

The Creation of the Biographical Style of Records of the Historian and Its Historical Significance

Wang Hao*

Department of History, SOAS, University of London, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London
1150101002@cnu.edu.cn

*corresponding author

Abstract: The *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the historian*) written by Sima Qian 司馬遷 is the first of the so-called "official histories". Professor Liang Qichao 梁啟超 once said, "Before Sima Qian, there was no such thing as historiography." This view is debatable, but it is a good indication of the status of the *Shiji*. In particular, Sima Qian changed the "chronological" compilation method of the pre-Qin 先秦 period and adopted the "biographical style", which was followed by the "official history". However, there is still no definite conclusion as to whether the style of the *Shiji* was first created by Sima Qian or was inherited from his predecessors. In view of this, based on the previous studies, this paper intends to explore the creation of the style of *Shiji* and discuss Sima Qian's view of history, his historical knowledge, and the historical significance of *Shiji* on the basis of "the way of heaven" and "human affairs".

Keywords: biographical style, records of the historian, historical significance

1. The Style of *Shiji*

The biographical style is of great importance in the codification of ancient Chinese history and have always been valued by historians. However, there are two main views on the creation of the biographical style, the "originality theory" and the "inheritance theory", which have been controversial in historiography. The first person to suggest that the "five styles" were created by Sima Qian was Ban Biao 班彪, who said of the *Shiji* that:

During the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, the Taishigong 太史公 Sima Qian to adopt *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo commentary*) and *Guoyu* 國語 (*Discourses of the States*) and delete *Shi ben* 世本 and *Zhanguo Ce* 戰國策 (*Strategies of the Warring States*). According to the current affairs of the states of Chu and Han, he went up from the Yellow Emperor and went down to Huolin, and wrote 130 books on *Benji* 本紀 (biographic sketches of emperors), *Shijia* 世家 (aristocratic family), *Liezhuan* 列傳 (biographies), *Shu* 書 (books) and *Biao* 表 (tables). As for the books of hundred families, we can follow suit. As *Zuozhuan*, *Guoyu*, *Shi ben*, *Zhanguo Ce*, *Chuhan Chunqiu* 楚漢春秋 (*Chuhan Annals*), and the *Shiji*. Now we know the ancient times, and the later can see the former, the ears and eyes of saints. Sima Qian narrated that the emperor said the *Benji*, the princes said the *Shijia*, and the rise of Qing Shi said the *Liezhuan*[1]

In this passage, Ban Biao proposed that the "five styles" were all created by Sima Qian. Here, the adoption of *Zuozhuan* and *Guoyu*, and the deletion of *Shi ben* and *Zhanguo Ce* refer to the inheritance

in historical materials rather than following its style; Ban Biao advocated that the book of *Shiji* and *Zuozhuan* can be followed by later generations. It is a model for later history, and also pointed out the use of the Benji, *Shijia* and *Liezhuan*. Since Ban Biao, many scholars have held this argument. For example Huang Fushi 皇甫湜 of the Tang Dynasty thought: The ancient chronicle began to change its style when Sima Qian, the history of the Han Dynasty, was adopted today as a biographical style, which cannot be changed.[2] In addition, Wang Mingsheng 王鳴盛 also supported that: Sima Qian founded the style of Benji, Shu, Biao, *Shijia* and *Liezhuan*. Later, those who wrote history followed suit. No one could go beyond this scope.[3]

For a long time, there have been two main views on "inheritance theory" in the field of history. First, the style of *Shiji* comes from *Lvshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (*Lvshi Annals*). *Wenxin Diaolong* 文心雕龍 (*Mind of Literature and Carving Dragons*) wrote by Liu 劉勰, *Shiji Tiyao* 史記提要 (*Summary of Historical Records*) wrote by Shao Jinhan 邵晉涵 and *Wenshi Tongyi* 文史通義 (*General History*) wrote by Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 all hold this view. However, this view seems to be somewhat far-fetched, and there is no strong evidence to support that, simply because the *Lvshi Chunqiu* is twelve Ji 紀, eight Lan 覽, and six Lun 論, while the *Shiji* is twelve Benji, ten Biao, eight Shu, thirty *Shijia*, and seventy *Liezhuan*, and both books happen to have twelve Ji, and the eight Lan and eight Shu coincide numerically. The twelve Ji of *Lvshi Chunqiu* are probably the source of the Benji of the *Shiji*, the Eight Lan are probably the source of the Eight Shu, and the Six Lun are probably the source of the *Liezhuan*. [4] Zhang Xuecheng used the word "probably" to show that he was not sure about this view. It was only the inference after the combination of numbers. As for the second view, it is believed that the style of *Shiji* originates from *Shi ben*. For example, the *Shiben Jibu- author s preface* 世本輯補·自序 wrote by Qin Jiamo 秦嘉謨 suggested that the *Chunqiu* was the chronicles, the book of *Shiben* was the biography, and Taishigong created *Shiji* with reference to *Shi ben* and the biography did not start from the book of *Shiji*". [5] As another example, professor LV Simian 呂思勉 pointed out that the style of *Shiji* was not created by Sima Tan 司馬談 and Sima Qian. Checking the style of *Shiben* was mostly the same as that of *Shiji*. Therefore, at that time, the rules of historians to record history were the same, and Sima Qian just collected them. [6] Professor Meng Wentong 蒙文通 also supported that:

