A GREED FOR HISTORY



William Robert Reilly
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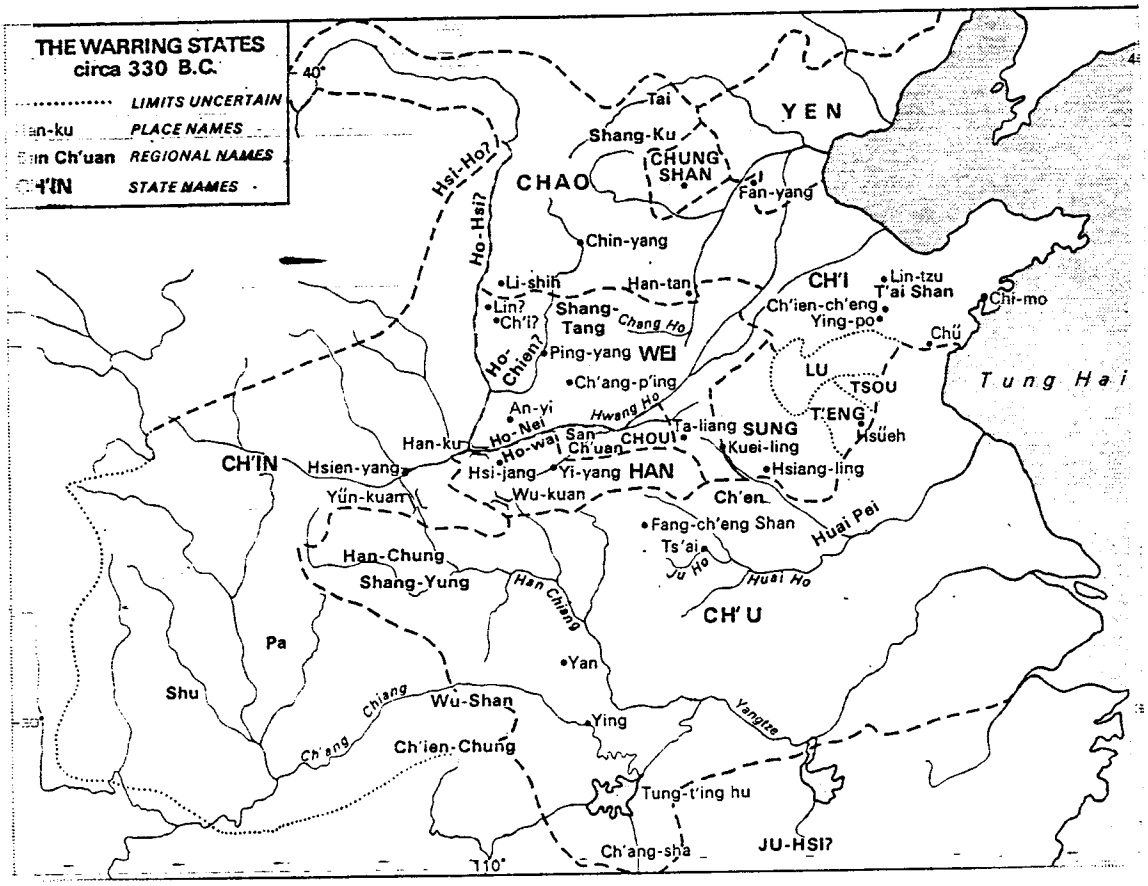

"Open thy mind to what I now unfold,

and give it inward keeping.

Knowledge comes of learning well retained ..."

--Dante

Preface

As the paper developed into its final form, I found my original title "What's in a word?" to be obtuse and inadequate. In my quest for a new title I am indebted to both Wade Dickinson and Kevin Starr. Kevin, last Tuesday in his newspaper article, stated that, "... Every group needs its history...."

My paper is representative of such a group. For over 4,200 years they have revered their past and its history. Two thousand two hundred two years ago an event occurred that has denied to them and all mankind a significant portion of their past history. The drive that they have exhibited in their endeavors to restore what was lost can best be described (borrowing a word from Wade's latest Chit Chat Essay) as bordering on "greed." I have entitled my paper, therefore, "A Greed for History."

Two thousand two hundred two years ago, i.e. 221 B.C., five years after Hannibal had crossed the alps, out of a province in a land that the Roman's called Seres (i.e. "silk" in Latin) rose a ruler who for the first time unified the entire land. He proclaimed himself to be the country's first sovereign emperor. And hence, called himself "Ch'in Shih Huang Ti" (Ch'in after the name of his province, Shih = First, Huang = Sovereign, and, Ti = Emperor)[1]. To this day the country he unified carries his name. We call it China. In the exercise of his power he perpetrated an act from which mankind has never fully recovered. To grasp the magnitude of this dastardly deed we need to go back to the era of the Golden Age.

In the Golden Age, which was a very long time ago, about 1,000 B.C., legend has it a Dragon-Horse came out of the Yellow River. He carried on his back curious symbols. The first emperor of China, Fu Hsi, stood on the bank. A marvelous thing happened, legend says. The Dragon-Horse revealed the symbols on his back to Fu Hsi, and the first emperor copied them. Thus the mystical characters were acquired, with which all of China's history has come to be recorded.

At first, the Chinese used them to inscribe questions on pieces of tortoise shell or bone. Their purpose was to

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[1]There are two Romanizations of the Chinese language: Yale and Wade-Giles. The latter is used throughout this paper. It will be found that even within the Wade-Giles different writers modify the spelling of names.

consult the ancient spirits by carving the question on the shell, then reducing the shell's thickness and applying a heated rod to the thinnest part. The answer was interpreted from the pattern of the cracks. As to how they used the answers, one ruler stated:

> When you have doubts about any great matter, consult with your own mind; consult with your ministers and officers; consult with the tortoise shell. If you, the shell, the ministers and officers, and the common people all agree about a course, this is what is called a great concord; the result will be the welfare of your person and the good fortune of your descendants. If you and the shell agree, while the ministers, officers, and the common people oppose, internal operations may be fortunate, but external undertakings will be unlucky. When the shell is opposed to the views of of all of you, there will be good fortune in being still; active operations will be unlucky.

