exactly how Confucius once vividly described his personal experience:

> At fifteen I set my heart upon learning. At thirty, I had planted my feet firm on the ground. At forty, I no longer suffered confusion from anything. At fifty, I comprehended the

\(^{92}\) Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Critique of Practical Reason: And Other Writings in Moral Philosophy*, 73.
commands of Heaven. At sixty, I had docile ears [to understand all the subtleties]. At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired without crossing the line.

吾十有五而志于學。三十而立。四十而不感。五十而知天命。六十而耳順。七十而從心所欲不逾矩。93

Obeying the moral law as an obligation is not yet the highest state of human cultivation; internalizing it as an intuitive desire is. That one can act freely as his heart desires without ever violating the moral standard signals such a successful internalization. In light of this pursuit of moral internalization, the repeated lament of Confucius that he has “never seen one who loves virtue the way he loves beauty [吾未見好德如好色者也],”94 expresses less a sad acceptance of its impossibility than an adamant aspiration for its realization. On another occasion, such a supreme state of personal moral cultivation has been described by Confucius as if he meant it to forefend the Kantian ethics, which was to come more than two thousand year later:

93 Lun-yū, 1. 10ab.
94 See Ibid., 5. 7a, and 8. 4b. Arthur Waley translates the word sex as “sexual desire,” which might highlight the necessity of internalizing and intuitionalizing the moral law to an even greater extent.
He who knows it [the Way] cannot match the one who prefers it, and he who prefers it cannot match the one who delights in it.

知之者不如好之者，好之者不如樂之者。95

If Kant’s imperfect, but moral, man is the one who knows the moral law and is more or less reluctantly constrained by it, a Confucian sage is the one who not only prefers, but sincerely delights in, behaving according to it. This state of nei-sheng (inner sagehood) is the highest state of human moral cultivation which Confucianism believes achievable to everyone, and has been leaving no means untried to achieve.

Due to the absence of a God in the humanistic cosmological symbolism of Confucianism, this human moral/spiritual ascent and transcendence turn to the aesthetic in its search for an accessible path. Literature and art are believed to be able to affect human morality forcefully and profoundly, as they come from, and go deep into, the bottom of man’s heart. As the “Preface to the Mao Version of the Shih-ching (毛詩序 or 詩大序)” sums up:

Poetry is where the aspiration goes. It is aspiration when within the heart, and poetry when expressed in language. Feelings and emotions surge within, then take shape in speech; as speech becomes inadequate they are expressed sighs and exclamations; when sighs and exclamations become inadequate

95 Ibid., 3. 16b.
they are expressed in prolonged songs; when prolonged songs become inadequate, unconsciously the arms begin to move and the feet to dance.

詩者，志之所之也，在心為志，发言為詩。情動於中而形於言，言之不足故嗟嘆之，嗟嘆之不足永歌之，永歌之不足，不知手之舞之，足之蹈之也。96

Highlighted here is the observed sincerity of man's deep feelings and emotions when he is experiencing poetry, music, and dance. The effectiveness of literature and art in moral cultivation is a conclusion based upon this observation. The reason Confucianism advocates "using music to cultivate man's heart [致樂以治心],"97 for instance, is that "music is the only thing which man can never fake [唯樂不可以偽]."98 According to Mencius, when used properly, music can internalize and nurture the Confucian moral law deeply in a man's heart, and transform it from a stern command into something to be delighted in:

The content of Benevolence is to serve one's parents filially; the content of Righteousness is to obey one's elder brothers... The content of music is to delight in these two [moral imperatives]. When they are delighted in, they grow [within

96 Mao-shih, 1. 1b-2a.

97 Li-chi, 11. 19b.

98 Ibid, 13b.
one’s heart. When they grow, how can they be stopped? When they can no longer be stopped, [one] then dances with his feet and waves his arms without knowing it.

仁之實，事親是也；義之實，從兄是也；樂之實，樂斯二者。
樂則生矣，生則恐可已也，恐可已，則不知足之蹈之手之舞之。99

Based on this insightful observation, aesthetic sensibility was employed as a potent device for man’s moral cultivation, as well as an indispensable component of his fully realized humanity. Confucius commanded his disciples to carry out a successful personal moral cultivation in the following way:

Set your heart upon the Way, root yourself in Virtue, lean upon Benevolence, and frolic in the Arts.

志於道，據於德，依於仁，遊於藝。100

The word 藝 here refers to activities such as she 射 (archery), yū 駕 (chariot driving), and yūeh 樂 (music). Since music was so inseparably connected with poetry, literary and aesthetic activities are undoubtedly included in Confucius’s approaches to moral cultivation. Yet more significant here is the verb yu 遊, whose literal meaning is “play.” To command one to play in arts as part of the effort of cultivating his morality implies that one must

99 Meng-tzu, 7. 16b–17a.

100 Lun-yū, 4. 1b–2a.
aestheticize this solemnest process, and genuinely delight in it, if he seeks to internalize the moral law deeply within himself. And this point is further stressed when Confucius divides the entire course of man's moral cultivation into three successive phases:

[A man should be first] inspired by poetry [in the Book of Songs], then given a firm footing by studying rites, and finally perfected by music.

興於詩。立於禮。成於樂。

Studying and practicing poetry and music, as the activities of developing one's aesthetic sensibility, serve as at once the starting point and the finishing line for man's personal moral cultivation. The importance of aesthetic sensibility in moral cultivation could not be further emphasized. The purpose of engaging literature and arts is precisely to nurture this aesthetic sensibility within a person. A sufficiently aestheticized morality represents the highest state of personal moral cultivation, that is, a man who not only knows the moral law and acts according to it, but spontaneously and sincerely delights in doing so. By being aestheticized, the moral law is internalized and intuitionalized. In Mencius's "earthy" metaphor, it is a state in which "Justice and Righteousness delight my heart the way beef and pork please my tongue.

101 Ibid., 14a.
To a man who has reached this state of cultivation, acting according to the moral law is no longer his obligation, but his nature, his spontaneous and delightful way of human existence. This comprehension of the function of the aesthetic in personal moral cultivation, and the predominant Confucian conviction that "All men are capable of becoming a [sage just like] Yao or Shun [人皆可以為堯舜]," have resulted in such a great emphasis upon the social function of literature and art in maintaining morality in the society, that any quotation in this respect would be superfluous. And in the light of this examination, we now discover that although the famous formula "Substitute aesthetic education for religion [以美育代宗教]" was not clearly worked out until the May Fourth Movement in 1919, its practice as an approach to moral cultivation had nevertheless had a long history in Chinese cultural tradition.

In light of this investigation into the genesic connection between poetry and history as established in Confucianism, of its belief in the identical moral function of the two, and of the

102 Meng-tzu, 11. 8b.

103 Ibid., 12. 2a.

104 See Ts'ai Yuan-p'eix Xiàn-shèng ch'üan-chi, ed. Sun Ch'ang-wei (Taipei: Taiwan Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1968), 729-34.
underlying conviction about the essence of both history and poetry, it is no surprise that poetry on history, a distinct literary genre that synthesizes these two elements into an organic entity, was eventually created by the Confucian cultural elite to convey their deepest and most solemn beliefs about human life. No study can do full justice to Confucianism without first recognizing this cultural significance, for only based on this comprehension can we proceed to explore why and how various approaches are employed by the Confucian intellectuals in this distinct genre of poetry to articulate Chinese pan-historicism.
CHAPTER II

MORALIZATION AND SYMBOLIZATION

When historical material is treated in poetry on history, the first process it undergoes is moralization, a process through which historical material is categorized, measured, and evaluated, principally from a viewpoint of morality. A comparison with works of official history on the one hand, and historical novels on the other, will set off the special importance of this moralization process in poetry on history. At the first glance, an all-inclusive moralization, or moralism, seems so prevalent in both Chinese historiography and historical novels, that its presence in poetry on history is reasonably expected, but hardly merits any special attention. An in-depth investigation, however, will immediately lay bare the significant difference among the three.

In historical works, the social status of historical figures is a very important criterion when they are categorized. On the one
hand, however bad or insignificant he was, an emperor will usually be entitled to a separate *Chi* (Annals) of his own in a standard history. On the other hand, a non-royal person can only get a *Chuan* (Biography), arranged behind the biographies of all those inconsequential imperial concubines, even if he is regarded as the greatest man of his time. Ssu-ma Ch'ien made some exceptions in this respect, such as granting Hsiang Yü (232-202 B.C.) a *Penchii* (Basic Annals), Confucius a *Shih-chia* (Hereditary Household). But these were the only exceptions, and never adopted by later historians. Distinction of this kind, however, finds no place in poetry on history: no courtesy will be exercised toward a bad emperor in terms of poetic form, and an insignificant one will simply be ignored. In addition, an emperor usually obtains a more charitable treatment in historical works than in poetry on history. For example, in both the *Chiu T'ang-shu* (Old History of the T'ang Dynasty) and *Hsin T'ang-shu* (New History of the T'ang Dynasty), written by the official historians of later dynasties, Emperor Hsüan-tsung, who is considered responsible for the decline of the T'ang, enjoys a treatment far more amiable than in most poems about him, including those written by Li Shang-yin (c. 813-c. 858), a later T'ang poet and self-claimed relative of the imperial family. Furthermore, moralization or moralism is remarkably less exclusive in historical works, to which a relatively complete portrait of a historical personage is still a legitimate, if not obligatory, objective. The *San-kuo chih* (Records of the
Three Kingdoms), for instance, describes at length the capability in civil administration of Chu-ke Liang 諸葛亮 (181-234), and emphasizes the martial prowess of Kuan Yu關羽 (?-219) and Chang Fei張飛 (?-221). But in poetry on history, what attracts the poets' inspiration most is Chu-ke Liang's unwavering loyalty to the Han regime, while his other attributes are largely downplayed. And Kuan Yü and Chang Fei, along with numerous distinguished warriors, are basically ignored, as martial prowess is never a major concern of poetry on history.

On the other hand, historical novel, a genre that has an origin in popular story-telling and leans sharply towards entertaining the reader, demonstrates a particular tendency of its own in processing historical material. In the San-kuo-chih yen-i 三國志演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms), for instance, Chu-ke Liang is transformed into a synonym for miraculous military strategy, despite the repeated statement in the historical work San-kuo chih 三國志, on which the novel is based, that military strategy was exactly the Achilles heel of this great man:

However, Chu-ke Liang's ability was strong in military administering, but weak in devising unusual plans. He was more capable of civil administration than of military strategy
[然亮才，於治戎為長，奇謀為短，理民之幹，優於將略]."1

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1 Ch'en Shou 陳壽, San-kuo chih 三國志 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1962) 35. 930.
At the same time the martial prowess of Kuan Yū, Chang Fei and others is so exaggerated and reveled in by the novelist, that one cannot imagine what the novel would be like without these sensationalized warriors. In her study of Chinese historical novels, Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang observes several features characteristic of this genre: the glorification of historical or legendary figures and events that emphasize action and drama in the narration; the worship of supermilitary man; the justification of the so-called righteous revolt of rustic heroes as a necessary process of rejuvenating or replacing a degenerating regime; the re-arrangement of the traditional value scale of “three immortalityes [三不朽]” by putting “meritorious public service [立功]” above “moral virtues [立德]” and “words [立言]”;² and the detailed description of social problems and phenomena without getting into the hearts or the roots of these problems.³ Even when it advocates moral concepts, such as righteousness, a historical novel usually does it with a particular emphasis of its own:

² The “three immortalityes” were first elaborated on in the Tso-chuan. Moral virtues were given the highest value, meritorious public service was the second, words were the third. See Tso-chuan, 17. 6b-7a.

In the case of righteousness, the emphases are also shifted from the moral principles that govern the relationship between the sovereign and minister to those that govern the relationship between the individual and the society, in other words the relationship among fellow men. Specifically, they mean three things in historical novels: the ideas (and ideals) of reciprocating favors, mutual appreciation, and sworn brotherhood. All three show elements characteristic of popular heroism.4

The insight and accuracy of this observation can be corroborated by the relationship between Liu Pei 刘备, Kuan Yü and Chang Fei in the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, that among the heroes in the Sui T'ang yen-i 隋唐演義 (Romance of the Sui and the T'ang), and needless to say, that among those one hundred and eight heroes in the Water Margin.

This inter-generic comparison between historical works, historical novel, and poetry on history reveals that while all the three pay great attention upon morality, significant difference does exist. On the one hand, historical works pursue a relatively more comprehensive description of a person’s deeds first. The moral evaluation of him is finally reached, based on this description, presented as a conclusion well substantiated by all the historical facts. On the other hand, historical novel, due to its popular nature, focuses more on action and drama to carry out its entertaining

4 Ibid., 125.
function. As long as the established moral orthodoxy is not violated, it is safe enough to the author, and morally correct enough to the reader. Only poetry on history, as an elite poetic genre with a solemn pursuit, includes neither comprehensive recording nor pleasant entertaining among its major concerns, but uncompromisingly focuses on exploring the moral significance of all kinds of human historical experience and drawing moral lessons from them.

Moralization in poetry on history means that historical material is first categorized essentially from a moral point of view. Social status, official rank, talent, and success or failure, none of these is used as the major category to sort out the numerous historical figures for the basic purpose of cognition. Was A a greater politician than B because he served in a higher position? Was C actually more talented than D, or vice versa? Was E historically less significant than F since the former’s cause failed whereas the latter’s succeeded? These are not the major concerns of the poets writing poetry on history. History is not cognized that way in this specific genre. The predominant “cognitive pattern” is that of morality. And the moral categories applied here are those cardinal Confucian concepts, such as Jen (Benevolence), Li (Righteousness), Li (Propriety), Chih (Sagacity), Hsin (Trustworthiness), Chung (Loyalty), Hsiao (Filial piety), Chieh (Incorruptibility) and Yung (Valor), and so forth. The entire system of these categories serves as a basic framework, into which every
historical event/personage will be arranged and, only after that, begins to truly make sense to the poets. Nothing speaks more of the primary concern of the genre than does a cognitive pattern so predominantly moralistic.⁵

Moralization in poetry on history also means that historical events/personages are primarily measured in terms of morality. In case of a historical figure, for example, the most important question a poet would ask about him is: judged by the Confucian moral standards, was he good or bad, how good or how bad, and in what specific way? If sometimes the social status of a person seems to be taken into consideration, it is only to specify the particular moral standard by which this person should be measured. For instance, if the person treated in a poem is an emperor, then he is to be measured by the specific moral standard set by Confucianism for a good sovereign. He is required to appreciate virtuous and talented subjects, and entrust them with the duty of administration; to discern those wicked sycophants and expel them from his court; to eagerly seek straightforward remonstrance from loyal subjects and

⁵ Even when talent is the apparent topic of a poem, the real issue is usually the morality. According to Confucianism, to recognize people with true talent in spite of their humble family background, poor financial situation, and often immodest personality, and entrust them with state affairs, are among the responsibilities of a righteous ruler or higher official, for it is in the interest of the state and people. Ignored true talent is one of the major signs of a corrupted polity.
correct himself accordingly; to restrain himself from the fatal temptation of excessive drinking, hunting, sexual indulgence, wasteful palace-construction, immortality-seeking, extravagant traveling, and the like. How well an emperor fulfilled this specific moral requirement for his particular social role, determines how well he fares as an emperor in poetry on history.

Moralization in poetry on history also means that historical events/personages are principally evaluated from a moral point of view. Unequivocal praise or condemnation will be expressed by the poets, usually accompanied by intense feelings and emotions. If "intuitive" and "ambiguous" are accurate descriptions of some of classical Chinese poems, they are certainly not of works in this distinct genre. Moral evaluation in poetry on history is never ambiguous or indeterminate. Although a firm Confucian moralistic stand can be found in the statement that "Though a man have gifts as wonderful as those of the Duke of Chou, yet if he be arrogant and mean, all the rest is of no account [如有周公之才之美，便骄且吝，其余不足论也已]." men like Ch'in Shih-huang-ti in the historical work Shih-chi, and Ts'ao Ts'ao in the historical novel San-kuo-chih yen-i, have forced from the historian and the novelist some

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6 See Yanfang Tang, "Mind and Manifestation: The Intuitive Art (miaowu) of Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics (Literary Thinking)" (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 1993).

acknowledgment of their overwhelming energy and power, and their awe-inspiring practical achievements. It is in poetry on history that figures like these two are to be evaluated most strictly by this uncompromising Confucian moral standard.

Thousands of poems on history could serve as apt examples for this moralization process, but analyzing a few of them will be sufficient to make our point clear. A poem by the Sung poet Wen T’ien-hsiang 文天祥 (1236-1283), titled “Huai K’ung-ming 怀孔明 [Thinking of K’ung-ming],” demonstrates how political failure is not considered a liability as long as one preserves his moral integrity:

The Yeh-ku strategy was not successful,\(^8\)
The military star fell in the camps.\(^9\)
The Memorials he wrote on the expedition, Move me to tears reading it today.\(^10\)
Making the critical distinction between the Han and the usurpers, His loyal heart shines in the sky. Were the world to value men by success and failure,

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\(^8\) Yeh-ku was a valley of the Chung-nan Mountains in present-day Shan-hsi province. In 228 Chu-ke Liang declared that he was to lead an expedition against the Wei taking the route of Yeh-ku. But he actually took the route of Ch’i-shan Mountains for a surprise attack.

\(^9\) Chu-ke Liang died in 234 in the military camps during an expedition against the Wei.

\(^10\) Two Memorials are extant and attributed to Chu-ke Liang’s authorship, in which he expressed a determination to carry out his mission of restoring the Han dynasty, even though there was no guarantee that it would be fulfilled.
Ts'ao Ts'ao and Ssu-ma I would be the true heroes.\(^1\)

Chu-ke Liang (courtesy name K'ung-ming) was the Counselor-in-chief (丞相) of the Shu-Han regime (221-263). His lifetime effort was to restore the collapsing Han dynasty, a mission highly regarded by many later historians as a righteous cause. But he died of physical exhaustion during a military expedition against the Wei regime, and his Shu-Han regime was eventually conquered by the

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\(^{11}\) Ts'ao Ts'ao controlled the political power in the Han court during its last years, and his son Ts'ao P'i 曹丕 (187-226) later displaced the Han with the Wei, of which he became the first emperor. Ssu-ma I 司馬懿 (179-251) did the same thing to the Wei and his son Ssu-ma Yen 司馬炎 (236-290) later displaced the Wei with his Chin dynasty.

Wei. The poet, however, insists upon looking at this historical figure exclusively from a viewpoint of morality and evaluate him accordingly. With great respect, he praises Chu-ke Liang for his unwavering loyalty to the legitimate dynasty of Han and his opposition to the Wei usurper. The poet asserts that as long as he upheld the critical moral principles, Chu-ke Liang has secured for himself a place in history as a "true hero" even though his political cause actually failed. At the same time, the poet denies any positive recognition to the winners of this struggle between the Han and Wei regimes, i.e., Ts’ao Ts’ao and Ssu-ma I, because they are viewed as the usurpers of a legitimate dynasty. He imagines the unimaginable that only when the entire world were to evaluate men by success or failure only, historical figures like the two mentioned above would be regarded as heroes.

And unimaginable it is. Even far more powerful figures like Ch’in Shih-huang-ti, let alone figures like Ts’ao Ts’ao and Ssu-ma I, have hardly received a single good word in the world of poetry on history. As the first emperor, Ch’in Shih-huang-ti is in some sense unmatched in political achievement: he unified the whole nation, standardized writing, weights and measures, and most importantly, set up the chün-hsien (commanderies and districts) system of administrative districts for the next two thousand years. Still he is almost unanimously regarded as the cruelest ruler in the entire Chinese history, and this moral factor alone determines the kind of treatment he subsequently received in poetry on history. The poem
titled "Ch'in-huang miao [The Shrine of the Ch'in Emperor]" by the Ming poet Lin Pi 林龺 goes as follows:

The grandeur of annexation has gone with the flowing river water,
Only the deserted shrine attaches to the foot of the hill.
The boats of the immortals were unreachable,13
The bones of soldiers abounded along the Great Wall.
The people of Lu preserved the Chou rites and music,14
The Ch'in land was merely added to the mountains and rivers of the Han.
Had it been known that the Second Emperor would not enjoy a long reign,15
It would have been unnecessary to polish so many stones for monuments.16

13 Ch'in Shih-huang-ti was notorious for his fanatic pursuit for immortality.

14 Despite Ch'in Shih-huang-ti's merciless persecution and bibliocaust, Confucians in the State of Lu managed to preserve the Chou rites and music until the end of Ch'in dynasty, and carried it into the Han.

15 The Ch'in dynasty is counted by most historians as having lasted for fifteen years (221-206 B.C.) and two generations, i. e., Ch'in Shih-huang-ti and his son Hu-hai. Hu-hai's reign lasted for only three years.

16 Ch'in Shih-huang-ti was very fond of erecting stone monuments on the top of the famous mountains he ascended, with grandiose text engraved on them boasting of his unmatched achievements as the first emperor in the entire Chinese history.
Contrasted to a "virtuous loser" like Chu-ke Liang, Ch'in Shih-huang-ti was unquestionably a winner in his political life, but a vicious one. And for this single reason, the only thing he obtains from the poet is the criticism of his pursuit for immortality, his building of the Great Wall, his liking of wars, his persecution of the Confucians and his bibliocaust, as well as a sharp satire of his cruelty, stupidity, ignorance, arrogance, and the short-livedness of the dynasty he established "for ten thousand generations." It should be pointed out that to a Sung poet like Wen T'ien-hsiang, or a Ming poet like Lin Pi, who had read of many dynasties before their own, the fact that a particular dynasty had been replaced by a successive one alone could hardly justify criticizing its founder. Still, however short fifteen years may sound for the life of a dynasty, the

Ch'in had a more substantial existence than did Chu-ke Liang's Shu-Han regime, which was not even recognized by historians like Ch'en Shou as a genuine dynasty. It is the low moral standing of Ch'in Shih-huang-ti that alone commands as well as justifies the negative valuation of him in this poem by Lin Pi, and quite expectedly, in poetry on history as a whole.