The "*Shi ben* has been lost for a long time, according to the group of quotations, know that its book has *Benji Shijia Liezhuan*, then the so-called Sima Qian creation of the biographical style, just inherited from the *Shi ben*, and take it as a model, also cut the "*Shangshu* 尚書 (*Book of documents*), *Zuozhuan*, *Zhanguo Ce*, and *Chuhan Chunqiu* scattered into the *Benji*, *Shijia* and *Liezhuan*, divided into caught under the person, the style of the biography can be valuable, but it was created by the *Shi ben*, not Sima Qian [7].

This view no longer looks for the commonality between the two numerically, which seems to be more convincing than the former view. However, according to the research of Professor Qiao Zhizhong 喬治忠 in Nankai University, although the *Shi ben* contains the documents of the *Zhanguo* 戰國 (Warring States period), it was formally compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向 during the Western Han 西漢, and the name of *Shi ben* and the titles of each chapter were also drawn up by Liu Xiang, far after Sima Qian. Although the chapters of the book have an order, they are independent of each other, and the essence is only a compilation of information. This article by Professor Qiao Zhizhong is very detailed and can completely disprove this view [8].

As research progresses, some scholars have further developed the theory of "inheritance", arguing that the style of the biography was not created by Sima Qian, but that its five styles were not taken from one book, but a combination of the styles of several books, resulting in the biography. An early explorer of this idea was Professor Cheng Jinzao 程金造 of Beijing Foreign Studies University,

he argued that the five styles of the *Shiji*, the *Benji*, the *Shijia*, the *Liezhuan*, the *Shu* and the *Biao* all have their early origins. The twelve *Benji* are derived from the pre-Qin historical text *Yu Benji* 禹本紀; the ten *Biao* are derived from the genealogy; the eight *Shu* are derived from the *Shangshu*; the thirty *Shijia* are imitations of the ancient style of the *Shijia*; and the seventy *Liezhuan* are imitations of the ancient biographies of people [9]. However, this view is not too much literature basis, is still speculation. A similar view is held by the American sinologist Grant Hardy, who argues that various genres of books in the *Shiji* had already appeared before Sima Qian wrote it, and that Sima Qian's contribution was to put these existing genres in one book [10]. Also, in the book "*Heroic Ancestors and brotherly nations*", professor Wang Mingke 王明珂 argues that Sima Qian created a biographical style based on emperors and generals because this was the pattern of his society, and his biographical style was a reflection of the social pattern of the Han Dynasty [11]. This is a relatively new view from the perspective of historical anthropology, noting the relevance of historical texts to real situations. Moreover, Professor Qiao Zhizhong believes that when Sima Qian wrote his biography, due to the limitation of space, except for political figures, most of them were combined into one biography. Even the Confucian second sage Mencius 孟子 was also combined into one biography with Xunzi 荀子. While Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 was a solo biography, comparable to Confucius, 孔子 and was unique among the non-political figures in biographies. In Sima Xiangru's biography, Sima Qian transcribed many entire *Fu* 賦 made by him. It is evident that Sima Qian held Sima Xiangru and his *Fu* in high esteem, and further inferred that the style of *Shiji* was probably influenced by the method of classified description of Han *Fu* [12]. However, historiography was not a subordinate to literature, and the creation of a new style of history was of great importance in historical codification. It is acceptable to say that Sima Qian was inspired by the prevailing literary styles of the time, but that's certainly not the whole story, or even the main story.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the different perspectives on the creation of the historical biography described above.

Firstly, scholars who hold the "originality theory" have a clear viewpoint and a firm position, believing that the "five bodies" of the biography were all created by Sima Qian. Although there are words such as pick, delete, and base, they refer to historical materials and do not involve the issue of style. Secondly, the *Shi ben* came after the *Shiji*, and the style of the *Shiji* was not based on the *Shi ben*; while the view that the style of *Shiji* was based on the *Lvshi Chunqiu* is a farfetched, and the scholars who hold this view do not hold a firm position. Thirdly, compared with the theory of "following one book", the theory of "mixing multiple books" is more convincing and more in line with the development law of Chinese historiography. This is mainly because Chinese historiography originated very early, at the latest in 841 BC, an official chronological history that continuously recorded historical events in chronological order had been produced [13]. By Sima Qian's time, the Chinese had recorded history for at least 700 years. It is not difficult to imagine that a vast number of historical books must have been left during this period. As a supreme historian, Sima Qian is likely to have access to these books. In particular, Sima Qian said that he compiled history books and national archives, which shows that he has access to national collections that are difficult for ordinary people to access. So many historical records, any one of them may inspire Sima Qian in the compilation of the style of *Shiji*. Therefore, it is not objective to think that the "five styles" are completely created by Sima Qian without following any previous historical records. It is Sima Qian's first initiative to combine the "five styles" into one book, which should not be a problem.

