

REVIEW FORUM

THE SHAPE OF HISTORY: ON READING LI WAI-YEE

Kai Vogelsang*

Ever since Hayden White declared that as a literary artifact the historical text is indistinguishable from fiction,¹ the study of historiography has ceased to be the prerogative of historians. It is thus no accident that we owe some of the finest recent works on the *Zuo zhuan*, China's oldest narrative history, not to historians but to scholars of Chinese literature. In her splendid book on *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge 2007) Li Wai-yee demonstrates just how fruitful it is to treat Chinese historiography from a literary perspective. She puts to rest the "idea that kernels of historical truth can or should be separated from the rich verbal fabric" in favor of "what is more germane to the sense of history," namely "the conscious formulation of patterns and principles to understand the past" (Li 2007, pp. 2–3).

The *Zuo zhuan*'s history, then, is a rhetorically "patterned past" (Schaberg 2001). But Li wai-yee adds an important observation to this well-known insight: "This rhetoric is, however, imposed on a reality of violence and disorder," in fact it is "a corrective rhetoric to a reality of violence and disorder," and sometimes "the more exalted the rhetoric, the more violent the reality" (Li 2007, pp. 4, 8, 12). Thus history turns out to be not a mirror of the past but a remedy for an unsettling present. The "rhetoric of order" that "presumes and fosters continuity" (Li 2007, p. 4) actually reflects rampant *disorder* and a disquieting awareness of *discontinuity*. This strikingly cogent argument leads to an entirely new perspective on the historiography of the *Zuo zhuan*, which Li Wai-yee illustrates in great detail. Discussing the interpretation of (in)auspicious signs, the function of music, the role of women, the evaluation of

* Kai Vogelsang, 馮凱, University of Hamburg; email: kai.vogelsang@uni-hamburg.de.

1. See Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 81–100, and, with extensive documentation, Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

gestures, effects of divination, and many other topics that shape *Zuo zhuan* narratives, she provides thoughtful insights into diverse ways in which the past and the present were constructed in the *Zuo zhuan*.

In what follows, I will focus on the fundamental issue that underlies Li Wai-yee's case studies, namely the "shape of history" (Li 2007, p. 27). Gathering numerous clues distributed throughout the book, occasionally reading between the lines and expanding on Li Wai-yee's thoughts, I shall try to identify some very basic "patterns and principles to understand the past": ways in which history was constructed in *Zuo zhuan* narratives and, indeed, in ancient China at large.²

History as Compensation

The principle of compensation outlined above—the rhetoric of order making up for the disorder at hand—provides an appropriate starting point for this discussion, since it applies not only to the narratives of *Zuo zhuan*. Rather, it may be regarded as the underlying principle of history *in toto*. Just like traditions are invented "when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed,"³ so "history begins only at the point where tradition ends."⁴ The sense of history is born from the awakening to the fact that the past was essentially different from the present.⁵ *Nota bene*, this is not a comforting thought. Rather, the awareness of discontinuity is a disturbing problem, and it is precisely this problem that is being addressed by historiography. Arguably, the basic function of historiography is to compensate for this perceived discontinuity by constructing new *continuities*. Whereas historical consciousness by definition presupposes the knowledge of change in time, historical narrative "fosters continuity" by suggesting that despite all the changes

2. Much of what follows is based on my book: Kai Vogelsang, *Geschichte als Problem: Entstehung, Formen und Funktionen von Geschichtsschreibung im Alten China* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007). Since this book was written without the benefit of having read *The Readability of the Past*, it seems appropriate to review some of its main points in the light of Li Wai-yee's work.

3. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4.

4. Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), 130: "C'est qu'en général l'histoire ne commence qu'au point où finit la tradition, au moment où s'éteint ou se décompose la mémoire sociale."

5. For a recent survey of this awakening, see Zachary S. Schiffman, *The Birth of the Past* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

some things have stayed the same. History, then, serves as a remedy for the disruption in temporal coherence.⁶

In China, the need for such a remedy seems to have arisen in the middle Western Zhou period, which saw thorough-going military, administrative, land, and ritual reforms as well as the decline of the Zhou which culminated in the overthrow of a Zhou king in 842 B.C.E.⁷ These were epochal transformations. It is perhaps no accident that precisely at this time the Chinese seemed to have acquired a sense of history.⁸ The difference between past and present was deplored in contemporary bronze inscriptions, and even more significantly, the first genealogical texts were written. The most striking examples are those found on the Shi Qiang *pan* and the Lai *pan*, which recount the succession of the Wei and Shan families, respectively.⁹ “Happy and helpful was Ancestor Yi! ... Clear-eyed and bright was Grandfather Xin of the branch lineage! ... Extending and even was my cultured deceased-father Duke Yi! ... Filial and convivial is Scribe Qiang!”¹⁰

Apparently, the function of such genealogies was to bridge the gap between a past, one that seemed increasingly removed, and the present: they were precisely what Li Wai-ye calls “a corrective

6. This has become especially evident in our own times with its pervasive craving for history: “Because people in the modern world—which is subject to accelerated change and therefore more and more discontinuous—especially need to protect their continuity, the sense of history ... arises especially and only in this world. The sense of history, if I am correct, is most of all a sense for continuity, for slowness.” Odo Marquard, *Zukunft braucht Herkunft: Philosophische Essays* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003), 228.

7. See Edward L. Shaughnessy, “Western Zhou History,” in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, ed. Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 292–351, esp. 323–31, and, for the ritual reform, Jessica Rawson, “Western Zhou Archaeology,” in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, 352–449, and Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1000–250 BC)* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, 2006), 29–73.

8. For a detailed discussion of this process, see Vogelsang, *Geschichte als Problem*, 92–159.

9. Edward Shaughnessy called the Shi Qiang *pan* inscription “probably the first conscious attempt in China to write history.” Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History: Inscribed Bronze Vessels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1.

10. Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History*, 185–89. For a different translation, see Ulrich Lau, *Quellenstudien zur Landvergabe und Bodenübertragung in der westlichen Zhou-Dynastie (1045?–771 v. Chr.)* (Nettetal: Steyler-Verlag, 1999), 184–204. On the Lai *pan*, see *Kaogu yu wenwu* 2003.3, 3–12, and *Wenwu* 2003.6, throughout.

rhetoric."¹¹ They evoke permanence in change by claiming that despite all historical transformations the *family line* has remained unbroken.

