

Summary

Chinese Philosophy of History

From the beginnings to the end of the eighteenth century

The book reconstructs and theoretically interprets the Chinese philosophy of history from its beginnings to the end of the eighteenth century. Despite the central position of historical works in Chinese culture, so far there has been no monograph in any Western language devoted to a comprehensive treatment of the classical Chinese philosophy of history. The book aims at filling this gap by proposing a philosophically synthetic and historically comprehensive analysis of the classical Chinese philosophy of history. Hence, Chapter One elucidates what is (and should be) meant by the philosophy of history and draws upon the preliminary reception of Chinese historiography within the Western philosophy of history, which gave rise to still-dominant ethnocentric approach to the Chinese historical thinking. The next five chapters present detailed analysis of particular Chinese views of history and historical writing, while Chapter Seven generalizes these case studies, offering a general conclusion concerning the specificity of the classical Chinese philosophy of history as a whole. Therefore, while Sinologist would be more focused on the middle part and its concrete arguments, a philosopher would be much more interested in the recognized problem and its solution, namely in the proposed interpretation of the complex non-Western tradition of philosophical inquiry into the nature of history.

Chapter One discusses the meaning of the term 'philosophy of history' and its relation to the term 'historiosophy', as well as the relation of the philosophy of history to the theory of history on the one hand and other philosophical disciplines on the other. When outlining the problems of philosophy of history, its fundamental contemporary division into continental and analytical philosophy of history is described. This leads to sketching the possibly broadest scheme of questions a philosophy of history answers to, which are eventually applied to the analyzed material. This is accompanied by an overview of methodological problems implied by distinctive nature of Chinese language and thought. From the hermeneutical perspective, however, the historical context of established interpretations of Chinese thought and history within the Western philosophy of history is no less important, for it was always colored by ethnocentrism, which ultimately stands behind the refusal to recognize the existence of Chinese philosophy of history. Analyzing the images of Chinese history in the European thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I also show that, paradoxically, Western philosophy of history itself emerged partly due to the discovery of Chinese secular historiography.

Chapter Two examines the pre-imperial Confucian philosophy of history, the basic categories of which remained a benchmark for later thinkers. The sources of these categories are to be found already in the bronze inscriptions and, then, in the historiography of the *Book of Songs* and the *Book of Documents*, with the latter providing a classical exposition of the theory of the Mandate of Heaven. The intermediate phase between this historiography and the Confucian philosophy of history in the strict sense was marked by the ethics of history in *the Analects*, the theoretical layer of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (along with the *Zuo Commentary*) and the ‘peripheries’ of Confucianism that offered alternative views of history, such as the concept of the Great Unity in the chapter “Destiny of rituals” of the *Book of Rites*. The philosophies of history of Mencius and Xunzi became a mature expression of all these tendencies: the former proposed a developed cyclical vision of history governed by the moral principle, while the latter opposed the newly established theory of the Mandate of Heaven and the belief in an undifferentiated cognitive unity of the past and present.

Chapter Three elaborates on the alternative, non-Confucian philosophies of history in the Warring States Period, focusing on the Legalist philosophy of history of Shang Yang and Han Fei, which introduces the key concept of the propensity of history (*shi*), proposing the interpretation of history through the prism of social and technological development, thereby undermining the typically Confucian idea of imitating the past. Another distinctive view of history, albeit not so contrasted to Confucianism in its basic premises, was propounded by the Mohists. The Daoists, on the other hand, defended the idea of returning to the pre-social state of nature, manifesting their critical (and ironic) attitude towards speculative philosophy of history. This speculative character was not lacking in the philosophy of history of the *Yin-Yang School*, which built its thought based on the categories present in the *Book of Changes*. In addition to Zou Yan, these ideas can also be found in the eclectic *Lüshi Chunqiu*.