Not only particular historical events and personages are categorized, measured, and evaluated primarily from a moral viewpoint, but human history in general is perceived and conceived in the same way. The best evidence of this would be the oft-quoted poem "Singing of History [詠史]":

All previous dynasties and families surveyed,
Successes were due to diligence and thrift, destruction
to extravagance.
Why need a pillow to be made of amber,\textsuperscript{18}
And why does a chariot need pearls?\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} Amber was treasured as a precious decorative material as well as an effective medicine to metal-inflicted wound. During the Southern Dynasties, the local officials of Ning-chou once presented an amber pillow to Emperor Wu of Sung (363-422) as a gift. The Emperor ordered that it be powdered and distributed among his soldiers because he would soon launch an military expedition against the North.

\textsuperscript{19} King Hui of Wei (400-319 B.C.) of the Warring States period once boasted to King Wei of Ch'i (?-320 B.C.) of possessing ten large pearls that could light up twelve chariots in front of it and twelve behind it in a procession. King Wei of Ch'i replied that what he treasured were virtuous and talented subjects who could "light up a thousand miles."
When the blessing of a dynasty was gone, the Ch'ing-hai horses could no longer be found.\textsuperscript{20}

When the men were exhausted, the Shu-shan Snake could not be pulled out.\textsuperscript{21}

Few people ever heard the "Song of Southern Wind."\textsuperscript{22}

The green-feather pennants in Ts'ang-wu will always be mourned for.\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{quote}
\begin{verse}
歴観前賢國與家，
咸由勤儉由奢。
何須競効方為杭，
豈得真珠始是車。
運去不逢青海馬，
\end{verse}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{20} A breed of horse from Ch'ing-hai was believed to be able to gallop a thousand \textit{li} a day. It is used here as a metaphor for worthy and talented subjects.

\textsuperscript{21} The legend goes that King Hui of Ch'in once sent five beautiful women to King of Shu, and the latter sent five gladiators to meet them. On the way back, the five men saw a huge snake creeping into a mountain. They grasped its tail and tried to pull it out. The mountain collapsed, burying the five men and five women in it. The snake is here used as a metaphor for deep-rooted vicious forces of all kinds.

\textsuperscript{22} The sage Shun was believed to have sung the "Song of Southern Wind" and achieved peace and prosperity throughout the country under his rule.

\textsuperscript{23} The green-feather pennants were used exclusively for emperor's procession. Ts'ang-wu (in present-day Hunan) was the mountain where Shun reportedly died on the way of his last tour of inspection.
Traditional critics have interpreted this poem as commenting on history while lamenting on the failure of Emperor Wen of T'ang (809-840) to revive the deteriorating dynasty. Best-known and most frequently quoted among generations of Chinese readers, however, is the poet's summary statement about history in general, articulated in the first two lines: "All previous dynasties and families surveyed/Successes were due to diligence and shrift, destruction to extravagance." Concepts such as diligence, thrift, and extravagance in this particular context are more moralistic than economic. Metonymically, extravagance refers to all those moral deficiencies on the part of the rulers, including heavy taxation, self-indulgence in wine, music, hunting, palace-constructing and sexual wantonness, pursuit for immortality, and as their inevitable consequence, trust for wicked subjects, rejection of advice from and persecution of virtuous subjects, and negligence of administrative

24 Li Shang-yin, *Yü-hsi-sheng shih chien-chu* 玉谿生詩箋注, annotated by Feng Hao 福浩 (SPPY ed.) 2. 1ab.

25 See, for instance, the commentaries by Chu He-ling and Yao P'eich'ien 姚培謙 to the poem, quoted by Feng Hao 福浩 in *Yü-hsi-sheng shih chien-chu* 玉谿生詩箋注 (SPPY ed.) 2. 1b.
responsibility. By the same token, diligence and thrift refer to the moral integrity of the rulers who conduct themselves in a way diametrically opposite to that of those “extravagant” rulers. The notion that all historical events must, and can, be comprehended and explained sufficiently in terms of morality, was widely accepted and deeply rooted among the Confucian intellectuals in traditional China. Strong evidence for this assertion is the fact that this highly moralistic work of poetry on history, one of the best-known and most-loved among the Confucian intellectuals, turns out to have been written by Li Shang-yin—the most notorious writer of decadent love poems in Chinese literary history.

It is therefore especially illuminating to examine the predominance of moralization in poetry on history by analyzing works in this genre by Li Shang-yin. Li Shang-yin is unquestionably one of the most controversial poets in the history of Chinese literature. And this controversy can be to a great extent understood, and settled, by taking into consideration his poetry on history. On the one hand, critics who ignored his works in this genre often found, as summed up by Chu He-ling 朱鶴齡, that “Half of Li Shang-yin’s poems are about boudoirs [義山之詩，半及閨閣],” and for that reason derogatorily labeled him a poet of romance. On the other

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hand, critics who were not content with limiting their analysis to half of a poet's works, like Chu himself, ended up with discovering a totally different Li Shang-yin in the same poet—"Given his criticizing contemporary affairs with loyalty to the court, his sorrow and anger [at the wrongdoings of those in power], he and that 'Old man by the Ch'ü Stream [in the T'ang dynasty capital of Ch'ang-an]' could simply look at each other and smile with a mutual appreciation [此其指事懷忠，鬱魴激切，直可與屈江老人相視而笑]."27 Here the "Old man by the Ch'ü Stream" refers to Tu Fu, the Chinese "poet sage [詩聖]" admired for uncompromisingly upholding Confucian morality in his poetry. And for Chu He-ling, this assessment of Li Shang-yin and analogy with Tu Fu were reached by extending his examination over Li's other poems, most notably poems on history:

As to his poems on the Han Palace, the Jeweled Pond in the elfland of the K'un-lun Mountains,28 the Hua-ch'ing Palace, and Ma-wei Slope,29 none of them is not a satire to the absurdity of alchemists, or a warning about the nation-ruining consequence of sexual extravagance.

27 Ibid.

28 Emperor Wu of Han pursued immortality in his palace, while King Mu of Chou(r. 1023-983 B.C.) was reported to have met the goddess Hsi-wang-mu 西王母 at the Jeweled Pond.

29 Emperor Hsūan-tsung of T'ang indulged himself with Yang Yu-huan in sexual extravagance in the Hua-ch'ing Palace; yet later in flight from the rebels, he was forced by the angry imperial guards into letting the woman strangled at Ma-wei Slope.
Most of Li Shang-yin's works referred to here are poems on history. And there are more of them with similarly serious topics and themes. Among Li's some six hundred poems extant today, over sixty are written in the genre of poetry of history, and many of them are highly acclaimed among generations of Chinese readers. A comprehensive survey of these works testifies that to categorize, measure, and evaluate historical events/personages according to a system of orthodox Confucian moral standards is the foremost concern of the poet when writing in this genre. Furthermore, a fanatical maker of poetic riddles as he was, Li Shang-yin's moralization in his poems on history is never ambiguous. While he sometimes makes certain moral evaluation allusive at first sight, sufficient information would be provided, enabling a competent reader to eventually recognize it unmistakably. And when it is recognized at last, all the artistic devices that have been ostensibly concealing it, now serve to present it as a sudden enlightenment.

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30 Ibid.

For example, the famous quatrain “Lung-ch’ih 龍池 [The Dragon Pool]” goes as follows:

At the Imperial banquet by the Dragon Pool, the cloud-screens opened.
The barbarian drum sounded loud; all other music stopped.
At midnight, returning from the feast as the palace waterclock dripped away,
Prince Hsüeh was heavily drunk, but Prince Shou was sober.32

龍池賜酒啟雲屏，
羯鼓聲高翠樂停。
夜半謫歸宮漏永，
薛王沉醉壽王醒。33

This is a poem on an imperial banquet in one of the palaces of Emperor Hsüan-tsung of T’ang, and the last line makes a contrast between two of His Majesty’s sons, one is drunk and the other sober.
The sober one, Prince Shou Li Mao 李瑁, used to have a beautiful wife named Yang Yü-huan 楊玉環(719-756). After the death of his pet concubine, however, the Emperor snatched the daughter-in-law from the son, made her his own concubine, and later elevated her to


33 Li Shang-yin, Yû-hsi-sheng shih chien-chu, 5. 21b.
the status of *Kui-fei* 齊妃 (Honorable Consort). Based on this historical fact, the poet describes an imaginary scene of imperial banquet some time after this incestuous incident. The poor prince has to attend the banquet to show respect to his Emperor-father, who is satisfactorily accompanied by that woman, the ex-wife yet current "stepmother" of the son. While the drawn out banquet with its mellow wine and wild music is so enjoyable to everyone else—Prince Hsüeh, for example, gets himself blind drunk—to Prince Shou it is nothing less than a torture. With a single character *hsing* 翤 (sober) as the last word of the last line, the poet suddenly lays open all the feelings and emotions—the misery, the desire, the humiliation, and perhaps even the hatred for his father—that have been churning deeply within the son’s heart for the whole evening. This is a relentless exposure of the palace scandal and a condemnation of the Emperor’s moral decadence. Taking into consideration that the poet was writing about the very dynasty in which he lived, about an unutterable scandal in the imperial family to which he claimed himself a relative, the reader cannot fail to be impressed by his uncompromising moralism. Although the sharpness of its satire offended the Ch’ing critic Shen Te-ch’ien 沈德潜 as "frivolous and disrespectful [輕薄]," the Ming critic Hu Ying-lin’s

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34 See *Hsin T’ang-shu*, 5.141-45, and 76. 3493.

praise is more representative of most traditional critics: "The subtler the language is, the more explicit the meaning."

To them the poem was right in line with the moralistic requirement of the genre, and they admired Li Shang-yin's artistry of using a poetic diction so delicate to articulate a meaning so devastatingly exposing.

Viewed in this new light, the widely accepted image of Li Shang-yin as a poet of romantic love can no longer remain satisfactory. In literature study, a somewhat simplified generalization is often indispensable, if a poet or writer is to be simply categorized. Thus even though we are well aware of the "style of vajra's angry countenance [金剛怒目式]" of some of T'ao Ch'ien's poems, such as "On Reading the Classic of Mountains and Seas [讀《山海經》]", the label "the father of all recluse poets ancient and present [古今隱逸詩人之宗]" given by the Liang critic Chung Hung can still serve as a useful opinion about the poet, as long as we keep in mind the limitation of such a generalization. To view Li Shang-yin as merely a poet of love, however, is even more


37 See Lu Hsün 魯迅, Lu Hsün ch'ūan-chí 魯迅全集 (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1961) 6, 336.

38 See T'ao Ch'ien, Ching-chieh hsien-sheng chi , 4. 12b-17b.

39 Chung Hung, Shih-p'īn (SPPY ed.), 3b.
inadequate than to view T’ao Ch’ien as a poet recluse. The reason for this lies in the critical importance of the genre of poetry on history to Li Shang-yin, as well as the importance of Li Shang-yin the poet to the genre. One cannot talk about Li as a poet without his poetry on history, or talk about poetry on history as a genre while ignoring him, if one means to do full justice to either. As far as the study of Li Shang-yin is concerned, an examination of his poetry on history immediately sheds light on certain important factors: his conspicuous sharing of that *fin de siècle* sentiment which also captured many other later T’ang poets; his self-conscious personal tie to the T’ang imperial family, whose decay seemed to him irrevocable; his setting aside in poems on history that peculiar obsession with the splendid, erotic, and bizarre in his well-known love poems; his suppression of his strong Taoist and Buddhist inclinations in favor of an orthodox Confucian persona when writing in this solemnest genre of Chinese poetry. All such considerations are essential to an adequate comprehension of this highly complex poet. In turn such considerations throw light upon poetry on history as a distinct literary genre. If a poet who has been otherwise exceedingly fond of the ambiguous, ornate, and bizarre, should turn


out to be even more concerned with unequivocal moralization when writing in this genre, something more potent and fundamental than his personal preference must have been at work. And that is what Heather Dubrow calls "generic contract." When an author makes clear the generic commitment of a specific work, Dubrow points out, "He in effect agrees that he will follow at least some of the patterns and conventions we associate with the genre or genres in which he is writing, and we in turn agree we will pay close attention to certain aspects of his work while realizing that others, because of the nature of the genre, are likely to be far less important." In the case of poetry on history, one of those generic patterns and conventions negotiated out between the poets and readers is the critical importance of moralization. By faithfully observing this generic contract at the expense of his strong personal preference, Li Shang-yin provides an apt example that impressively demonstrates the fundamental significance of moralization in poetry on history.

By highlighting moralization as the first characteristic approach to treating history in the genre, I have no intention to oversimplify poetry on history, which consists of thousands of works, into a completely monotonous entity. Exceptions could be found, for instance, in some of the works by the T'ang poet Tu Mu (803-852). For instance, in a quatrains entitled "Ch'ih-pi 赤壁

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[the Red Cliff]," the poet argues that the "Battle of the Red Cliff," a critical victory of the alliance between Liu Pei and Sun Ch’üan 孫 橫 (182-252) over Ts’ao Ts’ao in the year 208, was won by a sheer luck, instead of by the efforts of Chou Yü 周 瑜 (175-210), as has been hitherto claimed by every historian. Yet exceptions like this are far from sufficient to invalidate the predominance of moralization in the genre. As a matter of fact, even among the poems on history by Tu Mu, a poet with an extraordinary interest and expertise in military strategy, works focusing on the "technical" aspect of a famous historical event, like the one referred to above, are still quite rare. Most of his works in poetry on history still concentrate upon the moral significance of historical events/personages, and moralization turns out to be as important to him as it is to other poets writing in the same genre.

Concurrent with moralization, historical material treated in poetry on history also undergoes a process of symbolization.

Symbolization is a widely employed approach in literary creation. Generally speaking, a literary symbol is a concrete image standing for an abstract concept. As pointed out by Samuel Coleridge, a symbol "is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all by the translucence of the eternal

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43 See Tu Mu, Fan-ch’uan-shih chi-chu , 271.
through and in the temporal. Some scholars, like J. A. Cuddon and M. H. Abrams, prefer to make a further distinction between a "public" (or conventional) symbol and a "private" (or personal) symbol. A journey into the underworld and returning from it (as in the works of Virgil, Dante and James Joyce), for Cuddon, would be a public symbol for a spiritual experience, a dark night of the soul and a kind of redemptive odyssey, whereas examples of private symbols could be those images in the works of W. B. Yeats: the sun and moon, a tower, a mask, a tree, a winding stair and a hawk. As I shall demonstrate later in this chapter, this distinction between a private symbol and a public one, and the development of the former into the latter, could be quite instructive to our inquiry into the particularity of the symbolization process in poetry on history.

In poetry on history, symbolization and moralization could be regarded as two sides of the same process which historical material undergoes. However, examined from the angle of symbolization, the same process now reveals certain significance which would be overshadowed if our inquiry is confined to the single standpoint of moralization.

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While a symbol in other literary works could be an object/event that is natural (a dove for peace), man-made (the scales for justice), or imaginary (a journey into the underworld), symbols in poetry on history turn out to be all real historical personages. A historical figure becomes a literary symbol in poetry on history as the result of the moralization process he/she undergoes in it. As we have pointed out above, when treated in this poetic genre, history—no matter how much moral emphasis has been placed upon it by the official historiography—further undergoes a process of moralization. As far as a historical personage is concerned, it means that a comprehensive representation of all those multifarious aspects of his/her life, thought, and conduct is never what the poets aim at. On the contrary, one of those many aspects is always focused upon, amplified, and examined from a moral point of view. This is the primary way this person matters in a poem on history. He/she is thus rendered a symbol for a certain Confucian moral category. Since morality is viewed as the essence of history, moralization of history represents a Confucian meta-interpretation of human historical experiences. A symbol for a certain Confucian moral category, in the final analysis, symbolizes the particular kind of historical experiences embodying that moral category.

A typical example in this respect would be Emperor Hsüan-tsung of the T'ang dynasty. In the eyes of traditional historians, he was one of the most complex figures in Chinese history, with many merits and faults to be taken into account if an adequate judgment
was to be reached on him. Of the two major dynastic histories of the T'ang, the *Old History of the T'ang Dynasty* and *New History of the T'ang Dynasty*, the second one, compiled by the Sung historian Ou-yang Hsiu 欧陽修 (1007-1072) and others, is obviously less charitable to Hsüan-tsung. Unlike the *Old History* which, to a certain degree, observes the principle of "eulogizing noble [爲尊者譴]" in the Chronicle of Hsüan-tsung, the *New History* matter-of-factly records several times the incestuous scandal that the Emperor made his concubine of his own daughter-in-law. Yet the authors still felt that, as historians, they were obliged to also register the achievements of Hsüan-tsung's earlier reign, followed by an admiring praise: "When he was diligent in administration during the K'ai-yüan years, the nation was so close to the situation of The Great Peace and Prosperity, how vigorous it was [方其勵精政事，開元之際，幾致太平，何其盛也]!" In a sharp contrast to historical works, however, in the hundreds of poems by poets of the T'ang as well as later times, the same Hsüan-tsung is simply presented as a ruler who, by indulging himself in the sexual extravagance with the palace beauty, the Honorable Consort Yang, brought the entire nation into a devastating disaster from which it never fully recovered. And all those achievements of his earlier

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46 See *Hsin T'ang-shu*, 5.141-45, and 76. 3493.

reign are simply ignored. One might have expected some sympathy from a poet like Li Shang-yin, not only because he lived in the same T'ang dynasty, but because he claimed to be somehow a relative of the imperial family, therefore, of the Emperor. Yet as demonstrated in the poem titled “Ma-wei Slope [馬嵬],” even under Li Shang-yin's pen, Hsüan-tsung received the kind of condemnation exclusively reserved for those most contemptible rulers who ruined their nations (wang-kuo chih chün 亡國之君):

So what if you heard of those other domains beyond the seas?
While you can't prophesy about the next life, this one is all but over.
In vain you hear the tiger-like nightwatches beat their wooden clappers,
No more will the palace-crier announce the arrival of dawn.
On this day, the Six Armies together stopped their horses,
Formerly, on Seventh Night, the two of you laughed at the Cowherd.
Why is it that a Son of Heaven who had reigned two score years
Could not match the man from the Lu family with his Mo-ch'ou?\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{48} The translation is based on that of James Liu, in \textit{The Poetry of Li Shang-yin: Ninth-Century Baroque Chinese Poet}. And below are some relevant incidents recorded in historical works: Hsüan-tsung was so infatuated with the Honorable Consort Yang that he neglected all his duties as an emperor. That brought about the rebellion led by the ambitious general An Lu-shan in 755. When the rebel force approached the capital city Ch'ang-an the next year, Hsüan-tsung fled westward to Shu (present-day Ssu-ch'uan province). On the way at Ma-wei Slope, the imperial guards refused to proceed unless the Honorable Consort Yang was executed. Without any other choice, the
In addition to the basic facts recorded in historical works, exploited here are some other stories previously told by authors like Po Chü-i and Ch'en Hung, stories more valuable for their literary imagination than reliable as historical documentation. One story tells that once on the seventh night of the Seventh Month, the only night each year when the mythological couple of the Weaving Maid (Vega) and the Cowherd (Altair) reunite across the Silver River (the Milky Way), the imperial couple vowed in the palace that the two of them would never separate. And another story goes that after Lady Yang's death, a Taoist magician, sent by Hsüan-tsung in search of her soul, eventually found her as an immortal on a fairy mountain beyond Emperor ordered that she be strangled. For the story of Mo-ch'ou, see next page and Note 50.

the seas, awaiting to meet the Emperor in his next life.⁵⁰ Allusion is also made to a poem written by Emperor Wu of Liang (464-549), in which a commoner named Lu married a beautiful girl Mo-ch’ou (literally, “Don’t Worry”) and successfully kept her in his home.⁵¹ Altogether, these materials serve the poet’s one single purpose, that is, to ridicule the Emperor as bitingly as possible—just as he did in some other poems to Ch’en Hou-chu and Emperor Yang of Sui, both examples of imperial corruption. The complex historical figure of Hsüan-tsung is thus simplified and transformed into a poetic symbol for a specific kind of moral corruption which, to Li Shang-yin’s Confucian eyes, has had too many rulers and their nations ruined.

The long history of China meant a long list of important historical personages as potential topics when a poet was writing in poetry on history. Only a small number of them have been chosen, yet they still constitute in this poetic genre a magnificent galaxy of hundreds of historical figures. Whether a particular figure could be included into this galaxy depends upon his/her potential of functioning as a symbol for at least one of the various Confucian moral categories. And due to their versatility in this respect,


⁵¹ See Emperor Wu of Liang, “He-chung chih shui ke [河中之水歌],” in Ting Fu-pao, 2. 857.
certain historical personages have become the poets' preferred choices. The Former Han palace woman Wang Chao-chün 王昭君 is a fitting example in this case. The original records of Wang Chao-chün's incident are primarily kept in three works: the History of the Han Dynasty, the History of the Later Han Dynasty, and the Hsí-ching tsa-chi 西京雜記 (Miscellanies of the Western Capital). The last is of controversial authorship, classified into the Hsiao-shuo-chia-lei 小說家類 (Writers of anecdotes) of the tzu 子 (Philosophy) section in the Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao 四庫全書總目提要 (An Annotated Full List of the Complete Library of Four Branches of Books). But a great part of its contents has been treated by many as valuable historical data unavailable elsewhere. Putting together what is in these three works, we have a brief account of Wang Chao-chün as follows:

She was a beautiful girl from a liang-chia 良家 (literally "good family," referring to a family with no doctor, shaman, merchant, or craftsman among its members) in Tzu-kui in present-day Hupei province. Sometime during the reign of Emperor Yüan (r. 48-33 B.C.), she was selected into the imperial palace as a tai-chao yeh-t'ing 待詔掖庭 (Expectant Official in Palace Discipline Service, literally "awaiting an edict in the side apartment in the palace"). This was the official title for the Emperor's nominal concubines, awaiting a summons from him to become a real one overnight. But His Majesty had too many women on the waiting list to find out by his own eyes the most beautiful to patronize. He
therefore ordered that portraits be painted of them all, then submitted to him for an expedited selection. The candidates all bribed the imperial painters in exchange for the latter's beautifying them in painting, so their chance to the Emperor's patronage would be enhanced. But Wang Chao-chün, out of full confidence in her own beauty and distaste for bribery, refused to do so. Consequently she was deliberately misrepresented by a painter named Mao Yen-shou 毛延壽, and thus never summoned by the Emperor until the year 33 B.C., the year the chieftain of the Hsiung-nu barbarians came to the Han capital Ch’ang-an for a goodwill visit, and asked for a woman of the Han palace to be his wife. The nomadic tribe was militarily very strong due to their superior cavalry, and had been threatening the Han's northern frontier for a long time. To appease the militaristic neighbor, the court decided to send a beautiful woman there. Disappointed and enraged by the unfair treatment she had been suffering for all these years, Wang Chao-chün volunteered to go (according to the History of the Later Han Dynasty; in the History of the Han Dynasty, she was sent there by the court). At the farewell banquet given to the barbarian chieftain, the Emperor saw for the first time the striking beauty of Wang Chao-chün, and immediately regretted the arrangement. Yet it was too late to make any change if the court meant to maintain its credibility. All the powerful Emperor could do was to watch the beauty leaving forever, order an investigation into the case, and then have all the imperial painters executed.
The complexity of her story renders Wang Chao-chün one of the historical figures most frequently written about in poetry on history. Hundreds of poems on her have been written in the past two thousand years. Various aspects of this historical figure and her conduct are explored by the poets, resulting in a Wang Chao-chün so polymorphic that she alone stands as a symbol for several different Confucian moral categories.

