

The Rebel-Reformer  
and  
Modern Chinese Biography

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THE rebel-reformer probably makes a good subject for biography in any culture.<sup>1</sup> Although often feared and discredited, he would normally have had an interesting life, filled with decisions and doubts; if short on discretion, he would certainly be long on individuality, the very stuff of memorable biography. Chinese rebel-reformers were not different; although they were classed as 'villains' and relegated to the back pages of the standard histories, they were usually of sufficient interest to be the subject of biography. A few were even romanticized in fiction and drama, but their stories would normally have been adapted and expanded from the formal biographies written of them. The question is, what kinds of biography were written of them? As there have been so many rebel-reformers throughout Chinese history, would there not have grown a flourishing biographical tradition based on such interesting individuals alone? Would there not be great Chinese biography today, stirred as the Chinese have been by so many extraordinary rebel-reformers during the twentieth century?

Rather surprisingly, the answer to the last two questions is 'No'. I would like to explore the main reasons why this was so. Some of the reasons for this, especially the limitations of the Chinese biographical tradition, have been discussed before by a succession of scholars from Hu Shih (1891-1962), Chu Tung-jun, Ch'en Shih-hsiang (1912-71) to Peter Olbricht, Denis Twitchett and David Nivison.<sup>2</sup> The general consensus is reflected in Denis Twitchett's statement on traditional biography:

The purpose of biography was essentially commemorative, born from a desire to provide a record of the deceased's achievements and personality for his surviving descendants, relatives, and associates... a biography was not merely a record of fact, but was also designed for a didactic purpose. The biography would serve either as a model to be emulated, suggesting to posterity courses of action likely to lead to

<sup>1</sup> The notes have been kept to a minimum and, wherever possible, limited to Western sources and Chinese sources available in translation.

<sup>2</sup> Hu Shih, Preface to Chang Hsiao-jo, *Nan-t'ung Chang Chi-chih Hsien-sheng Chaun-chi* (Biography of Mr Chang Chi-chih of Nan-t'ung), Shanghai 1930, pp. 1-3, and Preface to *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, A. W. Hummel (ed.), 2 vols, Washington 1943, Vol. I, pp. iii-vii; Chu Tung-jun, Preface to his *Chang Chii-cheng Ta-chuan* (Biography of Chang Chü-cheng), 1945, pp. 1-15; Ch'en Shih-hsiang, 'An Innovation in Chinese Biographical Writing', *Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1953, pp. 44-62.

P. Olbricht, 'Die Biographie in China', *Saeculum*, Vol. 8, 1957, pp. 224-35; D. Twitchett, 'Chinese Biographical Writing' in *Historians of China and Japan*, W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleyblank (eds), London 1961, pp. 95-114, and 'Problems of Chinese Biography' in *Confucian Personalities*, A. F. Wright and D. Twitchett (eds), Stanford 1962, pp. 24-39; David S. Nivison, 'Aspects of traditional Chinese biography', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 21, August 1962, pp. 457-63.

success and approbation, or less commonly as a minatory example illustrating errors to be avoided.<sup>3</sup>

I would like to take this further by looking at the effect of the tradition on modern biography and focus attention on the question of writing the lives of rebel-reformers, both past and present. At the same time, I hope also to throw light on the theme of the Individual in Traditional and Modern Society, the theme of the Asian Studies symposium sponsored here by the Australian Academy of the Humanities.<sup>4</sup>

Let me begin by referring to my own efforts to deal with traditional and modern lives. My first experience of the problem was a fortunate one. I had not attempted a biography, but simply a sketch of the life of Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) during the years 1900-11, with special reference to his activities in Singapore.<sup>5</sup> It turned out to be relatively easy to collect together what Sun Yat-sen had written and said and to date his writings and his movements. He had had several Chinese and foreign biographers by the early 1950s and there had been official collections of his letters, speeches, telegrams as well as published works. It was rather encouraging to know that so much was known of a rebel who was almost never successful at anything during his lifetime. If this was possible, I concluded, it was also possible to write the biography of all important modern Chinese.

I then turned to traditional biography, starting with Chu Wen (852-912), a ninth-century rebel who turned respectable and eventually usurped the throne and destroyed one of the great dynasties of China, the T'ang dynasty (618-906).<sup>6</sup> This was, on the surface, not too difficult to do. Although an usurper, he did found a dynasty, official *Veritable Records* (*Shih-lu*) had been prepared for him and much of this had been incorporated in a standard history. But, apart from a few anecdotes about his early life, the materials were formal and lifeless. Even Chu Wen's attempts to reform the Imperial system radically were only sketchily described and there seems to have been no interest at all in his motives, his feelings, or his personality. I wondered at the time whether this was because he had left no writings and had always had a 'hostile press'. I thought that perhaps I could do better with men who were not rebels and who had been more sympathetically treated by their contemporaries. Two men, both of whom died in the 950s, engaged my attention. One was Ch'ai Jung (921-59), a reckless soldier and adopted son of an usurper, himself a brilliant emperor who started the process of unifying China after some seventy years of division. The other was Feng Tao (882-954), the pious Confucian official who survived ten emperors

<sup>3</sup> Twitchett, 'Problems of Chinese Biography', p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> This lecture was planned to fit in with the Academy Symposium held in May 1974. Nine other papers were read and a volume of essays is planned.

<sup>5</sup> 'Sun Yat-sen and Singapore', *Journal of the South Seas Society*, 15, December 1959, pp. 55-68.

<sup>6</sup> I did not attempt a separate biography of Chu Wen, but incorporated a short life of him in my book, *The Structure of Power in North China during the Five Dynasties*, Kuala Lumpur and Stanford 1963, pp. 26-9, 47-84.

of five different imperial houses and was the subject of controversy among philosophers, historians and literary men for a thousand years.<sup>7</sup> For the first, there was ample evidence of decisive action, but very little material to throw light on Ch'ai Jung the man. For the latter, there was room for scholarly debate and even sympathetic reconstruction of the conditions under which Feng Tao lived, but the man who died smug at his own survival eluded me. I fared little better with a number of biographies I wrote for the Ming Biography Project at Columbia University in New York and the Sung Biography Project at the University of Munich.<sup>8</sup> What I managed to write provided basic information about some interesting or distinguished figures, but none of these men could come alive given the biographical materials preserved about them. I concluded, therefore, that there simply was not enough interest in, or concern for, the individual in the past; these efforts of mine provided reference materials to serve the historian as traditional biographies had done in the past. In short, the scholars from Hu Shih to David Nivison were right.

But what about modern biography, especially that of the rebel-reformer? Remembering how relatively rich the materials were about Sun Yat-sen, I hoped that it would be possible to do better with leading figures of the twentieth century. Two men who came from the same region of southern Fukien province began to fascinate me. Both were men of great ambitions and fierce personalities; both were reformers turned rebels. The first was Ch'en Chia-keng or Tan Kah-kee (1874-1961), who followed his father to Singapore and eventually made his fortune from the rubber industry. Despite his wealth, he was a rebel against the Ch'ing dynasty, a keen local reformer, and a radical opponent of both the warlords and the Nanking government and finally gave his fullest support to revolutionary leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, thus ending his life as a rebel against the very capitalist system that had enriched him in the first place. He died in Peking and was buried with full honours.<sup>9</sup> The second was Ch'en Po-ta (b. 1904), thirty years younger than Tan Kah-kee, a man who came from a very poor family and studied in the modern school Tan Kah-kee had founded. He began his career as a trade union activist and a reformer-secretary to a local warlord. Later, he joined the Communist Party and studied in Moscow. About 1931, he returned to become a professor at a university in Peking; six years later, he joined Mao Tse-tung in Yen-an and rose eventually to become Mao's political secretary. He had become a professional revolutionary and the 'leading interpreter' of Mao Tse-tung's thought. The most spectacular part of his career was yet to come. In 1966-9, he was in

<sup>7</sup> My biography of Ch'ai Jung is part of a larger study of the Later Chou dynasty (951-9), still to be completed. The essay on Feng Tao appears in *Confucian Personalities*, Wright and Twitchett (eds), pp. 123-45, 346-51.