Chapter Four analyzes the philosophy of history of the Han dynasty, especially the philosophy of history resulting from the combination of the Confucian ethics of history and the theory of the Mandate of Heaven with the philosophy of nature, as it was reflected in the philosophy of history of Dong Zhongshu and other Confucian thinkers of this paradigm, mainly during the later Han dynasty. The broader idea of a correlation between nature and human history was common to earlier Confucians, who did not assume the mediation of Heaven (Lu Jia) and the Daoists of the Huang-Lao school, such as the authors of the *Huainanzi*. At the same time, it had both linear and cyclical, developmental and regressive variants. On the other hand, many philosophers of the time have turned against the synthesis of cosmology and the philosophy of history, seeing the only driving force of history in man, either in the individual sense (Yang Xiong) or collective (the historical populism of Jia Yi and Zhong Changtong); the others separated the natural and social laws of history, finding the causes of historical changes in positive laws (the Neolegalists: Cui Shu and Huan Tan) or the natural ones, namely the combination of fate and contingency (Wang Chong). The chapter ends with the analysis of the historiography of Sima Qian and Ban Gu, which accompanied the birth of official historiography.

Chapter Five, the longest in the book, is devoted to the Medieval Chinese philosophy of history from the third to the twelfth century. The Early Middle Ages are shown as a period of opposition to correlative meta-narratives, whether in the form of the idea of historical heroes, or the millenarian philosophy of history enunciated in the Neo-Daoist *Taipingjing*, or, finally, in the philosophy of historiography of Liu Zhiji. Then the Neo-Confucian philosophy of the Tang and Song era is discussed, which, depending on the approach to the presence of timeless principles in history, is divided into idealist positions, including spiritualist ones, as represented by Shao Yong, Wang Anshi, Sima Guang, the Cheng brothers, and Zhu Xi, and realistic standpoints, including the materialist ones, as proposed by Liu Zongyuan, Li Gou, Ouyang Xiu, Su Xun, and Chen Liang. Historical idealism includes both

linear and cyclical, developmental and regressive views; in the case of historical materialism, its various versions – social, economic and natural – are distinguished.

Chapter Six expounds the development of Chinese philosophy of history from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. In the Ming era, the philosophy of history was approached from a viewpoint of specific individualism and historicism, as testified by Wang Yangming's thought, contemporary philosophy of historiography (Wang Shizhen, Hu Yinglin), the relativism of Li Zhi and prospectivism of Wang Tingxiang and Zhang Juzheng. In the initial phase of the Qing dynasty, the philosophy of history became even more rooted in the evidential scholarship (*kaozheng*) and prospectively oriented thought, which is shown in the example of Gu Yanwu and Huang Zongxi, and which culminated in the systems of Wang Fuzhi and Zhang Xuecheng, the former being a synthesis closer to materialism, while the latter was closer to idealism. It was also Zhang Xuecheng who finally integrated the philosophy of history and the philosophy of historiography into a coherent and holistic synthesis.

Chapter Seven offers a synchronic, diachronic and critical interpretation of Chinese philosophy of history that concludes the book. By means of referring the applied conceptual apparatus that determines the questions posed by philosopher of history (with particular regard to Wichrowski's proposal), distinctive features of the Chinese philosophy of history are revealed. This is complemented by an analysis of the evolution of classical Chinese philosophy of history, which in contrast to the previous paragraph, which shows its range of discussed problems, stresses its diachronic continuity. Finally, thus synthesized material is critically interpreted from the viewpoint of the idea of historiographical holism. This does not mean that Chinese philosophy of history taken as a whole expresses a specific idea of holism in unison, but that the holistic view of history has resulted in the most comprehensive concepts in Chinese philosophy of history, transformations of which determined the dynamics of this thought. As this paragraph shows, the classical Chinese philosophy of history was holistic in more than one sense of this term, although it was not holistic as far as its 'spatial' postulates are concerned. This interpretative body of classical Chinese philosophy of history is also compared with the main premises of the Western philosophy of history, resulting in some suggestions for further comparative studies, which are presented in the afterword.

