

# Overview of Ancient Chinese Historiography of Philosophy

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**ABSTRACT** | As a recently developed field of inquiry, the history of Chinese-language historiography of philosophy prioritizes studies of the history of Chinese philosophy since the 20th century. Relevant studies prior to the 20th century, mainly written in ancient Chinese, are highly marginalized. The historiography of philosophy in a global perspective attaches great importance to different expressions and frames of what is commonly referred to as “philosophy and history of philosophy”, thereby providing the essential theoretical support for the reconstruction of an ancient Chinese historiography of philosophy. This article outlines the historiography of ancient Chinese philosophy in order to present its basic characteristics in terms of approaches, methods and styles.<sup>1</sup>

**KEYWORDS** | Historiography of Ancient Chinese Philosophy; Global Perspective; Line of the Way; Female Philosophy

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As a recently developed field, the *History of Chinese Philosophical Historiography* (Zhongguo Zhexueshixue Shi, 中國哲學史學史) focuses on the study of the historiography of Chinese philosophy since the 20th century while works predating the 20th century, written predominantly in ancient Chinese, are highly marginalized. For instance, Chai Wenhua's *History of Chinese Philosophical History* (2018, Zhongguo Zhexueshixue Shi, 中國哲學史學史) is dedicated to the historiography of Chinese philosophy but considers it a field which only developed in the 20th century. Despite his attempts to include earlier traditions in his study, Wenhua is reluctant to refer to these as philosophical, instead framing them as part of the prehistory of Chinese philosophical historiography in the sense of a historiography of learned thought (Xueshu Sixiangshi, 學術思想史). (柴文華/Chai 2018, 5)

The Reinhart Koselleck project at the German University of Hildesheim, *Histories of Philosophy in Global Perspective*, is devoted to different expressions and conceptualizations of what is called *philosophy and history of philosophy*. It thereby widens the scope for the exploration of a historiography of philosophy in ancient languages. As a result, the possibility of reconstructing historiographies of ancient Chinese philosophy gains substantial theoretical support. In what follows, I present the outlines of historiography of ancient Chinese philosophy and present their basic features in terms of approaches, methods and styles.

## I

But first, the crucial question about the origin of philosophical historiography in the Chinese-speaking world needs to be addressed. Existing studies suggest that the earliest historical accounts of Chinese philosophy can be traced back to the pre-Qin period (Xianqin Shiqi, 先秦時期) (before 221 BCE), and as such comprises the early stage of the Chinese tradition of thought. (Elberfeld 2017, 10; 柴文華/Chai 2018, 20). The pre-Qin period is often considered to have been one in which Chinese thought reached an early peak which saw the emergence of numerous schools of thought such as Confucianism (Rujia, 儒家), Daoism (Daojia, 道家), Mohism (Mojia, 墨家), Legalism (Fajia, 法家), the School of Names (Mingjia, 名家) and the Eclectic School (Zajia, 雜家). Against this background, the description and evaluation of thinkers and schools of thought also developed. These descriptions were mainly fragmentary and often appeared in the form of single chapters, paragraphs, sentences or even just words. Previous studies (柴文華/Chai 2018, 20–23; Gentz 2012, 62) consider the following texts the earliest beginnings of a Chinese history of philosophy: *Under Heaven* (Tianxia, 天下) in *Zhuangzi* (Zhuangzi,

庄子) (350 BCE–250 BCE), *Criticism of Twelve Philosophers* (Fei shi'er zi, 非十二子) in the *Xunzi* (Xunzi, 荀子) (475 BCE–221 BCE) and *Prominent Teaching* (Xianxue, 顯學) in the *Hanfeizi* (Hanfeizi, 韓非子) (475 BCE–221 BCE).<sup>2</sup> *Under Heaven* is regarded by most as the first description of Chinese learned thought to have come down to us (柴文華/Chai, 20th ed.) Written from a Daoist perspective this work dealt with contemporary doctrines such as Daoism, Confucianism, Mohism and the School of Names while *Criticism of Twelve Philosophers* was not only devoted to a critique of twelve forms of thought including Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism and the School of Names but also praised of the contribution of Confucius and his disciples to the unity of the nation and the welfare of the people. *Prominent Teaching* dealt with the lines of development of Confucianism and Mohism and, as the title suggests, for the first time considered the two schools of thought part of prominent teachings (柴文華/Chai 2018, 23).