<sup>8</sup> The Ming Biography Project has been completed and is due to be published. The Sung Biography Project is still in progress.

<sup>9</sup> H. L. Boorman (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, Vol. I, New York and London 1967, pp. 165-70.

the forefront of the 'rectification' of the Government and the Party during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, but his final public act after becoming the fourth-ranking leader in China was to have 'rebelled' against Mao Tse-tung himself. He has been in disgrace since 1970.<sup>10</sup>

For quite different reasons, the sources for the lives of the two men have been difficult to come by. Tan Kah-kee's early career in business has gone virtually unrecorded: only a few anecdotes survive besides his own brief accounts in his *Memoirs*. Interviews with old residents in Singapore have brought out details only of his later career as publicist, educational reformer, anti-Japanese patriot and Overseas Chinese leader in Peking. His own newspaper has some fulsome references to his public career; other newspapers in Singapore and in China occasionally point to his faults and failures. British colonial records both praise and warn against him. His family papers have not been available and his son-in-law's papers deposited in the Singapore Archives have been quite disappointing. There has so far only been one short journalistic biography and one set of eulogies produced by his friends and colleagues in Peking at his death. But there has been nothing as rich and fascinating as his own *Memoirs* which he prepared when he lived in hiding in Java during the Second World War.<sup>11</sup>

As for Ch'en Po-ta, he has written several million words ranging from crude propaganda, potted history to political commentary, Marxist and Maoist philosophy and even works of scholarship—enough there to help us discover the workings of a fierce and unforgiving mind. But when one searches for personal detail, there is virtually nothing. Taiwan sources on his life rely on the recollections of some of his old friends and former colleagues. Soviet data rely on those who knew him in Moscow and others who met him in China. Western journalists remember little of what appears to have been a colourless and reticent figure in the background in Yenan and in Peking. There is little to help us capture his independent and rebellious spirit from these details. Only his writings and some of the fragmentary reports in the Cultural Revolution materials bring him a little to life. But the picture is conflicting—varying from examples of noble ideals backed by close analyses to examples of pettiness and downright dishonesty. No biographical material is likely now to be forthcoming. Dismissed in Soviet Russia, hated in Taiwan and since 1970 reviled in China, he is almost a non-person now and it is difficult to expect reliable personal details to appear.<sup>12</sup> For both men, the lack of private papers and

<sup>10</sup> Bootman (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary*, Vol. I, pp. 221-3; D. W. Klein and A. B. Clark (eds), *Biographic Dictionary of Chinese Communism 1921-65*, Vol. I, pp. 122-5; Parris H. Chang, 'The Role of Ch'en Po-ta in the Cultural Revolution', *Asia Quarterly*, No. 1, Brussels 1973, pp. 17-58.

<sup>11</sup> *Nan-ch'iao Hui-i Lu* (Reminiscences), 2 vols, (completed 1944, Preface dated 1946), Foochow 1950 (reprint). His own newspaper was the *Nanyang Siang Pao*, founded in Singapore in 1923. Archival materials include scattered references in CO 273 and the Lee Kong Chian papers in the Singapore Archives.

<sup>12</sup> Parris Chang, 'Ch'en Po-ta', pp. 17-25, 51-8; Li Feng-min (ed.), *Chung-Kung Shou-yao Shih-lueh Hui-pien* (Chronology of Chinese Communist Leaders), Taipei 1969, pp. 81-104.

accounts of their private lives leave us little with which to understand the inner man.

It has already been suggested that traditional biography was not really concerned with the individual. The emphasis was more on a person's contribution to history, whether clan, local or national history. In fact, the biographers were historians and they were interested in their subjects principally as historical types. For the twentieth century, men like Sun Yat-sen, Tan Kah-kcc and Ch'en Po-ta all appear easy to fit into a type, the general class of rebel-reformer. Certainly to describe their many public acts and discuss their proper place in the general class is not difficult. The question is how far we can get with biographies that explore the individuality of each of them. Surely with men who rebel and propose radical change, their distinctiveness from other men, their assertion of individuality, are not in question. Yet there are indications that, even for such men, biography will rarely get below the level of public acts. Why this should be so deserves to be examined. Are the roots of our difficulties in the Chinese tradition itself? What of the modern biographies written so far and the great hopes aroused about the new kind of biography of twentieth-century China?<sup>13</sup>

Since the 1930s, there have been several large-scale efforts to take a fresh look at the lives of prominent Chinese. In 1934, a group of Chinese and Western scholars gathered to produce a *modern* biographical dictionary of the 300 years from about 1600 to 1911. This was completed in 1942 under the editorship of Arthur Hummel and published by the Library of Congress as *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (in two volumes). Notably, the work was begun within seven years of the completion of the last set of official biographies compiled in China along traditional lines: this was the *Draft History of Ch'ing Dynasty* completed in 1927.<sup>14</sup> The *Eminent Chinese* started in 1934 was to be a modern work reconstructing 'authentic and objective biographies' and making 'full use of the results of modern historical research in China'. On its publication, it was hailed as 'a great biographical dictionary' and efforts have been made to duplicate the achievement for the periods before and after the Ch'ing dynasty. For the periods before the Ch'ing, there are the Ming Biography Project and the Sung Biography Project mentioned earlier; also there is the Yuan Biography Project organized by my colleague and a Fellow of the Academy, Dr Igor de Rachewiltz, at the Australian National University. For the twentieth century, there have been two major efforts in English: first, the *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* published in 1967-71 in four volumes, and then the two-volume *Biographic Dictionary of Chinese Communism (1921-65)* published in 1971.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For a short introduction, see Richard C. Howard, 'Modern Chinese biographical writing' and William Ayres, 'Current biography in Communist China' in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 21, August 1962, pp. 465-73 and 477-85 respectively.

<sup>14</sup> Chao Er-sun (ed.), *Ch'ing-shih kao*, 2 vols, Hong Kong edn, n.d.; compare the biography chapters with Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, passim.

<sup>15</sup> Boorman (ed.) *Biographical Dictionary*, 4 vols; Klein and Clark (eds), *Biographic Dictionary*, 2 vols.

Except for the Yuan Biography Project at the Australian National University which plans to eschew the dictionary approach, the biographies which have appeared so far are modelled largely on those in *Eminent Chinese* published some thirty years ago. When all of these are published, we can expect to have *modern* biographies of most of the prominent men in China since the middle of the tenth century.

Yet in what sense are the biographies modern? Hu Shih, the great liberal Westernizer, summed it up well when he introduced *Eminent Chinese* in the Preface dated 1943. He said, 'it is more than a biographical dictionary. It is the most detailed and the best history of China of the last three hundred years that one can find anywhere today. It is written in the *form of biographies* of eight hundred men and women who made that history. This form, *by the way*, is in line with the Chinese tradition of historiography' (my italics). In that little aside, 'by the way', he had put his finger on the question of modernity versus tradition: what was *modern* was mainly more accuracy, more objectivity and the use of non-Chinese sources. There was certainly nothing comparable to the later efforts by Arthur Waley with literary men (especially his biography of Yuan Mei, 1716-97, published in 1956), nor were there hints of what could be achieved by more persistent inquiry (as seen in the first part of Harold Schiffrin's biography of Sun Yat-sen published in 1968).<sup>16</sup> Hu Shih also indirectly pointed to the classic feature of biography in China. Biography was for historians, not simply the tool or handmaiden of history, but an integral part of history writing.