Traditional History

This form of historical narrative that harks back to the "origins of present world orders and life forms" may be called "traditional history."¹² It invokes an uninterrupted tradition which, despite all surrounding historical change, still provides valid guidance in the present. This seems to have been the most ancient form of historiography in China. Traditional history appears not only in middle Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, but also in some songs of the *Shi jing* that recount the genealogy of the Shang and Zhou, drawing a line from remote origins to the present and thereby concealing the disruptions of historical change.¹³ Looking for the "shape of history" in ancient China, the first one encounters is a *vector*.

"Traditional history" also figures very prominently in the *Zuo zhuan*. Among the most well known examples is a speech by Zichan of Zheng to a Jin minister upon Zheng's invasion of Chen that Li Wai-ye discusses on pp. 375–76:

Formerly Yu Efu became the Zhou director of pottery production so as to serve our former king. Our former king, in recognition of how his vessels benefited all, and also of his descent from Shun, the sage king of divine illumination, gave his eldest daughter, Tai Ji, in marriage to Yu Efu's son, Hugong, and put him in power in Chen to complete the honors due the "three respected lines." Thus Chen came from our Zhou house, and to this day relies on its beneficence. With the unrest following the death of Lord Huan of Chen, the leaders of Cai wanted to establish as ruler the Chen heir born of a Cai lady. Our former ruler, Lord Zhuang, supported Wufu and established him as ruler. The leaders of Cai killed him, and

11. In another context, Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer remarked that "the break in tradition which was so strongly felt in the 11th century [C.E.] came to stimulate the production of clan genealogies. These were forms of compensation." Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, "Chinesisches Geschichtsdenken," in *Die Vielfalt der Kulturen*, ed. Jörn Rüsen, Michael Gottlob, and Achim Mittag (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1998), 126.

12. See Jörn Rüsen, *Lebendige Geschichte: Formen und Funktionen des historischen Wissens* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 56, who calls it "traditionale Sinnbildung." See *ibid.*, 43–45, and Jörn Rüsen, "Die vier Typen des historischen Erzählens," in *Formen der Geschichtsschreibung* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982), 514–606.

13. The Zhou genealogy is spread over *Shi jing* nos. 235–45; for the Shang genealogy, see *Shi jing* nos. 303–5.

we worked with them to support and maintain Lord Li. Coming to Lords Zhuang and Xuan, each was established as ruler by us. During the rebellion of Xia Zhengshu, Lord Cheng wandered as an exile, and was also brought back into Chen through our effort. That is something you, my lord, knew about. Now Chen has forgotten the great virtue and beneficence of Zhou, rejected our ties by marriage, and relied on Chu forces to threaten and demolish our humble settlement. It could not be satisfied. That was why we had last year's request.

昔虞闕父為周陶正，以服事我先王。我先王賴其利器用也，與其神明之後也，庸以元女大姬配胡公，而封諸陳，以備三恪。則我周之自出，至于今是賴。桓公之亂，蔡人欲立其出，我先君莊公奉五父而立之，蔡人殺之，我又與蔡人奉戴厲公。至於莊、宣，皆我之自立。夏氏之亂，成公播蕩，又我之自入，君所知也。今陳忘周之大德，蔑我大惠，棄我姻親，介恃楚眾，以憑陵我敝邑，不可億逞，我是以有往年之告。

(*Zuo zhuan* Xiang 25.10, 1104–5)¹⁴

Throughout his speech, Zichan refers to historical origins and the resulting obligations that are irrevocable “to this day.” He describes an unbroken line from the past to the present, arguing that—whatever other historical changes there may have been—the relationship between Zhou and Chen remains unchanged. Interestingly, this argument is—*pace* Li Wai-yee (Li 2007, p. 376)—entirely *amoral*. Zichan offers a compelling appeal to the “binding origins of present life forms and their permanent enforcement,”¹⁵ showing no concern whatsoever for ritual propriety, righteousness, humaneness, reverence, good faith, or other “virtue words” (Li 2007, p. 7). The one seeming exception, *de* 德, arguably does not refer to moral virtue at all. Being “perhaps the most multifaceted and disputed term of ancient Chinese political, ethical, and religious discourse,”¹⁶ *de* originally referred to the ruler's charisma (or perhaps his very commands) or power.¹⁷ In Chunqiu

14. Translations from the *Zuo zhuan* are not from the book under discussion but from Li Wai-yee's, Stephen Durrant's, and David Schaberg's forthcoming translation of the entire work (footnotes omitted). I thank the authors for sharing their yet unpublished work with me. The Chinese texts are taken from: *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995).

15. Rüsen, *Lebendige Geschichte*, 43, describing “traditionale Sinnbildung.”

16. Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought: Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722–453 B.C.E.* (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 180; see the discussion of *de*, *ibid.*, 180–84.

17. Note the usage in *Zhangguo ce* 戰國策, ed. Liu Xiang 劉向 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 19.653, where king Wuling of Zhao says: 嗣立不忘先德，君之道也。 See J.I. Crump, *Chan-kuo Ts'e* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The

footnote continued on next page

times, *de* was increasingly associated with ministers or *junzi* as well, and the concept came to acquire ethical meanings, eventually turning into a *virtus moralis*.¹⁸ In Zichan's speech, however, the term is only associated with the Zhou rulers, apparently still retaining the old meaning of binding power. As such, *de* is in fact a key term in traditional history which is invoked time and again. In Wangsun Mang's famous reply to the Chu king's inquiry regarding the nine tripods, the regalia of Zhou (discussed in Li 2007, 300–301), the term appears no fewer than six times:

Size and weight depend on virtue, not on the cauldrons. In the past, just when Xia possessed virtue, men from afar depict various creatures, and the nine superintendents submitted metal, so that cauldrons were cast with images of various creatures. The hundred things were therewith completely set forth, and the people thus knew the spirits and the evil things. That was why when the people entered rivers, marshes, mountains, and forests, they would not meet what could harm them, and the sprites of the hills and waters could not get at them. Thus they were able to harmonize with those above and below them and to receive heaven's blessings. The last Xia king, Jie, possessed dimmed virtue, and the cauldrons were moved to the house of Shang, there to remain for six hundred years. The last Shang king, Zhou, was violent and tyrannical, and the cauldrons were moved to the house of Zhou. When virtue is bright and resplendent, the cauldrons, though small, are heavy. When virtue is distorted, dimmed, and confused, the cauldrons, though large, are light. Heaven blesses those of bright virtue, giving them the place for realizing and maintaining it. When King Cheng put the cauldrons in place at Jiaru, he divined on the number of generations and got thirty; he divined on the number of years and got seven hundred. This is what Heaven has commanded. Although Zhou virtue is in decline, the heavenly command has not yet changed. The question of whether the cauldrons are light or heavy may not be asked yet.