Stylistically, these works stand out as theoretical treatises characterized by argumentation and logic and as such their importance for the reconstruction of an ancient Chinese historiography of philosophy is self-evident. However, if the criteria were limited to works that offered a theoretical account, there would be a danger of overlooking those works which better characterize ancient Chinese philosophy. Historically, Chinese thought was primarily pragmatic and practical. Therefore, it was common practice for classical writings on a particular topic to record the words and deeds of practitioners such as monarchs, courtiers, officials, politicians, reformers, diplomats and military strategists alongside those of scholars. Moreover, a prevailing attitude of Chinese scholars toward knowledge was to put what they had learned into practice so that theoretical works could eventually contribute to practice. As a result, a purely theoretical exploration of knowledge did not develop widely in the Chinese tradition, as can be seen from the widespread criticism of the short-lived pre-Qin School of Names which emphasized logic and linguistic analysis.

Based on this, it would be useful and significant to attempt a new reconstruction of a historiography of ancient Chinese philosophy, an expanded historiography which would, in addition to theoretical treatises, also include works with practical and pragmatic features such as the compilation of the regulations of court ceremonies, labels, customs and norms of social behavior found in the pre-Qin *Book of Rites* (Liji, 禮記, chap. 3, 9, 5, 11, etc.) (475 BCE–221 BCE); the outline of the lives, deeds, words and the governing ideology of monarchs of early antiquity (Yao, Shun, Yu) in the *Book of Deeds* (Shang Shu, 尚書, chapters 1, 2, 3, etc.) (772 BCE–476 BCE); the account of the labels, laws and military rules of earlier eras (Xia,

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<sup>2</sup> Dating is based on the *Chinese Text Project* (<https://ctext.org/>).

Shang, Zhou) in *The Methods of Sima* (Si Ma Fa, 司馬法, ch. 2) (772 BCE–221 BCE) and the description of the sacrificial ceremonies of the past twelve rulers on the sacred mountain Tai (ch. 50) and the strategies of rulers in earlier epochs (chs. 64, 79, 84, etc.) in the *Book of Guanzi* (Guanzi, 管子) (475 BCE–220 CE).

## II

Today, literature, history and philosophy are the three basic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences in China. In ancient China, however, there were no such distinctions. On the contrary, the three fields were essentially intertwined in intellectual discourses. As a result, descriptions of ancient Chinese philosophy can also be found in history books and literary works and the approaches are both historical and literary. This is an important feature of early historiography of philosophy in ancient China. In addition, the following two characteristics of ancient Chinese philosophy should be given special attention.

First, narrative styles in the early period were very diverse and included, among others, dialogue, proverb, anecdote, parable, myth, legend, document, conference report, hagiography and rhapsody. As one of the most important literary forms in ancient China, dialogue served as an intersection between oral practices and canonical writings. According to Reinhard Emmerich (2004), the emergence of dialogue as genre can be considered the birth of Chinese philosophical literature.<sup>3</sup> An outstanding example of this genre is *Conversations* (Lunyu, 論語) (480 BCE–350 BCE), a compilation of Confucius' doctrinal collections and conversations. Throughout the work one finds commentaries on individuals and their deeds. These include Confucius' assessments of his disciples, other thinkers (such as Guanzhong, Yan Pingzhong and Zuo Qiuming), certain personalities (such as rulers, ministers, scholars, sages and hermits), his disciples' assessments of Confucius, Confucius' self-assessment, disciples' assessments of each other and so on. Allegorical stories and fables were also common forms at the time. *The Book of Liezi* (列子) (475 BCE–221 BCE) (particularly chapters 1, 2, 4, and 6) is a classic of Daoist literature and consists of a series of allegorical stories and parables featuring Confucians, Daoists, Mohists and dialecticians. As a record of mythologies and geographies, *Classics of Mountains and Seas* (Shan Hai Jing, 山海經) (475 BCE–220

<sup>3</sup> "The starting point of the philosophical literature are the early sections of the *Analects*, probably going back to the 5th century BCE, in whose brief dialogues the practice of oral instruction is reflected. The works of the late 5th and then 4th centuries BCE – the core chapters of the *Mozzi*, the 'inner' chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, and *Mencius* – are also largely organized in dialogue. Only texts of the late 4th and then 3rd centuries BCE – *Xunzi*, *Han Feizi*, younger layers of *Mozzi* and *Zhuangzi*, the *Guodian* manuscripts – reveal a systematic layout and argumentation." (Emmerich 2004, 47).