First, Wang Chao-chün is presented as a symbol for the unconditional loyalty to one's sovereign and motherland. Out of this loyalty one is always ready to sacrifice his own interest and life for the sovereign and the nation, which the sovereign represents, as stated in the following examples:

As long as she could stop the wars for His Majesty,
She was glad to bury her bones in that barbarian land.

能為君王驅徵戍,
甘心玉骨葬胡塵。52

Ordered to pacify the enemy by marrying their chieftain,
Calmly I leave the imperial palace.
Because I know that to overcome a national calamity
Is worth more than to serve the Emperor personally.

As long as my life can serve the country,  
I don't mind if the Emperor's patronage goes to others.

但使此身能報國，
何妨恩寵屬他人。53

I'd ask those attending the emperors' bed in the Chao-yang Palace,
Who has repaid more for the sovereigns' favor?

寄言侍妾昭陽者，
同報君恩若個多?55

In all these poems Wang Chao-chün stands as a symbol for an unconditional loyalty to one's sovereign and nation. It is one of the essential Confucian moral requirements for every virtuous subject. It demands that he must always place above his personal interest

53 Kao Pi 高璧, "Chao-chün ch'ū [貞君曲]," in Lu Ke, 146.

54 See Huo Ying 霍瑛, "Ch'ing-chung tiao Ming-fei [青冢弔明妃]," in Lu Ke, 178.

55 See Yüan Mei 袁枚, "Ming-fei ch'ū [明妃曲]," in Lu Ke, 234.
and life the interest of his sovereign and the welfare of the nation, and always ready himself to happily sacrifice the former for the latter. These poems emphasize the point that there was nothing personally beneficial to Wang Chao-chün in her marriage, thus the only reason she was doing it was her realization that it served the interest of her sovereign and nation, and this realization alone was sufficient to make her happy and proud. When the marriage of a beautiful young girl is presented in the spirit of the self-sacrifice of a brave martyr, this girl no longer stands for herself only. She now stands for a general moral principle that has been upheld and observed by many other people. In other words, the poetic image of Wang Chao-chün now symbolizes that specific moral principle of Confucianism. She is now regarded not as an isolated individual, but as one of the numerous exemplars through which this moral principle has been manifesting itself once and again throughout history. It is in this sense that Coleridge's definition of a literary symbol is right on the mark. A symbol, Coleridge emphasizes, "is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual. . . above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative."56

Second, the same Wang Chao-chün is also presented as a symbol for the moral integrity which is victimized by the sinister court politics, as demonstrated in the following lines:

Even if the Emperor makes light of beauty,
How could he delegate the decision to the painters?

君王縱使輕顏色，
子奪姍何異畫工。57

Far beyond the Yü-men Pass,
I still hate my own beauty.58
Those of you who crave the Emperors' favor,
You'd better bribe the painters with gold.

玉關妾已遠，
獨自恨蛾眉。
寄語承恩者，
黃金賜畫師。59

To guard against the barbarians calls for worthy people,
Yet I'm more worried there are too many "painters."

57 See Ts'ao Chan 曹頤, "Ming-fei [明妃]," in Lu Ke, 244.

58 This is an irony expressing a bitter complaint that her faith in the value of true beauty ruined her.

59 Wu Ying-chi 吳應箕, "Chao-chün yúan [昭君怨]," in Lu Ke, 184.
She refused to buy the painters with gold,  
Deeming it shameful to advance like a woman offering herself  
to a man for marriage.  
Now we realize that the heart of a peerless beauty  
Matches the spirit of a national hero.

不把黃金買畫工，  
避身差與自媒同。  
始知絕代佳人意，  
即有千秋國士風。61

The “painters” in these poems remind the reader of those wicked  
courtiers, whose business it is to bewitch the sovereign with  
flattery and denigrate honest subjects with smears. Accordingly,  
Wang Chao-chün symbolizes that moral integrity which embodies in  
all true chün-tzu 君子 (gentlemen). Often overwhelmed in court  
politics, they feel angry toward the ruthless “painters,” and at the  
same time complain about the stupidity of the sovereigns. But as  
emphasized in the last poem cited, they still refuse to compromise  
their moral principle for the advance in their official career. When

60 See Ku Ting-ch' en 頭鼎臣, “Ming-fei tz’u [明妃詞],” in Lu Ke, 157.  
61 See Wu Wen 吳潤, “Ming-fei [明妃],” in Lu Ke, 259.
the "heart" of Wang Chao-chün is explicitly analogized to the incorruptible "spirit" of a national hero, the image of this "peerless beauty" comes to symbolize the Confucian moral principle that distinguishes true "gentlemen" from all hsiao-jen  (vile persons).

Thirdly, Wang Chao-chün is also frequently presented as a symbol for another doctrine of the Confucian morality, that is, an absolute subservience toward one's sovereign. According to this doctrine, a subject must never harbor the slightest resentment against the sovereign, however much he was wronged by the latter. Furthermore, he must always remain faithful to the sovereign, and be ready to devote his service whenever an imperial summons comes again. The following two poems can serve as apt examples:

It was indeed the painter who ruined me,
Yet my heart will never change.
I vow to meet Your Majesty in next life,
And wish I would then win your favor.

良工自謫妾。
妾心終不移。
他生誓相見，
幸得被恩私。62

I ask the returning Han envoy to bear a message for me,

62 See Ku Ting-ch'en "Ming-fei tz'u [明妃曲]," in Lu Ke, 157.
When will the Emperor ransom me with gold?
If His Majesty asks about my appearance,
Please don’t say it’s not as pretty as was in the Han Palace.

漢使卻回愚寄語，
黃金何日賜蛾眉？
君王若問妾顏色，
莫道不如宮裡時。63

This third image of Wang Chao-chün is different from the first one in that this time she sees in her marriage nothing beneficial to the nation. She is wronged, and she knows it. Yet she has no grudge against the Emperor himself—even though she is fully aware that he is the one who made all final decisions. Therefore this Wang Chao-chün is also remarkably different from the second one. What she is doing here is to express her unshakable faith in the sovereign, and at the same time appeal for one more chance to serve him, or more importantly, to prove herself to him. An absolute subservience like this has its root in the enthusiastic advocacy of the Chou Kings’ authority in Confucius’s political activities, and in works attributed to his authorship, like the Ch’un-ch’iu. And it was further developed and emphasized by later Confucians such as Han Yü 64 as the political institution in traditional China became more


64 See Han Yü, “Yüan Tao [原道],” in Han Yü, Han Ch’ang-li ch’üan-chi 蘭陽纂全集 (Hong Kong: Kuang-chih shu-chü, n. d.), 171-75.
authoritarian. Vowing her unconditional obedience and devotion while agonizing over her abuse, this image of Wang Chao-chün is presented to symbolize this absolute subservience as one of the moral doctrines of Confucianism.

Not only a single historical personage could be utilized by different poets in various ways of symbolization, the same historical figure could also be presented by the same poet as symbols for different and sometimes mutually conflicting moral categories. For instance, in one of his two poems titled "Wang Chao-chün," which has been quoted above, The T'ang poet Po Chü-i made Wang Chao-chün a symbol for the unconditional subservience toward one's sovereign. Yet this was not the only way Po Chü-i treated Wang Chao-chün in his poetry on history. In another poem, titled "The Green Tomb [青冢]," the same Wang Chao-chün was presented by the same poet as a symbol for the pure morality victimized by sinister court politics, thus providing a cruel lesson on staying away from those unworthy rulers and their courts:

Once distorted in painting,
White was confused with black.
In the eyes of the Emperor,
Hsi-shih became Mo-mu.65

65 Hsi-shih was a beautiful woman of the Yüeh State of the Spring and Autumn period and later became a synonym for beauty. Mo Mu was an ugly woman in ancient legends.
Others won the Emperor's favor,  
And she was married to an alien.  
How can fortune or misfortune be predicted?  
The beautiful could fare worse than the ugly.  
Why talk about this incident?  
Because it can warn people of a thousand years later.  
It tells those beauties of later generation,  
Appearance is not reliable.  
Don't reject thorns as hairpin,\(^6\)\(^6\)  
It would be better to marry into a poor family.  
Don't you see on the “Green tomb”  
Those passersby offering libation?\(^6\)\(^7\)

\(^6\) A hairspin is usually made of gold, silver, or jade. Wearing thorns as hairpin is a sign of poverty. It is said that Meng Kuang 孟光, the wife of Liang Hung 梁鸿 of the Latter Han time, wore thorns as hairpin and skirt made of coarse cloth (剩篾布裙) but was proud of the plain lifestyle. See Li fang 李昉 and others, \textit{T'ai-p'ing yü-lan} 太平御覽, 12 vols. Taipei: Hsin-hsing shu-chü, 1959) 718. 2a.

\(^7\) The “Green Tomb” is to the south of Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, where Wang Chao-chün was reportedly buried. When offering libation, people pour a cup of wine on the ground at one's tomb to express their sorrow and respect to the deceased.
That the same historical personage is treated by the same poet in two conflicting ways attests again to the fact that, when writing in poetry on history, a poet's main concern is not to reach a complete, consistent, and well-balanced account of what happened to a historical figure factually, but to explore the moral significance of his/her deeds from various angles. While the representations of a same figure and interpretations of a same deed could be mutually conflicting, the moral categories they symbolize are all constituent elements of the system of Confucian morality. It is true of the case of Wang Chao-chün, and of the aggregate of historical personages in poetry on history examined as a whole.

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68 See Lu Ke, 57.
As we examine the process of symbolization in poetry on history, the distinction made by some critics between a public symbol and a private one could prove very useful. M. H. Abrams makes this distinction primarily by how widely the meaning of a symbol is known or agreed upon. Thus "the Cross," and "the Good Shepherd" are public or "conventional" symbols, as their meanings are widely known. And an example of private symbols would be the "rose" in William Blake's poem "The Sick Rose," which, unlike the symbolic rose of Dante's *Paradiso* and other medieval poems, "symbolizes the destruction wrought by furtiveness, deceit, and hypocrisy in what should be a frank and joyous relationship of physical love."⁶⁹ Although a rose is a widely used natural object in literary symbolization, it serves in this particular case as a private symbol rather than a public one, for it symbolizes something conventionally not associated with it, therefore not widely known to the contemporary readers. It seems logical to infer from this distinction that while not all private symbols will necessarily develop into public ones, many public symbols must have had a private origin in literary history. It is how a private symbol succeeds or fails to develop into a public one that is especially instructive to our examination of the symbolization in poetry on history.

In poetry on history, the symbols used by the poets are all historical figures. Famous or obscure, they are undoubtedly viewed as public figures, recorded in various historical works as a common heritage of all those in the same culture. No poet is permitted to create a fictional character of his own to symbolize anything in a poem on history. Private or personal innovation in this respect is categorically ruled out by the generic regulations. Moreover, the symbolized are moral categories in the system of Confucian morality, which is also widely recognized by the community of Confucian intellectuals in traditional China. Heterodox opinions would not be tolerated, and sheer private sentiments and fantasies would hardly be taken seriously. It would be too hasty, however, to conclude that no private symbol can exist in poetry on history. The potentiality of a specific historical figure to serve as a literary symbol is the realm in which a poet's originality and creativity could be exercised and tested to a great extent. When a historical figure, even a well-known one, is used to symbolize a moral category that had not been associated with him/her before, this historical figure is being presented as a private symbol. By adding a private symbol to the existing aggregate of symbols in poetry on history, a poet is trying to demonstrate his moral insight and artistic creativity, making his unique contribution to the genre. That the insight and creativity is recognized, and new contribution accepted, by the community of Confucian intellectuals is often indicated by the fact that this private symbol is widely accepted.
into the genre and employed again, in ways artistically different yet morally similar. In other words, the private symbol eventually becomes a public one. The process from the presentation of a private symbol to its acceptance as a public one could involve a dynamic negotiation among the poet, his readers, and critics of current and later generations.

Two poems on Wang Chao-chün by Wang An-shih (1021-1086) of the Sung dynasty, one of the most argumentative authors in the history of Chinese literary and one of the most controversial statesmen in the history of Chinese politics, provide a revealing example of a private symbol that tried, but failed, to be accepted as public. The first of the two well-known poems, entitled *Ming-fei ch’ü* 明妃曲 (Songs on Wang Chao-chün), ends with lines as follows:

The family members sent her a message across the ten thousand miles,
“Live well in that yurt city and don’t be homesick.
Don’t you see Ah-chiao was locked in the Ch’ang-men Palace near the Emperor?" 
South or north makes no difference to an abandoned person."

70 Ah-chiao was the nickname of Empress Ch’en, the wife of Emperor Wu of Han. She was abandoned and confined to the desolate Ch’ang-men Palace in the capital when the Emperor shifted his infatuation to other women. See *Han-shu*, 97A. 3948.
By imagining what family members of Wang Chao-chün would have said to console her, the poet points out that, given the treacherous way the Han emperors have treated other women, the Han palace is not necessarily a better place than the Hun yurt. And this in the second poem directly leads to an assertion by Wang Chao-chün herself that, as a matter of fact, the Hun is doubtless better than the Han:

To me the Han favor is thin and the Hun favor deeper,  
And happiness in life lies in two hearts appreciating one another.

It amounts to declaring that given the way the Han court treated her and the others like her, it does not deserve her loyalty and service anymore. Now to her the land of the Hsiung-nu is a far better place since the people here treat her better. Underlying such a daring judgment and rebellious attitude is an unshaken confidence in her

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71 See Lu Ke, 71.
72 See Lu Ke, 73.
own moral righteousness. This image of Wang Chao-chün thus stands as a symbol for another Confucian moral principle, i.e. under no circumstances should one compromise his moral integrity, even if that means to be uncooperative and defiant to the court. While upholding the absolute rights of the sovereigns in some of its statements, Confucianism also on many other occasions defends the inevitability and justifiability of righteous rebellion. It can be evidenced by Mencius's famous statement that "What I heard of is eradicating the autocrat Chou, not regicide". When a sovereign is deemed to be irredeemably unworthy, self-preserving seclusion and righteous rebellion all become consistent with Confucian morality. Seemingly a self-contradiction, this phenomenon is in fact not uncommon, or even universal, to all great traditions of thought, philosophy, and religion. Here again, the genuine significance of a principle like this lies in its specific application in each particular historical situation. The favorable interpretations in the official history of the overthrow of corrupt dynasties such as the Hsia, Shang, Ch'in, Ch'en and Sui, obviously result from the application of this Confucian moral principle.

Wang Chao-chün is a widely known historical figure, and what she symbolizes in this poem by Wang An-shih is a widely accepted Confucian doctrine. But the Wang Chao-chün in this poem was a

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73 Meng-tzu, 2. 12a.
private symbol, for the relationship of this particular historical figure and the specific moral category had not been established by anyone, until Wang An-shih tried it for the first time. And then it turned out to be fiercely controversial. To critics like Luo Ta-ching, this judgment of Wang An-shih "violated the moral principles and harmed the Way to the extreme extent." Although most Confucians agreed that, as a principle, a subject is justified to abandon his sovereign if the latter proves to be totally unworthy, they were also convinced that circumstances rarely became so hopeless, and that of Wang Chao-chün was certainly not a case of this kind. Her treatment by the Han court, however unfair even abusive, was deemed insufficient for warranting such a defiant and rebellious behavior on her part. Therefore to critics like Luo Ta-ching, Wang Chao-chün could not rightfully symbolize this moral category assigned to her by Wang An-shih. The writing of this poem by Wang An-shih and the criticism it provoked from others generated a dynamic negotiation among the Confucian intellectuals, a negotiation on how a particular historical situation should be morally interpreted, and how a specific Confucian moral principle should be properly applied in a real-life situation. Many poets and critics expressed their disagreement, yet few ever came to support Wang An-shih, or write

poems applying a similar symbolization. It indicates that the poet did not win his negotiation. This private symbol of him failed, or has yet to succeed, to be accepted as a public symbol in poetry on history.

In more cases, however, successful negotiation has been carried out among generations of Confucian intellectuals. The result is the entire system of historical personages in the thousands of poems on history, symbolizing various categories of Confucian morality. The construction and maintenance of this symbolic system has been a collective endeavor of the Confucian intellectuals, and a continuous effort that has been carried on for the past two thousand years. Hundreds of historical figures have been written about in this genre. On the one hand, there are licentious rulers like Ch'en Hou-chu (553-604), Emperor Yang of Sui (569-618), and Emperor Hsüan-tsung of T'ang; brutal emperors like Ch'in Shih-huang-ti; bewitching *femmes fatale* like Tan Chi 妤己, Pao-ssu 袁奴, Chang Li-hua 張麗華 (?-589), and Yang Yü-huan; perfidious Grand Councilor like Ch'in K'uai 秦檜 (1090-1155) and Chia Ssu-tao 賈似道 (1213-1275); hero-turned mutineer like Han Hsin 蘇信 (?-196 B.C.); cunning usurpers like Wang Mang 王莽 (45 B.C.-23 A.D.); capitulatory generals like Li Ling 李陵 (?-74 B.C.); politicians who sold their service to whichever state paid the highest price, like Su Ch'in 蘇秦 and Chang I 張儀 (?-310); and vicious eunuchs like Wei Chung-hsien 魏忠賢 (1568-1627). On the other hand, there are prudent and able rulers like Emperor T'ai-tsung of T'ang (599-649); heroic assassins
like Ching K'e; unreservedly devoted subjects like Chu-ke Liang; patriotic generals like Tsu T'i 祖逖 (266-321), Liu K'un 劉琨 (271-318) and Yüeh Fei 岳飛 (1103-1142); wasted political prodigies like Chia I 贊貳 (200-168 B.C.); brave and loyal envoys like Su Wu 苏武 (?-60 B.C.); loyal subjects who died martyrs for their dynasties, like Chang Hsün 張遼 (709-757), Hsü Yüan 許遠 (709-757), Wen T'ien-hsiang 文天祥 (1236-1283) and Shih K'e-fa 史可法 (1601-1645); patriotic subjects victimized by palace coups, like Yü Ch'ien 呂頊 (1398-1457); women who remained loyal to their man, like Lü Chu 呂珠 (?-300); honest and impartial magistrates like Pao Cheng 包拯 (999-1062) and Hai Jui 海瑞 (1514-1587); upright officials who chose death before serving usurpers, like Fang Hsiao-ju 方孝孺 (1357-1402); and high-principled recluses like Yen Kuang 軍光. The list could go on and on. However, putting together all these historical figures and their deeds, what we eventually obtain is not a poetic account of the entire Chinese history, not even a simplified outline of it. But if we investigate this aggregate of historical personages from the viewpoints of moralization and symbolization, it immediately reveals itself to us as a system of poetic symbols for Confucian morality, and for that matter, a remarkably comprehensive and organic one.

And when an otherwise highly abstract and complicated moral doctrine obtains such a symbolization in poetry on history, it acquires several new features to its great advantage.
The first feature of this symbolization of Confucian morality—as the Confucian meta-interpretation of human history—is its enhanced comprehensibility. Particular persons and specific events, utilized in poetry on history to convey the corresponding moral concepts and significance, render lifelike illustration to the latter. The general is concretized, the abstract vivified, and the vague clarified. The theoretical is applied to a practical situation. And on a moral issue nothing could prove more substantial than this application, for as Kant correctly stressed with the title of his second Critique, a moral issue is in essence always a practical issue.

The second feature of this symbolization of Confucian morality is its solid verifiability. If the enhanced comprehensibility discussed above could also be achieved through illustration with fictional characters and plots, it is the believed factuality of historical material that can alone provide the symbolized morality with a verifiability so solid, that it appears absolutely unchallengeable. According to Cuddon, the distinction between an allegory and a symbol is that while a symbol has a “real existence,” the figures and places in an allegory merely have an arbitrary existence invented by the author. Although a literary allegory, due to its fictionality, could often furnish an abstract concept or value with phenomenal expressiveness, it does not furnish any concrete

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75 See A Dictionary of Literary Terms, s.v. “Allegory.”
example. This is because a literary allegory, as a product of its author's imagination, does not directly provide any independent "ontological" authenticity besides the author's pure subjectivity, and thus substantiating it. A symbol made of a historical personage, however, possesses an unchallengeable factuality that is independent of a poet's subjectivity, and provides a solid grounding for it. Although a poet's interpretation of a specific historical figure could be debatable, in most cases efforts could be made to boil the debate down to the existence or nonexistence of certain historical facts, which the Chinese in those good old pre-postmodern days still believed to be verifiable or falsifiable, to a certain extent at least. As a result, when historical personages are employed in this symbolization of Confucian morality, they endow it with a great verifiability and credibility, not only as an eloquent "discourse," but as an indisputable testimony.