What was also important but something he did not emphasize was that, as he was writing, there had been a shift in modern attitudes towards certain types of historical figures, and fresh evaluations were taking place concerning their roles in society, especially of their efforts to change or even to overturn their societies. For example, Hu Shih was content to note that, thanks to the preservation of the records of the Taiping rebellion (1851-64) in foreign archives and to the abundance of foreign sources about its leaders, we now have fuller biographies of rebels than were provided for in the *Draft History of the Ch'ing Dynasty*. What he did not acknowledge was that the image of the rebel and reformer had changed, and not merely by having Hung Hsiu-ch'uan (1812-64) and his friends arranged alphabetically instead of being classed as rebels and relegated to the back pages.<sup>17</sup> They were beginning to be seen as harbingers of a new society and pioneers in the final overthrow of a corrupt and dying social order.

This re-assessment did not, of course, occur until several decades after the failure of the Taiping rebellion. Ironically, it probably began with the not

<sup>16</sup> A. Waley, *Yuan Mei: Eighteenth Century Chinese Poet*, London 1956; H. Schiffrin, *Sun Yat-sen and the Origins of the Chinese Revolution*, Berkeley 1968.

<sup>17</sup> Compare *Ch'ing Shih-kao*, Vol. II, Biographies, chuan 262, pp. 1436-50, and Hummel (ed.), *Eminent Chinese*, Vol. I, pp. 361-7, with the enthusiastic scholarship of the 1930s by Hsiao I-shan, Lo Er-kang and Chien Yu-wen.

very original view of Confucius as a radical reformer who ultimately transformed his society. This was a view presented vigorously by K'ang Yu-wei (1858-1927) in 1897, just before the ill-fated Hundred Days' Reform of 1898. K'ang actually went so far as to suggest that Confucius was a prophet who had founded a new religion.<sup>18</sup> In the realm of biography, this glowing image of the radical reformer was to influence the first biography of K'ang Yu-wei himself, written by his disciple Liang Ch'i-ch'ao (1873-1929) four years later in 1901. Although unusually effusive, as befits a disciple's effort, Liang's words promised to open up a new dimension in Chinese biography:

In short, he is "born earlier" [a pun on *hsien-sheng*], that is an individual born before his time, like the cockcrow preceding the activities of everything else and the appearance of Venus [in the West?] before all other stars. Therefore most people do not hear him or see him and indeed there are parts of his nature which are not suitable to present times. Thus whatever he does is followed by calamity and the whole nation is hostile to him. There is no other reason for this than that he was born too early.

Liang continues in this vein in his concluding section of K'ang's biography. He was conscious of how this might sound to his readers, and ends by saying

The famous English leader Cromwell once warned his painter "paint me as I am!" [warts and all] because he disliked the painter's attempt to flatter him and wanted him not to lose sight of his true appearance. These words have become famous. In writing this biography of K'ang Nan-hai (Yu-wei) I claim little for it except that I am confident I will not be scolded by Cromwell.<sup>19</sup>

Liang went further by writing a short biography of Cromwell himself.<sup>20</sup> But, most of all, he appreciated the nineteenth-century revisionism of Clarendon, Gardiner and Firth which gave Cromwell his rightful place in British history. A few years later, Liang embarked on a full-scale biography of the great Sung dynasty (960-1276) reformer Wang An-shih (1021-86).<sup>21</sup> Again he returned to the theme of being born before one's time and remaining unappreciated long after one's death. He was impressed by the English Parliament's acknowledgement of Cromwell's historic place and disgusted by the Chinese failure to recognize Wang An-shih's greatness more than 900 years after his death. Only one man had had the courage to revise the accepted view—and then only

<sup>18</sup> There are several fine studies of K'ang; see Richard C. Howard, 'K'ang Yu-wei: his intellectual background and early thought' in *Confucian Personalities*, Wright and Twitchett (eds), pp. 294-316, 382-6; and Lo Jung-pang (ed.), *K'ang Yu-wei, a Biography and a Symposium*, Tucson 1967.

<sup>19</sup> In Liang Ch'i-ch'ao's collected works, *Yin-ping Shih Ho-chi, Wen-chi* (Collected works from the Ice-drinker's Studio, collected essays), 16 vols., Shanghai 1936, Vol. III, chuan 6, pp. 57-89.

<sup>20</sup> *Yin-ping Shih Ho-chi, Chuan-chi* (Collected works), 24 vols, Shanghai 1936, Vol. IV, chuan 13, pp. 1-20.

<sup>21</sup> *Wang An-shih P'ing-chuan*, Kwang-chih Bookshop, Hongkong, n.d., 156 + 11 pp.; also *Chuan-chi*, Vol. VIII, chuan 27.



cautiously. This was the obscure scholar, Ts'ai Shang-hsaing, who laboured a long lifetime and completed his work in 1804 at the age of eighty-seven. But Ts'ai's work, the *Wang Ching-kung nien-p'u k'ao-lueh*, was known only to a few scholars and his more favourable view of the reformer was never accepted. It is interesting that the courage to dissent gained a new dimension with each decade. Liang had praised Ts'ai in 1908, Ts'ai's work was not republished in a modern edition until 1930; this was followed by several new biographies, and new histories which showed fresh interest in Wang An-shih, but Ts'ai's work was largely unread. In 1959-60, however, Liang and all other biographies were supplanted by Ts'ai's pioneering study, and in August 1973, a new printing of Ts'ai's book in at least 25,000 copies was re-issued by the Shanghai People's Publishing House. Thus Ts'ai, the first dissenter in 1804 has been rewarded with the greatest honour in China despite the fact that he wrote in classical Chinese in the traditional chronological *nien-p'u* form and is virtually unreadable to a generation brought up on modern colloquial Chinese.<sup>22</sup>

Liang Ch'i-ch'ao was, of course, praising radical reform when he wrote the biography of his teacher, K'ang Yu-wei, and that of Wang An-shih. He had no praise for the rebellions in Chinese History which he equated with *Ko-ming* (now translated as 'revolution'). However, he was ambiguous about this and grouped under this term *Ko-ming* the actions of men like Cromwell, Washington and the leaders of the French Revolution together with those of successful rebels who later became emperors of China like the founders of the Former Han and Later Han dynasties (206 BC-AD 8 and AD 25-220), the T'ang, Sung and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties as well as those of the unsuccessful leaders of all varieties of rebellions down to the Taiping Rebellion. But in Cromwell, he was already aware of a blurring of the line between reformer and rebel, for he did not hesitate to compare Wang An-shih and K'ang Yu-wei to Cromwell. He was already conscious of the radical changes Western 'rebels' had brought to their societies as contrasted with the damage Chinese 'rebels' generally brought to China. He even listed in an essay written in 1904 the seven points of difference between Chinese and Western 'rebels', all of them showing how superior Western 'rebels' were compared to Chinese ones.<sup>23</sup> In doing this, he seemed to have been groping towards the idea of a 'rebel-reformer', a man who rebelled against the ills of his society and his times but whose desire for radical change was based on ideas of better ways of doing things if not a vision of a better world—a transitional man, a precursor of modern revolutionary.

Within a few years, this was resolved for him. Sun Yat-sen was momentarily successful with his 'revolution' (still a much-debated word to describe what happened in 1911-12) and Liang found himself something of a political leader and a 'rebel-reformer' in the new republic, and so quickly did he perceive the opportunities for radical change that he resisted the idea of restoring the

<sup>22</sup> Shanghai 1959 and 1960 and August and September 1973. See *P'ing Chuan*, p. 4, for Liang Ch'i-ch'ao's comment.