University of Michigan, 1996), 288: "The Way of Kings is to be mindful of the virtue of their ancestors while they are on the throne"); interestingly, a parallel passage in *Shangjun shu zhuizhi* 商君書錐指, ed. Jiang Lihong 蔣禮鴻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996) 1.1, reads: 代立不忘社稷, 君之道也。Here, the altars of earth and grain substitute for "virtue": in both passages, not moral virtue is at issue but the tradition of the ruling house.

18. See the etymology of English "virtue" (< Latin *virtūt-*, *virtus* manliness, valor, worth, etc., < *vir* man), which originally meant "power or operative influence inherent in a supernatural or divine being" but also acquired the meaning of "conformity of life and conduct with the principles of morality" or "a particular moral excellence" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "virtue, n.").

在德不在鼎。昔夏之方有德也，遠方圖物，貢金九牧，鑄鼎象物，百物而為之備，使民知神、姦。故民入川澤、山林，不逢不若。螭魅罔兩，莫能逢之。用能協于上下，以承天休。桀有昏德，鼎遷于商，載祀六百。商紂暴虐，鼎遷于周。德之休明，雖小、重也。其姦回昏亂，雖大、輕也。天祚明德，有所底止。成王定鼎于郊廓，卜世三十，卜年七百，天所命也。周德雖衰，天命未改。鼎之輕重，未可問也。(Zuo zhuan Xuan 3, 669–72)

Again a piece of traditional history, the cauldrons being the symbol for continuity in change and the proof that “the heavenly command has not yet changed.” Although Li Wai-ye translates *de* as “virtue” throughout this speech, it is clearly not meant as a moral virtue. Rather, it is an essential quality of the king, his power to bind and rule.¹⁹ Especially the phrase *mingde* 明德, which features prominently in late Western Zhou and Chunqiu bronze inscriptions but becomes very rare in Zhanguo texts, points to an archaic understanding of the concept which had nothing to do with “Confucian” moral values. It is not a personally acquired quality but the inborn habitus of a ruler, passed on from generation to generation. Remaining unchanged in time, “virtue” encapsulates what traditional history is all about. Moral virtues, per contra, have no place in this discourse. Rather than being passed on from ruler to ruler, they can be acquired by anybody and must always be reaffirmed anew through good deeds: this makes them unfit for a discourse that serves to legitimize hereditary rights.

Traditional history is fundamentally amoral. This is all the more remarkable since moral principles are widely held to be the fabric of *Zuo zhuan’s* “rhetoric of order.” Yet, they are conspicuously absent from speeches that describe traditional history.²⁰ Take the famous speech by prince Zhao of Zhou (Li 2007, 389–91) which is worth being quoted in full.

In times past, when King Wu had prevailed over Yin, King Cheng pacified the four quarters, and King Kang gave the people their ease. Both of them set up their younger full brothers in order to serve as a bulwark for Zhou. Indeed they said, “We would by no means enjoy exclusive possession of the achievements of Kings Wen and Wu. What is more, should our successors lose their way and fail, capsizing and drowning in troubles, these men will come to their rescue.” When it came to the reign of King Yi, the king

19. In at least one passage, Li, Durrant, and Schaberg translate 德 as “ties of beneficence” (see below). This nicely captures the word’s meaning: it is clearly not a moral virtue.

20. For other quite different amoral elements in *Zuo zhuan*, see Kai Vogelsang, “From Anecdote to History: Observations on the Composition of the *Zuo zhuan*,” *Oriens Extremus* 50 (2011), 99–124.

suffered a serious illness, and there was none among the princes who did not hurry about and offer all of the prospect sacrifices in order to pray for the king's health. When it came to the reign of King Li, the king was cruel-minded, and the myriad people could not tolerate him, so they settled the king at Zhi. Princes left their own posts to join the royal government. Only when King Xuan was cognizant was he given his official position. When it came to the reign of King You, Heaven was ruthless to Zhou: the king was benighted and incompetent and therefore lost his place. The Xi King usurped the mandate, but the princes put him aside, setting up a successor to the king and at the same time moving him to Jiaru. This, then, is how brothers can exert themselves on behalf of the royal house. "When it came to the reign of King Hui, Heaven gave Zhou no peace, but conceived in Prince Tui thoughts of insurrection, which then affected Prince Dai. Kings Hui and Xiang, escaping the troubles, departed the royal city. Then duly Jin and Zheng extirpated the crooked men in order to stabilize the royal house. This, then, is how brothers can carry forward the mandate of the former kings." In the sixth year of the reign of King Ding, a phantom came down among people in Qin and said, "In Zhou there will be a mustachioed king, who will be capable of cultivating his official duties: the princes will submit to him in enjoying their domains, and for two generations they will revere their duties. Then there will be in the royal house one who usurps the royal office: the princes will not plan against him, but will suffer the disturbance and disaster that will follow." When it came down to the time of King Ling, he was born with a mustache. The king was very spiritual and a sage, and was in no way hated by the princes. Kings Ling and Jing were able to bring their reigns to completion.

Now the royal house is in disorder, and Shan Qi and Liu Di have thrown the world into confusion. They act on their own, defying precedent, and claim, "What constants did the former kings keep to? Whatever our minds should command—who would presume to chastise us?" At the head of a mob of depraved ruthless men, they have sown disorder in the royal house. In their predations and desires they are insatiable, and in their plotting and requests they have no standards. They habitually offend the ghosts and spirits, they haughtily toss aside the penal codes, they betray and violate covenants, they superciliously trample upon royal dignity, and they lyngly arrogate the authority of the former kings. Jin has acted contrary to the way, aiding these men and abetting them, in this way thinking to indulge them without limit. This is why I, the inadequate one, have been shaken and cast to the winds, skulking among the Man of Jing, with no place as yet to stop and rest. If one or two of you, my brothers, nephews, and uncles, should restore and comply with Heaven's law, offering no aid to the rogues, but instead

following the commands of the former kings—not spurring on Heaven’s punishments, but instead relieving me and planning on my behalf, the inadequate one—then that is precisely what I would wish. Although I presume to lay out in full my own heart’s desires as well as the constant rules of the former kings, it is the princes who must plan deeply about it.