The third important feature of this symbolization of Confucian morality by historical personages is its inexhaustibility in terms of both moral significance and historical concretization. This process of symbolization means far more than typologically pairing up a historical figure with a moral category once for all. As demonstrated in the case of Wang Chao-chün, it is a process of continual negotiation and re-negotiation, and the complicated dynamics of exploring, experimenting, persuading, rejecting, and consenting. And it goes along with the endless course of history itself. As history advances, more historical figures would be
included into the reserve of potential symbols for the poets to draw on. But more important is that as new elements are added in, even the ancient past would alter its historical significance to each new generation of poets. As the realm of history expands, its entirety obtains a modified structure. And each old element is accordingly placed in a new position in this new structure, therefore acquires for itself a new historical significance hitherto unknown to the older generations. And this makes symbolization a process that is always dynamic, unexpectable, and enlightening.
CHAPTER III

SPATIALIZATION AND ETERNALIZATION

While being moralized and symbolized, history, characterized by temporality and transiency, is nevertheless in poetry on history spatialized and eternalized. These two processes will be examined in detail in this chapter.

Strictly speaking, spatiality and temporality are the two essential elements in human experience, as the spatial-temporal is the fundamental form in which humans experience the world. It is therefore inadequate to insist doctrinally on the inevitability of a symbiosis of spatiality and temporality, or on the impossibility of a pure spatialization or temporalization in human experience, or in the symbolic system—a narrative, a picture, or a poem, etc.—in which this experience is re-presented. This is because a “theoretical neatness” of this sort, its aura of an unmatched profundity notwithstanding, could provide no constructive insight whatsoever.
and would lead our inquiry nowhere. Only an in-depth investigation into the relative weight which spatiality or temporality carries in a specific re-presentation can shed light upon this issue.¹ In the case of poetry on history, we shall examine the spatialization of history from four different angles: structural principle, presentation of historical figures, works of individual poets, and the genre as a whole.

As far as structural principle is concerned, a brief survey of how time is processed in both historical works and historical novels will provide a revealing inter-generic comparison. There are three major forms of narrative history in traditional Chinese historiography: the pien-nien 錦年 (Annals), the chi-shih pen-mo 紀事本末 (Narrative of major sequences of events from beginning to end), and the one in which all the works of standard history(cheng-shih 正史) are written—the chi-chuan 續傳 (Annals-biography). The pien-nien works, like the Spring and Autumn Annals and Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government, adopt the most strict temporal order in its arrangement of events. The narration advances year by year. The chi-shih pen-mo works, like the T'ung-chien chi-shih pen-mo 遇鑑紀事本末 (The Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government Topically Arranged) by Yuan Shu 衢在 (1131-1205),

¹ For an elaborate study of spatialization in one of the traditional Chinese historical works, see Xiaobin Jian, “Spatialization in the Shiji” (Ph. D. diss., The Ohio State University, 1992).
advance event by event. Individual events are the basic units of arrangement. If event A occurred before event B but concluded after it, a *chi-shih pen-mo* work would first narrate A through its end, then turn back to that point in time when event B commenced and start telling its whole story. But within each individual event, the narration is still in a strict temporal order, and usually in great detail as well. A *chi-chuan* work has a more complex structure. It usually includes four major sections: the *Chi* 纪 (Annals), the *Chuan* 載 (Biographies), the *Piao* 表 (Tables), and the *Chi* 志 or *Shu* 書 (Treatises). Annals of individual emperors’ reigns and biographies of other historical figures are primarily in a temporal order. Most tables, as evidenced by those in the *Shih-chi*, are in a temporal order as well. Only the treatises, as analytical summaries of specific institutions such as rites, music, laws, calendar, etc., are often not arranged into a very clear temporal order. Yet as implied in its name, the major sections of a *chi-chuan* work are undoubtedly its annals and biographies. Furthermore, a *chi-chuan* work as a whole, either a *tuan-tai-shih* 断代史 (dynastic history) like the *History of the Han Dynasty*, or a *t’ung-shih* 通史 (general history) like the *Records of the Grand Historian*, always makes unequivocally clear the specific historical period it covers. It seems safe to conclude that temporality is the most fundamental structural principle of major traditional Chinese historical works.

A temporal structure is always manifest in historical novels as well. The typical title of a historical novel begins with the
historical period it covers, followed by the term *yen-i* (romance), as in the best-known *San-kuo-chih yen-i* and *Sui T’ang yen-i*. It would narrate the events occurred in that specific period of time, and primarily in the same temporal sequence as they happened. Also the gradual progress of an event would be narrated in great detail, far more than necessary to draw a brief moral conclusion from it. The account of Battle of the Red Cliff, for instance, occupies eight chapters in the *San-kuo-chih yen-i*, including details like Chu-ke Liang's disputing with all the scholars of the Wu regime; his spurring Chou Yū to fight Ts'ao Ts'ao with a rumor about the latter's desire for the former's wife; Chou Yū's exploiting Chiang Kan with a ruse; Chu-ke Liang's "borrowing" arrows with the *ts'ao-ch'uan* (boats with bundles of straw lashed to the sides); Huang Kai's pretended treason; P'ang T'ung's suggesting Ts'ao Ts'ao to chain his ships together; Chu-ke Liang's "borrowing" the east wind; and Kuan Yū's releasing Ts'ao Ts'ao for paying back the latter's previous favor. Again, all these features attest to the importance of temporality as a primary structural principle in traditional Chinese historical novels.

Although dealing with historical events and personages, as historical works and historical novels do, poetry on history seldom, if ever, adopts temporality as a major structural principle. On the contrary, the temporality of a historical event would be more or less neutralized. And two of the frequently employed structural
principles for this purpose could be designated as the thematic, and the causal.

The thematic structure in poetry on history is one in which events and personages of different times are organized into an individual poem, under the command of a single theme which bestows an integrating meaning upon each of them, and the poem as a whole. Even before Tso Ssu wrote his “Yung-shih,” the famous eight poems, part of which we cited in the “Introduction,” the Wei poet Tu Chih's 杜摯 (?-?) “To Kuan-ch’iu Chien [贈丘倫]” had provided an earlier example for this thematic structure:

A steed with no chance to prove itself,
Could only dawdle beside the troughs and mangers.
A heroic man with no chance to fulfill his ambition,
Would merely lead a life of frustration and misery.
Yi Chih was a dowry-slave of Ch’eng T’ang’s wife,²
Lù Wang held a fishing rod at riverside.³
Yi-wu was stranded as a merchant,⁴

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² Yi Chih was a slave whom Ch’eng T’ang’s wife brought to her husband as part of her dowry. He later aided Ch’eng T’ang in overthrowing the Hsia and establishing the Shang dynasty, then became the most powerful minister in the court.

³ Lù Wang, better known as Chiang Tzu-ya 姜子牙, was a recluse-fishman at the Wei-he River before becoming the Grand Preceptor 太師 of the Chou and helping King Wu to conquer the Shang.

⁴ Yi-wu was the name of Kuan Chung 管仲 (?-645 B.C.). He was a merchant before participating in politics, but ended up as the most important minister of Duke Huan of Ch’i.
And Ning Ch'i sighed in desperation facing the cows.\(^5\)
Yi-chi was trapped in the position of janitor,\(^6\)
The Marquis of Huai-yin once almost starved.\(^7\)
Mai-ch'en was a woodcutter till an old age,
His wife abandoned him, never returning.\(^8\)
Shih-chih served in the government for ten years,
Yet failed to obtain a promotion.\(^9\)
My talent is no match for these eight gentlemen,
Yet I am suffering the same misfortune as they did.
My obscurity is not truly due to lack of talent,
It is because Yüan Ang has yet to speak for me.\(^{10}\)
I have suffered these diseases for a long time,
The Jung and Wei airs in my body are disturbed.\(^{11}\)

\(^5\) Ning Ch'i once made a living on driving cart for others. Duke Huan of Ch'i heard him singing a song complaining his misfortune, and promoted him to a minister.

\(^6\) Li Yi-chi (？-203 B.C.) was a janitor. He later joined Liu Pang's army and rendered an outstanding service.

\(^7\) Han Hsin, later the Marquis of Huai-yin of the Han, was poor before his time came and would have starved if an old poor woman had not fed him with her own food for about a month.

\(^8\) Chu Mai-ch'en (？-115 B.C.) was a poor woodcutter and abandoned by his wife before entering service to the court.

\(^9\) Chang Shih-chih served as a junior official for a long time under Emperor Wen of Han, but later became Chamberlain for Law Enforcement.

\(^{10}\) Yüan Ang (？-148 B.C.) was the one who spoke well of Chang Shih-chih in front of Emperor Wen and helped him obtain the promotion.

\(^{11}\) Jung and Wei are two terms of traditional Chinese medical theory, referring to two vital forces in human body. The disturbance and imbalance of the two indicate a diseased condition.
I heard of that you have Han Chung’s medicine.\textsuperscript{1,2} Could you send me a bolus along with your reply?

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\textsuperscript{1,2} Han Chung was an alchemist assigned by Ch’in Shih-huang-ti to make elixir.
That the poem was presented to a powerful friend asking for a recommendation should not conceal from our critical examination the fact that its content also qualifies it, no less than those works by Tso Ssu, as a poem on history. As a matter of fact, it is even possible that Tso Ssu was somehow inspired by this precedent of Tu Chih. Another much later example would be the Sung poet Wen T’ien-hsiang’s famous “Song of the Upright Spirit [正氣歌].”¹⁴ A poem with a thematic structure like these usually covers more than one historical event or personage, and often more than one dynasty. Tu Chih’s poem, for instance, includes eight historical figures of the Shang, Chou, and Han dynasties. There is one factor, however, common to these eight figures, i.e., they were all extraordinarily talented people who, before finally proving themselves, had nevertheless suffered neglect by those in power. A talented man deserves a chance to prove himself to his superior and sovereign, or those in power would be found unwise and unfair—a moral deficiency

¹³ Tu Chih, “Tseng Kuan-ch’iu Chien [贈母丘倩],” in Ting Fu-pao, 1. 200.

¹⁴ See Wen T’ien-hsiang ch’üan-chi, 375-76.
as well as an administrative incompetence—this is the single theme which commands the incorporation of all these different historical figures of separate ages, with their diverse deeds, into an organic structure in one single poem. That these deeds were originally done in a temporal order matters little to the poet. He makes no effort whatsoever to gauge the temporal intervals between the incidents, or to explore the possible causal connection between them. He even places the story of Chu Mai-ch’en before that of Chang Shih-chih simply for the sake of convenience, although the latter actually happened decades before the former. And both Tso Ssu and Wen T’ien-hsiang made the same temporal inversion in their respective poems mentioned above. The great liberty which the poets assume in dealing with the original temporal order suggests that they do not put much significance on temporality. And this neutralization of temporality, or detemporalization, is at the same time a process of spatialization—a phenomenon that has occurred repeatedly in time is now re-presented as a phenomenon that takes place widely in space, in various situations, and the poet himself exists as part of this whole picture.

The causal structure in poetry on history is one in which the relationship between the cause of a historical event and its effect is greatly highlighted, with the temporal sequence between the two downplayed. Although in reality a cause always precedes its effect, the causal structure in poetry on history makes it possible that the temporality between the two is backgrounded, while the logicality
between them is kept intact, or even thus foregrounded. In other words, causality overshadows, or even completely displaces, temporality. When adopting a causal structure, a poet does not concern himself with elaborating, step by step, on the gradual development from the cause to the effect. On the contrary, he strives to shorten, or totally omit, the temporal duration along with all the transitional phases from the cause to the effect. It results in an effect placed much closer to its cause, or even juxtaposed with it. And a juxtaposition of cause with effect, while backgrounding the temporality, immediately foregrounds the inevitable causality, between the two. The following poem provides a typical example for the causal structure:

A kingdom is lost the moment a beauty's smile bewitches the ruler,
Need one's sorrow wait till thorns grow in the palace?
The night Little Lovely's jade-like body lay flat
Already declared the Chou army's entry to Chin-yang.

一笑相傾國便亡，
何勞荆棘始堪傷。
小憐玉體橫陳夜，
已報同師入晉陽。15

15 See Li Shang-yin 李商隱, "Two Poems on the Northern Ch'i Dynasty [北齊二首]," Yü-hsi-sheng shih chien-chu, 6. 16b-17a.
The poem explores the causality between a ruler's sexual indulgence and the fate of his regime. "Little Lovely" was the name of a pet concubine of Ch'i Hou-chu, the Northern Ch'i emperor who was responsible for the collapse of the regime. The sack of the city of Chin-yang by the Northern Chou army in 576 was the war decisive on the Northern Ch'i's ruin the next year, and is therefore used by the poet to represent the ruin. Historically, the Emperor's infatuation with "Little Lovely" began in 574, two years before the sack of Chin-yang, and three years before the collapse of the Northern Ch'i. In the poem, however, the entire span from the ruler's sexual indulgence with the woman to the ruin of his regime is deliberately omitted, along with all the transitional phases of the whole event, so that the two incidents could be placed side by side. The effect and its cause, which it temporally followed, are now re-presented as two facets of the same event which happened simultaneously— "A kingdom is lost the moment a beauty's smile bewitches the ruler."

In his *The Psychology of Time*, Paul Fraisse elaborates on the notion of "perceived present," during which a string of physically successive stimuli can be perceived psychologically in a form of simultaneity:

There also exists, however, a *perceived* present which can last only for the duration of the organization which we perceive as one unit. . . . All the rest is already past or still belongs to the future. There is order in this present, there are intervals between its constituent elements, but there is also a form of simultaneity resulting from the very unit of my act of
perception. Thus the perceived present is not the paradox which logical analysis would make it seem by splitting time into atoms and reducing the present to the simple passage of time without psychological reality.16

A “perceived present,” or a “psychological present” as Fraisse sometimes prefers,17 is not an instant in the strictest logic sense, i.e., a moment with no duration. It is a well organized psychological unit in which “several successive events can be apprehended with relative simultaneity.”18 And there is some flexibility about how long the duration could be. According to Fraisse, “The duration of the perceived present, like the richness of its contents, depends on the possibilities for the organization of successive elements into one unit. It is primarily determined by the direction of our attention.”19 In the light of this concept of “perceived present,” what Li Shang-yin does in the poem analyzed above amounts to re-organizing the originally temporal sequence of cause and effect into a spatialized structure, and presenting it to his reader as a “perceived present.” Fraisse enumerates several factors in a

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18 *Ibid*.

successful organization like this one: “As our perception of succession is dependent on the possibilities of organization, everything which facilitates this—the attitude of the subject, grouping by proximity, structure, meaning—increases the richness of what constitutes our present.” In the case of this poem by Li Shang-yin, meaning—the logicality between the cause and its effect—obviously plays the most significant role. That A will necessarily lead to B is re-presented as if A includes B as part of itself— “A kingdom is lost the moment a beauty’s smile bewitches the ruler”—A and B become two sides of a single coin, and we simply cannot have one without the other. An originally temporal sequence is thus transformed into a spatial structure, so that the inevitable causality between its two elements is connected tightly together and highlighted with an alerting clarity. As the history-criticizing poetry became the mainstream of poetry on history, and attracted more poets to writing it, this causal structure became a more widely adopted one. Another illustrative example can be found in a poem by Tu Mu on Ch’en Hou-Chu. The last emperor of the Ch’en dynasty was condemned by historians for having indulged himself altogether in the sexual wantonness with his pet concubines Chang Li-hua and others, and thus neglected his duty of administration. Because of this, his regime became weak and was eventually conquered by the Sui army, led by a general named Han Ch’in-hu

\[20\] bid ., 92.
This temporality between the historical cause and effect, however, is spatialized by the poet in two lines as follows:

At the palace gate came Han Ch'in-hu [leading the Sui troops],
On the palace tower was Chang Li-hua [dancing for the Emperor].

In historical works covering the particular period at issue, such as the *Ch'en-shu* (History of the Ch'en Dynasty) or *Nan-shih* (History of the Southern Dynasties), there is no record of such a dramatic scene. Yet the poet not only juxtaposes the effect with the cause, but deliberately puts the effect before its cause to highlight this device of detemporalization and spatialization. The result is a re-organized picture of two incidents, to be perceived by the reader instantly as two inseverable facets of a single event, yet at the same time still comprehended as the cause and its effect.

When it comes to the representation of historical figures, it is done in a very different way in poetry on history than in historical novels. Despite the cliché that Chinese narratives are crowded by “flat” characters only, “round” characters like the complex Ts'ao Ts'ao in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and the unpredictable

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Lin Ch'ung in the *Water Margin* can still be found. But this is not the case in poetry on history. As we have demonstrated in previous chapter, here the poet usually concerns himself less with characterization than symbolization. In other words, a historical figure is assigned to convey a certain moral significance directly and unequivocally, rather than to obtain an independent and realistic characterization of his/her own. If the characterization like what we would habitually seek in a realistic narrative is not the poet’s pursuit at all, he would hardly concern himself with concepts such as “flat,” or “round,” characters. Our survey reveals that the devices he would most frequently adopt are the anecdotal and summary ones. Through the anecdotal device a historical figure is presented in a poem as the agent of a specific conduct, and at least in this particular poem, he could be defined and evaluated by this conduct alone. So far as this anecdote proves sufficient to convey a particular moral significance, it does not have to be an overall “realistic” or fair portrait of the historical figure at issue.

Emperor Wen of Han (r.180-157 B.C.), for instance, was almost unanimously praised by historians for being benevolent, thrifty, and intelligent—a typical virtuous sovereign. Yet in the following poem by Li Shang-yin the Emperor is presented as nothing but a stupidest ruler:

To the audience hall the worthy banished minister was recalled; Master Chia's talents were matchless in the world.
Alas, in vain did the Emperor move his seat forward at midnight—
Instead of asking about the people, he asked about the gods!22

宣室求賢訪逓臣，
賈生才調更無倫。
可憐夜半虛前席，
不問蒼生意鬼神。23

In his only poem on Emperor Wen, many of whose good deeds are recorded in the *Shih-chi* and *Han-shu*, Li Shang-yin selects nothing but this unflattering anecdote, not from the Annals of the Emperor, but from the biography of Chia I. Under the pressure from other meritorious senior subjects, the Emperor once reluctantly banished Chia I from the court, although he was well aware that the young scholar was an extraordinarily talented statesman, and had much valuable advice to offer. Later he summoned Chia I back to the palace in a midnight, and asked for his advice—but only about the gods and spirits. Chia I began talking, and the Emperor got so fascinated by the topic that he moved his seat-mat forward to be closer to Chia. Presented in this anecdote, Emperor Wen in the poem


is the target of the poet's relentless ridicule. During the twenty-three years of his reign, the Emperor did many things recorded as very admirable by historians. As soon as a single anecdote is cut off from its original temporal sequence, however, its temporality is neutralized. As this anecdote is meticulously unfolded, described, and examined under a moral amplifier from a particular angle, the detemporalization renders it a spatial entity. It exposes one of the many facets of the totality of a historical figure. Yet as far as this poem is concerned, this anecdote is that figure. And the historical figure thus re-presented (more often than not one-sidedly, as we have seen), now stands as a symbol for one of the categories of a system of morality, a system conceived as timeless and multifaceted, with its all sections tightly interconnected into an organic structure.

A historical figure could also be presented in a poem on history through a summary device. In this case his all major conducts would be summed up, and based upon the summary a final and consistent moral conclusion on him would be reached. A telling example would be the T'ang poet Tu Mu's "Written as Passing the Li-shan Hill [過關山作]".24

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24 Ch'in Shih-huang-ti was buried at the foot of the Li-shan Hill.
The Emperor traveled eastward and fished for the Chou tripods.\footnote{After establishing the Ch’in dynasty, the Emperor traveled around the country to deter potential rebels. He also sent men fishing in the Ssu-shui River for the nine Chou tripods, symbols for the mandate of heaven to a dynasty but believed to have been thrown into the river at the end of the Chou.}

Liu Pang and Hsiang Yü watched him, craning their necks.\footnote{Liu and Hsiang respectively witnessed the Emperor’s procession on different occasions, and felt the majestic grandeur irresistably tempting. Both of them later became leaders of the uprising peasant armies that together overthrew the Ch’in regime.}

You worked really hard to conquer the whole nation,
Yet benefited were those poor fellows by the roadside.
The “Black heads” were not fooled, but yourself were.\footnote{The Ch’in called the commoners “black heads,” and tried to make them easier to rule by burning books and burying intellectuals alive.}
The thousand miles of the Han-ku Pass locked you the autocrat up.\footnote{The Han-ku Pass was established by the Ch’in during the Warring States period, and heavily relied upon as a shield for its safety.}

The shepherd boy carried the torch into the Nine-springs,\footnote{The term “Nine-springs” refers to a place deeply under the ground, and is thus used to mean tombs. Here it also refers to those imitative “rivers and seas” dug in the Emperor’s tomb and filled with mercury.}
Failed to dry them up, the fire burned you to ashes.\footnote{A shepherd boy entered the Emperor’s tomb with a torch, looking for a lost sheep, and accidentally burned off his coffin.}
In poems like this one, a historical figure obtains a presentation based upon a summary of all his major deeds. If the accuracy of the overall presentation and the fairness of the final evaluation that permeates through it are the concerns of the poet, the inner complexity and the gradual development of the character are obviously not. The poet’s most important task is to reach a final and consistent moral conclusion on the historical figure at issue. What he does is to “compress,” from the viewpoint of the posterity, the long account of the entire life of a historical figure into a picture of him, with certain representative acts highlighting his moral characteristics. In this poem by Tu Mu, for instance, these representative acts are Ch’in Shih-huang-ti’s searching for the nine Chou tripods in order to sanctify his regime with the symbols of mandate of heaven, his unifying the nation exclusively by military

31 Tu Mu, *Fan-ch’uan-shih chi-chu*, 87-89.
force, his book-burning and burying intellectuals alive in order to
dupe the people, his reliance on natural barriers to safeguard his
regime, his grandiose tomb construction and its farcical destruction.
The particular dates of these conducts and the specific temporal
order in which they were carried out, although a great concern of a
historian, matter little to the poet. He is satisfied so far as they
can be accepted as reliable historical facts. Compressed together,
what they constitute is not a chronicle of the Emperor, but a picture
of him, a picture drawn from several angles of various moral
categories and with his major moral characteristics marked, like a
mosaic or map. What is expected of the reader is not to trace, step
by step, the course of gradual development of this historical
character, but to perceive the whole picture at one instance as is
presented to him, to recognize what kind of person the Emperor was,
and to comprehend the moral category he symbolizes. Serving as
symbols for the system of Confucian morality, historical figures in
poetry on history are presented as something essentially spatial—as
pointed out by William Troy:

Whatever operation of the imagination have gone on to produce
them, symbols themselves become fixed, constant, and static.
They may be considered as the end-results of the effort of the
imagination to fix itself somewhere in space. The symbol may
be considered as something spatial (original italic). . . .
whether separate or integrated into a total vision, symbols are
capable of being grasped, like other aspects of space, by a single and instantaneous effort of perception.\textsuperscript{32}

As for works of individual poets, when written in the genre poetry on history, their primary concern is always the moral significance of concrete historical events or personages, not the uninterrupted continuity of dynasties, nor the complete coverage of a particular historical period. No poet has successfully traced in his poetry on history the entire course of a single dynasty—like a historian would do by writing a \textit{tuan-tai-shih} (dynastic history), or that of several consecutive dynasties—like a historian would do by writing a \textit{t'ung-shih} (general history). The subjects are selected individually and discretely, without trying to represent the unbroken continuity and completeness of the historical period from which they are chosen. As we have seen in the works by Tu Chih and Tso Ssu, historical figures from several dynasties could be put into a single poem, with their original temporal order often inverted, but under a single commanding theme. And when a poet is overwhelmingly concerned about a particular theme, this thematic unity could even be found among many works by him—it becomes a thematic leitmotif characteristic of his poetry on history. For instance, Li Shang-yin is strikingly notable for his \textit{fin de siècle}

theme, and Wen T’ien-hsiang for his martyr theme. That Li Shang-yin lived in a time when the T’ang dynasty was unredeemably collapsing, and that Wen T’ien-hsiang died a martyr himself when the Southern Sung was destroyed by the Yüan troops, provide illuminating explanations for their respective thematic leitmotifs. And the same historical event, such as that of Wang Chao-chün, although happening only once, could be written of repeatedly by the same poet, but from different angles. What has inspired generations of poets to engage in this genre is not to narrate a historical course in rhyme, but to explore the complicated structure of the system of Confucian morality in every possible dimension, and to fully unfold its sophisticated moral significance as manifested in various historical experiences. Every one of these experiences adds to a whole picture, which is aimed to depicting the multifaceted structure of Confucian morality in its entirety.