CE) is also important for the study of Chinese thought in early antiquity because it contains a description of about 40 countries, 100 historical figures and 400 goddesses, spirits and monsters. It is important to note that it was not uncommon for philosophical histories to cite theses without naming the associated thinkers or schools of thought. Moreover, Chinese thinkers often focused on describing the thoughts of others and cared little whether or not they accurately represented the original sources. Combined, these pose challenges to the reconstruction of ancient Chinese philosophy, so that when using referring to these historical sources one must constantly turn to the original works cited or the relevant history books to verify their accuracy. Among many examples, the following is illustrative. In *Xunzi* (荀子) (475 BCE–221 BCE) (chap. 8) it is written: “How fullness and emptiness replace each other, or how hard and white, similarity and dissimilarity are distinguished, are things which sharp ears do not hear, sharp eyes cannot see, and about which experienced debaters cannot speak” (若夫充虛之相施易也，堅白同異之分隔也，是聽耳之所不能聽也，明目之所不能見也，辯士之所不能言也). In this instance, the distinction between hard and white (Li Jian Bai, 離堅白) refers to a thesis advanced by Gongsun Long (公孫龍) (320 BCE–250 BCE), a representative of the School of Names, even though his name does not appear.<sup>4</sup> According to *Gongsun Long* (Gongsun Longzi, 公孫龍子) (475 BCE–221 BCE) (ch. 5), if a stone is hard and white, one cannot judge with one’s eyes alone whether it is hard, but only that it is white. By the same token, one cannot determine by hand whether it is white, but only that it is hard. Accordingly, there are either white or hard stones in the world, but no stones which are both white and hard.

Second, historical accounts of people and events can, in a sense, be considered part of a philosophical historiography. A typical example is the Confucian classic *Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chun Qiu, 春秋), an official chronicle of Confucius’ home state of Lu from 722 BCE to 481 BCE. Traditionally, this work is attributed to Confucius and consists of short entries on courtly, diplomatic and martial events. While these descriptions do not appear to be related to philosophy they nonetheless express Confucian thoughts on political, social and ethical issues in a subtle form. In that sense, this work could be considered a philosophical historiography which combines a Confucian perspective with historical narrative. The three later history books which comment on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* could then be described as one of the earliest forms of ancient Chinese philosophical historiography. The first of these, *Notes of Zuo on the Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chun Qiu Zuo Zhuan, 春秋左傳) (468 BCE–300 BCE), is traditionally attributed to

<sup>4</sup> The same method of describing the School of Names is also found in chapter 41 of *Hanfeizi* and chapter 17 of *Spring and Autumn of Lü Bu We*.

Zuo Qiuming (左丘明, 556 BCE–451 BCE) and is considered a classic for the study of the intellectual history of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chunqiu Shidai, 春秋時代) (770 BCE–476 BCE). It is a history book that not only comments on the work of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* but also describes events not covered in them. The second work, *Guliang's Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chun Qiu Guliang Zhuan, 春秋穀梁傳) (206 BCE–9 CE) and the third work, *Gongyang's Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chun Qiu Gongyang Zhuan, 春秋公羊傳) (206 BCE–9 CE), traditionally attributed to Guliang Chi (穀梁赤, ?–?) and Gongyang Gao (公羊高, ?–?) respectively, are both historical books as well as commentaries on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

### III

The Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) represented a turning point in the historiography of ancient Chinese philosophy. On the one hand, the basic features of the historiography of pre-Qin philosophy discussed here –fragmentation, stylistic diversity, integration of literature, history and philosophy –continued into this epoch, as reflected, for instance, in *Master of Huainan* (Huainanzi, 淮南子) (206 BCE–9 CE). Theoretically based on Daoist thought of the pre-Qin period, this encyclopedia of human life and the universe integrates, among others, Confucianism, the Yin-Yang school, Mohism, the School of Names and Legalism. In particular, the six classics of Confucianism, namely the *Book of Songs* (詩經, Shijing), the *Book of Deeds* (尚書, Shangshu), the *Book of Rites* (禮記, Liji), the *Book of Music* (樂記, Yueji), *I-Ging* (易經, Yijing) and *Spring and Autumn Annals* (春秋, Chunqiu) are described and critically engaged. In terms of genres, we are presented with a combination of poetry, prose, dialogue, sayings, story, myth and anecdote. Chapter 21 offers both an explanation of the motif and structure of the work as well as a summary description of the development of Confucianism, Mohism, the school of diplomats, legalism and their interrelationships.

On the other hand, the emergence of imperial catalogs contributed significantly to advances in the categorization and canonization of philosophical writings. As Emmerich (2002, 45) points out, “[m]ore than the philosophical debates of the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE themselves, therefore, the imperial catalog shaped the canonization of early texts and their doctrinal differences”. The work *Classified Catalogues* (Bie Lu, 別錄, after 26 BCE) is considered to be the earliest, comprehensive and official Chinese catalog book produced by the imperial order. The holdings of the imperial library were cataloged under 6 domains, 38 classes, 603 families and 13 219 volumes, and includes the titles of books, number of items and