Among the five styles, "*Benji*", "*Shijia*" and "*Liezhuan*" are the most important. Sima Qian broke the style of "taking events as the key link" in the Pre-Qin, established the "taking people as the key link" in the compilation of historical books, and highlighted the personnel behind historical events and systems. He stated categorically that when a country is about to rise, there must be auspicious

omens, and the gentleman is reappointed and the villain is repulsed; when the country is about to be destroyed, the wise men are retired and the rebellious ministers are prominent (*Shiji—Chuyuanwang Shijia* 楚元王世家). Such a change comes down in a continuous line with the Pre-Qin philosophers, even can be traced back to the Western Zhou 西周. The Shang 商 people valued ghosts and gods and attached great importance to divination, and there are still a large number of Shang oracle bones with divination inscriptions surviving. While the Zhou people valued virtue, and the carrier of virtue was man, and the value of man was discovered for the first time in the Western Zhou. During the Chunqiu 春秋 Period, the royal family declined, the official school moved down, the monopoly of education by the nobility was broken, and an era of a hundred families of thought contend was formed, in which more and more of the scholar class and commoners participated directly in state politics, and the role of human affairs in the development of history became more prominent. During the Zhanguo period, society became more turbulent and the war between vassal states changed from "hegemony" to "annexation". Faced with the chaos of the times and the need to debate with other schools of thought, historians and scholars were no longer content merely to record history, but to explain it, that is, why it was the way it was. The vassal states also wanted to preserve their own states and annex others in a brutal war of annexation. Therefore, they also need scholars to explain history for them, illustrate human affairs behind history, in order to seek lessons and governance. In this case, the ancient Chinese historiography tends to change from "Information category" to "Interpretation category" [14]. It is far more important to interpret history than to record it, and some history books even make very serious mistakes in recording history [15]. In this period, the role of man in history to a certain extent has exceeded the role of events. Since the Western Zhou, the role of personnel in history has been constantly highlighted and strengthened, if people as the main body of history, then the emergence of the character-based biography style "*Shiji*" should be logical.

2. The Way of Heaven and Virtuous Government

Sima Qian once said that the purpose of writing the *Shiji* is: "to investigate the times of heaven and man, to understand the changes of the past and present, and to become a family of words" (*A Reply to Ren An* 任安). It can be seen that the relationship between heaven and man is what Sima Qian focuses on in the *Shiji*. In the era of Sima Qian's life, the doctrine of "induction of heaven and man" 天人感應 proposed by Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 was very popular. At that time, the Chinese believed that people with extraordinary abilities, especially those with great political achievements, were often born with a "supernatural" mystery. As Sima Qian wrote in the *Gaozu Benji* 高祖本紀:

Before *Gaozu* was born, Liu Ao 劉媪 once rested on the Bank of daze and met God in a dream. At this time, there was lightning and thunder. It was dark. Taigong went to find Liu Ao and saw a dragon lying on her. Soon after, Liu became pregnant and gave birth to *Gaozu* [16].

This account is clearly not true. These texts are constructing the theory of "Mandate of Heaven" for Liu Bang in order to gain legitimacy for his rule. The Han dynasty theory of the Mandate of Heaven is based on the "Wude Shizhong (五德始終)" theory, which explains the inevitability of the Han dynasty of Qin. The core of this theory is that Liu Bang was "ordained by Heaven", and therefore his birth must be different. This pedigree of royal mythology was common in ancient Chinese dynasties and was one of the ways in which rulers established their ideology and developed political centripetal force. In addition, some scholars pointed out that the structure of *Shiji* is the comprehensive expression of "heaven": The twelve Benji represent the twelve months of a year, the ten Biao represent a dekad, the eight Shu are like eight solar terms, the thirty *Shijia* represent the thirty days of a month, and the seventy *Liezhuàn* represent the life span of a person [17]. The significance of Sima Qian is that he realized that "The separation of heaven and man", outside the

Law of Heaven is the fundamental reason for the rise and fall of dynasties. In the *Qinshihuang Benji* 秦始皇本紀, Sima Qian quotes Jia Yi 賈誼 as commenting on the demise of the Qin dynasty:

The king of Qin was greedy and despicable and only wanted to show his personal wisdom. He did not trust his meritorious ministers, did not get close to the people, abandoned the benevolent and royal way, established his personal authority, banned poetry and ancient books, imposed harsh laws, put guile and power in the front, left benevolence and virtue behind, and made brutality and tyranny the prerequisite for governing the world.....Qin went through the Zhanguo to unify the world. Its route did not change, and its decrees did not change, which was no different from the methods it used to seize and protect the world. King Qin was alone but had the world, so his disillusionment soon came [18].