In times past, the command of the former kings said: “When there is no legitimate heir by the queen, then choose and establish the eldest as heir. When sons are of equal age, go by their virtue. When they are of equal virtue, go by divination. The king does not establish his heir on the basis of preference, and lords and ministers are without personal bias.” That was the system of old. When Queen Mu and the heir apparent Shou died young and passed from the world, Shan and Liu helped their personal favorite and established a younger son as heir, thereby defying the former kings. Indeed it is up to you alone, kinsmen old and young, to plan about it.

昔武王克殷，成王靖四方，康王息民，並建母弟，以蕃屏周，亦曰：『吾無專享文、武之功，且為後人之迷敗傾覆而溺入于難，則振救之。』至于夷王，王愆于厥身，諸侯莫不並走其望，以祈王身。至于厲王，王心戾虐，萬民弗忍，居王于囿。諸侯釋位，以間王政。宣王有志，而後效官。至于幽王，天不弔周，王昏不若，用愆厥位。攜王好命，諸侯替之，而建王嗣，用遷邠，則是兄弟之能用力於王室也。至于惠王，天不靖周，生積禍心，施于叔帶。惠、襄辟難，越去王都。則有晉、鄭咸黜不端，以綏定王家。則是兄弟之能率先王之命也。在定王六年，秦人降妖，曰：『周其有顛王，亦克能脩其職，諸侯服享，二世共職。王室其有間王位，諸侯不圖，而受其亂災。』至于靈王，生而有顛。王甚神聖，無惡於諸侯。靈王、景王克終其世。「今王室亂，單旗、劉狄剝亂天下，壹行不若，謂『先王何常之有，唯余心所命，其誰敢討之』，帥群不弔之人，以行亂于王室。侵欲無厭，規求無度，貫瀆鬼神，慢棄刑法，倍奸齊盟，傲很威儀，矯誣先王。晉為不道，是攝是贊，思肆其罔極。茲不穀震盪播越，竄在荆蠻，未有攸底。若我一二兄弟甥舅獎順天法，無助狡猾，以從先王之命，毋速天罰，赦圖不穀，則所願也。敢盡布其腹心及先王之經，而諸侯實深圖之。「昔先王之命曰：『王后無適，則擇立長。年鈞以德，德鈞以下。』王不立愛，公卿無私，古之制也。穆后及大子壽早夭即世，單、劉贊私立少，以間先王。亦唯伯仲叔季圖之！」 (Zuo zhuan Zhao 26, 1475-79)

This speech is paradigmatic for traditional history. It harks back to the very origin of Zhou rule (“King Wu had prevailed over Yin”) and explicitly mentions the binding commitment of their relatives (“these men will come to their rescue”). Then it traces the succession of the Zhou “former kings” (先王, which Zichan also refers to) from Wu, Cheng and Kang to Yi, Li, You, Hui, and Ling. The leaps in this list are elegantly glossed over by the repeated phrase 至于 (“when it came to”). Just like

Zichan's speech (which also uses 至), it is clearly designed to suggest continuity over time: the "commands of the former kings" have come down right to the present, the "system of old" is still effective and must be abided by. Arguably, the references to the former kings are not so much "analogies of past and present disorder" (Li 2007, 390), "analogy" implying a difference between the cases compared, but rather instances of *one* continuous political order. As will be seen anon, the argument by analogy belongs to quite a different sort of historical discourse.

As in the case of Zichan's speech, prince Zhao's injunctions are not couched in moral terms: none of the "virtue words" mentioned above appear. Instead, only the charismatic virtue (德) of the Zhou kings is invoked.²¹ Yet another element of traditional history becomes apparent in this speech: the reference to written sources. Prince Zhao seems to have based his speech on written "documents and records of Zhou" that he had taken with him on his flight to Chu.²² This is significant. Writing is the historical medium *par excellence*, insofar as the symbolization of the absent through writing makes possible the presence of the past, the currency of origins (for example, of an aristocratic house), and thus the legitimizing force of arché, origo, basis. The consequences, as is well known, are ambivalent: by orientating oneself to the past, one's attention is drawn to what is different in the present.²³

Writing is much more effective than oral tradition in stabilizing information over long periods of time. By giving a (potentially) unaltered

21. Interestingly, Min Mafu, who *opposes* the speech by prince Zhao, argues that the latter committed "a great failure of ritual propriety (Li 2007, 391); but prince Zhao himself never uses this category. The same may be observed in another case, where the Zhou king Jing's arguments based on traditional history are countered by Shuxiang with reference to ritual propriety (*Zuo zhuan* Zhao 15.1374, see Li 2007, 387).

22. Not only the exact date ("In the sixth year of the reign of King Ding") may indicate that prince Zhao is quoting from documents, but also numerous archaic elements in his speech, such as the possessive pronoun 厥 (instead of classical 其), the relative pronoun 彼 (instead of 所), the particle 唯, the preposition 于, and the conjunction 用 (instead of 以). In the speech of Zichan, above, the preposed object in 是賴 as well as the repeated use of anteposed objects as in 我周之自出, 我之自立, and 我之自入, "no doubt a survival of a more widespread placing of pronoun objects in front of the verb in preclassical language" (Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press 1996), 70) appear as archaic elements.