volumes, names of the authors with short biographies, the meaning of book titles, origin of the books, type of book, the process of compilation and the evaluation of the books. Another catalog book, *Seven Territories* (Qilüe, 七略, 6 BCE–5 BCE), is a summary of the work *Classified Catalog* and is divided into seven domains: *Book Catalogs* (Jilüe, 輯略), *Six Arts* (Liuyilüe, 六藝略), *Scholars* (Zhuzilüe, 諸子略), *Songs and Rhapsodies* (Shifulüe, 詩賦略), *Military Works* (Bingshulüe, 兵書略), *Cosmological and Prognostic Techniques* (Shushulüe, 數術略) and *Pharmaceutical and Medical Practice* (Fangjilüe, 方技略). Among these, the domain of *Scholars* is considered one of the earliest classified catalogs of Chinese philosophical writings. It divides the various Chinese schools of thought into ten traditions, namely Confucianism, Daoism, the Yin-Yang School, Legalism, the School of Names, Mohism, the School of Diplomacy, Syncretism, Agrarianism and the School of Side Talks. Despite the priority given to Confucianism in the late Western Han period, this categorization still offers an inclusive overview of other schools of thought.

During the Han period, a historical account of philosophical thought was frequently included in history books, which became one of the most important ways of preserving works of ancient Chinese philosophy. In addition, the genre of biography was significantly developed during this period.

The book *Records of the Chronicler* (Shiji, 91 BCE) by Sima Qian (司馬遷) is considered the first general historical work devoted to historical persons in the form of biographies. In China, the genre of biography is

essentially the portrayal of a person as a member of a particular group. Biographies are always found in collections of biographies, never in isolation. They function in a web of biographical references to other biographies and must be read as such. (Gentz 2012, 62)

In Sima Qian's work, various types of biographies can be found; those of individual thinkers (e.g., volume 85, *Biography of Lü Buwei*/呂不韋列傳), joint biographies of multiple thinkers (e.g. volume 63, *Biographies of Laozi and Han Fei*/老子韓非列傳) and class biographies (e.g. volume 67, *Biographies of Confucius' disciples*/仲尼弟子列傳 and volume 121, *Biographies of Confucians*/儒林列傳). In a sense, the *Biographies of Confucians* can be seen as an overview of the development of Confucianism in the early Han dynasty (柴文華/Chai 2018, 30). The final volume (no. 130) contains an autobiography of the author, a description of the process of creating the work and a brief overview of each chapter. It is worth mentioning that the *Treatise on the Essence of the Six Schools* (Lun Liujia Yaozhi, 論六家要旨), written by the author's father, *Sima Tan* (司馬談), is cited here. The teachings of the pre-Qin period are divided into six schools: the Yin Yang School, Confucianism, Mohism, the School of Names, Legalism and Daoism. Daoism is highly valued,

which is consistent with the official approach of the early Western Han dynasty to honor *Huanglao Daoism* (Huanglao Zhi Xue, 黃老之學; 柴文華/Chai 2018, 26)

The biography genre, initiated by *Records of the Chronicler*, was elaborated on in a great number of official Chinese dynastic history books.<sup>5</sup> The book *History of the Han Dynasty* (Han Shu, 漢書, 92 CE) is an official history book in the form of an annal of biographies which cover the history of Han dynasties from 206 BC–23 CE. In terms of the method of philosophical historiography it continues the tradition of *Shiji* and includes individual biographies of scholars of the period such as *Biography of Jia Yi* (賈誼傳, vol. 48), the *Biography of Dong Zhongshu* (董仲舒傳, vol. 56), the *Biography of Sima Xiangru* (司馬相如傳, vol. 57), the *Biography of Sima Qian* (司馬遷傳, vol. 62), the *Biography of Dongfang Shuo* (東方朔, volume 65) and the *Biography of Yang Xiong* (揚雄, vol. 87). Volume 30, *Treatise on Art and Literature* (Yi Wen Zhi, 藝文志), is a bibliography of Chinese writings whose method of categorization is largely based on the Seven Areas text, although the seven areas are reduced to six: *Six Arts, Scholars, Songs and Rhapsodies, Military Works, Cosmological and Prognostic Techniques and Pharmaceutical and Medical Practice*. As in *Seven Areas*, the area of *Scholars* includes the same ten schools, namely Confucianism, Daoism, the Yin-Yang School, Legalism, the School of Names, Mohism, the School of Diplomacy, Syncretism, Agrarianism, and the School of Side Talks. That said, a high regard for Confucianism dominates the discussions (柴文華/Chai 2018, 31f.).