This passage fully shows that Sima Qian strongly approved of Jia Yi's view that the fall of the Qin dynasty was due to the ruler's failure to change his ruling policy in time, and after unification, he still ruled the people with the same policy of the Zhanguo, which eventually led to the fall of the Qin dynasty in the second emperor. Sima Qian is completely factual and reveals the reasons for the dynastic changes, rather than just promoting the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven. Among the many human affairs, Sima Qian's greatest emphasis is on the "virtuous rule" of rulers. The origin of this idea also comes from the Western Zhou.

The rulers of Shang and Zhou emphasized "respect for heaven". The Shang ruler's "respect for heaven" was expressed in the "service to ghosts and gods". The Shang dynasty was popular with cruel sacrificial rituals, and the phenomenon of "human sacrifice" was very common. Take the capital "Yin (殷)" in the middle and late Shang Dynasty as an example. Since the early 20th century, archaeologists have successively excavated 2327 human and animal bones in Yin Ruins, including adult men, adult women and young children. Most of these bones were separated from their heads, and it can be seen that they were thrown into the pit after being beheaded. Among the oracle bone inscriptions unearthed with these corpses, 1350 pieces of human sacrifice oracle bones and 1,992 pieces divination texts were involved. According to the divination records, at least 13,000 human sacrifices were used from the time the capital was set in Yin until the fall of the Shang dynasty. According to some scholars, the total number of human sacrifices in the Yin is estimated to be more than 15,000 [19]. Unlike the Shang rulers, the Western Zhou rulers' "respect for heaven" ultimately had to be expressed in the "protection of the people". In sharp contrast to the Shang Dynasty, human sacrifices were rarely used in the sacrifice of the Western Zhou. According to the current archaeological findings, there is only one case of human sacrifices in the Western Zhou. It was found in 1974 in BeiYao 北窯 village, Luoyang. This is the settlement of the descendants of the Yin Shang Dynasty after the king of Wu conquered the Shang Dynasty. It is likely to be the inheritance of the customs of the Yin Shan. Even in the Chunqiu and Zhanguo with frequent wars, "human sacrifices" are not common. It can be seen that the rulers of the Western Zhou adhered to the concept of "people-oriented". They associate "destiny" with "Virtue". Yin had the Mandate of Heaven, but they lost it prematurely because they did not pay attention to practicing virtue (*Shangshu—Zhoushu—Shaogao* 尚書·周書·召誥), this was the re-thinking of the rulers of the Western Zhou on the demise of the Shang dynasty. They knew clearly that the Yin Shang had lost the Mandate of Heaven because of their lack of virtue, and that they and their ancestors had gained the Mandate of Heaven because of their virtue, so they had to have virtue if they wanted to keep the Mandate of Heaven. For a ruler, the most direct manifestation of "virtue" is to implement "virtuous governance", to use punishment carefully, to love the people, and to make the people live and work in peace and happiness. From virtuous governance, the ancient Chinese derived a series of "people-oriented ideas", which became an important ruling idea and an important factor influencing politics in ancient China.

Sima Qian directly inherited the idea of "virtuous governance". Sima Qian emphasized that the ruler should give priority to virtuous governance, and believed that the best way to deal with

"heavenly changes" was to cultivate virtue, followed by reforming political affairs, followed by discussing matters as they happened and saving them, followed by performing rituals to the gods to avoid disasters, and the worst was not to take any measures (*Shiji—Tianguan Shu* 天官書). Sima Qian conceded the "Way of Heaven", but the "Way of Heaven" is obviously illusory, and whether it is good or bad depends entirely on the human affairs in the real world. It should also be noted here that "Virtue" is different from "destiny". Destiny can be inherited by heaven and ancestors [20], but "Virtue" is not allowed. It needs to be obtained through the learning of the emperor. Therefore, if a dynasty ruler has virtue, he can have the mandate of heaven for a long time, and if the ruler loses virtue, the mandate of heaven will be transferred, and eventually, a new dynasty will replace the old one and complete the dynastic renewal. The ancient history of China is under the influence of this "Mandate of Heaven" and "Virtue" theory to come full circle.

In addition, although virtue is the foundation of rule, the cultivation of virtue is a long process. Therefore, in the face of severe "heavenly changes," the ruler needs to implement some practical and immediate policies to remedy the situation, which is what Sima Qian calls "reforming political affairs". And the use of "virtue" and "government" together formed the basis of "virtuous government" in ancient China. In addition, although virtue is the foundation of rule, the cultivation of virtue is a long process. Therefore, in the face of severe "heavenly changes," the rulers need to implement some practical, quick-acting policies to remedy, which is what Sima Qian calls "reforming political affairs". Thus, the use of "virtue" and "government" together formed the basis of "virtuous government" in ancient China.