23. Niklas Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1997), 273. Interestingly, although Luhmann refers to European tradition, in this passage he cites Jacques Gernet, who observed a "retour du passé" with the spread of printing in the 12th and 13th centuries; see Jacques Gernet, *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion, 1250–1276* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 229: "return to [sic] the past."

account of the past, it accentuates the difference between present and past: and it is precisely the awareness of this discontinuity that constitutes historical consciousness. Writing would seem to be intimately connected with the rise of history.²⁴ In particular, the “keen awareness of how ‘documents and records’ define memory and serve as emblems of authority” (Li 2007, 388) is associated with *traditional* history, which refers to origins by (implicitly or explicitly) quoting documents. This seems to be precisely what is meant by the phrase *wenci* 文辭 which is repeatedly used to characterize such speeches.²⁵ Not simply “patterned phrases” in the sense of “beautiful words” (Li 2007, 391), *wenci* quite literally means “written words,” that is words quoted from written documents. By calling a speech *wenci*, it is acknowledged as being “exemplary for its archaic style and its citation of the most hallowed precedents of early Zhou history.”²⁶ In short, it is exemplary for citing old documents.²⁷

In early China, only the rulers (and their ministers) could quote written sources to bolster their claims, since only they had privileged access to such documents. In fact, as Li Wai-ye observes, it is almost exclusively the aristocracy that appeals to origins: “Zhou kings and ministers have the best reasons to appeal to the early Zhou political order, when the Zhou kings rewarded kinsmen and meritorious helpers with domains, which were supposed to seal bonds of obligation toward the royal house” (Li 2007, 380). Only the aristocratic elite could derive legitimacy from historical origins—only they *had a history*. For non-aristocrats, the use of traditional history simply would not make sense. In another example, which Li Wai-ye discusses on pp. 385–86, it is the Zhou king himself who summons up the origins of the royal order.

24. Incidentally, the rise of historical thought in the middle Western Zhou as described above seems to coincide with the spread of writing beyond the confines of the Zhou royal house; see, for a recent overview, Li Feng, “Literacy and the Social Contexts of Writing in the Western Zhou,” in *Writing and Literacy in Early China: Studies from the Columbia Early China Seminar*, ed. Li Feng and David Prager Branner (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 217–301.

25. Prince Zhao’s speech is characterized as *wenci* (*Zuo zhuan* Zhao 26.1479) just like speeches of Zichan (Xiang 25.1106) and of Shuxiang (Zhao 13.1355).

26. David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 84. For an extensive discussion of the term *wenci*, placing it in a wider context of *wen*, see *ibid.*, 81–86.

27. Surprisingly, however, the *documents* par excellence, the *shu* which would later become the *Shu jing*, are hardly ever quoted (as far as I can see, the only instance is Ziyu’s speech in *Zuo zhuan* Ding 4.1537–42). Nor are the songs of the *Shi jing*, the most widely quoted text in all of classical literature, ever quoted in traditional history. I shall return to this observation.

Arguing with a Jin envoy over ritual offerings to the Zhou, he pronounces:

Younger uncle, you have forgotten! The royal uncle Tang Shu was a full younger brother of King Cheng; could he have had no portion? The drum and grand chariot of Mixu, with which King Wen conducted his grand muster, and the Quegong armor, with which King Wu overcame the Shang: Tang Shu received these and was placed with them in the region governed by the asterism Shen, where he was surrounded at his borders by the Rong and Di. Afterward, there were King Xiang's two chariots, his bronze axe, his millet wine, vermilion bow, and "tiger runner" guards, which Lord Wen received as he took possession of the Nanyang territory and pacified the eastern Xia regions. If this was not a portion, what was it? To have some achievement and not to let it fade; to have some accomplishment and to have it recorded; to have it upheld with landholdings, confirmed with sacrificial vessels, marked with chariots and regalia, made conspicuous with patterned flags, so that one's descendants do not forget it: this is what is known as a blessing. If your blessings are not registered, then what place is there for you, uncle? What is more, in times past your distant ancestor Sun Boyan was supervisor of Jin's archival records, which were used for great administrative matters, and he was therefore called Ji, or "Records." It was when Xin You's second son Dong went to Jin that Jin first had the Dong scribes. You are the descendant of supervisors of the archives. Why have you forgotten these things?

叔氏，而忘諸乎！叔父唐叔，成王之母弟也，其反無分乎？密須之鼓與其大路，文所以大蒐也；闕鞏之甲，武所以克商也，唐叔受之，以處參虛，匡有戎狄。其後襄之二路，鉞鉞、秬鬯，彤弓、虎賁，文公受之，以有南陽之田，撫征東夏，非分而何？夫有勳而不廢，有績而載，奉之以土田，撫之以彝器，旌之以車服，明之以文章，子孫不忘，所謂福也。福祚之不登，叔父焉在？且昔而高祖孫伯鬻司晉之典籍，以為大政，故曰籍氏。及辛有之二子董之晉，於是乎有董史。女、司典之後也，何故忘之？

(*Zuo zhuan Zhao* 15.7, 1371–73)

"Why have you forgotten these things?" Like the Jewish *zakhor*, which reverberates throughout the Hebrew Bible, the admonition *bu wang*—don't forget—is the shibboleth of traditional history. As the audience of these speeches "is enjoined to remember, so it is adjured not to forget."²⁸ The Zhou king blames the Jin envoy for having forgotten their ancestry, Zichan criticizes that "Chen has forgotten the great virtue and beneficence of Zhou," and when Jin severs its relations

28. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 5, with reference to the people of Israel.

with Qin, Lü Xiang famously reports that Lord Mu “did not forget the old ties of beneficence,”²⁹ duke Dao of Jin, upon promoting an officer, warns him that the virtue of his forebears may not be forgotten.³⁰

To sum up: a distinct and perhaps the most ancient form of history in ancient China may be called traditional history. It is characterized by

- reference to origins and the continuous legitimacy of an ancient order;
- the appeal to memory and the injunction not to forget traditional commitments;
- the (implicit or explicit) reference to written documents;
- the absence of moral arguments and instead the invocation of charismatic virtue;
- its employment by rulers and their spokesmen.

The significance of these characteristics will become even clearer when discussing a second form of historical discourse which differs radically from traditional history.

Exemplary History

The second form of historical discourse to be found in the *Zuo zhuan* may be called *exemplary history*. It

follows the well-known slogan “*historia magistra vitae*.” History teaches general rules of action through the wealth of past events that she transmits.... For example, stories that recount the deeds of rulers teach precepts of wise rulership; stories about the rise, the transformation and fall of political entities teach insights into the ways in which rulership changes under certain circumstances. Such regular abstract-general insights may be transferred to a wealth of historical examples and thus strengthened.³¹

29. *Zuo zhuan* Cheng 13.861: 穆公不忘舊德 (and, in a later passage: 我襄公未忘君之舊勳). Lü Xiang’s message features the elements that are typical for traditional history: “virtue words” do not appear at all, and it uses archaic language like anteposed objects (我之自出, 余唯利是視, 唯好是求), the pronoun 厥, the preposition 于, and the conjunction 用 (see. n. 22 above).