### III

The earliest monograph of philosophical historiography that focused on a particular domain of thought is found in Buddhist writings. From the Wei, Jin as well as

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the *Biographies of the Confucians* (Rulin Liezhuan, 儒林列傳) in the *History of the Han Dynasty* (Han Shu, 漢書, 92 CE.), the *History of the Later Han* (Hou Hanshu, 後漢書, 445 CE), the *History of the Jin Dynasty* (Jin Shu, 晉書, 648 CE), the *History of the Liang Dynasty* (Liang Shu, 梁書, 636 CE), the *History of the Chen Dynasty* (Chen Shu, 陳書, 636 CE), the *History of the Wei Dynasty* (Wei Shu, 魏書, 554 CE), the *Book of the Northern Qi Dynasty* (Bei Qi Shu, 北齊書, 636 CE), the *History of the Northern Zhou Dynasty* (Zhou Shu, 周書, 636 CE), the *History of the Sui Dynasty* (Sui Shu, 隋書, 636 CE), the *History of the Southern Dynasties* (Nan Shi, 南史, 659 CE), the *History of the Northern Dynasties* (Bei Shi, 北史, 659 CE), the *History of the Song Dynasty* (Song Shi, 宋, 1345 CE), the *History of the Ming Dynasty* (Ming Shi, 明史, 1739 CE), the *New History of the Yuan Dynasty* (Xin Yuan Shi, 新元史, 1919 CE), the *Outline of a History of the Qing Dynasty* (Qingshi Gao, 清史稿, 1928 CE), the *Biography of Confucianism* (Ruxue Zhuan, 儒學傳) in the *Ancient History of the Tang Dynasty* (Jiu Tangshu, 舊唐書, 945 CE), the *New History of the Tang Dynasty* (Xin Tangshu, 新唐書: 1060 CE), the *History of the Yuan Dynasty* (Yuan Shi, 元史, 1370 CE), the *Biography of Daoism in the History of the Song Dynasty* (Song Shi, 宋史, 1345 CE) and the *Biographies of Buddhists and Daoists* (Shi Lao Zhuan, 釋老傳) in the *History of the Yuan Dynasty* (Yuan Shi, 元史, 1370 CE).



Southern and Northern dynasties (魏晉南北朝, 265–589 CE) to the Sui and Tang dynasties (隋唐, 581–960 CE), Buddhism was widespread in China, as a result of which many Buddhist biographies appeared, with one of the goals being “to establish orthodox lines of transmission” (Gentz 2012, 62). Among these is the *Collection of Reports on the Translated Tripitaka* (Chu Sanzang Jiji, 出三藏記集) of Sengyou (僧祐) from the Liang dynasty (梁朝, 502–557 CE). This work is predominantly a collection and catalogue of Buddhist scriptures (Jinglu, 經錄). It contains the biographies of more than 32 monks involved in the translation of Buddhist works. Several authors, including Hui Jiao (慧皎, 497–554 CE), Dao Xuan (道宣, 596–667 CE), Zan Ning (讚寧, 919–1001 CE) and Ru Xing (如惺, n.d.) had written works entitled *Biographies of Famous Buddhist Monks* (Gaoseng Zhuan, 高僧傳). Among them, Hui Jiao’s work, which includes descriptions of the contributions of 257 Buddhist monks to the development of Buddhism, from its introduction to China to the Northern Wei dynasty (北魏) (385–535 CE), is considered an influential work. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, an increasing variety of Buddhist sects emerged, which also contributed to the production of such historical accounts. Examples include the *Biography of the Lotus Sutra* (Fahuaing Zhuanji, 法華經傳記) of the Tiantai sect (Tiantai Zong, 天臺宗), the *Biography of the Avatamsaka Sutra* (Huayanjing Zhuanji, 華嚴經傳記) of the Huayan sect (Huayan Zong, 華嚴宗) and the *Biography of Baolin* (Baolin Zhuan, 寶林傳) of the Chan sect (Chan Zong, 禪宗). As the earliest existing history of Chan Buddhism, *Baolin’s Biography* contains stories about 28 ancestors of the Western Paradise (Xitian, 西天) and 6 ancestors of the Eastern Lands (Dongtu, 東土, 柴文華/Chai 2018, 34). From the Song dynasties (兩宋时期) (960–1279 CE), the text *Record of the Lamp* (Deng Lu, 燈錄) exemplifies an important genre of Chan Buddhist historiography, one which stylistically combines biographies with collections of doctrines and chronologic descriptions of the words and deeds of Buddhist monks (柴文華/Chai 2018, 36). One of the earliest such works is *Jing De Records on the Transmission of the Lamp* (Jide Chuandenglu, 景德傳燈錄, 1004 CE), which consists of 1 701 biographies of Chan patriarchs and famous Buddhist monks. Another work, *The Compendium of the Five Lamps* (Wudeng Huiyuan, 五燈會元, 1252 CE), is divided into different volumes according to *Five Teachings and Seven Schools* (Wujia Qizong, 五家七宗) in order to show the lineages of Chan Buddhism. About this genre, Genz (2012, 62) comments:

[Biographies] represent norms of exemplary lives in social references that are meant to serve readers as points of reference for their own lives. At the same time, through the genealogical and social references, they construct contexts of tradition that can be binding for the readers. We find the same in Confucian biography collections

from the 12th century onward, which from then on claim to trace the transmission of right doctrine (daotong 道統).