As recorded in the *Xingtang Shu—Yaochong Zhuan* 新唐書·姚崇傳 (New History Book of Tang—biography of Yao Chong), there was a very serious locust plague in Shandong in the fourth year of Kaiyuan 開元. Yao Chong and Ni Ruoshui 倪若水, the governor of bianzhou 汴州, had a heated debate on "cultivation of virtue":

Ni Ruoshui, the governor of Bianzhou, wrote to the emperor and said, "We should use virtue to eliminate natural disasters. In the past, Liu Cong 劉聰 did not succeed in eliminating locusts, and they did more harm." Yao Chong wrote to him sarcastically, saying, "Liu Cong was a tyrant, and virtue could not be better than demons, but nowadays, demons cannot be better than virtue. In ancient times, the locusts were avoided by the virtuous governor. If you say that you can avoid locusts by cultivating virtue, are you not incurring pests because you have no virtue? Now you are sitting by and watching the locusts eat the seedlings, but you are not helping to save the seedlings, therefore, you encounter a famine. How can you be called a governor?" [21]

Yao Chong and Ni Ruoshui both believed that "Yao 妖 does not prevail over virtue", and their disagreement lay in how to remedy the situation in the face of natural disasters. Ni Ruoshui advocated relying solely on the cultivation of virtue to overcome the locust plague. In the face of such a serious disaster, there was undoubtedly not much time for the ruler to rely solely on virtue cultivation to alleviate the natural disaster. Therefore, Yao Chong advocates that an effective locust control policy must be strongly implemented. This shows that "cultivating virtue" and "cultivating government" are inseparable from each other, and that "virtue" without "government" is as illusory as the same is true of the Mandate of Heaven. In ancient China, the "monarch" was essentially an institution, and the emperor himself was one of the symbols of this institution. In the era of Sima Qian, Confucianism represented by Dong Zhongshu recognized the sanctity of the monarch and hoped to strengthen its human attribute. The monarch is endowed with the mandate of heaven and is therefore sacred. But he is essentially a human being in the real world, charged with the mission of ruling the people. The monarch needs virtue to uphold the Mandate of Heaven, and the first manifestation of virtue is virtuous government. Thus, the Divine Order ultimately has to be expressed through human affairs. The administration had to rely on the agency of officials. Finally, the scholar class represented by

Confucianism obtained the power to govern the country, and relied on the interpretation of "heaven" to persuade the king to serve politics and morality, forming a stable system. This system not only provided divine legitimacy for the monarchy, but also served to limit the power of the monarch, alleviating the negative effects of excessive monarchical power and reflecting the unique Confucian doctrine of "The *Zhidao Lun* 治道論" [22,23].

3. Famous Hanging Historical Pen and the Way of the Three Kings

From the above discussion, it can be seen that in the relationship between heaven and human affairs in the *Shiji*, Sima Qian conveys the idea of "separation of heaven and man", hoping to use the "mandate of heaven" to advise the ruler to carry out "virtuous governance", and ultimately to restrain the power of the ruler. He hopes to use the "mandate of heaven" to advise the ruler to implement "virtuous governance" and to restrain the power of the ruler, so that the people can live and work in peace and happiness. However, above this, Sima Qian had a higher goal. The *Shiji* consists of 130 chapters, of which 70 are *Liezhuan*, accounting for more than half of the total. The name of the Jizhuan style is derived from the *Liezhuan*. The *Liezhuan* are also the ones that Sima Qian wrote most about among the five bodies. Sima Qian placed Boyi 伯夷, who had no political achievements, at the top of the *Liezhuan*. In addition to praising Boyi and Shuqi 叔齊, more importantly, at the end of *Boyi Liezhuan*, he showed that he had an original intention to write *Shiji*:

Heaven's rule is not biased, it is always for the good." So, like Bo Yi and Shu Qi, can they be called good people or not good people? They had accumulated benevolence and virtue, and had reached such a high level of virtue and purity that they died of hunger! Confucius only cited Yan Yuan as a good student among his seventy disciples, but Yan Yuan 顏淵 was always poor and could not even get enough chaff, and finally died prematurely. What about the argument that heaven always repays and bestows good people? The thief killed innocent people every day, ate people's hearts and livers, was fierce and brutal, and gathered thousands of his followers to roam the world, and finally died at an advanced age. What kind of morality did he follow? These are some particularly significant and clear examples. If we talk about the recent times, there are people who are not disciplined in their conduct, who are dedicated to violating the law, and who enjoy comfort and happiness throughout their lives. All their children and grandchildren have rich estates. There are more than enough people who choose the right path before they step forward, who speak only when they see the right moment, who never take the wrong path, and who do not strive to do what is not just and righteous, but suffer misfortune. I am very skeptical. If this is the so-called heavenly way, then is it reasonable? Or is it unreasonable?Confucius said, "The greatest fear of a moral man is that his fame will not be spread after his death.....Although Boyi and Shuqi were sages, they were even more famous because of Confucius' praise. Although Yan Yuan was devoted to learning, his virtue became more and more obvious because he followed Confucius. While people living in seclusion in rock caves have such standardized choices. It's really sad that these people's names are drowned and not praised [24].