30. *Guoyu* 國語 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 13.432. For further examples, see Vogelsang, *Geschichte als Problem*, 198–200.

31. Rösen, *Lebendige Geschichte*, 46. Rösen’s original term is “*exemplarische Sinnbildung*.”

This form of history is so well known to historians of ancient China that a single example may suffice to illustrate it.³² It is the famous letter that Shuxiang of Jin wrote to Zichan in 536 B.C.E. after the latter had cast legal codes on bronze vessels.

In the beginning I expected much from you, but now I no longer do so. Long ago the former kings consulted about matters to decide them, but did not make penal codes: they feared that the people would become contentious. When they still could not restrain them, they therefore fenced them in with dutifulness, bound them with governance, employed them with ritual propriety, maintained them with good faith, and fostered them with nobility of spirit. They determined emoluments and ranks to encourage their obedience, and decided punishments and penalties strictly to overawe them in their excesses. Fearing that that still was not enough, they taught them loyalty, rewarded good conduct, instructed them in their duties, employed them harmoniously, supervised them with vigilance, oversaw them with might, and adjudged them with rigor. Further, they sought superiors who were sage and principled, officials who were brilliant and discerning, elders who were loyal and trustworthy, and teachers who were kind and generous. With this, then, the people could be employed without disaster or disorder resulting. When the people know that there is a code, they have no wariness of their superiors. All together, they get contentious ideas, appealing to the writings, and achieve their goals after seeking lucky opportunities. They cannot be governed.

When there was disorder in the Xia government, they created the "Code of Yu." When there was disorder in the Shang government, they created the "Code of Tang." When there was disorder in the Zhou government, they composed the "Code of the Nine Punishments." These three penal codes in each case arose in the dynasty's final age.

Now as chief minister in the domain of Zheng you have created fields and ditches, established an administration that is reviled, determined the three statutes, and cast the penal writings. Will it not be difficult to calm the people by such means? As it says in the Odes,

"Take the virtue of King Wen as a guide, a model, a pattern; Day by day calm the four quarters."

And as it says elsewhere:

"Take as model King Wen, And the ten thousand realms have trust."

32. Li 2007, 363–66. While the following account is limited to examples from the *Zuo zhuan*, see Vogelsang, *Geschichte als Problem*, 223–63 for an extensive discussion of exemplary history including other Zhanguo texts.

In this case, why would there be any penal codes at all? When the people have learned how to contend over points of law, they will abandon ritual propriety and appeal to the writings. Even at chisel's tip and knife's edge they will contend. A chaotic litigiousness will flourish and bribes will circulate everywhere. Will Zheng perhaps perish at the end of your generation? I have heard that "When a domain is about to fall, its regulations are sure to be numerous." Perhaps this is what is meant?

始吾有虞於子，今則已矣。昔先王議事以制，不為刑辟，懼民之有爭心也。猶不可禁禦，是故閑之以義，糾之以政，行之以禮，守之以信，奉之以仁；制為祿位，以勸其從；嚴斷刑罰，以威其淫。懼其未也，故誨之以忠，聳之以行，教之以務，使之以和，臨之以敬，泄之以彊，斷之以剛；猶求聖哲之上、明察之官、忠信之長、慈惠之師，民於是乎可任使也，而不生禍亂。民知有辟，則不忌於上。並有爭心，以徵於書，而徵幸以成之，弗可為矣。夏有亂政，而作《禹刑》；商有亂政，而作《湯刑》；周有亂政，而作《九刑》：三辟之興，皆叔世也。今吾子相鄭國，作封洫，立謗政，制參辟，鑄刑書，將以靖民，不亦難乎？《詩》曰：『儀式刑文王之德，日靖四方。』又曰：『儀式刑文王，萬邦作孚。』如是，何辟之有？民知爭端矣，將棄禮而徵於書，錐刀之末，將盡爭之。亂獄滋豐，賄賂並行。終子之世，鄭其敗乎？肸聞之：『國將亡，必多制』，其此之謂乎！

(*Zuo zhuan Zhao* 6, 1274-76)

Shuxiang's line of reasoning is clearly historical.³³ Yet it differs significantly from the discourse of traditional history described above. Rather than describing an unbroken line from the past to the present, Shuxiang lists isolated events from widely different contexts. The Xia, Shang, and Zhou equally serve as examples for the point he wants to make: laws are a sign of decay, "when a domain is about to fall, its regulations are sure to be numerous." He does not appeal to historical origins and obligations that are irrevocable "to this day," but rather points to a rule of history that applies no matter when and where. This is where the argument by analogy comes into play. The "former kings" (who, significantly, remain anonymous) are not invoked as the founders of a tradition which still rests upon the contemporaries' shoulders, but as exemplars of good rulership. If the shape of traditional history is that of a *vector* which connects the past with the present,

33. Contrary to Benjamin Schwartz, "History in Chinese Culture. Some Comparative Reflections," *History and Theory* 35.4 (1996), 23-33, who speaks of a "kind of 'ahistorical' view of history which regards history as a casebook of human actions in situations which can be considered in an entirely metahistorical framework." This view would seem to be based on an all too narrow historicist interpretation of history.

exemplary history takes the shape of *parallels* that may be drawn between past and present.

