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THE  
CHRONICLE  
OF FU CHIEN:  
A Case of  
Exemplar History

Translated and Annotated  
with Prolegomena  
By MICHAEL C. ROGERS

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## Foreword

The feeling is shared by my respected colleagues on the editorial committee that a foreword by the chief editor especially for this issue is in order. There are two pleasant reasons. First, it is by far our Series' largest undertaking, and one which casts new light on a most significant polemic subject. A foreword may help light the way to appreciating its multiple dimensions of import, for its contemporary relevance as well as historical interest. Secondly, circumstances of this publication call for a special acknowledgement. I might begin with some personal reminiscences.

One of the earliest monographs published for the inauguration of our Series was also on a subject from the Chin-shu, or Chin History. That effort of mine of fifteen years ago, the Biography of Ku K'ai-chih (1953), now looks modest indeed beside Professor Rogers' present volume of such magnificent scope and substance, wrought from the same source. Commenting on that earlier work, Professor Wu Shih-ch'ang, then of Oxford, said in his kindly review (in Oriental Art, Summer, 1955), "That the introduction and the notes take up four-fifths of the whole monograph is ample justification for such an undertaking. . . . Working through fifty-odd reference books and articles for the translation of a short biography of 839 characters is truly like 'attacking a rabbit with the full strength of a lion,' as the Chinese saying has it." The metaphor seems better suited to the Chronicle of Fu Chien, except that the "strength of the lion," be it so called, is here many times multiplied, and the object of attack is now a fox rather than a rabbit. It is not only much bigger but more elusive. And as in traditional Chinese belief the fox is capable of many illusory transformations, to snare it and successfully show its true form takes a much more efficacious art. Hence the well over one thousand notes, more than two hundred bibliographical references in oriental and western languages, and a wide-ranging Prolegomena section, marshaled to penetrate every arcane corner of less than one hundred pages of translated text.

The Chin-shu, as cheng-shih or "standard history," has been recognized for its several unique features and its special significance in Chinese historiography. It is the only cheng-shih that is accredited with "royal authorship," by dint of Emperor T'ang T'ai-tsung's own contribution to four chapters. It firmly set the precedent and example for all later dynasties since the mid-7th century A.D. to have



the ensuing "Standard Histories" compiled by an organized, collective task force in the "History Bureau" officially established by the court. The official version of the Chin-shu sprang from the most heterogeneous origins. It has perhaps the largest number of earlier strata in various "private" versions as its precursors during the three hundred turbulent years previous to its compilation. The number is phenomenal, about thirty by a rough count in my Ku K'ai-chih study. And last but not least, the Chin period has been looked upon as the most fateful era of the Chinese nation, when the course of events was to decide whether traditional China was to be preserved or plunged into total "barbarization" as was Europe in the "Dark Ages." Some highly respected modern Chinese historians, therefore, as they cast a long view backwards, see in the Chin era a single watershed, or "great divide," as Rogers says in his citation of this view, that determines the shape of things in the whole of Chinese history.

It is a commonplace that the more celebrated and significant some historical events are, the more likely they are to be legendized. Once the legend is established, the actual occurrence of events is no longer questioned. The legend is accepted as truth, captivates the imagination, and may exercise a moral force for several millennia. In the long course of time, the legendization itself, over and above the actual, historical incidents, becomes a historiographical event, from which derives our understanding of a national culture through its written history. We emphasize the word "written," because while facts remain the essential concern in our study of history, it is the letter and spirit of the surviving written texts that affect us most, when they make certain facts celebrated with legendary aura. Such aura tends to increase with time, dazzling the mind while obscuring the facts. One of the important justifications of the continuance of historical research, age after age, is therefore the need of endless efforts both to reassess what has been most celebrated as "facts," and to unveil the motivation, process, and effects of legendization. Such is the task undertaken in Rogers' present work, in connection with a great historical drama on record, of which the famed Battle of the Fei River has been the most celebrated climactic event. The compound of fact and legend as recorded, having been standardized under the aegis of T'ang T'ai-tung, has become imbedded in national psychology, and even today makes its appearance in the ideological pronouncements of such an awesome political hegemon as Mao Tse-tung. Some may think that matters having "contemporary relevance" are the special province of the social sciences. But it is true only to the extent that such matters are quantifiable; there remains a dimension of the human spirit to which only humanistically oriented studies can do justice, and indeed must do justice lest our understanding of the present as well as the past be attenuated and impoverished.

Rogers' findings might be likened to the demolition of the long-held belief in the records of the famed battle of Marathon, discovering "mystiques" in the narrated events, yet according sympathetic understanding to Herodotus' motives and his art of writing rather than laying blame, as did Plutarch, on his "ill nature." This is achieved by a close examination of the Chin-shu text, not only excavating its direct historical sources in the early buried strata, but discovering paradigms in other contexts to show effectively how the "mystiques" were constructed with literary finesse and moral intention. While the ancient Romans, such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus, believed "history is philosophy teaching by examples," it is as if



the T'ang historians in their compilation of the Chin-shu, particularly in this Chronicle, were acting on the principle that history is wen, or art of letters, teaching by paradigms. Rogers' great contribution is his affirmation of this art. While recognizing a case of exemplar historiography, he delves further into its secrets as a work of literary art, and analyzes its rhetoric, allusions, and characterology, thus illuminating the text from perspectives hitherto not yet pursued. He thus enhances our understanding of the T'ang historians' intentions but, more important, of their ability as myth-makers to establish symbols that continue to appeal to the Chinese national psychology to the present day.

