

**MAJOR TRENDS IN HISTORICAL THOUGHT AND  
WRITING  
MODULE-1  
TOPIC:CHINESE HISTORIOGRAPHY**



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# Circumstances favorable for the growth of Chinese historiography



- Most historically minded people
- Called as ‘Paradise of Historians’
- 1. from early times recording of past events considered as very important
  - archives of documents such as registers, family trees, records of contracts, & oracles
  - princely houses kept officials to draw up treaties, record edicts, draft documents etc.
  - Archivist astrologer act as Secretary to Emperor



- 2. Growth of rationalist movement - flowering of culture which brought philosophical thought to a climax – helped the growth of history as a subject
  - For Chinese philosophy meant a kind of wisdom that is necessary for conduct of life, particularly for govt.
- From 7<sup>th</sup> C onwards a separate department for History emerged & it became important subject in civil service examination
- History made as most popular & respectable form of literature in China

# CHINESE HISTORIANS



- CONFUCIUS:
  - 6<sup>th</sup> C B.C
  - stressed the importance of history in promoting reverence for the past & respect for the examples set up by ancestors
  - 3 curriculum for his pupil - history, poetry, rules of propriety (behavior that is accepted as socially or morally correct and proper)
  - *Five Ching* or Canonical Books – 2 of these books – 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> are historical works

## Continues....



- Fourth – *Ch'un Ch'ieu or Spring and Autumn Annals*- brief chronicle of the reigns of 12 Dukes of his own province Lu from 722-484 BC- also a guide to moral conduct
- Fifth- *Shu- Ching or Book of History or Book of Documents* – collection of royal speeches, edicts, memorials, feudal documents etc.
- Cannot be considered as a historian as he added to his record imaginary speeches & stories to promote morals & wisdom
- But contributed for the growth of history as a discipline



- SUMA CHIEN:
  - Father of oriental history
  - son of court historian & astrologer of Han Emperor Wu
  - like his father he also entered in to royal service
  - asked to complete the task of writing *Shih Chi* (Historical Record) started by his father
- - *Shih Chi* – greatest work – 130 chapters – cover the history of China for a period of 3000 years
  - Early part – more mythical in nature
  - But from the middle of 3<sup>rd</sup> C BC – it become more detailed & precise particularly of Han dynasty



- FEATURES OF HIS WRITINGS:
  - Unlike his predecessors he wrote history of world
  - draws upon more varied collection of source materials than his predecessors
  - look beyond boundaries of court
  - depart from tradition of chronological arrangement-  
divided his book into 5 sections
    - Basic annals of Emperors
    - Chronological tables
    - Eight chapters/ treatises on rites, music, astrology etc
    - Annals of Feudal nobles
    - Biographies of Eminent Men



- No serious attempt to explain & interpret
- Saw history as the product of man's will & did not seek to comprehend it
- Events are presented as informed by the documents or reported by eyewitnesses
- It has moral & didactical purpose
- Grand historian of China
- With him Chinese historiography came to exert a profound influence on Japanese, Korean & Vietnamese history writing.





- **PAN KU:**
  - 1<sup>st</sup> C. AD
  - followed Suma Ch'iens pattern of organization
  - **HISTORY OF THE FORMER HAN DYNASTY**
  - Set up a new pattern of writing
  - started a practice for each dynasty to compile historical material for his successors
  - **DIARIES OF ACTIVITY AND REPOSE** – utterances of the emperor & the business that he transacted day to day
  - **VERITABLE RECORD** – A survey of an Emperors reign, when the Emperor died
  - this practice continued for several years



- From Tang rulers – 7<sup>th</sup> C. CE – national history
- New office for compilation of history started- committee of scholars were formed
- scholars made use of archival sources, record of existing Govt., diaries etc.
- Monographs & treaties on economy, astronomy, calendar making etc.
- Biographies of important personalities



- Private historians
- YANG HSIU -11<sup>th</sup> c CE –official as well as non-official historian- NEW HISTORY OF TANG- NEW HISTORY OF THE FIVE DYNASTIES
- SUMA KUANG –HISTORY AS A MIRROR- a guide for future emperors & statesmen
- YUAN SHU – 12<sup>th</sup> c- EVENTS IN HISTORY AS A MIRROR- arranged events in accordance with events, instead of chronological order
- CHENG CHIA- GENERAL RECORD- history of music, literature & humanities
- MA TUAN – 14<sup>th</sup> c – A STUDY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE – about land tax, money& exchange, population, commerce, education, criminal justice

# Assessment of Chinese Historiography



- No nation produced such voluminous, continuous, varied & accurate record of past – imperial history, local & dynastic histories, gazetteers, chronicles
- European historians did not consider Chinese history as proper history
- Defects – moral purpose of historical writings, deviate from objectivity
  - did not attempt for causal explanation – not interpret data