This past is no longer, as in traditional history, limited to the line of one ruling house. The scope of historical examples is unlimited: virtually any person or any event may be adduced to prove a general point. Now history becomes a vast reservoir of cases that may be freely used by way of illustration. In the exemplary mode, history radically expands its possibilities. It is no accident that this form of history became so ubiquitous that it appears as the Chinese historical discourse par excellence. Now, anything may serve as history, and history may serve anybody. Whereas in traditional history, only those who *had history*, namely the aristocrats, could avail themselves of historical arguments, exemplary history is potentially available to everybody. It became the standard rhetorical device of the rising class of *shi* 士, and the “philosophical” literature of the Zhanguo period—*Mozi*, *Mengzi*, *Xunzi*, *Guanzi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Hanfei zi*, *Liushi chunqiu*, and others—abound with exemplary history. Even women could use exemplary history for their purposes, as the remonstrance of Shuxiang’s mother against his intended marriage with the daughter of Wuchen from Shen demonstrates (Li 2007, 156–57):

Qu Wuchen’s wife Xia Ji has killed three husbands, one ruler, and one son, and has brought one domain and two high ministers to their destruction. Should you not see her faults? I have heard that “Great beauty must necessarily hold great evil.” That woman was the daughter of Yao Zi, the lesser wife of Lord Mu of Zheng; she was the younger sister of Lord Ling of Zheng. Lord Ling died early without an heir, and Heaven concentrated beauty in this one, for it was certain to use this one to bring about great destruction.

Long ago a girl was born to the Youreng lineage. Her thick black hair was very beautiful and glossy enough to use as a mirror. They would call her the Dark Wife. The music director Lord Kui took her to wife and she bore Bofeng, who had in him the heart of a swine, insatiably greedy and violent beyond all bounds. They called him the Great Swine. Lord Yi of Youqiong destroyed him, so that Lord Kui receives no sacrifices. What is more, the falls of the three dynasties and the deposing of the Jin heir Shensheng were all due to these creatures. What do you intend to accomplish by this? This is an extraordinary creature, one capable of changing a man. Unless he is a man of virtue and dutifulness, there is sure to be disaster.

子靈之妻殺三夫、一君、一子，而亡一國、兩卿矣，可無懲乎？吾聞之：『甚美必有甚惡。』是鄭穆少妃姚子之子，子貉之妹也。子貉早死，無後，而天鍾美於是，將必以是大有敗也。昔有仍氏生女，黠黑，而甚美，光可

以鑑，名曰玄妻。樂正后夔取之，生伯封，實有豕心，貪惓無厭，忿類無期，謂之封豕。有窮后羿滅之，夔是以不祀。且三代之亡、共子之廢，皆是物也，女何以為哉？夫有尤物，足以移人。苟非德義，則必有禍。
(*Zuo zhuan Zhao* 28, 1492–93)

Predictably, Shuxiang “did not dare marry her.” The historical evidence his mother musters is overwhelming: five examples from a span of well over a millennium (from before the Xia to the calamity of Jin in 666 B.C.E.) are irrefutable proof for the point she makes: “Great beauty must necessarily hold great evil.” Shuxiang’s mother does not refer to a narrow family tradition—only one of her examples is taken from Jin history—but to general, even proverbial wisdom. The phrase “I have heard that,” introducing such sayings also appears in Shuxiang’s speech, above: it is typical of exemplary history. Whereas traditional history’s admonition not to *forget* appeals to family lore that the listener is expected to have known all along, exemplary history introduces potentially *new* knowledge. Knowledge, not remembrance, is the catchword of exemplary history:³⁴ knowledge acquired by hearsay or, more systematically, by learning. Whereas family history may be conveyed more or less informally by socialization, the wide expanse of historical knowledge opened by the exemplary discourse can only be explored through learning.

By the same token, one can learn *from* this history. Whereas traditional history, by its very logic, offers no truths that go beyond the particular case in point, the lessons of exemplary history may be applied by analogy to all kinds of situations. Thus history becomes a teacher for life: *historia magistra vitae*. The implicit assumption of exemplary history is that there is a correspondence between past and present insofar as they follow the same general rules: similar actions will lead to similar results, no matter when and where they are carried out. This is clearly stated in another text, the *Lüshi chunqiu*:

The relation between the present and the past resembles that between the past and later ages. The relation between present and later ages also resembles that between the past and the present.³⁵ Therefore, by examining the present, one can know the past; and knowing the past, one can know

34. See David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, above n. 26, at 158: “Knowledge (*zhi*) is the faculty that allows rulers and ministers to understand and predict events within the ritual system and its edges. In this sense *zhi* designates the hermeneutic skills that the historiographers prize both in their characters and in historical investigation itself.”

35. There follow an emendation proposed by Chen Qiyu, who reads: 今之於後世，亦猶古之於今也。See *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋, ed. Chen Qiyu 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1984), 11.606, n. 3).

what follows: therefore past and present, before and after are one. Therefore the sages know the past thousand years and the coming thousand years.

今之於古也，猶古之於後世也。今之於後世，亦猶今之於古也。故審知今則可知古，知古則可知後，古今前後一也。故聖人上知千歲下知千歲也。
(*Lüshi chungiu* 11.5, 604)

Of course, the statement that “past and present, before and after are one” does not refer to particular events but to historical rules of cause and effect. These unchanging rules and the constancy of human nature represent the elements of permanence in change that every historical narrative needs, they are the remedy for the discontinuity that is history.

Due to its universal scope, exemplary history may be used by anyone, and it may rely on virtually anything as a source of information. Whereas the sources of traditional history are largely limited to documents from the own family tradition, the exemplary discourse may cite proverbs, anonymous traditions, documents, odes, etc. In fact, exemplary history does not even need sources at all (and mostly they are not quoted). By its very logic, it is perfectly appropriate to simply *invent* exemplary stories. If “by examining the present, one can know antiquity,” then any story may be inferred from present circumstances; and if “antiquity and present, before and after are one,” then the parallel to the present sufficiently validates a fabricated story. Exemplary history may serve to “prove anything.”³⁶ No modern scholar would seriously believe that the pre-dynastic (i.e. neolithic) tales that Shuxiang’s mother extemporizes or, for that matter, many other stories in classical literature are actually *true*.³⁷ But this is not the point. Exemplary history is not about historical truth in a modern critical sense, but about how

36. Reinhart Koselleck, “Historia Magistra Vitae: Über die Auflösung des Topos im Horizont neuzeitlich bewegter Geschichte,” in *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), 38–66, esp. 40. This phenomenon is by no means restricted to ancient China. Forgeries (a modern concept which did not exist at the time) of all kind were ubiquitous in medieval Europe, and they were quite in accord with what was morally right and fair. For an instructive example of a deliberate historical lie in political debate from as late as the 19th century, see Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), 38.

37. It hardly needs to be pointed out that not only stories but entire books or chapters thereof were forged in ancient China. The practice was so widespread that an entire branch of scholarship, *bianwei xue* 辨偽學, developed in reaction to it.

things *should* have been.³⁸ It is all about an instructive lesson: *historia magistra vitae*.