Finally, even the genre poetry on history as a whole does not exhibit anything close to a well-organized temporal sequence.

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34 See Wen T’ien-hsiang ch’üan-chi . Among about ten poems on history written by him, most are on historical figures like Su Wu, Chu-ke Liang, Liu K’un, Tsu T’i, Yen kao-ch’ing and Hsü Yüan, all of whom suffered or died for their dynasty or nation without wavering their loyalty.
Thousands of poems have been written in this genre. Surveyed as a whole, however, what can be clearly recognized in it is not a diachronic narration of the entire Chinese history, but rather a synchronic structure of all the diverse and conflicting moral forces interacting with one another. The history presented in those poems as a whole demonstrates less how it evolves than how it works. History does not go ahead as a unilinear and irreversible progression every stage of which is unique and unrepeatable. On the contrary, it goes back again and again to where it has previously been: peace, unity, prosperity, corruption, disorder, rebellion, war, chaos, ruin of dynasties, etc. The focus is always on what is recurrent and cyclical, i.e., what is essentially timeless. What a reader could eventually discover in those poems is not a narrative chronicle of the long course of Chinese history in becoming, but an analytical description of the comprehensive structure of Chinese history in operating.

Spatialization, as analyzed from the angles of structural principle, presentation of historical figures, works of individual poets, and the genre poetry on history as a whole, proves to be a primary process history undergoes when poeticized in this genre. And underlying this process is the basic Confucian concept of history as the manifestation of the Way through human activities, which we have examined in Chapter I. The originally temporal sequence of historical events and personages, through moralization and symbolization, is first detemporalized into some timeless
essences of history as understood by the poets. Presented in poetic form, these timeless essences are further spatialized into an integral picture illustrating the kaleidoscopic panorama of human activities. As history is conceived as the incessant manifestation of the Way which is essentially changeless, its continuity in time is accordingly perceived and presented as a timeless expansion in space, throughout which the moral significance of the Way unfolds boundlessly. The longer the time is, the more vast the space, the fuller the unfolding, and the more extensive and profound man's recognition and appreciation of the Way.

Looked from another point of view, moreover, this process of spatialization, while detemporalizing historical events and personages, nevertheless sustains in a remarkable way their everlasting significance—history is eternalized.

We have pointed out that spatialization is concurrent with moralization and symbolization. When history is moralized, the moral significance is rendered more essential than specific. When particular historical figures are employed to symbolize moral categories as the essence of human historical experiences, the symbolized is rendered more essential than the symbols themselves. The incidental is backgrounded while the essential foregrounded, the particular is backgrounded while the general foregrounded. Accompanying this is the process of spatialization. It neutralizes the specific temporality of historical events and personages,
therefore rendering history virtually timeless. And exactly because the history thus re-presented in this poetic genre is no longer so strictly confined to a particular period of time, it acquires a remarkably extended relevance—it now belongs to any time and all times: the past, the present, and the future. In his observation of the wide adoption of "spatial form" in modern Western literature, Joseph Frank notices a similar phenomenon:

What has occurred, at least so far as literature is concerned, may be described as the transformation of the historical imagination into myth—an imagination for which historical time does not exist and which sees the actions and events of a particular time only as the bodying forth of the eternal prototypes.35

Among the examples Frank gives to illustrate this spatial form and its mythologizing tendency are James Joyce's *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The fact that modern artists such as Eliot pursues eternity in their works by mythologizing history is also discerned by critics like Douglas Wood. In a study titled *Man against Time*, by examining Eliot's application of the "mythical method" in his writing *The Waste Land* as well as reviewing the *Ulysses*, Wood contends that

Eliot thought that the timeless world of myth provided a coherent background upon which the artist could focus the bewildering kaleidoscope of contemporary events. Myth was stable, not affected by the accidents of change, and thus could be used by the poet or novelist not only to impose pattern upon the anarchy of current history, but to structure his own experience.36

While a Christian like Eliot would so understandably pursue eternity by mythologizing history, the strong humanistic tendency of Confucianism not only accounts for the relative underdevelopment of myth (as opposed to legend) in traditional Chinese culture,37 but sheds light upon this "secular method" of pursuing eternity by moralizing history, in order to reach a penetrating comprehension and to take a firm grasp of the current life. Poetry on history provides itself as a telling example in this respect.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the everlasting relevance of this eternalized history is to examine another distinct phenomenon in Chinese literature, i.e., it is within the genre of "poetry on history" that Chinese satirical poetry achieves its highest development.


The achievement, or more accurately, the very existence of satirical poetry in traditional China, has been a controversial issue. To some critics, such as C. T. Hsia, satirical poetry as a mature poetic genre has never existed in China at all:

The greatest weakness of classical Chinese poetry, which follows from its need to observe social and political decorum, is its satiric reticence—its fear to speak out against government and social abuses and its avoidance of raillery and lampoon in the name of good taste.38

An observation like this might not be completely groundless. Satire, as a work of art "in which wickedness or folly is censured,"39 always "victimizes" its subject, thus making its own moral righteousness look suspicious. A satire aimed at an identifiable individual in current life is very likely to call into question its author's motive. In a reader's eyes, the poet might have written a satirical poem because he bears a grudge against a particular person, or simply suffers from a cynical personality. Considering that even a great satirical poet like Alexander Pope has been viewed


39 This definition is given by Dr. Johnson and quoted in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, enlarged ed., s.v. "Satire," by Robert Elliott.
by some as "a mean spiteful little wretch," the generic disadvantage of satirical poetry must have been hindering poets everywhere in the world. The emphasis upon the "good taste" of literature in general, and of poetry in particular—shih (poetry) was regarded as more serious a genre than others like tz'u (lyric), ch'ü (aria) and hsiao-shuo (fiction)—has undoubtedly made an impact on the development of satirical poetry in traditional China. If a satire happens to offend, or to be conceived of as offensive to, those in power, it could even put the poet's life in danger. Su Shih's (1037-1101) miserable experience in the well-known Wu-t'ai shih-an (A case of satirical poems investigated by the Censorate) provides a typical example for such a situation. It is quite questionable whether traditional Chinese poets maintained a concept of satirical poetry exactly as their Western counterparts did, or as Professor Hsia has expected.

This, however, does not mean that there was really a "satiric reticence" in classical Chinese poetry. As a matter of fact, satirical poetry survived and thrived in Chinese literature, just as it did in Western literature. Even in the Shih-ching anthology, the "sacred" text of Chinese poetry, we recognize very stinging

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satirical poems like the famous "Hsin-t'ai [新臺]"\(^2\) and "Ch'iang-yu-tz'u [揚有茨],"\(^3\) aimed right at the nobles and rulers. A significant factor, however, must not be neglected here, i.e., these poems had been folk songs originally uttered by people whose names were never found out by the authority. When they were eventually heard of by those up in court, and included into the repertoire of the political and cultural elite, the victims of the biting satire might have been long gone with the time, and officially labeled as villains deserving such a contemptuous treatment in literature. In other words, they were already history. The subjects of the two poems were the Duke Hsüan of Wei (r. 718-700 B.C.) and his son Wan. The former snapped for himself his another son's bride on her way to wedding, and the latter had an affair with one of the wives of his own father. Their time was two centuries before that of Confucius. And the attribution of the *Shih-ching* to the editorship/censorship of Confucius himself suggests that, even from the most orthodox Confucian standpoint, a satire aimed at historical figures, however noble they used to be, was considered admissible politically, morally, as well as artistically. These noble and powerful people became available for satire, or satire became applicable to them, primarily because they had become historical.

\(^2\) Mao-shih, 2, 17b-18a.

\(^3\) Ibid., 1a-2a.
Hence the intriguing phenomenon that, albeit at the first glance satirical poetry seems to have been severely hindered in traditional China by the literary orthodoxy as well as political authoritarianism, it eventually turns out to have developed via a detour, flourishing in a distinct genre—poetry on history. This development has even been commanded and invigorated by the very Confucian moralism and its insistence on a good literary taste. And it is the failure to recognize poetry on history as a major genre of classical Chinese literature in the first place that made Professor Hsia, whose remarkable academic achievements are deservedly admired by many students (myself included) in the field, reach such a sweeping conclusion that there is a "satiric reticence" in classical Chinese poetry.

Poetry on history is where one should go in order to find most, and the best, satirical poems in classical Chinese literature—satirical poetry as a genre exists in traditional China primarily as poetry on history. And the fundamental reason for this intriguing phenomenon is the eternalization of history. It is this eternalization that makes history for ever relevant to the present situation, and renders a satire aimed at historical events and personages bearing an unquestionable applicability to contemporary life, political, social, and moral.

And this applicability is actualized primarily through two major devices: specific topicality and general standard.
When a specific topicality is charged into a poem on history, the poem becomes particularly, directly, and definitely relevant to the present situation, against which the poet writes it and the reader is supposed to read it. The poem would be on some historical event/personage, yet it is written by the poet with one of his eyes on a specific current issue or situation. And this issue or situation is the very context in which the implied reader is expected to read the text of the poem. The relationship between the history referred to in the poem and the reality in the present situation could be explicitly pointed out, subtly hinted at, or not mentioned at all. In the last case, it is often because the poet believes that to emphasize the specific topicality of his work would be either politically hazardous, or artistically anticlimactic. Yet a competent reader, as an active member of the political and cultural elite of the contemporary society, to whom this particular poetic genre exclusively belongs, is expected to figure it out by himself. In some cases, a poet would, in a time he thought convenient, offer the information about the specific topicality that has been charged to a work when he was writing it. The first instance coming to one’s mind would be the famous “Prose-poem on the Ah-p’ang Palace [阿房宫赋]” by the poet Tu Mu. Tu Mu wrote this work to satirize the extravagant palace-constructing of Ch’in Shih-hung-ti, whose dynasty had collapsed more than a thousand years before the poet’s
own time. Later on in a letter to a friend, however, the poet confessed that the work had a specific topicality: "During the Pao-li period [the Emperor] indulged himself in extravagant palace-constructing, women, and music—therefore I wrote the 'Prose-poem on the Ah-p'ang Palace' [寳曇大起宮室，廣聲色，故作《阿房宮賦》]." This is an admission that the real target of his satire in the work was Emperor Ching-tsung of T'ang, who was on the throne from 824 to 826 with the reign title of Pao-li. That fu (prose-poem) could be counted as a form of poetry only in the broadest sense of the term, is less relevant here than the fact that it is a satirical work on a historical figure, with a specific topicality aimed at an emperor currently sitting on the throne when the work was written. And the fact that Tu Mu could frankly admit such a scheme then get away with it, although he was still living under the same dynasty, indicates that a specific topicality in a satirical work on history was deemed as a somewhat tolerable practice. Similar phenomena can be found in other dynasties as well. The Regulated verse entitled “Emperor Wu of Han [漢武]” by the Sung poet Yang I (974-1020) provides a suitable example in this respect:

44 See Tu Mu, Fan-ch'uan wen-chi (SPTK ed.) 1, 1a-2b.

45 See Ibid., 11a-12a.
The silver minarets on the P'eng-lai Island were far overseas,\textsuperscript{46} Hard to reach due to the Weak-water and Back-wind.\textsuperscript{47} In night, His Majesty kowtowed in the Bamboo Palace to the divine light,\textsuperscript{48} In morning, he drank the dew gathered by the copper hand.\textsuperscript{49} He launched the military campaigns in Ch'ing-hai to seek the dragon-horses,\textsuperscript{50} And insisted that Wen-ch'eng General died from eating horse liver.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{46} The P'eng-lai Island was one of the three islands believed to be inhabited by deities and immortals who lived in buildings of gold and silver.

\textsuperscript{47} The Weak-water was a special kind of water surrounding those fairy islands which could not float even a feather, making aviation impossible. In addition to this, the Back-wind would blow any boat close to those islands back to where it came from.

\textsuperscript{48} Night and night, Emperor Wu waited for deities and immortals in a palace built of bamboo, and would kowtow to some remote light which he believed to indicate their arrival.

\textsuperscript{49} The Emperor also had a tall copper tower built, topped with a hand of a deity to gather the purest dewdrops from heaven before they touched the ground. He drank the dew mixed with powdered jade every morning to pursue immortality.

\textsuperscript{50} It was believed that a most precious breed of horse was produced in Ch'ing-hai, mothered by a horse but fathered by a dragon. Emperor Wu launched many military campaigns against the West neighbors of the Han, and obtained some special horses from there.

\textsuperscript{51} A necromancer named Shao-weng 少翁 promised to summon deities for the Emperor and was thus dubbed Wen-ch'eng General. He failed to deliver, cheated, got caught, and was then executed. The Emperor told a lie that the man died from eating horse liver, in order to maintain the morale of other necromancers.
Mr. Expectant Official had teeth white as shells,
Why should he be treated like a beggar in Ch’ang-an?\(^2\)

This is a satire aimed at Emperor Wu of Han, notorious for his fanatic pursuit of deities and immortality. The incidents mentioned in the poem were his deeds recorded in various reliable historical works. This satire, however, had another target as well, i.e., the ruling emperor of Yang I’s own time, Emperor Chen-tsung of Sung (968-1022). Like Emperor Wu of over a thousand years ago, the Sung emperor was very fond of all those superstitious things such as

\(^{2}\) Tung-fang Shuo 東方朔 (154-93 B.C.) was a very charming and talented subject, yet the Emperor put him in a low position—Expectant Official—for a long period of time, made him unberably poor.

feng-ch'an 封禅 (a grand ceremony of worship of heaven on the top of the T'ai-shan Mountain to pray and give thanks for peace and prosperity), hsiang-jui 祥瑞 (good omens), and t'ien-shu 天書 (books from heaven), to the extent that “the sovereign and his subjects all acted like fanatics[一國君臣如狂然].” 54 When writing this poem, Yang I and some other literati were compiling a huge encyclopedia of historical events, the famous Ts'e-fu yün-kui 册府元龜 (Outstanding Models from the Storehouse of Literature, or Tortoise Shells for Divining from the Imperial Archives). 55 Commissioned by the court, this voluminous book was intended to provide historical experience for the Sung rulers to consult with. Entrusted by the Emperor and privileged by the exclusive access to the imperial library, this group of Confucian intellectuals, Yang I, Liu Yün 劉筠 (?-?), Ch'ien Wei-yen 錢惟演 (?-1033?) and others, felt a strong obligation to criticize

54 T'o T'o 謝朓 and others, Sung-shih 宋史 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1977) 8. 172.

55 The work was originally titled Li-tai chün-ch'en shih-chi 歷代君臣事跡 (Incidents of Sovereigns and Subjects of the Previous Dynasties), and obtained the present title after its completion. It covers the period from the antiquity to the Five Dynasties, classifies historical incidents that happened during this period, by their content, into thirty-one categories and over a thousand sub-categories. Under the category "Ti-wang 帝王 [Emperors and Kings]," for instance, are sub-categories such as "Establishment of dynasties," "Resurgence of dynasties," "Benevolence," and "Upholding Confucianism," etc. See Ts'e-fu yün-kui 册府元龜 (Taipei: Taiwan Chung-hua shu-chü, n. d.).
the Emperor’s stupidity, and found themselves equipped with more than enough historical allusions to do it satirically—via poetry on history. In addition to the poem cited above, they also wrote “The Hsüan-ch’ü Palace [宣曲],” 56 “Emperor Ming-huang [明皇],” 57 and “The Southern Dynasties [南朝],” criticizing the Sung emperor in the same manner. 58 Although this kind of satire was reported by some other officials to the Emperor, which brought about a moderate warning from His Majesty, nothing harmful occurred to the poets. 59 Moreover, several years later Yang Unhesitantly included all these satirical poems into a collection titled Hsi-k’un ch’ou-ch’ang-chi 西昆酬唱集 (Anthology of Poems Exchanged in the Hsi-k’un Archives) and published it.

Specific topicality is by no means the only device by which the applicability of history to the present is actualized in this poetic genre. As a matter of fact, the satire in most poems on history is not aimed at a positively identifiable issue in the contemporary situation. It does not mean, however, that the poets were doing it totally regardless of the present—nothing could sound

56 See Hsi-k’un ch’ou-ch’ang-chi chu, 78-97.
57 See Ibid., 101-07.
58 In Ibid., 14-18.
weirder to a Chinese Confucian than a statement like “History for history’s sake.” The continuous practice of poetry on history throughout the past bimillennium itself attests more abundantly than anything else to this believed relevance of history to the contemporary life. When this relevance does not make itself felt through a specific topicality, it does it through constructing and maintaining a general moral standard in society. While this generality at the first glance renders history less applicable to any particular political or social issue in the present, it nevertheless extends its applicability to more issues, although often less directly. As far as moral satire is concerned, a poem aimed at a particular historical figure at the same time speaks to all the people in the past, present, and future who share the pattern of that person’s conduct and should thus be classified into the same group in terms of morality. The satirized historical figures, as the symbols for various Confucian moral categories, keep demonstrating to the readers what kinds of behavior must be condemned and avoided. And this serves as a negative, yet effective, way to clarify and uphold Confucian morality. As Professor Yan-shuan Lao points out, when poets like Wu Ch'eng 吴澄 (1249-1333) and Shu Yüeh-hsiang 舒岳祥 (1236-?) wrote poems criticizing historical figures like Yang Hsiung 杨雄 (53 B.C. -18 A.D.) and Shu-sun T'ung 沙遜通 (?-?) for their political disloyalty, they were in effect issuing a general warning to the entire community of the Confucian intellectuals of their own early Yüan time, “that the decision as to whether to serve in
government should be made in a historical perspective. In other words, they should not merely take the present situation into consideration, lest they be criticized by future generations. What this "historical perspective" emphasizes is exactly the relevance and applicability of the past to the present, and of the present to the future—the essences of history never change. It is primarily through this device of general standard that satire and criticism aimed at particular historical personages have been applied to the contemporary life.

As if to compensate for the "remoteness" of history to the present, satire in poetry on history demonstrates a surprising vigor of anti-authoritative tendency in selecting its target. If a powerless man could serve as a safe target in real life, he would usually turn into a worthless one in poetry on history and is thus exempted. Emperors, those "Sons of Heaven" who would conventionally acquire a deferential treatment even in a historical work written by their conquerors, become not only legitimate targets, but most favored ones. A unanimously branded bad emperor like Ch'in Shih-huang-ti, Emperor Yang of Sui, or Ch'en Hou-chu, would be among the stock targets for most poets. A complex one like Emperor Wu of Han and Emperor Hsüan-tsung of T'ang would be

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selected mainly for their weakness and follies so that they could function as serviceable targets. Even an overall good emperor could be quite "abusively" exploited for his relatively minute mistakes—negligible in the eyes of official historians—to demonstrate the poet's artistic innovation as well as moral insight. It seems that no one has ever felt it is somewhat unfair to the historical figures at issue, as we have witnessed in Li Shang-yin's treatment of Emperor Wen of Han. And if emperors are not exempted from satire, there is no reason anyone else must be spared. As long as a sound moral lesson could be drawn from him/her, a historical personage could become a legitimate target of satire in poetry on history.

Satire in poetry on history also demonstrates a vast comprehensiveness in its scope. No vice, corruption, brutality, stupidity, political conspiracy, or sexual scandal would be too important, or too trivial, to fall prey to poets' moral wrath and artistic wit—the two basic components of satire. The result of this wide scope is that poetry on history as a whole could in a sense be read as an "Encyclopedia of Vices in Chinese History."