Our readers may find some of the discoveries astounding. But the argument of each one is meticulously documented. Sometimes the slenderest of clues leads to momentous conclusions. The Chin-shu in the tradition of Chinese historical scholarship, in fact since shortly after its completion under the T'ang dynasty itself and through the later ages, has been criticized for its indulgence in fancy and myth. Traditional latterday Confucian rationalism and modern "scientific" historicism may easily assume a superior air of disdain about such practices. But an answer seems not to have been seriously sought to the question of why the compilers of this Chin history, of whom some, at least, were well-known rational and practical statesman-historians, should have carried on such practices, particularly in the case of this most important historical work.

That the Chin age, being perhaps the longest and most dramatic period of agony during the time of medieval Chinese national decline, stayed only by hope, should breed the largest number of wishful-thinking and myth-laden "private" versions of its history, from which the T'ang historians inevitably drew their sources, may be one explanation for the abundance of the Chin-shu myths. But their immediate motive, as Rogers demonstrates, was to establish paradigms, especially in the Chronicle of Fu Chien, to "teach by examples." And their task was made all the more delicate because the "teaching" was intended as a personal rather than a general lesson, directed to none other than the Emperor T'ang T'ai-tsung himself. He was not only the most brilliant, sensitive, and alert sovereign to rule over them but, as a professed contributor himself, was to read the Chin-shu texts more closely than other histories. Utmost decorum of style was imperative. The historians therefore resorted to the subtlest methods, to sometimes far-fetched classical literary allusions, legendary beliefs, and oracular revelation. Thus they blew up hearsay episodes into dramatic dimensions and recreated the impressive historical figure, Fu Chien, in a heroic cast of deep tragic pathos. Stubborn assertion of will, defiance of fate, and action or words from the unconscious which spelt his doom, were deftly wrought into the text of the Chronicle. It is aimed at the effect of tragic drama to move and instruct, with Emperor T'ai-tsung as its perhaps most knowing audience. For a good part of the flaws and misdeeds of the hero might reflect the Emperor's own. We can well understand the need of impeccable tact, delicacy, and sleighty tropes in the endeavor of secret appeal to the One Man. But to others, in posterity or even among contemporaries, the semantics would become elusive, or as fantastic, indeed, as the Chinese fabulous fox. It takes Michael Rogers' erudition, enterprising spirit, and unrelenting effort to penetrate that "esoteric" intention, and uncover the many hidden layers of meaning of the text.



The original text of the Chronicle is thus revealed as a vein of rich ore to be mined again, with yields yet to be sifted and smelted, rather than looked upon as a finished product to be taken for granted. The translation aims therefore at fidelity to elements of the original intricate contexture, resulting sometimes in literal replica, rather than at fluent reading of the apparent sense. But the collative and semantic analyses in the copious notes as well as in the Prolegomena amply demonstrate the value of this approach, while flashes of wit and humor, in verse or prose, in the original have often been matched with admirable skill in the translation. This approach, it should be appropriate to add, may be said to represent the spirit of our Series.

Because of its large scope, and the breathless pace of the changing events involved, this monograph is equipped with maps and several appendixes dealing with geography, to help stabilize our view of the period, during which conflicting racial and political forces shifted the face of the northern Chinese land like a fast turning kaleidoscope. Under his minute examination of the details, geographical as well as historical, of the rhetoric as well as of the facts, Michael Rogers has obtained fresh angles for us to sight the human scenes anew. In doing so he accomplishes critiques of an immense amount of the knowledge and scholarship so far achieved in relation to this period.

Characteristic of Michael Rogers as a man and scholar, with his assiduous sense of truth always balanced by warm kindness and gentle modesty, whatever his criticism, it is generally in accordance with chung-shu, the Confucian ideal of "faithfulness and generous allowance" leading to true appreciation. Thus the end results of his critiques are constructive in three large respects. First, while he disputes certain important facts as recorded in the Chronicle, he, instead of discrediting the value of the Chin-shu historiography, rather vindicates it. If the T'ang rhetoric is here discovered to have too often embroidered certain Chin events, by tracing to the last threads of the fabric we are led to understand more of the historiographical niceties and artistry of the T'ang age. Secondly, recognizing the myth-making process and its intention, he applies in his critique new insights developed from modern literary criticism and psychology. Thus he is able to interpret the symbolic value of the myth, find reasons for its sustenance to the present day, and say with E. M. W. Tillyard, "A healthy mythology is a nation's most precious possession." Thirdly, Rogers does not so much reject the recorded facts as readjust them with microscopic attention. In so doing, his critique augurs the prospect of new dialogues on a world-wide scale with modern and contemporary western scholars as well as with Chinese historians.

Modern interest in the subject, and its contemporary significance, as we have indicated, have always been considerable in foreign countries and in China. The meticulous notes, bibliography, and appendixes, as well as the text of the Prolegomena, frequently pose queries while making reference to virtually every luminary concerned with the subject in Europe, America, Japan, and China, past and present. The author ever so often finds himself in good illustrious company when he criticizes a detail or disputes a record. Disagreements, being the result not of contentiousness, but of close and minute observations, especially when they are from a novel perspective, cannot but call some established authorities into ques-



tion. Differences of opinion and interpretation, even very strong ones, on details or large issues here presented, may still arise among learned readers of this volume. But we have no doubt that this work, with its striking vividness and probing analyses, should give new impetus to humanistic studies on a subject, that is not only of lasting historical interest, but remains vital as a reflection of Chinese national psychology, and has internationally engaged the attention of the modern intellect.

We gratefully acknowledge the help of the Chancellor's office in appropriating emergency funds to make possible the completion of this work of our project, which until last year had been supported by the Institute of International Studies, whose past services have also been appreciated.

Berkeley, California  
May 26, 1968

Shih-Hsiang Chen