Boyi and Shuqi were of course wise men, but without Confucius, their reputation would not be obvious, because Confucius understood the value of Boyi and Shuqi; He also clear that what a gentleman fears most is that his reputation will not be publicized after death. However, many hermits were buried in the world without being seen by "saints" such as Confucius, and their fame was not praised by future generations. Sima Qian sighed with regret. Boyi and Shuqi accumulated benevolence and integrity, but they starved to death; the thieves killed innocent people every day, but they died of old age. In Sima Qian's view, "the way of heaven" is unjust, and this is the meaning of the historian's existence. The historian wanted to make up for those who had been wronged in the Way of Heaven with his own historical pen, and to give them justice. The historian cannot rewrite

history, nor is he responsible for advancing it. The mission of the historian is to make the names of these benevolent and righteous people visible after their deaths, so that they can "hang their names in history". This is the "Dao" of historians. The way of heaven is not benevolent, but benevolence is in the writing of historians. From here, we can see that the view of history from ancient Chinese historians who from the very beginning emphasized the subjective initiative of the writers themselves and their sense of mission are very different from those of modern historians. The significance of the existence of historians is not limited to this. Sima Qian believes that his historical records is "successor to *Chunqiu*". The "*Chunqiu*" here is not only the annals, but also the "commentary". In the *author's preface of Shiji*, Sima Qian wrote:

I heard Dong Sheng say, 'When the royal family of Zhou was in decline, Confucius was the chief priest of the state of Lu, and the vassals framed him, while the great lords supported him. Knowing that his opinions were not accepted and his political ideas could not be carried out, Confucius put his praise and blame in the historical records of the two hundred and forty-two years as a guideline for the world, deprecating the Son of Heaven, rebuking the vassals, and denouncing the senior official, just for the sake of the king's way of getting through.' Confucius said, 'Instead of empty preaching, I should have expressed my intentions so profoundly and clearly in the narrative.' The Spring and Autumn Annals clarify the way of rule of the three kings upwards, identify the rules of personnel downwards, distinguish between suspicion and right and wrong, decide indecisive matters, praise good and punish evil, respect the virtuous and despise the unworthy, preserve the deeds of the fallen state, renew the broken lineage of the kingdoms, remedy their diseases, and revitalize the slack business, which is the essence of the way of kings..... There is no closer and more effective way to bring order out of chaos than the *Chunqiu*. The *Chunqiu* has tens of thousands of words and thousands of purports. The discrete aggregation of all things is in the *Chunqiu*. In the *Chunqiu*, it is recorded that there were 36 regicides and 52 countries were destroyed. Countless princes ran away and could not protect their countries. Investigating the reasons for their chaos and failure is that they have lost their roots [25].

This passage is Sima Qian's explanation of why Confucius wrote the *Chunqiu*, and in fact, he is also conveying his ideas to the reader. Confucius was a great thinker, but his ideas are limited if they are interpreted only in vague language. Therefore, Confucius incorporated his ideas into the narration of history. For historians, the record of faithfulness to the facts is the work that must be completed and the foundation and dignity of historians. However, in Sima Qian's view, recording history is only a means. The real mission of historians is to explore human order and social ethics. Confucius and Sima Qian first recorded history, then used historical facts as the basis to observe the changes of people over a long period of time, explain the operation of the human world, discover the elements in the rise and fall of success and failure, try to find the most suitable solution, and through the description of history, explain their thinking to the world, and finally achieve the purpose of making the nation last for thousands of generations. As mentioned above, the pre-Qin historical books are divided into "information" and "interpretation", and the best-known pre-Qin history book that combines the two types is *Zuozhuan*. Like the *Zuozhuan*, the *Shi Ji* is a fusion of two types of historical works. It was from Sima Qian that Chinese historiography changed once again from the "fiction" of the *Zhanguo* to the "actual record", and historical works regained their reliability, and historiography became the core of ancient Chinese culture.

Sima Qian praised the *Chunqiu* which mainly focus on the spirit of Confucius. However, there is a great difference in style between the two. Although both Sima Qian and Confucius had difficult life experiences, Sima Qian was in the heyday of a time when an unprecedentedly powerful empire was gradually coming to its prime, which determined the more exuberant mood that flowed from the *Shiji*. In addition, the *Chunqiu* focuses on the "Way of the King" and is written more for the ruling class, because Confucius was in a time of chaos when "rituals and music were in ruins", and

Confucius wrote the *Chunqiu* with the intention of restoring the Way of the King. However, this is not the case in the *Shiji*. Among the one hundred and thirty chapters of the *Shiji*, there are twelve *Benji* and thirty *Shijia*. Although that are mainly about emperors and nobles, but Xiang Yu is in the *Benji* also Chen Sheng and Confucius are in the *Shijia*. In addition, there are also seventy *Liezhuan*, which include not only ministers, but also Confucians, assassins, warriors, healers, merchants, etc. It can be said that Sima Qian made Chinese historiography have its first sinking. Apart from the emperors, generals and ministers, the *Shiji* set up a biography for all people in the world in order to let future generations see that behind the rise and fall of the dynasty, there are countless lives sacrificed and trampled on, which are also memorable. From this point of view, *Shiji* is Sima Qian's "funeral oration" written to all ordinary people in the past three thousand years.