Yet more noticeable is the startling sharpness that can be found in the satire uttered in poetry on history toward those powerful figures. On the one hand, now that they have been

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historicized, all the political or imperial aura that once aggrandized them suddenly faded away. Even a poor and powerless poet acquires a judgmental authority when writing poems on history, as he is now judging them by a moral standard which is believed to transcend political status or historical periods. The field is more than leveled—it is tilted the other way. On the other hand, as the objects of the satire are all historical personages who lived hundreds or even thousands of years before the poet’s time, the poet feels no need to worry about the accusation that he might hold a personal grudge against them. In other words, the historicity of the poet’s target reduces to the utmost the hazard that his satire might be mistaken for ill-natured lampoon, which Professor Timothy C. Wong succinctly defines as “satire gone slightly awry,” as it is an attack on virtuous or innocent individuals. As a result, the satire uttered in poetry on history represents the most courageous sarcasm in classical Chinese literature, characterized by a ruthlessness and contempt that could be found in nowhere else. Some works by the Ch’ing poet Yuan Mei (1716-1798) will illustrate this to the point. A quatrain titled “The Ching-yang Well [景陽井]” reads as follows:

Grass is all over the Hua-lin Garden in late Autumn,

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Who is that man pointing the ruins of the palace and looking for the Ching-yang Well?  
Even if the emperor quenched his thirst that day, 
How could there be enough room for those mandarin ducks to play around in this well?

華林秋老草茫茫，
誰指遠宮認景陽？
當日君王縱消渴，
井中何處泛鴛鴦?  

According to the History of the Southern Dynasties, when the last emperor of the Ch'en dynasty, Ch'en Hou-chu, was captured by the conquering Sui soldiers, he was dragged out of a well in the Ching-yang Palace, inside which he was hiding. The Sui soldiers were perplexed by the heavy weight of the rope, only to find out there were two beautiful palace women hanging at its end together with the Emperor. Referring to this incident, the poet teases the Emperor that there would not be enough room in that small well for the three of them to play around. Both Chinese words *hsiao-k'e* 消渴 (quench one's thirst) and *fan yün-yang* 泛鴛鴦 (float around like a couple of mandarin ducks) here connote blissful love-making. The reference  

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64 The word *hsiao-k'e* 消渴 could also refer to diabetes. See *Shih-chi*, 3053.
to His Majesty’s love life at such a “wrong time and wrong place,”
while pinpointing his sexual indulgence as the basic cause of the
ruin of his dynasty, turns this tragic event into a farcical one, thus
depriving him of any possible sympathy from the reader. And Ch’en
Hou-chu is by no means the only emperor who suffered such an
insufferable satire in the hands of the poet. In the eight quatrains
on Li Yüâte (937-978), the last Emperor of the Southern T’ang
regime, the poet does everything he can to mercilessly ridicule the
poor man:

The most heartless is that Buddha in the Western Paradise,
Having sent off the Hsiaos’ dynasty of Liang, again he’s sending
off Yours.

無情最是西天佛，
送適蕭梁又送君。65

Yet there is nothing to worry about at all, as

Fortunately Your Majesty have double pupils in one eye,
So you’ll have plenty of tears for face-washing whole day long.

官家賴有重瞳子，
洗面終朝眼淚多。66

65 See Ibid., 13.10.
66 See Ibid.
In the *Hsin Wu-tai-shih 新五代史* (New History of the Five Dynasties) by Ou-yang Hsiu, Li Yū’s fascination with Buddhism is recorded only with four characters—"Also he liked Buddhism [又喜浮圖]."\(^6\)\(^7\) Yūan Mei, however, had a strong distaste for Buddhism. In the poem he singles it out as one of the major causes of the ruin of the Southern T’ang. An analogy is further drawn between Li Yū and the rulers of the Liang dynasty (502-557). Having chosen the same city (present-day Nanking) as the capital for their dynasty before the Ch’én, the Liang rulers were more notorious for their flirtation with Buddhism. Emperor Wu (r. 502-549) alone sacrificed himself (舍身) three times to be a monk at the T’ung-t’ai Temple. Yet both dynasties were short-lived. The poet derides Li Yū’s non-Confucian belief with the joke that Buddha is the most heartless being in the entire universe, since he has, by definition, transcended all human affairs and feelings. Therefore all the devotion and sacrifice from the rulers of the two dynasties have been wasted on the most undeserving recipient. No matter how piously they have worshipped him, Buddha remains heartlessly indifferent witnessing the ruin of the Liang, then the Southern T’ang. And if Buddha could maintain disinterested toward the sufferings of his imperial devotees, Yūan Mei, a Ch’ing poet writing in poetry on history, simply cannot help himself from making fun of them. Even Li Yū’s physical appearance

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is exploited to make his sobbing laughable. According to the *New History of the Five Dynasties*, Li Yū had double pupils in one of his eyes, an extraordinary feature that immediately reminds the reader of two other well-known historical (or legendary) figures—the sage Shun 禹 and the unmatched warrior Hsiang Yū. Both men are reported to have double pupils, and both are men deeply admired by the people—although the admiration for Hsiang Yū is sometimes accompanied by a dissatisfaction. In this comparative light from Shun and Hsiang Yū, Li Yū is cast as a pathetic caricature who has profanely wasted an impressive facial feature. If this poem had been on a contemporary of the poet, it would have spoiled the "good taste" required of literature, and violated the morality defining a gentleman. It is its generic commitment as a poem on history that warrants to such a "personal" satire not only the artistic appreciability, but the moral justifiability and meaningfulness. This contemptuous attitude on the part of the poet implies that the target of the satire does not deserve to be taken seriously, which is in its own right a devastating moral judgment.

The fact that satire is employed to such a great extent in poetry on history bespeaks the belief of the Confucian intellectuals in the permanent relevance of history to the present. Whether this relevance is applied via a specific topicality or a general standard, history is always echoed in the present, and the present reflected in history. The belief in this everlasting relevance underlies the
inspiration that has been sustaining the practice of this poetic genre among Confucian intellectuals for the past bimillenium.

The relevance of history to the present has been a very sensitive issue, because while the Confucians strove to apply it to the current political situation so as to keep a strong moral pressure upon the rulers, the rulers were well aware of their effort and tried to limit the application to their own benefit only. At the latest, the Former Han rulers has clearly discerned what was hidden in those Confucian intellectuals' fascination with history. An interesting incident is related by Ssu-ma Ch'ien in his Records of the Grand Historian:

Scholar Yüan Ku, the Grand Mentor of Prince of Ch'ing-he, was from Ch'i. He was a specialist on the Book of Poetry, and because of that, became an Erudite in the time of Emperor Ching. Once he argued with a Scholar Huang in front of the Emperor. Huang said, "Ch'eng T'ang of the Shang and King Wu of Chou did not acquire Mandate of Heaven [to overthrow Chieh of the Hsia and Chou Hsin of the Shang, and establish their respective new dynasties], what they did was simply regicide." Yüan Ku said, "No. Chieh and Chou Hsin were abusive and unjust, the loyalty of the people in the country all went to Ch'eng T'ang and King Wu. Ch'eng T'ang and King Wu obliged the desire of the people and eradicated Chieh and Chou Hsin. People under the regimes of Chieh and Chou Hsin refused to serve them, instead, they joined Ch'eng T'ang and King Wu. Ch'eng T'ang and King Wu had no choice but to establish their own dynasties. What was it, if not having acquired Mandate of Heaven?" Huang said, "A hat must always be worn on head, however shabby it is; yet a pair of shoes can only be worn on feet, however new they are. Why? The high must be distinguished from the low. Although Chieh and Chou Hsin violated the Way, as sovereigns they were the high; even if Ch'eng T'ang and King Wu were true sages, they
as the subjects were the low. When the sovereigns made some mistakes, the subjects did not correct them with rightful remonstrance so as to make the Sons of Heaven more honorable, but took advantage of their mistakes, murdered them, displaced them, and usurped the throne. What was it, if not regicide?” Yüan Ku said, “Suppose what you said is right, then was it wrong that Emperor Kao-ti [of Han] displaced the Ch’in and took the throne of Son of Heaven?” At this point Emperor Ching said, “Eating meat but skipping horse liver would not disqualify one as a gourmet; talking about learning without mentioning Ch’eng T’ang and King Wu’s acquiring Mandate of Heaven would not make one a fool.” The argument ended then and there. After that no scholar dared to elaborate on acquiring Mandate of Heaven and eradicating evil sovereigns.68

This is the account of a conflict on how to apply the relevance of history to present politics, between a conscientious Confucian intellectual Yüan Ku and the imperial power, represented by Scholar Huang, who was backed up by the Emperor himself. While the interpretation of history as the manifestation of the Way enables a new dynasty to justify its replacing the previous one, it could at the same time lend the similar justification to potential competitors for the throne. On the one hand, Yüan Ku as a representative of those conscientious Confucians, wanted to maintain the theoretical thoroughness of this interpretation of history, in hope that the justifiability of a newer dynasty could serve as a moral pressure upon the current one—the ruler must always act morally to prevent

68 See Shih-chi, 121. 3122-23.
the challenge from arising. The Emperor and Scholar Huang, on the other hand, were anxiously concerned with preempting any excuse that a challenger for the throne might find. Having utilized history to justify their own replacing the Ch'in, the Han rulers now tried to discard it once for all, so that no one could use it again, and the present Han regime would never be historicized. The Emperor's analogizing “Ch'eng T'ang and King Wu's acquiring Mandate of Heaven” to “horse liver,” its theoretical awkwardness notwithstanding, revealed his acute sense of realpolitik. And it seems that most rulers of the later times chose to agree with Emperor Ching. Although not all of them succeeded, as Emperor Ching did temporarily, in silencing the interpretation of history as a process of overthrowing corrupt regimes and cruel rulers, the overall development was that more imperial censorship, surveillance, and monopoly were imposed upon historiography. And the tightened control has resulted in an official historiography which clearly reflects this political authoritarianism.

Compared with official historiography, poetry on history, albeit an exclusive literary genre of the elite, remarkably demonstrates more liberty in handling historical materials and

69 Horse liver, albeit undeniably a kind of meat, was believed to be poisonous to human health and could kill the person who ate it—just as “Ch'eng T'ang and King Wu's acquiring Mandate of Heaven” was no longer a healthy idea to the Han throne, although it had to be acknowledged as part of the true history.
reaching conclusions on them. There seems no evidence of sustained effort by the courts to control the writing of poetry on history, nor literary inquisition especially targeting poems on history. On the contrary, some tolerance could often be found on the part of the rulers, as illustrated by the way Emperor Chen tolerated satires from Yang I and his colleagues. Even during the reigns of Emperors K'ang-hsi, Yung-cheng, and Ch'ien-lung of the Ch'ing dynasty, a period notorious for its wen-tzu-yü (literary inquisitions) which sometimes led to massive execution of anti-Manchurian Han intellectuals, poetry on history seemed not a subject that especially attracted the scrutiny of the court, while historical work was, as evidenced by the case of Chuang T'ing-lung's Ming-shih chi-lüeh (A brief History of the Ming Dynasty). As a result, poetry on history, the most "remote" and "detached" major poetic genre at the first glance, turns out to be the major genre in classical Chinese literature that is politically most engaged and morally most combative. It is in this genre that fierce political criticism and moral condemnation obtain strong persuasion with its indisputable historical "factuality," while at the same time


securing necessary protection with its seeming innocence of historical “remoteness” and “irrelevance.” Coexisting with the strong authoritarian tendency of the political institutions and the harsh censorship over historiography during most of the imperial period, the perseverance and thriving of satirical poetry in the genre poetry on history provides not only a surprising contrast, but a balancing compensation. Anyone who understands how vital it is to sustain a moral standard in a society, modern or traditional, should have no difficulty in imagining what would have happened to traditional China, if the Confucian intellectuals had lost this, and other, apparatus of applying a constant and uncompromising moral pressure upon all those emperors and their powerful officials.

It is well-known that Aristotle prefers poetry over history, for the latter is regarded as concerning itself with delimited particular facts only, whereas the former is concerned with the general—"something more philosophic and of more serious import than history."\(^{72}\) In the Confucian China, history has never been viewed with such a bias. The humanistic character of Confucianism, as we have analyzed in Chapter I, genesically originated from the extraordinary importance of history, and is logically constructed around it. It would therefore be the most unimaginable thing for a Confucian to regard history as only concerning the fortuitous,

transient, and trivial particulars. It is in poetry on history, however, that this extraordinary importance granted to history can be best comprehended and appreciated. Synthesized with poetry into an organic whole, history acquires a further refinement through processes such as moralization, symbolization, and spatialization. In this way the essences of history, as understood by Confucian intellectuals, are further distinguished, selected, refined, and concentrated. It eventually results in a poetry on history which is in the Aristotelian sense so "philosophic," that it inevitably eternalizes history within itself as an irreplaceable study of "the myth of man," the fundamentals of which are believed never to change.
CHAPTER IV

AESTHETICIZATION AND RELIGIONIZATION

In the preceding chapter we have examined how history is eternalized in the genre of poetry on history, so that its relevance to the present life can be sufficiently applied. At this point, an inevitable question comes to the front, that is, why did historical works alone seem to the Chinese so inadequate to do this, why were poems on history necessary? In other words, given the long and rich tradition of Chinese historiography, how could the existence and flourishing of poetry on history be recognized as a cultural necessity, instead of a cultural accident and superfluity? An inquiry into the irreplaceability of this distinct poetic genre in the cultural life of traditional China thus leads us to the following two significant processes that history undergoes in it, i.e., aestheticization and religionization.

Generally speaking, a traditional Chinese historical work
could be viewed as a work of two dimensions. It records certain facts believed to have really happened in the past, and comments on them according to the Confucian moral standard. Historical factuality and Confucian morality constitute the two major dimensions in which a typical historical work is constructed. Accordingly, two major standards are applied to a historical work. The first is the epistemological, and the second the ethical. The epistemological standard is that of truthfulness, employed to sustain the factuality of what is recorded in a historical work. The ethical standard is that of goodness, employed to judge the morality of the historical figures and their conducts, thus sustaining the moral uprightness of the work.

Compared with a historical work, a poem on history should be viewed as a three-dimension work. It is written about a certain historical event or personage, from a moral viewpoint, and in a poetic form. In addition to the factuality and morality which can also be found in a historical work, it has a third dimension, i.e., that of aestheticity.

I am well aware of the fact that as a discipline in the humanities, the word “aesthetics” might suggest fundamental controversies yet unsolved—“Indeed, it could be said that self-definition has been the major task of modern aesthetics.”¹ However, my objective here is not to write a work on theory of

aesthetics, but to examine poetry on history from the viewpoint of an aesthetics which could be agreed upon by most aestheticians. For this purpose, a basic and general working-definition like the following should be sufficient: aesthetics "deals not only with the nature and value of the arts but also with those responses to natural objects that find expression in the language of the beautiful and the ugly" (italics mine). This "beautiful-ugly" attitude towards the experiential world is the essence of an aesthetic attitude. While art is not the only realm in which the aesthetic attitude could be adopted by man, it is undoubtedly the major activity in which this attitude is predominant. That accounts for the fact that most aestheticians have in their discussion drawn upon man's artistic experience as the unquestionable, typical, and intensified aesthetic experience. Poetry is a form of verbal art, and to poeticize is to aestheticize by the medium of language. When a poet is writing a poem dealing with certain historical material, what he is actually doing is to examine this historical material from an aesthetic viewpoint, and process it accordingly. As a work of verbal art, a poem on history thus acquires its artistic nature and subjects itself to the aesthetic judgment of its reader. Consequently, one more standard is applied to a poem on history, i.e. the standard of the aesthetic. The aesthetic standard is that of beauty, employed to judge the aestheticity of the historical figures and their conducts,

2 Ibid.
and sustain the artistry of a poetic work. When a moralized history is further poeticized, it is now perceived of from an aesthetic viewpoint and judged by an aesthetic standard. The result is that in poetry on history, immoral historical personages and their conducts are no longer rendered merely immoral, but grotesque, contemptible, ugly, distasteful, ludicrous, etc.; and moral historical personages and their conducts are no longer rendered merely moral, but beautiful, heroic, sublime, etc. What is more, the aesthetic in a poem on history is not only a new element or dimension, it is the synthesizing element and the predominant dimension. Both historical factuality and Confucian morality are integrated and totalized into aestheticity, and expressed through it. The three elements are separable only in our analysis, yet in a successful poem on history they exist as an organic one, and should be appreciated accordingly. A successful poem on history exists as an organic synthesis of the true, the good, and the beautiful. The true is realized through historical factuality, the good through Confucian morality, and both of them are synthesized into the beautiful, the aestheticity of the historical figures and their conduct embodied in poetic artistry.

We have seen in previous chapters how satire is applied in poetry on history to all kinds of immoral historical figures and their conduct. A satire thus carried out serves as a political, social, or moral criticism, and applies the relevance of certain historical experience to the present life. As the eternalization of history, it is
also its aestheticization. As a result, in such a poem an immoral historical figure is re-presented as not merely morally wrong, but aesthetically ugly, contemptible, or laughable. This satirization, exemplified by many poems cited in previous chapters, demonstrates one of the ways how history is aestheticized in this poetic genre. Although what is presented in a satirical work of poetry on history is the ugly and laughable, an aesthetic standard has definitely been applied in the process. Ugliness as an aesthetic property can be recognized and defined as such only against a standard of what is upheld as beautiful. The experience of ugliness is an aesthetic experience. The judgment of ugliness is an aesthetic judgment, and the advocacy of its opposite—the ideal of the beautiful. As noted by Gilbert Highet, however much they may sound bitter and cynical, "all satirists are at heart idealists." It is exactly the ideal of the beautiful that in the first place activated the poets to attack its opposite—the ugly—as an effort to uphold the positive aesthetic value and make it prevail. Since the ugly in poetry on history is the aestheticization of the immoral, the aesthetic satisfaction a reader acquires from recognizing the ugly is also a moral inhibition, a "Thou shalt not" commandment uttered in aesthetic language, which simultaneously implies what one should do.

Having briefly surveyed satirization as a means of aestheticization, we shall now investigate in detail another way of aestheticization in poetry on history—sublimation, that is, how the morally good is re-presented as the sublime—another basic aesthetic property.

"The sublime" has been a major category of Western aesthetics ever since Longinus. Although much discussion of it presents the sublime as something parallel to the beautiful, it would be mistaken to view it as a non-aesthetic concept, or the experience of the sublime a non-aesthetic experience. The fact that the sublime and the beautiful are considered so fixedly interconnected to one another, that it seems simply impossible to clarify one concept without discussing the other, testifies to the theoretical inevitability of incorporating both into an integral system of aesthetics. Half of Edmund Burke's *The Sublime and Beautiful* and much of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* are on the sublime, and both works are unanimously regarded as classics of Western aesthetics. And when Aristotle concentrates on tragedy in his *Poetics*, the experience of tragedy he examines—one of the variations of the experience of the sublime—is undoubtedly treated as a kind of aesthetic experience.

The widely used Chinese terms in current discourse of aesthetics are *mei* 美 for “beauty” and “beautiful,” *mei-hsūeh* 美術 for “aesthetics,” and *ch'ung-kao* 蒼高 for “sublime.” The term *mei*, as an aesthetic concept, has two meanings. In the broader sense it
denotes whatever is aesthetically pleasant, positive, or preferable; while in the narrower sense it denotes one kind of those aesthetically preferable, which is sometimes also referred to as you-mei [a fine and graceful beauty]. The mei in this narrower sense is parallel to ch'ung-kao, which is another kind of those aesthetically preferable. And mei-hsüeh (literally the study of the beautiful, or of beauty) refers to the academic discipline that studies anything for its aesthetic negativity and unpreferability (all kinds of ugliness including the ludicrous), as well as for its aesthetic positivity and preferability (all kinds of beauty including the sublime).^4

Whereas the Chinese concept ch'ung-kao has a meaning very close to that of the sublime in Western aesthetics, a delicate difference between the two should not be ignored. In Western aesthetics, much emphasis has been placed upon the unpleasant feelings that the sublime will cause in man. Edmund Burke, for instance, describes the sublime as being vast, rugged and negligent, dark and gloomy, solid, and massive,^5 and as causing unpleasant feelings such as terror, obscurity, privation, difficulty, and pain.^6

^4 See Li Tse-hou 李澤厚, Mei-hsüeh lun-chi 美學論集 (Shanghai: Shanghai wen-i ch'u-pan-she, 1980), 197-225.


^6 See Ibid., 49-73.
Based on this description he even asserts that as long as ugliness can excite a strong feeling of terror, it is "consistent enough with an idea of the sublime,"—a theoretical implication of his concept of sublimity on which most Chinese aestheticians, modern as well as traditional, would feel difficult to agree.7 And if we take the experience of tragedy described by Aristotle in his *Poetics* as an experience of the sublime, as most Western aestheticians obviously do, it is also somewhat different from the Chinese experience. Admissible elements of the experience of the sublime as they are, both terror and pity have never been considered essential, sufficient, or primary in this experience by the Chinese. In Kant's widely influential aesthetics, the sublime is the result of a conflict between the subject and object. A large or powerful object overwhelms the subject's senses, and this inadequacy of the senses arouses the subject's reason to recognize the infinity. Kant emphasizes that "the feeling of the sublime is a pleasure that arises only indirectly: it is produced by the feeling of momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger."8 In comparison, the Chinese aesthetics emphasizes identifying oneself with the great and powerful images.

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in nature or human life in a more direct manner. As pointed out by
the modern Chinese aesthetician Li Tse-hou:

The Chinese comprehension of the category sublimity differs
from traditional Western aesthetics. It has in itself few
elements such as horror, mystery, fear, misery, and
incomprehensibility in it. On the contrary, it predominantly
describes and defines sublimity with the more rational and
optimistic concepts, such as yang-kang [陽剛, masculine and
solid], hsiung-hun [雄渾, heroic and mighty], hao-chien [豪健, bold
and robust], hung-chuang [宏壯, magnificent and powerful] and
chûn-pa [峻拔, high and steep]. It directly views the sublime as
a grand beauty.9

This is the sublime as an important category of Chinese aesthetics.
Various terms have been applied to approximate it—Liu Hsieh’s
chuang-li [壯麗, grandeur],10 and Ssu-k’ung T’u’s 司空圖 hsiung-hun
雄渾, ching-chien 勳健 (robust), and hao-fang 豪放 (bold and
unconstrained),11 to mention only a few. It is the sublimity
understood in this sense that is to be applied in the following
examination of the aestheticization in poetry on history.