<sup>23</sup> 'Chung-kuo Li-shih shang Ko-ming chih Yen-chiu', *Wen-chi*, Vol. V, chuan 15, pp. 31-41.

monarchy three years later. Ironically, by 1915, he found himself a rebel against the regime in Peking.<sup>24</sup>

1911-12 was another kind of turning-point. Before that, Liang Ch'i-ch'ao had been much impressed by biography in the West and had written a new kind of biography about his teacher K'ang Yu-wei. By 1912, a similar new biography was being written by two Westerners, the first of many to come: this was James Cantlie and C. Sheridan Jones, *Sun Yat-sen and the Awakening of China*. It had been preceded by Sun Yat-sen's own autobiographical account of being 'kidnapped' in London which was published in 1897, and his 'remiscences' which appeared in *The Strand Magazine* in London in March 1912.<sup>25</sup> What was important was that Sun Yat-sen was seen as the 'rebel-reformer' *par excellence* and he opened the way for a better appreciation of such men in Chinese history. For one thing, he acknowledged the inspiration of Hung Hsiu-ch'uan and the Taiping Rebellion. At the same time, he was socially 'respectable', neither upper class nor lower class, but a man who moved freely among a newly emerging class of businessmen and student-intellectuals as well as among respectable foreigners, Europeans, Americans and Japanese.

Thus came, it would appear, a new freedom for biography. There seemed to be nothing to prevent a new genre from appearing which opened windows on personality and individuality 'warts and all'. In particular, leading political and literary figures began to bare themselves in autobiographical accounts or prepared their own *nien-p'u* biographies: notably Sung Chiao-jen (1882-1913), Kuo Mo-jo (b. 1892), Hu Han-min (1879-1936), K'ang Yu-wei, Chang Ping-lin (1868-1936) and Hu Shih.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the most remarkable was the autobiography of a young revisionist historian, Ku Chieh-kang (b. 1893) who was a student of the westernized Hu Shih. He wrote a moving personal account of how he came to attempt to re-write ancient Chinese history and this was promptly translated by Arthur Hummel into English in 1931,<sup>27</sup> three years before the project on *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* which Hummel then edited and Hu Shih then introduced.

The ferment in the 1920s and 1930s of the individual freed from traditional society and free to mould a new society is now well known, and indeed several

<sup>24</sup> J. R. Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China*, Cambridge, Mass. 1959, pp. 181-4; Philip C. Huang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Modern Chinese Liberalism*, Seattle and London 1972, pp. 131-2.

<sup>25</sup> Sun Yat-sen, *Kidnapped in London*, Bristol 1897; 'My Remiscences', *The Strand Magazine*, March 1912, pp. 301-7.

<sup>26</sup> Sung, *Wo chih Li-shih* (My History), Taipei reprint 1962; Kuo, *Ch'uang-tsoo Shih-nien* (Ten years of Creation), Shanghai reprint, 1956; Hu, *Tzu-chuan* (Autobiography) in *Ko-ming Wen-hsien*, Vol. III, Taipei 1958, pp. 373-442; K'ang, *K'ang Nan-hai Tzu-pien Nien-p'u* (A Self-compiled Chronological Biography), Shanghai reprint, in *Wu-hsü Pien-fa* (Hundred Days' Reform), Vol. III; Chang, *T'ai-yen Hsien-sheng Tzu-ting Nien-p'u* (A Self-established Chronological Biography), Hongkong reprint, 1965; Hu, *Ssu-shih Tzu-shu* (Self-account at Forty), Taipei reprint, 1959.

<sup>27</sup> Preface to *Ku-shih Pien* (Critiques of Ancient History), Vol. I, Peiping 1926; tr. by A. Hummel, *The Autobiography of a Chinese Historian*, Leiden 1931.

attempts were made during this period to write a new kind of biography. But there remained a major difficulty which I hinted at at the beginning of this lecture. This was the tradition of subordinating biography to history. Thus the fact that there was also new enthusiasm for rewriting history and re-evaluating historical figures meant that biography could barely get off the ground. For example, the perception of 'rebel-reformer' as a type was extended to sympathetic reconsiderations of rebellions and political movements which sought to transform Chinese society, and even more so, extended to patriots, precursors of nationalists and the saviours of China from foreign domination. Attention was rarely focused on the individuality of the subject of biography. Instead, again and again, the spotlight was on the heroic virtues and qualities of men as leaders and the emphasis quickly shifted to movements, the reforms and rebellions which ultimately strengthened China or prepared the ground for revolution.

There have been many reasons given for this failure to produce great biography. It has been pointed out that the Chinese had a strong collective tradition and the place of the individual was a firmly restricted one. It is well known that the individual traditionally sought his freedom in art and poetry and in certain types of Buddhism and Taoism and the eremitism which they sanctioned. And anyone who has looked closely at the biographical tradition would agree that it emphasized a man's public life and writings, and was content with a man's career and actions and such ideas as have been preserved in his published essays, memorials and poetry. There was precious little else. But one point needs greater emphasis. And that is, the new biographical efforts have centred far less on the life of the individual than on historical judgements because this has always been the most distinctive feature of the Chinese biography. As Hu Shih put it, history in the form of biographies is firmly in the Chinese tradition of historiography. I would like to go much further.

It is important to note that the first great collection of biographies appeared as part of the first great work of history, the *Shih Chi* of Ssu-ma Ch'ien (145-86 BC), completed at the beginning of the first century BC.<sup>28</sup> At the time, it was not merely a part of great history. It was, for its time, a collection of excellent biographies and, till this day, the collection remains surprisingly fresh and alive. And over the centuries, the separate biographies have been read not only as history but also as literature. But what is unmistakable is that these great biographical essays were presented as part of history and their very success ensured that future biographies would play a similar role in the writing of history. In short, the art of biography came to be dominated by historians and those men who hoped that their writings would contribute to the sources of history.

This is not to say that Chinese biographies were always written by historians.

<sup>28</sup> B. Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien, Grand Historian of China*, New York and London 1958. The first major translation was begun by E. Chavannes, *Les mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien*, 5 vols, Paris 1895-1905.

Sometimes it would have been better if this had been so. The great historians were capable of excellent biographies when they put their minds to it. The trouble was that the bulk of biography came to be written as 'social biography' (the term used by David Nivison) and written with some form of future history in mind, whether clan, local, regional or national history.<sup>29</sup> These were written mainly by filial sons, close friends, loyal followers and commissioned *literati* to commemorate, to eulogize, or to dutifully show respect to the dead. And the growing volume of such 'social biography' came to be the raw materials for later histories. The historians then concentrated on selecting and editing such 'social biographies' for their histories rather than on writing biographies on their own. The result was damage all round. The biographies became more formal and dull and the historians wrote less and less of the histories they compiled.

Interestingly enough, only in one area were the historians relatively free from the stultifying 'social biographies'. This was where the subjects were social outcasts, heretics, unsuccessful reformers and defeated rebels, all those who were unworthy of 'social biographies' and for whom a historian had to write independent biographies if he thought they were important enough to include in his history. For such men, the historian had to try his hand at biography.

It has often been observed that Chinese historiography was perhaps more concerned with the typical and the universal than with the unique and the particular. Certainly the tendency to group men according to what they had been and done had begun with Ssu-ma Ch'ien himself and the tradition has been unchallenged in most standard histories and biographical collections ever since. Yet the classic example of a biography of the failed rebel was Ssu-ma Ch'ien's brilliant essay on Hsiang Yü (232-02 BC), the rebel who brought down a dynasty but failed to found a new one of his own. The essay is too well known to go into here.<sup>30</sup> Suffice it to say that one of the best biographical accounts ever written in China was an integral part of a major historical work and that this at least was a most successful blend of the uniqueness of Hsiang Yü's personality with a sharp picture of the general conditions under which his type seemed doomed to fail.

Ssu-ma Ch'ien was able to achieve the same high standard of fine writing with several other biographies. But his achievement depended largely on the

<sup>29</sup> Nivison, 'Traditional Chinese biography', p. 457.