Among the sources that are quoted in exemplary history—not for historical events, but for the moral of the story—two corpora stand out: the odes that were later collected in the *Shi jing* and the documents many of which later became the *Shu jing*. This is all the more remarkable as both sources are almost completely absent from the discourse of traditional history (see n. 27 above). Only in the context of exemplary history, the odes and the documents become widely cited “repositories of dutifulness.”³⁹ Shuxiang quotes from the odes twice in his above-quoted letter. Significantly, he does not recite them in full, but only quotes single stanzas from different odes (Nos. 272 and 235). This is typical for the discourse of exemplary history: just like it adduces isolated historical examples severed from a larger narrative, it quotes isolated ode stanzas severed from their context. The odes are simply used as “suppliers of *exempla*.”⁴⁰ Reduced to the quality of proverbs, as it were, they are adduced to make one, and only one, point. For exemplary history, it is unnecessary—indeed, undesirable—to know the whole story, and it is equally uncalled for to recite the entire ode: any additional information would increase potential ambiguity and thus dilute the moral lesson.

This may explain why odes and documents do not appear in traditional history: only in the context of exemplary history are moral lessons called for. Whereas traditional history is void of moral considerations, exemplary history brings into play the entire vocabulary of “virtue words.”⁴¹ Shuxiang, cited above, mentions “dutifulness” (義), “ritual propriety” (禮), “good faith” (信), “nobility of spirit” (仁), “loyalty” (忠), “harmony” (和), “vigilance” (敬) and several others.

38. I have dealt with this issue more extensively in Kai Vogelsang, “Some Notions of Historical Judgment in China and the West,” in *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism and Ideology: Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture from a New Comparative Perspective*, ed. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, Achim Mittag, and Jörn Rüsen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 143–75.

39. *Zuo zhuan* Xi 27.445: 詩、書，義之府也。The crucial difference between the sources for traditional and exemplary history is addressed in the evaluation about the scribe of the left Yixiang in Zhao 12.1340–41. While being praised for his ability “to recite the ‘Three Barrows,’ the ‘Five Canons,’ the ‘Eight Guidelines,’ and the ‘Nine Mounds’”—ancient texts, that is—he is dismissed by a critic for not knowing an *ode*: “If you ask him something at all obscure, how can he possibly know it?” The qualifications of a traditional historian do not count in the context of exemplary history.

40. Andrea Schmölz, *Vom Lied in der Gemeinschaft zum Liedzitat im Text: Liedzitate in den Texten der Gelehrtentradition der späten Chou-Zeit* (Egelsbach: Hänssel-Hohenhausen, 1993), 122.

41. The “Confucian virtues” are discussed in Schaberg, *A Patterned Past*, 154–60, however without distinction between different modes of historical discourse.

"Virtue," which appears in coordination with "dutifulness" (德義) in the speech of Shuxiang's mother, is now understood as a moral quality.⁴² This is the kind of "moral rhetoric" (Li 2007, 77) that is so pervasive in classical Chinese literature as to appear indispensable to historical reasoning. Yet, as the comparison with traditional history shows, it is not. In fact, it only makes sense under certain circumstances. The rulers of ancient China, for whom history served to legitimize the existing order, were well advised *not* to invoke moral virtues, since these might as well be claimed by others or even be used against them. Rather, they would turn to traditional history, which offers an incontestable circular argument: things should be the way they are because they have always been that way.

On the other hand, moral considerations are regularly brought forth when the rulers' actions are *challenged*. They provide the stock arguments for protests, remonstrances and for exemplary history. Indeed, exemplary history and remonstrance seem to be intimately connected. Whereas traditional history legitimizes the powers that be, exemplary history serves to *delegitimize*.⁴³ It is a counter-narrative that challenges authoritative claims or decisions. Shuxiang employs it to criticize Zichan's politics, his mother uses it to prevent him from pursuing his marriage plans, and countless political advisors avail themselves of exemplary history to counter the plans of their rulers. "This will not do" (*buke* 不可) is a typical opening sentence (Li 2007, 153–54) for narratives of exemplary history. They present the "efficacious rhetoric that defends a vision of ritual propriety" (Li 2007, 338) even against the ruler's resolution.

To sum up: a second distinct form of history in ancient China, likely younger than traditional history, may be called exemplary history. It is characterized by

- reference to isolated historical events that serve as *exempla*;
- the appeal to knowledge and a didactic function in the sense of *historia magistra vitae*;

42. In Shuxiang's speech, "virtue" does appear in a quotation from the odes; but interestingly, the transmitted version in *Shi jing* no. 272 has 典 instead of 德.

43. One may wonder, however, about the passage discussed in Li 2007, 286, where lord Huan of Qi is dissuaded from attacking Lu: "The lord said, "Can Lu be taken?" He [Zhongsun Qiu] replied, "It cannot. It still upholds Zhou ritual. Zhou ritual constitutes its trunk. I have heard it said, 'When a domain is about to perish, the trunk must first fall. Only then will the branches and leaves follow.' If Lu does not abandon Zhou ritual, it cannot be shaken." This speech combines elements of traditional and exemplary history, juxtaposing the appeal to the long-established power of "Zhou ritual" with a general rule that was "heard."

- quotations of anonymous sayings, isolated stanzas from odes or phrases from the documents;
- the reference to “Confucian” moral values;
- its employment by diverse speakers;
- its function as a delegitimizing counter-narrative that challenges political orders or decisions.

The significance of these features may be fully appreciated by contrasting them to traditional history as discussed above. Exemplary history embodies the “idea that history writing is the corrective, compensatory gesture that addresses decline and failure” (Li 2007, 416) that came to characterize the mainstream of Chinese tradition. But, as Li Wai-yee has amply demonstrated and as this article has tried to analyze, there were other interpretations of history besides that. So Li Wai-yee is right: the “relative reticence of *Zuo zhuan*” in addressing moral decline may be explained by the fact “that the text predates that idea about history writing” (Li 2007, 416). Indeed, many of its narratives adhere not to exemplary history but to the older idea of traditional history. Just like the *Zuo zhuan* is multi-faceted, the shape of Chinese history itself is polymorphic.