The significance of the existence of historians is not to sing praises for the monarch. On the contrary, what historians should do is to point out the mistakes made by the ruling class. However, Sima Qian said in the *author's preface of Shiji*:

Since the rise of the Han Dynasty, the present wise Emperor has been granted the auspicious omen, the sealing of Mount Tai, the revision of the calendar, the change of costume, and the mandate from Heaven. The ministers and officials tried their best to praise the merits of the emperor, but they still could not fully express their feelings. Besides, it is a shame for a king to not appoint a wise and capable scholar, and it is a sin for an official not to spread the virtues of a wise and holy ruler. Moreover, as I was a royal historian, it would be a great sin if I were to abandon the holy virtues of my lord and not write them down, to bury the achievements of meritorious ministers, families, and wise rulers, and to forget the last words of my late father. What I have written down is merely a compilation of the old events that have been passed down from generation to generation, not a creation, and you are wrong to compare it with the *Chunqiu* [26].”

Sima Qian did not conceal anything about the administration of Emperor Wu of Han in the *Fengshan Shu* 封禪書, not just a record of Emperor Wu's great achievements as he himself said. Why did Sima Qian say so? These two passages seem to be self-contradictory, but they are an extremely important issue. Although emperor Han Wudi adopted Dong Zhongshu's suggestion of “respecting Confucianism alone”, it was actually “External Confucianism and internal law”. The authority of the emperor is connected with the heaven, which is mysterious and unquestionable. In this case, it is very dangerous to speak frankly about the emperor's fault. Therefore, Sima Qian needs to provide security for himself in this way. The above-mentioned "theory of destiny" is essentially the same. Since then, historical compilation has become an important way for scholars to restrict monarchy [27].

4. Conclusions

As a result of the above discussion in this paper, some insights can be drawn as follows. Firstly, from the perspective of the development process of Chinese historiography, the style of *Shiji* is likely created by Sima Qian by combining the styles of several documents, but the combination of "five styles" in one book was initiated by Sima Qian. Secondly, Sima Qian acknowledged that "the king's power is granted by heaven", but at the same time emphasized "the separation of heaven and human affairs", and admonished the monarch to practice "virtuous government" by "the way of heaven". "In the process of administration, the monarch relied on officials to act as agents, and ultimately, the power of interpretation of "heaven" was placed in the hands of the scholars, which to a certain extent served to limit the power of the monarch. Through this way, during the beginning of the "Age of Empires," the *Shiji* built up Confucian doctrine of “The *Zhidao Lun*, which has been continuously improved by later generations. Thirdly, one of Sima Qian's original intention for writing the *Shiji* was that "the way of heaven" was not always fair, and some people with noble conduct did not have their reputations made known, so Sima Qian wrote the history to make up for the injustice they had suffered and to leave their reputations in history. Fourthly, the *Shiji* inherits the spirit of the *Chunqiu*, and

conveys its own thoughts on human order and social ethics to the world by telling history. The *Shiji* also inherits the techniques of *Zuozhuan*, integrates two types of historical works of "information" and "interpretation", and restores the truthfulness of historical records. However, the mood of *Shiji* is more positive and shows its concern for the common people in the world. Finally, ancient Chinese historians, represented by Sima Qian, realized that in the imperial era, the monarch, whose "one word could benefit all the people and one word could plague the whole world," had absolute authority, and it was no longer possible for them to be the direct teachers of the emperor, like the Confucian scholars in the Chunqiu and Zhanguo. In this case, the "Way of Heaven" as a backing, to advise the king, correct the gains and losses, but has become a safe choice. The scholar bureaucrats not only gave the emperor "destiny" through historical compilation, but also limited emperors' behavior within the established order framework of the scholar class, forming a unique historiography in ancient China.