<sup>30</sup> 'The Basic Annals of Hsiang Yü', tr. by B. Watson in *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, 2 vols, Vol. I, New York and London, 1961, pp. 37-74. The distinction between Basic Annals (*pen-chi*) and Biographies (*lieh-chuan*) here has long been noted. Certainly Ssu-ma Ch'ien's decision to write of Hsiang Yü's life in the Basic Annals form gave him more scope than if he had merely written a Biography. For the origins and limitations of the *chuan* ('tradition'), see P. van der Loon, 'The ancient Chinese chronicles and the growth of historical ideas' in *Historians of China and Japan*, Beasley and Pulleyblank (eds), pp. 24-30. For an ingenious explanation of *lieh-chuan*, see P. Ryckmans, 'A new interpretation of the term *Lieh-chuan* as used in *Shih-chi*', *Papers on Far Eastern History*, No. 5, Canberra 1972, pp. 135-47.

relative freedom he enjoyed with a new and flexible form which he virtually invented. Much of his best writing was dramatic and fast-moving like an exciting story. When this was accompanied from time to time by general political and philosophical observations, as all his biographies were, the comments were integral to the subject—always relevant and mostly unobtrusive. At their best, several of his biographies were superior to the best of Plutarch's and were some of the best ever written in Chinese until very recent times.

Unfortunately for the art of biography, Ssu-ma Ch'ien's successes seem to have discouraged later historians from attempting to improve on the form and the presentation. The fact that biography had become part of great history doomed the art to remaining an adjunct of history. Although Ssu-ma Ch'ien himself had opened the way to a kind of biography that could be enjoyed as literature, he had placed his biographies in the frame of history and this seems to have narrowed the imagination and strangled the boldness needed to explore personality and individuality. In addition, the growing power of a new Confucian orthodoxy after Ssu-ma Ch'ien's death led to a greater emphasis on moral purpose and greater interest in dominant historical types. This shift in philosophical mood drew a sharper line between the lives of historical figures and the anecdotes and stories of perhaps the same men outside the historical context. Pan Ku (32-92) in the first century AD set an even more formal pattern for biography in his *Han Shu*.<sup>31</sup> This in turn influenced the eulogies, epitaphs, sacrificial odes and the so-called 'accounts of conduct' (*hsing chuang*) that formed the data for 'social biography'. These writings became in turn the basis of all biographies. And thus the symbiotic relationship between 'historical' and 'social' biographies persisted down to the twentieth century.

There was another development. I have already mentioned the biography of Hsiang Yü, the failed rebel. This inspired a considerable literature over the centuries—poetry, romance, drama, where the writers were free to let their imagination roam. It did not, however, lead to attempts to write another biography of the man.<sup>32</sup> The historian had spoken, as the saying goes: 'the coffin lid was nailed down and the final judgement had been made'. No other biography was possible or considered necessary. Thus the historian's word had great finality and indeed this was an intimidating role for the historian to play and it is no wonder that, for the biographies he selected, compiled and edited, such an authoritative role inhibited his art immeasurably.

All the same, Hsiang Yü's biography did remain a model for later historians who were forced to write the biography of rebels and other 'villains' for whom there were no eulogies or epitaphs and whose good name there were no family

<sup>31</sup> H. H. Dubs translated the Basic Annals section, *The History of the Former Han dynasty*, 3 vols, Baltimore 1938, 1944, 1955. Ryckmans '*Lieh-chuan in Shih-chi*', p. 142 notes Pan Ku's failure to appreciate Ssu-ma Ch'ien's grand design by reducing his life of Hsiang Yü from Basic Annals to Biography.

<sup>32</sup> Pan Ku's biography in *Han Shu* follows *Shih Chi* almost exactly and cannot be considered a new biography.

or followers left alive to defend. Indeed, it was one of the vital links which made it possible for good 'historical biography' to be written from time to time. Despite the increasing orthodoxy which cramped the style of Pan Ku, he did repeat the Hsiang Yü study with his long and brilliant study of Wang Mang (45 BC-AD 23), the usurper and reformer who nearly succeeded but was not in power for long enough to change the structure of Han Imperial Government.<sup>33</sup> Of course, as Wang Mang actually became emperor and was a Confucian scholar obsessed with ritual and administration, his life story was not nearly as exciting or as moving as that of Hsiang Yü. It was a measure of Pan Ku's writing skill that he was able to write memorably about a man who tried to change his world through a series of learned blueprints.

Similarly, in the next major historical work two centuries later, the *History of the Three Kingdoms* (*San-kuo chih*) by Ch'en Shou (233-97), the lack of official records for the two ultimately defeated kingdoms meant that the latter two kingdoms were presented through biographies which had to be carefully put together and largely written by the historian himself.<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly, there is much biographical art where the historian is forced to do a lot more work. Ch'en Shou wrote well and many of these biographies again became the materials for various literary forms, not least the famous *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* which has remained a major work of fiction down to the present day.

Of course, not all historians wrote well and not all their subjects, even their 'rebels and reformers', aroused the same amount of sympathy and interest. For the next six centuries until the tenth century, none of the historians seems to have been inspired by the right subjects for him to extend himself and write fine biographies. In the standard histories that have survived, perhaps only Yao Ssu-lien's (557-637) biography of the rebel Hou Ching (d. 552) in the *History of the Liang dynasty* (*Liang Shu*) approaches the standards of biography achieved by Ch'en Shou.<sup>35</sup> But Hou Ching was not a sympathetic figure and the historian was uninspired and the reader remains unmoved. This was indeed not a period of great history writing and the tradition had by this time so crystallized that the absence of good history appears also to mark the lack of good biography.

It has been pointed out that these same centuries saw the rise of Buddhism and organized Taoism and there was a new awareness of the place of the individual in Chinese society. Certainly one of the ideals for Buddhism and Taoism was to have the individual freed from the burdensome ties of family and clan and even from some of the obligations he owed to his emperor. But this did not lead far enough to change the conventions concerning how a man's life was written up after his death and the forms which biographies should take. On the contrary, the period was also one during which great families and new

<sup>33</sup> Dub, *Former Han Dynasty*, Vol. III, 1955.

<sup>34</sup> *Sans-kuo Chih*, punctuated edn, 5 vols, Peking 1973 (5th reprint), Vols 4 and 5, chuan 31-65; see translation of one of the best biographies, Rafé de Crespigny, *The Biography of Sun Chien*, Canberra 1966.

<sup>35</sup> *Liang Shu*, punctuated edn, 3 vols, Peking 1973, Vol. III, chuan 56, pp. 833-64.

feudal loyalties flourished and there grew even greater concern about a family's genealogy and the conventions of 'social biography'. Thus the apparent shift of emphasis to individual freedom was aborted by new aristocratic obsessions<sup>36</sup>—and the art of biography saw no real change.

One other development accentuated the difficulties of the historian-biographer. This was the development of the History Office under the T'ang Imperial Government from the seventh century.<sup>37</sup> While this meant more systematic collection of historical and biographical data and more careful examination of factual details, it also meant more standardization of the forms of historical writing and compilation and a more routine approach towards the writing of biography. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that, despite the glories of the T'ang empire and the dramatic events which produced some of the greatest literature (especially poetry) China had ever seen, the biographies in the first *History of the T'ang Dynasty* produced in the tenth century were stilted and difficult to read. There was, for example, no shortage of excellent biographical material on defeated rebels, but the biographies of the men involved in both the An Lu-shan (703-57) and the Huang Ch'ao (d. 884) rebellions cannot compare at all with the biographies done by Ssu-ma Ch'ien and Pan Ku a thousand years earlier.<sup>38</sup>

I have suggested that good biographies seem so dependent on good historians that it may be expected that when good history writing appears, good biography is not far behind. If this were so, the new era of historiography which started during the eleventh century should have provided a stimulus to good biography. To some extent, it almost did within the standard history framework. The biographies of the great rebels An Lu-shan and Huang Ch'ao, for example, in the *New History of the T'ang Dynasty*, were clearly superior as biographies to the earlier versions.<sup>39</sup> But there was no significant contribution to the art of biography. The better writer simply produced a better written biography. On the other hand, the new versions contained a strong didactic tone which is perhaps better suited to writing the lives of those one approves than of those one disapproves. Significantly, once the new version was established, there was no further interest in writing new biographies of these rebels until well into the twentieth century.