In terms of the continuation of right doctrine, the work *Records of Yiluo Origins* (Yiluo Yuan Yuan Lu, 伊洛淵源錄, 1173 CE) by Zhu Xi (朱熹) occupies a seminal place. This work aims to establish Cheng-Zhu-Lixue (程朱理學) as a right doctrine through a description of the words and deeds of Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤), Cheng Yi (程頤), Cheng Hao (程顥) and their disciples. Under its influence, many works on the history of Lixue (理學) appeared, among which Zhou Rudeng's (周汝登) *Orthodox Transmission of Sacred Learning* (Shengxue Zongzhuan, 聖學宗傳) and Sun Qifeng's (孫奇逢) *Orthodox Transmission of Lixue* (Lixue Zongzhuan, 理學宗傳) had the most significant influence. While the former describes 89 historical figures and Confucian scholars in order to establish the orthodox status of the contemporary Yangming School (陽明心學) in Confucianism, the latter is devoted to 170 Confucian scholars from different dynasties in order to establish a lineage of transmission of Confucianism.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties (明清時期, 1368–1912 CE), a new genre, the *Scholarly Cases* (xue'an 學案), emerged with its more comprehensive structure, signaling a high point of ancient Chinese philosophical historiography. Usually, a work classified as a scholarly case includes biographies of scholars, records of their words, deeds, writings and relevant commentaries by others. In describing the origin and lineage of a particular school of thought, special attention is paid to the line of transmission that constitutes it, thereby providing an authentic and detailed source for the study of the history of Chinese thought in different dynasties. In this regard, Huang Zongxi's (黃宗羲) *Scholarly Cases of the Ming Dynasty* (Mingru Xue'an, 明儒學案, 1676 CE) is considered a representative work devoted to the history of philosophical thought in the Ming period. Included in this book are 17 scholarly cases, consisting mainly of an overview of the schools of thought as well as biographies and collections of doctrines of the scholars along with commentaries. One of the foci of the text is the origin and development of the Yang Ming school. More than 200 Ming scholars are presented in chronological order, detailing the transmission of their teachings. Another significant work is the *Scholarly Cases of the Song-Yuan Dynasties* (Song-Yuan Xue'an, 宋元學案, 1838 CE), written by Huang Zongxi and updated by Huang Baijia (黃百家) and Quan Zuwang (全祖望). This work consists of 87 scholarly cases and introduces more than 2,000 scholars of the Song-Yuan period. Because of its description and evaluation of the origins and lines of development of the schools of thought of the Song and Yuan dynasties, this work is considered significant for the study of the history of philosophical thought of the period.

#### IV

It is commonly held that women's education was not well developed in ancient China due to millennia of oppression by a Confucian-based patriarchal system, with the result that there were hardly any learned women (see Graness in this volume). But this is a misconception. On the contrary, women created a large number of philosophical works in ancient China. The real problem is that these works have not been adequately studied. Hu Wenkai's (胡文楷) work *Investigation of Works by Women in Past Dynasties* (Lidai Funü Zhuzuokao, 歷代婦女著作考), first published in 1957 and revised in 1985, is the most complete catalogue of works by women to date and the first study of the general history of art and literature by Chinese women. (Cf. 張宏生、石旻/Zhang & Shi 2008, 1203f.) Hu Wenkai's collection includes more than 4,000 mostly literary works by women, from the Han dynasty to the early 20th century, of whom 33 were from the Han, Wei and Six dynasties; 22 from the Tang and Five dynasties; 46 from the Song and Liao dynasties; 16 from the Yuan dynasty; more than 250 from the Ming dynasty; more than 3,660 from the Qing dynasty and more than 160 from the early 20th century. Book titles, authors' names and short biographies, and sources are listed in the order of Chinese dynasties. The Qing dynasty obviously represents a high point in women's intellectual contributions. More than 900 works (mainly poetry collections) by more than 870 women from this era have been preserved (Cf. 張宏生、石旻/Zhang & Shi 2008, 1206). These findings are in sharp contrast to the view, introduced by the Confucian scholar Chen Jiru (陳繼儒, 1558–1639 CE) and prevalent since the Ming dynasty, that a woman's only talent is her virtue (Nüzi Wu Cai Bian Shi De 女子無才便是德, 劉詠聰/Liu 1998, 200–210).