9 Li Tse-hou 李澤厚, Mei-hsüeh lun-chi 魏 להיות 논집, 220.

10 Liu Hsieh, Wen-hsin tiao-lung chu 温心調論, 505.

11 See Ssu-k’ung T’u 司空圖, Shih-p’in 詩品, in Kuo Shao-yü 歌謷虞
and Wang Wen-sheng 王文生, eds., Chung-kuo li-tai wen-lun hsüan
中國歷代文論選, 4 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai ku-chi ch’u-pan-she,
1979), 2. 203-17.
When morally righteous historical figures and their conduct are aestheticized in poetry on history, they are often re-presented as the sublime. A poem on Chu-ke Liang by the famous T'ang poet Tu Fu is an apt example in this respect. Chu-ke Liang has been highly praised by most historians for his unwavering loyalty to his lord and self-forgetful devotion to his lifetime cause—to restore the Han dynasty. In this well-known poem, the historical figure of Chu-ke Liang, symbolizing these highly praised Confucian morals, is further aestheticized into a special kind of beauty—the sublime:

Between heaven and earth overhangs the great name of Chu-ke,
The image of the revered statesman, awes one with sublimity.
The trifid division was his laborious design,\(^1^{12}\)
His loftiness is like a phoenix flying high in the eternal sky.
His ability matches that of Yi Yin and Lü Wang,
He the imperturbable commander pales Hsiao He and Ts'ao Shen in comparison.\(^1^{13}\)
The Han was losing its blessing and could not be restored,

\(^1^{12}\) Chu-ke Liang advised Liu Pei to first divide the country into three parts, occupy one of them, then use it as the base to unify the entire nation. He helped Liu Pei to achieve the trifid division and establish the Shu-Han regime. He then devoted the rest of his life to the cause of unification, but died of physical exhaustion.

\(^1^{13}\) Hsiao He 蕭 何 (?-193 B.C.) and Ts'ao Shen 曹 邏 (?-196 B.C.) were the major aides to Emperor Liu Pang's 劉 森 (256-195 B.C.) cause of unifying the country and establishing the Han dynasty.
His life was exhausted by military tasks, yet his resolution unshaken.14

The poem was originally inspired by a shrine of Chu-ke Liang, where he had been honored by later generations. A sensitive reader would immediately recognize the highly deferential tone in the entire poem, conveying a strong sense of awe, and even worship. It is in an unmistakable aura of sublimity that the image of Chu-ke Liang is presented in this poem. The fact that he died without accomplishing his mission, that his cause was eventually lost, and that his Shu-Han regime was conquered by the Wei, has not damaged his image

14 The translation are based on that of David Hawkes. See David Hawkes, A Little Primer of Tu Fu (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 178-80.

aesthetically to the slightest extent. On the contrary, that he was such a “glorious loser” contributes remarkably to this sublimity in which he is presented. As a matter of fact, many people believed that in the later years of his life, even Chu-ke Liang himself had become aware that his cause was not likely to succeed. In the famous Hou ch'u-shih-piao 后出師表 (Second Memorial on Setting Off with My Troops), attributed to his authorship by most traditional historians and scholars, Chu-ke Liang stated to the second ruler of the Shu-Han (r. 223-63): “I shall exhaust myself in devoted service [to Your Majesty], stop only when I am dead. As for success or failure, efficiency or inefficiency, these are not what my foresight can discern [臣鞠躬盡力，死而后已，至于成败利鈍，非臣之明所能逆睹也].” It is exactly this perseverance and devotion that render Chu-ke Liang's lifetime effort a sublime heroism most admired by traditional Confucians. After all, Confucius himself was regarded by his contemporaries as “the one who realizes his cause will not succeed, but carries it on anyway [知其不可而為之者].” And the same could be said of Mencius, the second most important figure in Confucian tradition. I have stressed in Chapter I that Chinese pan-

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16 See San-kuo-chih, 35. 924. This memorial was not included in Che-ke Liang’s anthology, nor in the text of the San-kuo-chih by Ch'en Shou. P‘ei Sung-chih 樂松之 found it in Chang Yen’s 張 儒 Mo-chi 摄記 and included it into his own annotation to the San-kuo-chih.

17 Lun-yü, 7. 13b.
historicism differs from a pragmatistic calculation of successes vis-à-vis failures. And here again we see Chu-ke Liang is compared with four famous statesmen in Chinese history—Yi Yin, Lü Wang, Hsiao He and Ts'ao Shen—all regarded as extraordinarily talented and successful. Yet the poet asserts that Chu-ke Liang not only matches them on every account, but surpasses them, even though he is the only one among the five whose cause did fail. When one faces a natural or social force overwhelmingly more powerful than oneself, yet strives on existentially instead of surrendering or quitting, only because of one's unshakable belief in the moral righteousness of one's own cause, the seeming absurdity is transformed into a genuine sublimity. This sublimity, as an aesthetic property, pleases the reader by demonstrating the unconquerability of a free human will. The overwhelmingly powerful is a hostile force that renders one a "loser." The unconquerability of his will, however, renders him a "glorious loser," as it wins him a decisive moral victory in, and via, this physical defeat. In this sense, the final defeat is less a story of Oedipean fatalism than one of Sisyphean heroism.¹⁸ The extreme difficulties, hardship, and eventual defeat are not intended to distress the reader so as to provoke terror and pain, but to present the historical figure in the most critical situation, in which his choice to continue the struggle demonstrates, to the greatest

extent, all the strength of an incorruptible morality. And it is such a heroic historical figure, symbolizing Confucian morality and aestheticized into the beauty of sublimity, that the reader of a poem on history like this one is expected to identify himself with. For this reason, a "glorious loser" like Chu-ke Liang can be presented in poetry on history as a sublime figure who radiates an aura that brings on strong feelings of awe, admiration, and aspiration in the reader.

Sublimity is a special kind of beauty which inspires a sense of reverence in the reader, making him aware of the difficulty of possessing it and, for that very reason, compels him to possess it by all means. A brief survey would reveal that most historical figures presented as the sublime in poetry on history are "glorious losers" like Chu-ke Liang—those who fail without surrendering. Poeticized, their incorruptible moral integrity is now aestheticized into sublimity, a particular kind of beauty that inspires in a Chinese reader, not terror, pity, or pain, but love and respect, and a desire to identify with and emulate the heroism. This aesthetic satisfaction is intimately connected with a moral motivation, as summed up by Mencius in the following statement: "[The sage] Shun was a human, and I am a human, too. Shun set the example for everyone under heaven, and in the future. Yet I am still an uncultivated man. This is what should worry me. What then now it worries me? I shall be like Shun [舜人也，我亦人也。舜為法於天下，可傳於後世，我由未克為舜人也。]"
If even the sage Shun should, and can, be emulated by every ordinary human being, there is no question that those great historical figures should be appreciated and emulated in the same way. The aesthetic satisfaction a reader acquires from appreciating the sublime beauty embodied in these historical figures is also a moral motivation, a “Thou shalt” commandment uttered in aesthetic language.

The sublime is the result of the aestheticization of those historical figures and their heroic conduct, whereas the ludicrous is the result of the aestheticization of those deemed vicious in a clownish manner, as the satire in many works cited in the preceding chapters so well illustrates. They are merely two of the many ways in which aestheticization of history has been carried out in this poetic genre. Other aesthetic categories and concepts, such as tragedy, comedy, etc., could be applied to analyzing works in this genre as well. While the aesthetic deals with more than the artistic, the artistic is always also the aesthetic. Artistic practice is always the aesthetic endeavor by which the ideal of the beautiful is, directly or indirectly, pursued by the artist, and embodied in the artistry of his finished work—and writing poetry on history is no exception.

This brings us back to the question with which we began this chapter. Part of the cultural necessity of poeticizing history in this

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19 Meng-tzu, 8. 12a.
literary genre lies in the special importance that Confucianism grants to poetry, arts, and aesthetic sensibility in a perfectible moral cultivation. An elaborate investigation of this importance has been carried out in Chapter I, and so only a brief summary is needed here. Confucianism places a great emphasis upon the function of literature and arts in cultivating man's feelings and emotions, in internalizing the external restriction deeply within one's heart, and therefore in aestheticizing the rigid moral imperative into one's delicate instinctive inclination. For this reason, even though a very rich tradition of historiography has existed in Chinese culture, the aestheticization of history in this literary genre still makes poetry on history distinct and irreplaceable in a Confucian's lifetime pursuit of the nei-sheng (inner sagehood) state of personal moral cultivation—a state in which he not only obeys the moral law dutifully, but acts according to it delightfully.

Synthesizing the true (historical factuality), the good (Confucian morality), and the beautiful (poetic aestheticity) in a single organic unit, poetry on history strives to achieve a "Trinity of values." And this Trinity of values, in the humanistic tradition of Confucianism, becomes the highest value and ideal, and thus takes on a religious character. Like aestheticization, this religionization also accounts for, to a great extent, the uniqueness and irreplaceability of poetry on history in traditional Chinese culture, and for that reason will be the object of our investigation in the second half of this chapter.
I am fully aware of the difficulty, or even impossibility, of precisely defining religion in any specific terms, as has been convincingly demonstrated by John Dewey in his A Common Faith. After surveying the primary characteristics of various existing religions and concluding that religion cannot be defined in any strict sense, however, Dewey defines as "religious" "[a]ny activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality." Obviously, such an "ideal end" refers to man's pursuit for the universal, the absolute, the eternal, and the transcendent. In the words of Paul Tillich, the world authority of religious study, an ideal end like this is man's "ultimate concern." In many of his works, Tillich adequately expounds on the religiosity of this ultimate concern of man, the great risk it brings to him, and its inescapability in human life. He contends that an ultimate concern is essentially a religious concern:

What concerns one ultimately becomes holy. The awareness of the holy is awareness of the presence of the divine, namely of the content of our ultimate concern.  


21 Ibid., 27.

As a concern with the holy and divine in human life, this ultimate concern is also unconditional, everything else becomes secondary or even insignificant compared with it. And it is therefore also the greatest risk man can take in his life:

The risk to faith in one's ultimate concern is indeed the greatest risk man can run. For if it proves to be a failure, the meaning of one's life breaks down; one surrenders oneself, including truth and justice, to something which is not worth it. One has given away one's personal center without having a chance to regain it.²³

But even if man is (he is often not) fully aware of this greatest risk, he still has to have an ultimate concern on which to anchor his life. "Our ultimate concern can destroy us as it can heal us. But we never can be without it."²⁴ Therefore man lives in a state of "being grasped by an ultimate concern,"²⁵ places it above all other concerns and meanings in his life, and treats it as something unconditional. And such an attitude is nothing but a religious attitude, for "everything which is a matter of unconditional concern


is made into a god." 26 This religiosity can be found in various human activities usually perceived as having nothing to do with any particular religion at all. And by "religionization of history" I refer to the particular way in which traditional Chinese Confucians treat history, which to me seems unmistakably "religious" in the Deweyan and Tillichean sense. And this religious attitude towards history can be clearly recognized in poetry on history.

We have demonstrated in the first half of this chapter how history is aestheticized in poetry on history. What must be pointed out immediately is that aesthetic experience is by nature very close to religious experience. As observed by Frederick Turner: "There is always in beauty a global quality, a reference to the whole world and to its further meaning." 27 This pursuit for the universal, the absolute, and the transcendent has been long recognized by most aestheticians as an essential characteristic of aesthetic experience, although the terms they employed to conceptualize it vary considerably. This essential characteristic makes beauty, as claimed by Turner in the title of his work, a "value of values," and the sense of beauty—aesthetic experience—readily convertible into other transcendent human experiences, such as religious experience. Observes Turner:

26 Dynamics of Faith, 44.

Beauty is closely related to but not the same as other transcendent experiences: the glory or despairing triumph of heroic action; oceanic religious ecstasy or trance; the deep intellectual satisfaction of scientific or philosophical or mathematical insight; the rapture of love; the irresistible upwelling of laughter at absurdity or comedy. Though these are not the same as it, each need turn only a degree or so to become the beauty experience.\(^8\)

As a matter of fact, it often turns out to be a two-way convertibility—the beauty experience(aesthetic experience) too need turn only a degree or so to become a religious experience. In the case of poetry on history, as we have demonstrated above, the aestheticization of history is the further sublimation of its moralization. The strong concern with historical truth and moral goodness that underlies this sense of beauty, precludes the feasibility of a formalistic aestheticism, but leads this particular aestheticization further to a religionization of history. For an in-depth investigation into this religionization of history, the famous *Cheng-ch'i-ke* 正氣歌 (Song of the Upright Spirit), written by the Southern Sung poet Wen T'ien-hsiang, imprisoned after his dynasty was destroyed by the Mongols, is a revealing example. To comprehend this very rich poem, however, we need first to conduct a brief survey of the poet's life.

Born in 1236, Wen T’ien-hsiang’s early life was under the reign of Emperor Li-tsung (r. 1225-1264), and strongly influenced by the Emperor’s strenuous advocacy of Li-hsüeh 理學 (Neo-Confucianism). Although no one from the previous six generations in the Wen family had ever passed the Civil Service Examinations or become an official, Wen T’ien-hsiang studied Neo-Confucianism diligently, and was regarded as a third-generation disciple of Chu Hsi.29 In 1256 he won the highest examination degree(chin-shih 进士) at the age of twenty, and was then selected Chuang-yüan (Number One Scholar) by the Emperor himself. Because of his father’s death in the same year, he stayed home to observe mourning for three years and did not enter public service until 1259. He then served in various positions both in local governments and in the court. Noticeably, he also served as an official historian in the positions of Junior Compiler in Historiography Academy (國史院編修官) and Assistant Compiler in True Records Institute (實錄院檢討官). In 1276 when the invading Yüan or Mongol army approached the Sung capital Lin-an (present-day Hang-chou), Wen T’ien-hsiang was promoted to the important position of Yu ch’eng-hsiang 右丞相 (Right Grand Councilor) and dispatched to the Yüan camp to negotiate for a truce. His brave defiance and criticism of the invaders angered the Mongol commanders, who then detained him

29 See Huang Tsung-hsi 黃宗羲, Chüan Tsu-wang 全祖望 and others, Sung Yüan hsüeh-an 宋元學案 (SPPY ed.) 88. 2b-13a.
and took him northward to the Yüan capital Ta-tu (present-day Peking). Wen T'ien-hsiang managed to escape on the way and became the prominent leader of the resistance force, until he was recaptured in 1278.

For more than four years to the end of 1282, Wen T'ien-hsiang was kept a prisoner, about one year on the road to Ta-tu, and three years in prison in the capital. During the whole time, he saw the final decisive defeat of the Sung troops on the sea in 1279, and then learned of the death of the last Sung Emperor and the demise of the dynasty. At the same time, he was repeatedly offered high official positions by his captors in exchange for his capitulation. Eventually, he was offered the post of Chung-shu ch'eng-hsiang (Secretary-Grand Councilor) by the Yüan Emperor Shih-tsu (1215-1294) himself. Wen T'ien-hsiang rejected all the offers and asked only to die. He was executed publicly in 1282. According to his biography in the Sung-shih (History of the Sung Dynasty), written by the Yüan official historians, "Facing the execution, T'ien-hsiang was extraordinarily tranquil. He told the jailers, 'Now my mission is finished,' then accepted the execution prostrating himself southward]." It is a vivid description of what is meant by the

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30 See Sung-shih, 418. 12533-41. The south was where the Sung capital Lin-an had been located in relation to Ta-tu. To die prostrating southward was thus Wen T'ien-hsiang’s way to express his unwavering loyalty to the Sung.
Chinese maxim *shih-ssu ju-kui* 视死如歸 (literally, viewing death as returning house)—facing death with a calmness possible only to those who have committed to a value more important than life. For them, this ultimate concern or highest value was summed up in a very short *tsan* (encomium) he wrote and concealed in his belt for this pivotal moment. It was later found by his wife when she was preparing his body for burial. The Encomium reads:

Confucius taught that man should sacrifice his own life for Humanity.\(^{31}\)

Mencius taught that man should die for Righteousness.\(^{32}\)

Only after one has done everything he can for Righteousness, Can he reach the perfection of his Humanity.

Have been reading the books of the Sage and the Worthy, What do we really mean to learn after all?

It is hoped that from now on, I could feel no compunction about myself.

孔曰成仁，

孟曰取義。

惟其義盡，

所以仁至。

讀聖賢書，

所學何事？

而今而後，

\(^{31}\) See *Lun-yū*, 8. 3b.

\(^{32}\) See *Meng-tzu*, 11. 11a.
This is a highly abstract statement of Wen T’ien-hsiang’s conviction about Confucian morality. For a “profound, relevant, and clear illustration” of this “airy formulation” with “past events,” however, we need turn to the “Song of the Upright Spirit,” a poem on history that is not only the most famous among all his works, but one of the best-known among all classical Chinese poems. With a long preface describing the situation in the prison, in which it was written, the entire poem reads as follows:

I am captive in the northern court, placed in a dark mud room eight feet wide and two rods deep that had been hollowed out of the ground. It has a single doorway, low and small, and white-washed windows, short and narrow. On a summer day like today, I am enshrouded in various energies. When puddles of water converge from all sides, floating my bed and chair, this is the “energy of water.” When muck half dries and is covered with bubbles of steam, this is the “energy of earth.” When the weather clears and in the fierce heat no breeze passes through, this is the “energy of the sun.” When cooking fires kindled under the eaves add to the cruel heat, this is the “energy of fire.” When stores turn rotten and are left to decay, their staleness oppressive, this is the “energy of rice.” When one is thrown in with others, rank-smelling and dirty, this is the “energy of men.” And when

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assorted foulness come forth—from outdoor privies, dead corpses, and rotting rats—this is the “energy of filth.”

Faced with several such energies at once, few would not fall ill. But weak as I am, I have lived under these conditions for two years without illness. This is owing to what I have nourished. But does one know what I nourished is? Mencius once said that he “nourished his floodlike spirit-energy.” Those energies mentioned above number seven; mine is but one. Yet in fighting seven with one, I am not at all concerned—especially since this “floodlike spirit-energy” is none other than “the upright spirit of heaven and earth.” Thus it is that I have written the following “Song of the Upright Spirit.”

Heaven and Earth are infused with an Upright Spirit
That gives varied shapes to a stream of manifestations:
On earth below, the great river and sacred peaks,
In heaven above, the sun and stars.
In man, it is a greatness of spirit,
Overflowing, that fills the firmament.
The imperial way, meeting with tranquillity,
Offers a genial age of enlightened rule.
Yet when crises come, steadfastness appears
In one example after another in history.
The spirit is found—
In the bamboo slips of the Grand Astrologer of Ch‘i,34
In the brush of Tung Hu of the State of Chin.35

34 The historian of the Spring and Autumn period who was executed for recording on bamboo slips that Ts‘ui Chu 趙 蝶 had assassinated his sovereign. The two younger brothers who succeeded him faced the same circumstance and met the same fate.

35 Tung Hu in the Spring and Autumn period assigned responsibility for his lord’s murder to Chao Tun 趙 屯, who would not prosecute those in his clan who had killed the leader (with whom Chao had had a falling out).
In the hammer of Chang Liang of Ch‘in,36
And in the pennant of Su Wu of Han.37
Among its manifestations, one finds—
The head of General Yen Yen,38
The blood of the Palace Attendant, Chi Shao,39
The teeth of the Sui-yang defender, Chang Hsün,40
And the tongue of the Ch‘ang-shan defender, Yen Kao-ch‘ing.41
It also appears in—
The one with the Liao-tung cap,
Whose purity was sharper than ice or snow.42

36 Chang Liang (?-186 B.C.) tried to assassinate the harsh Ch‘in Shih-huang-ti, but without success.

37 Su Wu (?-60 B.C.), remaining loyal to his sovereign while held captive by the Hsiung-nu tribes, never parted with this emblem of his charge as a legate.

38 Yen Yen 項 was the Three Kingdoms general who, upon defeat, declared, “You have rudely wrested away our land. The land may have generals with severed heads, but it has no generals with heads that bow in allegiance.”

39 Chi Shao 曹 (253-304) was the Chin minister who died defending his sovereign from attack. The ruler directed his ministers not to wash away the blood of Chi that had spattered his robes.

40 Chang Hsün 晟(709-757) was the T‘ang general whose mouth was pried open by the sword blade of one of An Lu-shan’s soldiers after defeat. Most of his teeth had been gnashed away in fury at the rebels.

41 Yen Kao-ch‘ing 然某 (692-756) was the T‘ang official whose tongue was cut out for cursing the victorious rebel leader, An Lu-shan.

42 The black beretlike cap of Kuan Ning 晃 宁 (158-241), the scholar who at the end of the Han sought refuge in Liao-tung
Chu-ke Liang’s memorial on his expedition,
Of a heroism that brings tears to the gods,43
The beating of the boat paddle
In stouthearted avowal to swallow the Chieh,44
And the rebel-smiting tablet
That split the traitor-lackey’s skull.45
What is infused with this spirit,
With awesomeness lasts for eternity.
When it reaches the sun or moon,
All question of life or death becomes immaterial.
Upon it depend the fundaments of earth;
Up from it soar the pillars of heaven.
The Three Bonds combine its essence,
The Way and righteousness form its roots.
Alas! Things have come to an awful pass;
I, a worthless one, have not done my best.
A Ch’u prisoner who tied his cap strings,
I was transported by stages to the far north.
Being boiled alive would be sweet, like candy;
Indeed I requested it, to no avail.
Will-o’-the-wisps flicker in my dark cell;
The spring courtyard is shrouded in gloom.
I am a racehorse feeding from the same pail as oxen,
A phoenix eating together with chickens.

(present-day Manchuria), preferring to lead an unsullied life there to serving the emperors of the Wei.

43 The rousing third-century “Ch’u-shih piao,” or “Memorial on Setting Off with My Troops,” which Chu-ke Liang submitted to the throne upon departing to attack the state of Wei.

44 The paddle Tsu T‘i 祖逖 (266-321) of the Eastern Chin used to beat his gunwales, while vowing to regain territory from the Chieh regime.