The historian's art, in short, had become something of an obstacle to that of the biographer, especially in the sense that, where the historian had failed to advance his art, there was no advance in the biographer's either. But what about the development of the *nien-p'u* (the so-called 'chronological or chronicle

<sup>36</sup> See essay on genealogy during the Six Dynasties (220-589) by Liu Fang, *Hsin T'ang Shu*, Po-na edn, chuan 199, 112-13a.

<sup>37</sup> Yang Lien-sheng, 'The Organisation of Chinese Official Historiography: principles and methods of the Standard Histories from the T'ang through the Ming dynasty' in *Historians of China and Japan*, Beasley and Pulleyblank (eds), pp. 44-59.

<sup>38</sup> *Chiu T'ang Shu*, Po-na edn, chuan 200A, 12-4a, and 200B, 4b-9a.

<sup>39</sup> *Hsin T'ang Shu*, chuan 225A, 12-5b, and 225B, 12-9a. See Howard Levy's translation, *Biography of Huang Ch'ao*, Berkeley 1961.

biography'), during the Sung dynasty, especially during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries<sup>40</sup> As in the chronicle, the subject's life was arranged by date—what he did and said, with quotations (sometimes long) from his public writings. Indeed this new form marks a greater consciousness about individuals and the details of their lives, and the independent work of 'chronological biography' remains a dominant form of Chinese biography down to the present. But what was the origin of this form? Its chronicle form closely followed the chronicle-type of history that was gaining favour at the time. The Basic Annals form used by Ssu-ma Ch'ien was used also to compile *Records of Action and Repose* (*Ch'i-chü chu*), *Diaries* (*Jih-li*) [of living emperors], *Veritable Records* (*Shih-lu*) and *National Histories* (*Kuo-shih*) [of their reigns after their death].<sup>41</sup> By the T'ang dynasty, these preliminary 'chronicles' were in standard use in the History Office. The form would reach its climax as great history in the chronicle form adopted by Ssu-ma Kuang (1019-87) when he compiled the famous *Mirror for Government* (*Tzu-chih T'ung-chien*).<sup>42</sup> Its extension thereafter outside of the Emperor's court to cover the lives of great individuals seems logical. It suggests, however, that once again it was the historians who determined the growth of this new form of 'chronicle biography'. Such a form would have two major limitations. It was too much like chronicle to ever make good biography; and it was confined even more to great and highly respected men and especially men who had written enough for their lives to be chronologically arranged. Thus, although some of the *nien-p'u* reached deeper into personal lives and thoughts through more extensive use of the subjects' own writings, it remained too confined by chronology to free the form from the historian's art and become fully independent of the historian's style.

From the point of view of defeated rebels and unsuccessful reformers, the new form added nothing. There were certainly no *nien-p'u* for them until the twentieth century. For such men, only in fiction could something new be said. And this fiction, whose roots lay in Buddhist and Taoist traditions, did begin to develop and attract an audience from the Sung dynasty on. This stimulated not merely the story-teller and dramatist who used in their plots many of the lives found in the standard histories but also the latent biographer and auto-biographer who at last found some of the freedom they needed to explore the individual and his personality.<sup>43</sup> For the rest, the rigid forms of 'social biography' could not be discarded or changed. Again, only when the historian was forced to write the biographies of the not so respectable was he practising something

<sup>40</sup> Howard, 'Modern Chinese Biographical Writing', pp. 467-8.

<sup>41</sup> Yang, 'Official Historiography', pp. 45 and 51; Wang Gungwu, 'The *Chiu Wu-tai Shih* and History-Writing during the Five Dynasties', *Asia Major*, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1957, pp. 1-22.

<sup>42</sup> E. G. Pulleyblank, 'Chinese Historical Criticism: Liu Chih-chi and Ssu-ma Kuang' in *Historians of China and Japan*, Beasley and Pulleyblank (eds), pp. 151-166.

<sup>43</sup> The best known use of historical figures who may be considered as 'rebels' may be found in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (14th century), tr. by C. H. Brewitt-Taylor, 2 vols, Rutland 1959; and in *All Men are Brothers* (15th century), tr. by Pearl S. Buck, 2 vols, New York 1957.



like the biographer's art. By the Ming dynasty, as more and more biographical collections came to be published and more and more formal eulogies and epitaphs were printed, there was, with possibly one exception, less and less of the individual for the historian to deal with.

The exception occurred towards the end of the sixteenth century, and may be set beside the rapid growth of fiction writing. Two contemporaries, both well known if not also notorious, provided a chance that the biography gap between fiction and history might close. They were Wang Shih-chen (1526-90) and Li Chih (1527-1602). Both were thought to have encouraged and sponsored popular fiction in their day and both made large biographical collections which have come down to us. Wang Shih-chen was brilliant but conventional; he was also a dabbler in many forms of writing and most of his biographies were collected very much in his role as historian and were formal and didactic.<sup>44</sup> Li Chih, on the other hand, was the dissenter, the eccentric, the unorthodox individualist as his modern biographers now call him, and one would not be surprised if he established a new kind of biography in his quest for the individual personality. But this did not happen. The form he used was surprisingly conventional in both his *Ts'ang Shu* and *Hsü Ts'ang Shu* (the latter a collection of Ming biographies which included the lives of many of his friends and contemporaries).<sup>45</sup> But, although he made no contribution to the form, the original and distinctive comments accompanying some of his biographies did reflect a desire to be freer so that he might do justice to the complex personalities of some of his subjects. This can be seen in his biography of Wang Shih-chen, who was one year his senior and who died twelve years before he did.<sup>46</sup> Apart from the fact that Li Chih included many anecdotes and personal touches about Wang Shih-chen, he made clear that he wanted to show the many-sidedness of Wang's personality. He emphasized that Wang was not merely a literary man but also a tough and skilful administrator; he not only defied the most powerful man in the empire in his youth, but continued to defy two other dictatorial prime ministers during his last years; he was not simply the successful high official but a man who was untroubled even when he was quite unappreciated for a long time; everybody knew him as a reckless young man but was unaware of his strict adherence to Confucian ideals of behaviour; also, everyone knew of his genius but not of the help he unstintingly gave to young and poverty-stricken *literati*.

However, Li Chih did not get much beyond this. He was, in any case, too unorthodox for his times and died by his own hand in an imperial prison. No

<sup>44</sup> Two notable collections of his biographical works are *Ming-ch'ing Chi-chi* (Records of Achievements of Famous Officials) in 4 chuan, Chi-lu Hui-pien edn, and *Chia-ching I-lai Nei-ko Shou-fu Chuan* (Biographies of the Grand Secretaries since the Chia-ching period, 1522-66) in 8 chuan, Chieh-yueh Shan-fang Hui-ch'ao edn. Also his biographical essays in *Yen-chou Shan-jen Hsü-kao* (Yen-chou Shan-jen Drafts, second series), Ming-jen Wen-chi Taipei reprint, Vols 7-8, chuan 76-79.

<sup>45</sup> *Hsü Ts'ang Shu* (1602) in 27 chuan, Peking 1959.