Poetry was the main form through which learned Chinese women expressed their thoughts. The *Encyclopedia for Appreciating the Poems of Talented Women in China's Past Eras* collected 1,081 poems by 470 women, from the pre-Qin period to the 20th century (鄭光儀/Zheng 1991, 1–84). The earliest poems by women are found in the Confucian classic Book of Songs (Shijing, 詩經, 1046 BCE–771 BCE) which contains more than 20 poems by women of the pre-Qin period, dealing with love, marriage, patriotism, homesickness and nostalgia. As such, the *Book of Songs* could be used as the earliest source in the reconstruction of the history of Chinese women philosophers. As a Confucian text, it provided moral support and practical models for women in ancient China to participate in intellectual activities. By the time of the Qing dynasty, the notion that the *Book of Songs* established a tradition of Chinese women's writing was widely accepted (Cf. 張宏生、石旻/Zhang & Shi 2008, 1212f.).

Biographical works describing the words and deeds of women appeared dur-

ing the Han period. The original version of *Biographies of Women* (Lie Nü Zhuan, 列女傳, 206 BCE–9 CE), traditionally attributed to Liu Xiang (劉向, 77 BCE–6 CE), recorded the stories of 104 women, from the pre-Qin period to the Western Han dynasty, and was divided into seven volumes: *The Biographies of Exemplary Mothers* (Mu Yi Zhuan, 母儀傳), *The Biographies of the Wise and Enlightened* (Xian Ming Zhuan, 賢明傳), *The Biographies of the Kind and Virtuous* (Ren Zhi Zhuan, 仁智傳), *The Biographies of the Chaste and Obedient* (Zhen Shun Zhuan, 貞順傳), *The Biographies of the Principled and Righteous* (Jie Yi Zhuan, 節義傳), *The Biographies of the Eloquent and Educated* (Bian Tong Zhuan, 辯通傳) and *The Biographies of the Evil and Parasitic* (Nie Chu Zhuan, 孽嬖傳). The only female scholar mentioned among them is Xu Mu (Xu Mu Furen, 許穆夫人) (c. 690 BC–n.d.) in the *Biographies of the Kind and Virtuous*. Later, Ban Zhao (班昭) of the Eastern Han dynasty, added the volume *Additional Biographies of Women* (Xu Lie Nü Zhuan, 續列女傳), which recorded the stories of 20 women. In the process, another scholar, Ban Jieyu (班婕妤, n.d.), was added. The evaluation of women in the *Biographies of Women* was viewed from a Confucian perspective as a result of which, this work served for a long time as the standard textbook for the moral education of women in traditional China.

In the *Biographies of Women*, women's stories are categorized according to the commonalities in their words and actions. Following this paradigm, many subsequent history books –such as *History of the Han Dynasty* (Han Shu, 漢書, 92 CE), *History of the Later Han* (Hou Hanshu, 後漢書, 445 CE), *History of the Jin Dynasty* (Jin Shu, 晉書, 648 CE), *History of the Wei Dynasty* (Wei Shu, 魏書, 554 CE), *History of the Northern Dynasties* (Bei Shi, 北史, 659 CE), *History of the Song Dynasty* (Song Shi, 宋史, 1345 CE), *History of the Yuan Dynasty* (Yuan Shi, 元史, 1370 CE) and *Outline of a History of the Qing Dynasty* (Qingshi Gao, 清史稿, 1928 CE) –included biographies of women in general and some female scholars in particular. That said, most of the works by women from ancient China have been lost. Most of our current knowledge comes from history books, bibliographical categorizing books or collections of poems and essays, all of which are particularly significant for the study of the history of Chinese women philosophers.

Unlike the works of male scholars, there are few mentions of works by women in ancient Chinese official histories. Although there are references to women's works in *History of the Han Dynasty*, *History of the Sui Dynasty*, *History of the Ming Dynasty*, and other history books, most of these works are lost. In the Qing dynasty, a large number of anthologies recording poetic works by women appeared. Additionally, many anthologies were compiled by women. For example, *Anthology of Poems by Educated Women of the Qing Dynasty* (Guochao Guixiu Zheng Shi Ji, 國朝閨秀正始集, 1831 CE) and *Anthology of Poems by Educated Women of the Qing*

*Dynasty Volume II* (Guochao Guixiu Zheng Shi Xuji, 國朝閨秀正始續集, 1836 CE), were compiled by Yun Zhu (惲珠, 1771–1833 CE) and included nearly 3,000 works by more than 1,500 Qing women poets along with descriptions of their lives (張宏生、石旻/Zhang & Shi 2008, 1203). Then there is also Xiaodaixuan's *Poetic Commentaries on Poems* (Xiaodaixuan Lunshi Shi, 小黛軒論詩詩) by Chen Yun (陳芸, 1885–1911 CE), which is itself a poetry collection which consists of 221 works. A total of 1,198 women poets and 1,345 poems are evaluated in poetic form (王丹/Wang, 2016). Given that the criteria of selection were the virtue and talent of women authors (王丹/Wang, 2016), it is significant that the poems of Buddhist nuns and talented prostitutes<sup>6</sup> who had received little attention in official history books, were also included (王丹/Wang 2016, 26ff.)