45 The tablet used by the T‘ang official, Tuan Hsiu-shih 段秀實 (719-783), to smash the forehead of the would-be usurper, Chu Tz‘u 朱 洌.
One morning, shrouded in poisonous miasma,
I will end up skeleton in the gutter.
After two years of this heat and cold,
The noisome vapors have taken leave.
Alas! This dank quagmire
Has become my paradise!
I need no shoddy tricks
To hold the yin and yang harmless—for I have my Upright Spirit.
Reflecting on it glowing bright within me,
I gaze at the clouds above, floating, and white.
Unending is my heart's affliction—
Oh, Heaven above! When will it end?
Greats of the past grow daily more distant,
But their example remains as long ago.
In the breeze from the eaves, I spread out a book to read;
Before me shines the bright virtue of the past.\(^{46}\)

子因北庭，坐一土室。室廣八尺，深可四尋。幕席低小，白間短窄，
汗下而幽暗。當此夏日，諸氣萃然。雨潦四集，浮動床几，時則為水氣。
塗泥半朝，蒸沤歷瀆，時則為土氣。乍晴暴熱，風道四塞，時則為日氣。
疎陰萎翠，助長炎庶，時則為火氣。食腐寄頓，陳陳遙人，時則為木氣。
駝תנוע，腥腥汗垢，時則為人氣。或囈囈，或餻屍，或瘖鼠，惡氣雜出，
時則為化遠。當其思遠，當之者鮮不為厲。而予亦以歲弱，俯仰其間，
子皆二年矣，幸而無恙。是殆有養致然。然而亦安知所養何哉？孟子曰：
“吾善養吾浩然之氣。”彼氣有七，吾氣有一。以一敵七，吾何患焉。

\(^{46}\) The translation is based on that of John Timothy Wixted, with some revisions. See Yoshikawa Kojiro, *Five Hundred Years of Chinese Poetry, 1150-1650*, trans. John Timothy Wixted (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 52-55. The notes to this poem are mostly based on those provided in the same work.
沉浩然者，乃天地之正气也。作正气歌一首。

天地有正气，
巍然赋形。
下则为河岳，
上则为日星。
於人曰浩然，
沛乎塞苍冥。
皇路当清夷，
含和吐明庭。
時窮节乃见，
一一垂丹青。
在齐太史简，
在晋董狐笔。
在秦张良椎，
在汉苏武节。
爲夏殷草木，
爲春秋虫鸟。
爲张陶阴阳，
爲颜常山舌。
成为适南面，
清操属冰雪。
或為出師表，
鬼神泣壯烈。
或為渡江楫，
慷慨吞胡羯。
或為擊賊笏，
逆墜頭破裂。
是氣所旁薄，
凜烈萬古存。
當其鼓日月，
生死安足論。
地維賴以立，
天柱賴以尊。
三綱實係命，
道義為之根。
嗟予遘陽九，
龍也竊不力。
楚囚懷其冠，
傳草送窮北。
鼎镬甘如饴，
哀之不可得。
陰房開鬼火，
春院闌天黑。
牛驄同一色，
This work has been read either as a lyrical poem in which the poet expresses his strong feelings and emotions at a critical moment of his life, or as primarily a philosophical poem in which he

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47 Wen T'ien-hsiang ch'üan-chi, 375-76.
expounds his Neo-Confucianist philosophy in poetic language. Both interpretations are very instructive to our comprehension of it. However, if we mean to do justice to this very rich work, we need to read it as a poem on history as well. The work is another example of a poem on history without a clear generic declaration in its title. Read closely, however, it immediately reveals itself to us as a history-quoting poem, in which the poet quotes historical personages under a unifying theme and identifies himself with them. Due to the particular situation in which Wen T’ien-hsiang finds himself, and the burning question of “to-be-or-not-to-be” he is facing, the historical figures he quotes are all “glorious losers” who sacrificed themselves one way or another to their righteous causes. His philosophical conviction is illustrated by these historical figures and their deeds, while his lyrical expression is as well uttered through the admiration he entertains for, and the identification he makes with, these historical figures. Throughout the work Wen T’ien-hsiang articulates in poetic language his conviction that Humanity as defined in Confucian morality possesses an ontological authenticity like that of the universe; that history is the manifestation of the Way (the Cheng-ch’i in his Neo-Confucianist terminology); that the historical is the eternal; that he himself is an

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inseparable part of this history; that History is the "Last judgment" every human being has to face; that whether one can pass this judgment of history successfully should be the only significant concern of human life. As a whole, the poem reveals most indisputably the mentality of a typical Confucian like Wen T'ien-hsiang, that is, he does not think about history, but thinks in history, because he lives in History. By identifying himself with all those historical figures, the poet not only finds for himself the right "role models" and solves his current practical problem, but finds for himself the right place in History, therefore solves the ultimate problem about the meaning of his entire life. Since history is regarded as the manifestation of the Way or the "Upright spirit," finding the right place in History is the same as finding the right place in the universe, therefore same as finding the ultimate meaning of human existence. What concerns the poet here is no longer merely the ruin or establishment of certain particular dynasties, not even some specific Confucian morals, it is now the ultimate meaning of human life in this universe. It is an ultimate concern, and a religious experience. It is religious because it is an unconditional concern that is believed to have a higher value than anything else in the world. Therefore whatever concern is in conflict with it would be unhesitantly sacrificed, including one's own life. This unconditional and ultimate concern with History, Wen T'ien-hsiang also makes clearest in his another well-known poem. Upon his second capture, he was asked by the Yüan commanders to
write a letter urging another Sung commander to surrender, which of course would also mean his own surrender to the Yüan. Instead of according to the demand, he wrote a regulated verse titled “Kuo Lin-ting-yang [Passing the Sea of Solitude]” in reply. Although it is not on a specific historical event or personage and therefore not a poem on history, the poem nevertheless sums up Wen T’ien-hsiang’s fundamental attitude towards history, which underlies his entire life as well as all his works in poetry on history:

Hardship, my lot since passing the single-classic exam;49
Shields and daggers in futile struggle four years now.
Native hills and streams shattered, like catkins buffeted by wind,
Life floats haplessly as duckweed beaten by rain.
At Rapid of Worry, I speak of worry;
On the Sea of Solitude, I lament on solitude.
From time immemorial, who among men has escaped death?
Leave a righteous heart shining in History!50

辛苦誰逢起一絃，
干戈落落四周星。
山河破碎風撲絮，
身世漂搖雨打萍。

49 Wen T’ien-hsiang passed the Examination as the Number One Scholar with his interpretation of the I-ching (Book of Changes) in his answer to questions posed by the Emperor on current policy.

50 The translation is based on that John Timothy Wixted, with some revision. See Yoshikawa Kojiro, Five Hundred Years of Chinese Poetry, 1150-1650, trans. John Timothy Wixted, 51.
Written at such a critical moment, the poem amounts to a summary of Wen T’ien-hsiang’s entire life: all his efforts to save his nation having failed, he is himself incarcerated, his dynasty irreversibly collapsing. Worry, solitude, exhaustion, and desperation are now left to him. What we see here is a man militarily defeated, politically devastated, and emotionally bankrupted—the catkins buffeted by wind, the duckweed beaten by rain. Still, he holds onto a single conviction, that is, he has passed the “Last judgment” of History successfully. To him this is the one thing that really matters. History is his ultimate and unconditional concern, compared with which his very life becomes insignificant. Here we witness how “everything which is a matter of unconditional concern is made into a god.” And thus religionized, history becomes, at this particular moment of Wen’s life, his ultimate concern. As Tillich has pointed out:

51 Wen T’ien-hsiang ch’ūan-chi, 349.

52 Dynamics of Faith, 44.
Being ultimately concerned means being grasped by a concern which is not preliminary, as all finite and temporal concerns are. It is a concern which remains in power even when many of the objects of preliminary concern have disappeared; . . . If we are related to somebody or something with all our heart, strength, mind, and power, then this is an ultimate or, as I also could say, an unconditional concern, or as I further could say, an infinite concern, a concern which is not threatened.\(^3\)

A poem that begins with such anxiety and desperation can therefore conclude with such a sense of tranquillity. The spiritual salvation the poet obtains from his own conviction about History can be the only convincing explanation. Whatever Wen T'ien-hsiang will do cannot alter the fact that his political cause has been irredeemably lost. But by that time, that does not concern him anymore. He has transcended the finite and the temporal, now that his dynasty has disappeared. The only reason he is nevertheless able to acquire this tranquillity of mind is the fact that his ultimate concern—history and his place in it—is not threatened, and it can never be. The last two lines of his poem put human life into the perspective of History and sum up this Chinese pan-historicism in a highly elevated poetic language: “From time immemorial, who among men has escaped death?/ Leave a righteous heart shining in History!” The attitude toward death mirrors the attitude toward life. Death cannot be escaped, and that is exactly why it must be transcended. To

transcend death is to acquire an everlasting meaning for life. When History becomes the sole sphere in which man can transcend death, it serves to him as the sole sphere in which he can acquire ultimate meaning for his life. History does not provide man an afterlife, yet it does provide this life of his a meaning which is to him ultimate, absolute, and eternal. History thus perceived of is obviously religionized to the believers. That these two lines of the poem have since become universally known among Chinese Confucian intellectuals attests to the fact that this attitude toward History is widely shared. Although it is in Wen T'ien-hsiang's poetic works that this sincere religious conviction acquires its most mesmerizing articulation, as well as in his martyrish death that it acquires a typical pilgrimatic sacrifice, he as a member of this cultural elite is in fact more representative than exceptional.

To a great extent, it is this religionization of history that has underlain the bimillenium of enthusiasm for poetry on history, and has upheld it as the most elite and solemn poetic genre among generations of Confucians. On the one hand, the closeness of the aesthetic experience to religious experience obviously provides the basis of this religionization. On the other hand, the strong humanistic character of traditional Chinese culture, as analyzed in Chapter I, brought on the necessity of this religionization of history, as the locus where the ultimate could be expressed, and the transcendent pursued. In this sense, if we view as inevitable the rise and development of all kinds of religion in various cultures
throughout the world, we should also view it as inevitable that
history would be in some way religionized in traditional China.
Poetry on history demonstrates most revealingly how this
religionization is achieved in its elite literature. Crystallizing this
religionization, the “Song of Upright Spirit” sheds light upon
numerous works in this genre. Its fundamental attitude toward
history, its deep-rooted belief in history, and its intimate sense of
one’s living in history, and facing it as the “Last judgment” and the
ultimate human concern, all these ideas are widely shared by the
community of Confucian intellectuals, and expressed, directly or
indirectly, in their poems on history. In the best of those poems, the
synthesis of the true (historical factuality), the good (moral
virtues), and the beautiful (aesthetic preferability) sublimates into
the Holy, while the true (historical factuality), the bad (moral
vices), and the ugly (aesthetic unpreferability) are synthesized into
the diametrical opposite—the Profane. While those shrines built for
popular heroes like Kuan Yü in Chinese towns and villages have been
so often vulgarized for, and by, the superstitious activities of the
masses, the images of historical figures constructed by the cultural
elite with poetic language form a constellation of symbols for
Confucian morality. While those virtuous historical figures, having
successfully passed the “Last judgment” of History, now form a
shining galaxy of all the human virtues believed to be universal as
well as eternal, those vicious ones are condemned by History
irredeemably—the “Last judgment” of History is truly final. The
distinction and conflict between the two turn out to be not only the moral versus the immoral, the beautiful versus the ugly, but also the holy versus the profane. And the experience of holiness and profanity is indubitably a religious experience. Experienced in this way, history is to the Confucians ultimate, absolute, holy, but at the same time still human. It is remarkably religionized, but not in the sense of directing our ultimate concern beyond the tangible human world.

It might be somewhat difficult for a modern person to refrain from a sense of amused condescension at the "naive" and "unscientific" religionizing of human history. The more meaningful thing for us to do, however, would be to reflect upon how a humanistic tradition like that of Confucian China, via a unique attitude towards history, has for the past two thousand years, provided its cultural elite the direction that made meaningful their own existence in this universe. Humans are always in need of something ultimate and absolute to concern themselves with, and to anchor their life on. For the past bimillenium Chinese pan-historicism has fulfilled this cultural function, just as Christianity has in many Western nations. Neither has managed to retain its forever sway in the onslaught of modernism. As Paul Tillich laments:

Without an ultimate concern as its basis every system of morals degenerates into a method of adjustment to social demands, whether they are ultimately justified or not. And the
infinite passion which characterizes a genuine faith evaporates and is replaced by a clever calculation which is unable to withstand the passionate attack of an idolatrous faith. This is a description of what has happened on a large scale in Western civilization.54

This is also a valid description of what has happened to the concern for history in China. In this sense, the world has become more technologically advanced, but not necessarily more progressive, nor even more truly sophisticated. It seems that we are now facing a question not as easy to answer as we once so confidently assumed, that is, which is the “better” of the two—a religious faith or no faith at all? Put into this perspective, the religionization in traditional Chinese poetry on history might provide a modern person with more to think about than to sneer at. As study of religions has been shedding new light upon many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, such as history, literature, anthropology, and philosophy, a clearer and fuller awareness of this religiosity of Chinese pan-historicism, of its function as well as limitation, will prove pivotal to a more insightful interpretation, and a more convincing evaluation, of traditional Chinese culture as a whole.

54 Ibid., 119-20.
CONCLUSION

As I have pointed out in the Introduction, poetry on history is a genre that includes thousands of poems written by hundreds of poets during the past two thousand years. Like any other literary genre, it could be fruitfully studied from more than one point of view. As the goal of this project is to examine how Chinese pan-historicism, one of the essences of traditional Chinese culture, manifests itself in this distinct poetic genre, we have understandably concentrated upon how history is treated in the genre as a whole. This line of inquiry has led us to the discovery and analysis of six major approaches employed by the poets: moralization, symbolization, spatialization, eternalization, aestheticization, and religionization. Whereas it is possible and necessary to distinguish the six approaches from one another in abstract analysis, in concrete poetic works they always function together harmoniously. After analyzing them separately, therefore,
it is now crucial to put them together into one perspective and explore the interrelationship among them.

In poetry on history, history as a kind of highly interpreted representation of actual human experience is, more than in such other cultural phenomena as official historical works and popular historical novels, categorized, measured, and evaluated predominantly from the viewpoint of Confucian morality. Compared with moral judgment, all other considerations such as military strategy and administrative policy, are unexceptionally secondary, either in the oeuvre of a particular poet or in the genre as a whole. Moralization is the fundamental approach by which history is treated in this poetic genre, and it bears heavily upon all the other approaches adopted in it.

Such an intense moralization amounts to essentializing history into morality. As a result, the specific historical personages re-presented in poetry on history immediately acquire a profound generality beyond the historical particularity, which to a certain extent they still retain. They become symbols. With their respective deeds, these historical personages now symbolize various categories of the system of Confucian morality. The constellation of all these poetic symbols endows Confucian morality with enhanced comprehensibility, solid verifiability, and inexhaustibility in terms of both moral significance and historical concretization. In this way, they symbolize History, or the moralized Confucian meta-interpretation of human history.
When comprehending history from a moral viewpoint and presenting this comprehension via a system of poetic symbols become the poets’ major concern, history is to a great extent detemporalized, and at the same time spatialized. Time becomes unimportant, or even irrelevant, as the Confucian morality, the essence of history, is now perceived as a timeless entity. Instead of meticulously tracing a historical incident from its beginning to end, exploring every aspect and dimension of this system of Confucian morality and constructing an accordingly multifaceted system of poetic symbols to represent it occupy the poets’ foremost attention and characterize their major endeavor.

Concomitant with this spatialization of history is its eternalization. The historical is the human. It happened once, and that is exactly why it could happen again and again. The past is eternal. History is for ever relevant and applicable to the present and future. As demonstrated by the flourishing of Chinese satirical poetry in poetry on history, one of the major inspirations of those Confucian intellectuals writing in the latter for the past bimillennium has been to apply this everlasting relevance of history to their current life situation.

Poetry on history poeticizes history, that is, it aestheticizes it. An aesthetic standard is introduced into it, and an aesthetic judgment is delivered upon the historical events or personages at issue. Added to the value of truth (historical factuality) and goodness (Confucian morality), this value of beauty (poetic
aestheticity) synthesizes those two within itself, resulting in a "Trinity of values." This "Trinity of values" represents the highest value and ideal in the humanistic tradition of the Confucian China, thus gains a great momentum for its further transcendence—religionization.

The religionization of history could be regarded as the inevitable consequence of all those approaches employed to it in this distinct poetic genre. History becomes the ultimate concern of man, and it will deliver the "Last judgment" upon his entire life. To pass this trial of history successfully is even more important than to preserve one's own life. A Chinese Confucian does not think or write about history, he thinks in history, because he inescapably lives in History. In the absence of an anthropomorphized God, history is to a great extent religionized, and takes on a religious function, serving for a Confucian as his concern for the ultimate, the universal, the absolute, the eternal, and the transcendent.

As we have demonstrated in Chapter I, to the majority of Confucian intellectuals, neither history nor poetry is something to be taken light-heartedly. History is the core of the humanistic thought tradition of Confucianism, while poetry (and the aesthetic) the method to reach the highest state of personal moral cultivation. Synthesizing the two into an organic unit, poetry on history is an exclusive literary genre of the Confucian intellectuals, and the solemnest genre of theirs. Actively practicing this genre for the past bimillenium, the Confucian intellectuals have managed to give
Chinese pan-historicism, a fundamental attitude toward, and a profound conviction about, history, a most concentrated and crystallized manifestation in poetry on history.

Fully aware of the limited capacity of theoretical language alone in formulating this deeply internalized and intuitionized conviction, I shall now nevertheless make an attempt to sum up Chinese pan-historicism as follows:

Chinese pan-historicism is a deep-rooted conviction about, and a fundamental attitude toward, history, shared by most Confucian intellectuals in traditional China. It holds that history is the manifestation of the Way of Heaven—as comprehended in the Confucian Humanism—on earth through regulating and judging all human activities. It holds that any human issue—be it political, moral, or social—is a historical issue, and for that reason, part of the historical process that totalizes the past, present, and future. Therefore if any human issue is to be fully comprehended, such a historical perspective must be adopted. It therefore holds that history is for ever relevant to the present and future, and a historical judgment is what every man has to face in his life as the "Last judgment," and the only thing that truly matters to him as a human. Chinese pan-historicism is the way a Confucian intellectual lives his life and feels it—the past is eternal, and he lives in History.

Chinese pan-historicism thus conceptualized, far from a perfect formula notwithstanding, represents a significant advance
from the impressionistic feeling that the Chinese happened to have an unmatched “sense of history,” and this somehow mysterious “sixth sense” seems to have made them the “most historically minded of all peoples” in the world. It immediately throws new light upon many cultural phenomena in traditional China, phenomena such as the high esteem the official historians enjoyed, and the strict court control they suffered; the unmatched long and rich tradition of official historiography; the irresistible persuasive power of historical precedents in any political, philosophical, and moral debate; the social utopias presented as historically true; the unchallengeable authority enjoyed by those “old men” (translated into richer historical experiences), and the like.

Furthermore, Chinese pan-historicism thus understood highlights one of the primary functions of Confucian intellectuals in that complicated cultural structure, i.e., interpreting history for the rulers, the ruling class, and the whole society. Whenever “something” is deemed to possess the highest authority, this authority would be in effect exerted by those who prove able to provide the most persuasive and applicable interpretation to that “something,” be it the Bible, the “Natural law,” the “self-evident” truths, or the constitution of a nation. In the Chinese case, that “something” was to the Shang people the will of their god and ancestral deities, hinted to them with the cracks on the oracle bones. Accordingly, those inquirers (chen-jen 賢人), diviners (p’u-jen 卜人), and prognosticators (chan-jen 占人) in the court who
produced the cracks on the bones and interpreted them exerted the considerable authority. Ever since the Chou dynasty, however, it has been the Way of Heaven that was deemed to possess the highest authority, and to manifest itself via history. Those who eventually managed to come up with the most comprehensive, consistent, and constructively relevant interpretation of history, the Confucian intellectuals, have therefore exerted a predominant political, social, and cultural influence. Despite the fact that the majority of Confucians never became officials or directly wielded great political power, together as a community of cultural elite, they still exerted an overwhelming influence over the whole society.

In sharp contrast to this Confucian domination are Taoism and Buddhism. The fact that these two traditions have never played a predominant role in Chinese life for a significant period of time, I am convinced, is at least partly due to their disinterest in history, and the resultant impotence in making history constructively relevant to their dealing with the present life. When they failed to make history relevant to them, they failed to make themselves relevant to history. In a culture in which history is upheld as the only place where the highest authority in the universe manifests itself, the ultimate concern of man must lie, and the highest human value must be found, this irrelevance to history denies Taoism and Buddhism any chance to be taken seriously when it comes to those

most serious businesses in the Chinese life. It was no accident that throughout Chinese history, Taoism and Buddhism have played only a secondary role, supplementary and subordinate to the predominant Confucianism, in political, ideological, moral, artistic, and almost every other cultural sphere.

As I stated in the Introduction, the aim of this dissertation is to make the study of poetry on history shed light upon Chinese pan-historicism, and vice versa. In order to recognize the profound cultural significance of a hitherto largely ignored literary genre, we need first to obtain an idea about the specific position that genre could possibly occupy in the particular culture. In this case, an elaborate investigation into the special importance placed by Confucianism upon both history and poetry clarifies how this exclusive poetic genre of the cultural elite could be fruitfully examined. After analyzing in detail the major approaches employed in processing history in this genre, i.e., moralization, symbolization, spatialization, eternalization, aestheticization and religionization, we eventually discover that these are all manifestations of a fundamental attitude toward, and profound conviction about, history, shared by those Confucian intellectuals. That conviction is Chinese pan-historicism. And this comprehension of Chinese pan-historicism in turn further enhances our appreciation of poetry on history as a distinct Chinese literary genre, and its cultural significance to those Confucian intellectuals who have been practicing it with such an enthusiasm for the past two thousand
years. Furthermore, it also sheds new light upon many other cultural phenomena of traditional China, like those just mentioned above. Since this pan-historicism is one of the essences of traditional Chinese culture, it will be inevitably found manifesting itself, with all variations, in every sphere of the society and culture, such as political institutions, laws, thoughts, customs, arts, and the like. The investigation initiated in this limited project, therefore, could prove to have implications far richer than we have expected.
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