<sup>46</sup> *Hsü Ts'ang Shu*, pp. 512-4.

notable development in the writing of biography followed. On the contrary, by the time the standard *History of the Ming dynasty* was completed in 1739, Wang Shih-chen's biography was much briefer than Li Chih's version and again emphasized the traditional virtues.<sup>47</sup> Even more drastic was the place given to Li Chih himself. Not only was he unnamed in the list of contents, he was mentioned only in the biography of a high official (Keng Ting-hsiang, 1524-96) who had once befriended him but later disliked him intensely. The retreat from a freer style to the crushing conventionalism of the eighteenth century cannot be more sharply revealed than in the short note on this extraordinary man:

... Li Chih of Chin-chiang was once invited by [Keng] Ting-hsiang to Huang-an. Ting-hsiang gradually came to hate him and Chih also often criticised Ting-hsiang. The *literati* who were fond of Ch'an [Buddhism] often followed him. Chih was talented from youth. He was particularly skilful in debate and Ting-hsiang was no match for him. When he was magistrate at Yao-an, he once freed his hair, took off his official dress and sat on his official seat. He was then forced to resign. At Huang-an, he lectured daily and had women attend with the *literati*. He specially honoured Buddhism and slighted Confucius and Mencius. Later he travelled north to the T'ung Chou area. He was impeached by Chang Wen-ta, the supervising secretary, and arrested. He died in prison. [In contrast, Chang Wen-ta, as you might expect by now, was given a long and respectable biography in the standard history.]<sup>48</sup>

Li Chih was not the traditional Chinese reformer, although he did teach the need for change. Nor was he the traditional rebel who led armies to overthrow the existing dynasty. Rather, he was a bit of a rebel who hoped to discredit the system from within. Normally, the historian would be expected to write a biography for him as he would for the active reformers and dangerous rebels. Unfortunately, he was regarded as neither dangerous enough nor corrupt enough to deserve a formal biography. In sharp contrast to the few lines about Li Chih, there were full-length biographies of Li Tzu-Ch'eng (1605?-45) and Chang Hsien-chung (1605-47), the peasant rebels who, although ultimately unsuccessful, killed and burned their way across North China and brought the Ming dynasty down.<sup>49</sup> The historian in China, as elsewhere, was impressed by impact and numbers. By both of these tests, Li Chih did not pass. Merely to have extraordinary individualism was not enough. Indeed, Li Chih's failure to earn a biography for 300 years after the end of the Ming dynasty is a striking illustration of what happens to biography when it is dominated by historians. The fascinating story of this man had to wait until 1916 for another short biography and until 1934 for the first *nien-p'u* ('chronological biography')—and that by Suzuki Torao, a Japanese. Two other full-length biographies

<sup>47</sup> *Ming Shih* Po-na edn, chuan 287, 17a-20b.

<sup>48</sup> *Ming Shih*, chuan 221, 7a; Chang's biography in chuan 241, 3b-7a.

<sup>49</sup> *Ming Shih*, chuan 309, biography of Li, 2b-24b; biography of Chang, 24b-33a. See J. B. Parsons, *The Peasant Rebellions of the Late Ming dynasty*, Tucson 1970.

appeared in 1937, one in Chinese by Jung Shao-tsu and the other in German by the sinologist Otto Franke.<sup>60</sup>

The fact that Li Chih had to wait until the twentieth century for the biography he deserved is a good point for us to draw the threads together. Clearly Chinese biography has been a victim of historians. The tradition that lives are of interest only when they contribute to the unfolding of history has done the art of biography no good. Of course, the traditional historians might disclaim responsibility by either blaming the philosophers for giving so little weight to the unique and the singular, or the political system for insisting on orthodoxy and insisting that historians play their part in transmitting that orthodoxy. They might even argue that the historians had not inhibited the biographers; on the contrary, they had made biography indispensable to history. And if that had turned potential biographers into historians or actually made biographers unnecessary, it was hardly their fault.

But what of the present? Who are the biographers? What is the state of biography? The influence of Western biography has apparently been great: I have already mentioned the inspiration of the life of Cromwell, Western biographies of Sun Yat-sen, the flood of autobiography and the Sino-Western co-operative efforts to re-write the biographies of the last thousand years. One should also mention the numerous translations of Western biographies, notably of Bismarck, Napoleon and Hitler; of Tolstoy, Gandhi, Washington, and Woodrow Wilson; of Marx and Lenin; of Henry Ford. There have also been fresh biographical studies of great Chinese philosophers and poets and some reconsideration of rebel-reformers; and the nationalism of the 1930s and 1940s stimulated a large number of biographies of great national heroes.<sup>61</sup> But again and again, one notes that there is little concern with the man and his individuality, nor, for that matter, with the genre and the art of biography. Where the

<sup>60</sup> Both the biographical essay by Wu Yü in 1916 and that by Huang Yun-mei in 1932 were short. Suzuki Torao's *nien-p'u* was 'Ritakugo Nempu', *Shinagaku*, Vol. VII, No. 2, pp. 139-97 and No. 3, pp. 299-347. It was translated into Chinese by Chu Wei-chih in *Fu-chien Wen-hua*, Vol. No. 18, 1935.

Jung's biography is *Li Cho-wu P'ing-chuan* (Critical Biography), Shanghai 1937; O.Franke's is 'Li Tschi: ein Beitrage zur Geschichte der Chinesischen Geisteskampfe im 16. Jahrhundert', *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, No. 10, 1937 (reviewed by Feng Chün-p'ei in *T'u-shu chi-k'an*, new series, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1940, pp. 59-61). The latest study of Li Chih, 'the arch-individualist', may be found in Wm. T. de Bary, 'Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought' in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, Wm. T. de Bary (ed.), New York and London 1970, pp. 188-222.

<sup>61</sup> Howard, 'Modern Biographical Writing', pp. 467-70.

A representative example of the heroic biography is the three-series *Biographies of Great Men*, first published in 1943 and largely reprinted in Taiwan in the early 1950s with a preface by Yin Wei-lien: the first of great emperors, but including Confucius and Sun Yat-sen; the second of brave and adventurous commoners, including the reformer Wang An-shih and the rebel Hung Hsiu-ch'uan and two martyrs; the third of thinkers and scholars.

biographies have not been integral to the mainstream of history, they have been the handmaidens to the history of ideas and the history of literature. Only one self-conscious effort to write biography focusing on the individual came near to success. This was the study of Chang Chü-cheng (1525-82) by Chu Tung-jun completed in 1945.<sup>52</sup> Chu had read Boswell in the 1920s and was impressed by Morley's *Life of Gladstone* and Monypenny's *Life of Disraeli*. Most of all he saw the force of Lytton Strachey's *Queen Victoria* and *Eminent Victorians* and, although he recognized the limitations of Strachey's approach, was inspired to write a new kind of biography. He tried hard to avoid seeing Chang as a master-politician comparable to Bismarck and Cavour (as his predecessors were wont to do)—that is, he tried to focus on Chang the individual rather than on Chang as the greatest of his type in China. Nevertheless, what he achieved is still primarily revisionist history with some vivid accounts of court politics in the mid-sixteenth century. And, most of all, the book provides the clearest possible narrative of a man's public acts.

The position is hopefully not so difficult with modern figures. For example, with Sun Yat-sen the rebel turned 'Father of the Nation', there are, in addition to his complete works (including his surviving political correspondence), hundreds of published memoirs or reminiscences by his colleagues, friends and followers, even rivals and opponents and foreign critics. The Kuomintang and National Archives in Taiwan have preserved some of his manuscript papers and private letters and records of interviews about the rebel-reformer's personality. Although no great biography has yet been written of him, the attempts have long begun and the time will surely come when a great work will appear.<sup>53</sup> Similarly also with the lives of his successors as leaders of China: Chiang Kai-shek (b. 1887) and Mao Tse-tung (b. 1893). There should be no shortage of public and private documentation, no shortage of men competent and willing to disclose their experiences with the two men during the ups and downs of their lives and careers. Already there has been a beginning in Mao Ssu-ch'eng's large study of the young Chiang Kai-shek and Tung Hsien-kuang's early biography.<sup>54</sup> With Mao Tse-tung, materials concerning his personal life have

<sup>52</sup> Chu, *Chang Chü-cheng* (see note 1). This was the second attempt at a modern biography of Chang, the first being by Ch'en I-lin in 1934. There was also a modern *nien-p'u* by Yang To published in 1938. Both these were produced at a time when there was intense interest in Chang as a great politician.