References

- [1] (Southern Song) Fan Ye 範曄 written, (Tang) Li Xian 李賢, et al. noted, *biographies of Ban Biao*, Vol. 70, book of the later Han Dynasty, Vol. 30, Zhongzhou Ancient Books Press, 2018, p. 735-736..
- [2] (Tang) Huangfu Shi, *Huangfu Chizheng Collection 皇甫持正集*, vol. 2, *The editorial of chronology and biography*, Tang Ren Ji, block-printed edition of Song Shu, Beijing Library Press, 2004, p. 30.
- [3] (Qing) Wang Mingsheng, "Discussions on the Seventeen Histories", vol. 1, *The Founding of the style of Shiji*, Shanghai Ancient Books Press, 2016, p. 6
- [4] (Qing) Zhang Xuecheng, *Wenshi Tongyi*, vol. 6, *General Introduction to Hezhou Zhi – Liezhuan 和州志·列傳*, Shanghai Ancient Books Press, 2015, p. 229.
- [5] (Han) Song Zhong 宋衷 written, (Qing) Qin Jiamu et al. edited, *Shi ben Eight Species - Qin Jiamu's Repertoire Supplement - Shi ben Repertoire Supplement Self-Preface*, p. 1, Commercial Press, 1957.
- [6] Lv Simian, *Historiography and the Seven Species of History*, Shanghai Ancient Books Press, 2020, p. 49.
- [7] Meng Wentong, *Chinese historiography*, Bashu Press 2019, p. 53.
- [8] Qiao Zhizhong and Tong Jie 童傑, *A textual research on the time of the completion of Shi ben*, *Historiography Collection 史學集刊*, 2010, No. 5.
- [9] Cheng Jinzao, *Tracing origin of the style of Shiji. A glimpse of Shiji*, Shaanxi People's Press, 1985, p. 31.
- [10] (U.S.) Grant Hardy, *The World in the Text: Sima Qian's Shiji*, *Seminar on the History of Chinese History: Proceedings from a Comparative Perspective*, Daoxiang Press, 1999.
- [11] Wang Mingke, *Heroic Ancestors and brotherly nations: Texts and Contexts of Root History*, China Bookstore, 2009, p. 55-58.
- [12] Qiao Zhizhong and Wang Shengen, *On the influence of Han Fu on the creation of Shiji*, *The Monthly Journal of History*, No. 4, 2003.
- [13] Qiao Zhizhong, *An analysis of the origin and early development of Chinese historiography*, *The Monthly Journal of History*, No. 1, 2021.
- [14] "Re-examining the History of Early Chinese History from New Discoveries of Excavated Documents" on September 25, 2020 at Tsinghua University.
- [15] *Zhanguo*) Lv Buwei 呂不韋 et al. written, Zhang Shuangdi 張雙棣 et al. translated and annotated, *Lvshi Chunqiu—Shijun Lan*, China Bookstore, 2007, p. 223.
- [16] (Western Han) Sima Qian written, (Southern Dynasty Song) Pei Yin 裴駰 interpreted, (Tang) Sima Zhen 司馬貞 indexed, (Tang) Zhang Shoujie 張守節 justified: *The Shiji*, Volume 8, the *Gaozu Benji*, Shanghai Ancient Press, 2016, p. 276.
- [17] (U.S.) Grant Hardy, *The World in the Text: Sima Qian's Shiji*, *Seminar on the History of Chinese History: Proceedings from a Comparative Perspective*, Daoxiang Press, 1999.
- [18] (Western Han) Sima Qian written, (Southern Dynasty Song) Pei Yin interpreted, (Tang) Sima Zhen indexed, (Tang) Zhang Shoujie justified: *The Shiji*, Volume 6, *The Qinshihuang Benji*, Shanghai Ancient Press, 2016, p. 227.
- [19] Huang Zhangyue, "The Question of Human sacrifices and Human Martyrdom in Ancient China," *Archaeology*, No. 2, 1987
- [20] Wang Jianwen 王健文, "Fengtian Chengyun 奉天承運: The Concept of "State" and its Basis of Legitimacy in Ancient China," *Dongda Book Company*, 1995, p.19, p.98-134.
- [21] (Northern Song) Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Song Qi 宋祁: *Xintang Shu*, Vol. 124, *Yaochong Zhuan*, China Bookstore, 1975, p. 4384.

- [22] Yang Shiwen, *the Theory of disasters of the Han Dynasty and the Confucian theory of "Jundao Lun"*, *Chinese Social Sciences*, No. 3, 1991
- [23] You Ziyong, "Tiandao Renyao (天道人妖) :the weird world of the records of the Wuxing Zhi in the Middle Ages", *Doctoral Dissertation of Capital Normal University*, 2006.
- [24] (Western Han) Sima Qian written, (Southern Dynasty Song) Pei Yin interpreted, (Tang) Sima Zhen indexed, (Tang) Zhang Shoujie justified: *The Shiji, Volume 61, The Boyi Liezhuan*, Shanghai Ancient Press, 2016, p. 1777.
- [25] (Western Han) Sima Qian written, (Southern Dynasty Song) Pei Yin interpreted, (Tang) Sima Zhen indexed, (Tang) Zhang Shoujie justified: *The Shiji, Volume 130, The author s preface of Shiji*, Shanghai Ancient Press, 2016, p. 3502.
- [26] (Western Han) Sima Qian written, (Southern Dynasty Song) Pei Yin interpreted, (Tang) Sima Zhen indexed, (Tang) Zhang Shoujie justified: *The Shiji, Volume 130, The author s preface of Shiji*, Shanghai Ancient Press, 2016, p. 3503.
- [27] Gao Mingshi, *the Temple system under the emperor system, focusing on the period from the Qin and Han to the Sui and Tang dynasties* ", *Journal of Literature, History and Philosophy*, No. 40, 1993.