The active development of women's works in the Qing dynasty was an integral part of the work of male scholars. Famous scholars such as Mao Qiling (毛奇齡, 1623–1716 CE), You Tong (尤侗, 1618–1704 CE), Feng Ban (馮班, 1602–1671 CE) and Hang Shijun (杭世駿, 1696–1773 CE) had female students (Cf. 張宏生、石旻/Zhang & Shi 2008, 1208). In addition, many male scholars paid attention to the work produced by women. For example, Yuan Mei's (袁枚, 1716–1797 CE) influential *Notes on Poems from the Sui Garden* (Suixuan Shihua, 隨園詩話, 1792 CE) contains more than 180 references to women's poems (張宏生、石旻/Zhang & Shi 2008, 1212). Many male scholars also compiled anthologies of women's poetry. Examples of these include Liang Zhangju's (梁章鉅, 1775–1849 CE) *Notes on Poems of Women from the Min Region* (Minchuan Guixiu Shihua, 閩川閨秀詩話, actually a collection of biographies of Fujian women poets of the Ming and Qing dynasties), Lei Jin's (雷瑨, 1871–1941 CE) *Notes on Women's Poems* (Guixiu Shihua, 閩秀詩話) and *Notes on Poems of Women* from the book *Wumen-Notes on Poems* (Wumen Shihua, 閩門詩話) by Fa Shishan (法式善, 1753–1813 CE), a Mongolian scholar (張宏生、石旻/Zhang & Shi 2008, 1212). In addition, eminent scholars such as Ji Zhenyi (季振宜, 1630–n.d.), Xue Xue (薛雪, 1681–1770 CE), Zhao Zhixin (趙執信: 1661–1744 CE), Shen Deqian (沈德潛, 1673–1769 CE), Lu Wenchao (盧文弨, 1717–1796 CE), Wang Chang (王昶, 1724–1806 CE), Jiang Shiquan (蔣士銓, 1725–1785 CE), Hong Liangji (洪亮吉, 1746–1809 CE), Ruan Yuan (阮元, 1764–1849 CE), Ge Zai (戈載, 1786–1856 CE), Weng Tonghe (翁同龢, 1830–1904 CE), Wang Kaiyun (王闓運, 1833–1916 CE) and Lin Shu (林紓 1852–1924 CE) in addition to prefaces, epilogues or reviews of the works of women (張宏生、石旻/Zhang & Shi 2008, 1212).

It is evident that in ancient China women developed philosophical ideas mainly in the form of poetic philosophy. The reason why poetry occupied such a central

<sup>6</sup> In Chinese, “prostitutes” (jīnǚ, 妓女) refer both to people who provide sexual services and entertainers (similar to geisha in Japanese). The female authors mentioned in Chen's work are mainly from the latter group, that is, “talented prostitutes.”

position in the intellectual life of Chinese women can be explained with reference to their educational background and preferences combined with the influence of a strong tradition of poetic education (Shijiao, 詩教) inspired by *Book of Songs*. In traditional Chinese society, most women received only primary education. However, extensive reading, sound cultural knowledge and a critical attitude are all necessary and important for writing prose, novels and theoretical treatises –which explains why it was difficult for Chinese women to achieve success in these domains. In contrast, poetry was a relatively easier form to master –as a result of which, a large group of women poet-philosophers emerged. That said, the restriction of styles did not negatively impact the richness and diversity of their intellectual expressions and their unique status in the global history of women philosophers.

## Conclusion

From the above analysis, it is clear that the historiography of ancient Chinese philosophy, along with the gradually deepening awareness of the history of doctrines, underwent a notable shift from fragmentation to systematization: sporadic references of ideas and doctrines to each other → the selection, categorization and revision of canonical writings → the clarification of knowledge orders and genealogies based on the classification of surviving writings → the establishment of the tradition line of the Way.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, features such as the inseparability of ideas, accounts of words and deeds, a diversity of narrative styles and the fusion of literature, history and philosophy are common to all eras.

The curation of literature on ancient Chinese philosophical historiography is making great progress. Based on results so far, it can be concluded that reflection on the historical description of Chinese-language philosophy should no longer be limited to modern studies. We can expect that with the reconstruction of the early history of Chinese philosophy, new questions and methodological problems will be raised for the historiography of philosophy in a global perspective.

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<sup>7</sup> This suggestion comes from Prof. Dennis Schilling's lecture on Chinese philosophical historiography, which took place at the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Hildesheim in February 2020.

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