<sup>53</sup> Since 1949, there have been innumerable biographical essays and several full-length lives of Sun published in Taiwan and a few shorter works in China. While Lo Chia-lun's *nien-p'u* of Sun is scholarly and Ch'en Chien-fu's and Fu Ch'i-hsueh's are conscientious, the urge to embalm the great leader is still too strong. Outside of China, Paul Linebarger's *Sun Yat-sen and the Chinese Republic*, New York 1925 and Lyon Sharman's *Sun Yat-sen: His life and its meaning*, New York 1934 were the best of a dozen or so biographies. It was not until 1968 that Harold Schiffin's fine study appeared, *Sun Yat-sen and the Origins of the Chinese Revolution*, Berkeley 1968, but his work stops at 1905.

<sup>54</sup> Mao Ssu-ch'eng, *Min-kuo Shih-wu Nien i-ch'ien chih Chiang Chieh-shih Hsien-sheng* (Mr Chiang Kai-shek before 1926), first published 1936, Hong Kong 1965 (one-volume edition); and Hollington K. Tong (Tung Hsien-kuang), *Chiang Kai-shek: soldier and*

been difficult to come by. Edgar Snow's introduction to his early life has been extended by Emi Hsiao, Li Jui and Siao Yu, but much is still unknown.<sup>55</sup> Recently, there have been at least three significant biographical studies outside China by Jerome Chen, Stuart Schram and Han Suyin which clearly indicate what more is possible in time to come.<sup>56</sup> And perhaps even more encouraging for the art of biography has been the spate of reminiscences or biographies about the great literary figure of the century, Lu Hsün (1881-1936). Lu Hsün was no political leader, but an intrepid rebel-reformer who died under a cloud. It surely will not be long before a great biography of him appears.<sup>57</sup> He has, of course, been blessed by having a great admirer in Mao Tse-tung himself, who sees Lu Hsün as the personification of the spirit of rebellion and model rebel of the future. Whether this wish to paint him as a model will inhibit the appearance of the great biography or not is yet to be seen.

But there is still the hidden threat of the historiographical tradition. Perhaps the most disappointing development, and a portent of the future, has been the lack of a good biography of Hung Hsiu-ch'uan, the Taiping leader. As he is the first of the modern-type rebels who inspired both Sun Yat-sen and Mao Tse-tung, and someone who has been closely studied now for half a century,

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*statesman*, 2 vols, Shanghai 1937. There have been several official biographies published in Chinese and a number of popular biographies in Western languages. But the only serious attempt to penetrate the crust of formal eulogy and Chiang's own reticence is a recent study, Pichon P. Y. Loh, *The Early Chiang Kai-shek: a study of his personality and politics, 1887-1924*, New York and London 1971. Chiang's own reticence can be seen in his autobiographical and self-justificatory *Soviet Russia in China: a Summing-up at Seventy*, London 1957.

<sup>55</sup> Edgar Snow's record of what may be described as Mao's own 'autobiographical notes' has not been surpassed; *Red Star over China*, London 1937. The other three efforts are mentioned here in order to emphasize what difficulties lie ahead for the biographer: Emi Hsiao (San)'s *Mao Tse-tung, his childhood and youth*, Bombay 1953 is pure eulogy; Li Jui's *Mao Tse-tung T'ung-chih Ch'u-ch'i Ko-ming Huo-tung* (The Early Revolutionary Activities of Comrade Mao Tse-tung), Peking 1957, is more informative but no less fulsome; whereas Siao Yu's *Mao Tse-tung and I were Beggars*, London 1961, is clearly hostile.

<sup>56</sup> J. Chen, *Mao and the Chinese Revolution*, London 1965; S. Schram, *Mao Tse-tung*, Harmondsworth 1967; Han Suyin, *The Morning Deluge, Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Revolution, 1893-1953*, London 1972. Despite the fact that Han Suyin stops at 1953 in her first of two volumes, she uses the latest official interpretations about Liu Shao-ch'i and Lin Piao to explain several incidents in Mao's life. The cultural Revolution of 1966-9 has brought forth much new material about Mao's personality; some of these have already been used impressionistically in E. E. Rice, *Mao's Way*. Berkeley 1972 and S. Karnow, *Mao and China: From Revolution to Revolution*, New York 1972. Given more time and careful sifting, these materials should illuminate the life of Mao in ways not thought possible before.

<sup>57</sup> The literature on Lu Hsün is vast. His own writings, including his own letters and diaries, provide rich sources for biography. But a really fine biography has yet to appear. The nearest to a successful one is Ts'ao Chü-jen's *Lu Hsün P'ing-chuan* (Lu Hsün: a Critical Biography), Hong Kong 1956, but even this reads in part more like reminiscences than biography. For an orthodox account of his life, see Huang Sung-k'ang, *Lu Hsün and the New Culture Movement of Modern China*, Amsterdam 1957.

one would have thought that he was ideally placed as the subject of a full-scale biography. But this is not to be. Imagine the dismay when Lo Er-kang brought out his great study of the Rebellion and had Hung Hsiu-ch'uan framed in the traditional Basic-Annals ('Chronicle') form like a traditional emperor. Imagine the surprise when this was accepted and published by the revolutionary government of the People's Republic of China.<sup>58</sup> Equally disappointing have been the efforts in Taiwan to enhance the art of biography. For more than ten years, the Biographical Literature Association has brought out hundreds of articles in its monthly journal and dozens of books in its several series.<sup>59</sup> But the contribution to biography has been very thin. The vast bulk of what has been published seems destined to be material for future history. Of all the hundreds of contributors only one man has come close to producing memorable biography. This is Chang Chün-ku, whose biographies of two controversial figures, Tu Yueh-shen (1888-1951) and Wu P'ei-fu (1874-1939), can be enjoyed to some extent without reference to their contribution to history.<sup>60</sup> For the rest, the tradition of 'social biography' is still far too strong: the tradition to commemorate, to eulogize or dutifully to show respect to the dead. As for rebel-reformers there seems to be no place for them at all.

Thus the new biography in both China and Taiwan is still unestablished. With the one, the present emphasis is upon re-assessing historical figures to provide revolutionary models for the future. With the other, the overwhelming concern is still with 'social biography' and the historical place of the respectable dead. In both, the future biography seems to centre on the type, ranging from the rebel-reformer to the successful conformer. In line with the tradition of the historian-biographer, there is still no conviction that the unique is not somehow frivolous. There is no sign that the lives of men can be divorced from history. For those of us writing outside, such conditions are daunting. For myself, I still hope to write the biographies of Tan Kah-kee and Ch'en Po-ta. But I will be very much in the grand tradition if the historian in me leads me to solemn studies of the rebel-reformer as a type.

<sup>58</sup> Lo Er-kang, *T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo Shih-kao* (A Draft History of the T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo), Peking 1955. A new brief biography was attempted by Shu Shih-ch'eng and this was also published in 1955, but this was so much criticized that no other attempt has since been made.

<sup>59</sup> *Chuan-chi Wen-hsueh* (Biographical Literature) first appeared in 1962. Its two main series of books consist of some thirty titles in one and fifty-eight in the other.

<sup>60</sup> *Tu Yueh-sheng Chuan*, 4 vols, Taipei 1967-9; *Wu P'ei-fu Chuan*, 2 vols, Taipei 1968. Chang has continued to produce biographies: his more recent study, however, of the first president of the Republic of China (*Yuan Shih-k'ai Chuan*, 2 vols, Taipei 1970), is less successful.