For the next 1,700 years they recorded their history, governments, laws, concepts, philosophies, and poetry with these characters on wooden plates and bamboo strips. Paper wasn't invented until 112 A.D. During all this time, the ideograms were written with a sort of wooden pen (called stylus) with a reservoir holding the writing fluid (made from solid India ink since 2,600 B.C.) with a wick regulating the flow of the ink. Later, a bamboo pen was introduced, and finally, in 221 B.C. the camel hair brush was invented. Not only did they inscribe their wooden plates and bamboo strips with these ideograms, but they engraved their bronze vessels in use at that time with them, and carved them on stone and rock pieces that they placed in their locations of reverence and worship (e.g. certain mountain tops and shrines).

The Chinese approach to writing is different from ours. We of the western world view a word as but a selection of letters of our alphabet arranged to produce a sound. The letters C-H-I-N-A by themselves and grouped together tell us nothing more than how to pronounce the word "China." For its meaning we would need seek a dictionary to learn that the word means "a country in Asia." If, however, we were Asian and saw the Chinese script for the word "China," we would see two characters  and recognize that they meant "Central Nation" or "Middle Nation" (around which all other nations of the world are subservient). How we pronounced that word would depend on what dialect of Chinese we spoke (there are many) or if we were Japanese, Korean, or Annamese. The latter three Asian groups adopted the Chinese ideograms for their own written language between 600 A.D. and 900 A.D. The characters that we saw would give us no hint as to how to pronounce the word since they describe ideas with pictures, not phonetic pronunciation. The first character  (pronounced "Chung" in Mandarin) represents a square target pierced in the middle by an arrow, hence the concept "central" or "middle." The second character  (pronounced "Kuo" in Mandarin) is comprised of four pictures: representing land (which is flat); representing a weapon called the halberd that they used in defending themselves;  depicting the castle of the baron[1];  defining the

[1]There are some who say it is a mouth and therefore represents command and authority.

boundary of the land; hence these four pictures combine to depict the concept of country or nation.

We are most fortunate that the Chinese never changed their concept of using pictures to represent words. For, now, we can read what they wrote, even though no one knows how they pronounced the words at that time.

Confucius used these ideograms when in about 500 B.C. he recorded on wood plates all the important historical documents of China that he could assemble. He arranged these documents in 100 chapters and called them Shu-King (i.e. ancient writings). One of these chapters, which has come to be known to us as the "Mandate from Heaven," has had a significant impact on Chinese governing ever since. It was written originally after the Chou Emperor had defeated the armies of the Yin state (Chou dynasty lasted for 800 years, 1,122 B.C. - 230 B.C.). He sought for a philosophical principle with which to justify his action and assist him in persuading the Yin people to cooperate with the new regime. He found such a justification in the concept of the mandate of Heaven, which teaches that the would-be founders of a new dynasty, by their just and virtuous actions, receive from Heaven (which they viewed as a vague, helf-personalized spiritual power which rules the universe), a command to set up the new rule. So long as the successive leaders of the new dynasty continue to follow the virtuous course which first entitled their predecessors to the mandate, Heaven

will continue to sanction their power. But if subsequent rulers turn their backs upon virtue and sink into negligence and evil, Heaven will withdraw its blessing and bestow it instead upon another family or group of leaders, who will rise up, depose the erring dynasty, and establish a new reign of virtue in its place. The fact that they succeed in doing this is in itself necessary proof that Heaven has withdrawn its mandate from the old dynasty and conferred it upon the new. In other words, it is virtue alone that entitles a ruler to rule, and when he sets aside virtue he sets aside the right to call himself a sovereign. Hence, Heaven confers upon a dynasty the throne only for as long as the dynasty proves worthy of it. To bolster this assertion, a favorite argument of Chinese thinkers always has been to look back at the history of a dynasty, which they call their "proof of history" concept.

Periodically, throughout Chinese history rulers attempted to defy the Mandate of Heaven, but none so much as the first sovereign emperor Ch'in Shih Huang Ti. Born in the western province of Ch'in in 259 B.C., he was the son of Chuang-Hsiang, who at that time was the ruler of the Ch'in province. At that time China for 800 years had been under the Chou dynasty rule, and while his father as a young man had been held hostage in the Chou court he took a concubine[1] who gave

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[1]Another version is that his father was Lu Pu-Wei, the lady concubine later married I Jen (Chuang-Hsiang), and he declared the son his.

birth to Cheng (his personal name). Cheng remained in the Chou court as a hostage while his father ruled Ch'in, as was the custom of the Chou dynasty to insure fidelity in their feudal system. In 247 B.C. Chuang-Hsiang died, and Cheng became the new ruler of the Ch'in province, at the age of 13. For the next 26 years he did nothing but engage in warfare and violence with other feudal states. And in 221 B.C. he found that he had defeated the other 270 princes of China in his battles and became for the first time the master of all of China. He proclaimed himself to be the first sovereign emperor (Ch'in Shih Huang Ti). Some scholars attribute his winning warfare techniques to rumors that he was the first to assemble a cavalry in China's history, patterning them after the Tartars. Prior to then, horses had never been used in such a manner.

As one might expect, he was not without his enemies. He held his empire together by force and violence and some ingenuity also. Prior to his rule, China, for 800 years, had been a loose feudal coalition under the Chou rule. The pattern for every past ruler had been to reward his family and followers by making them princes and rulers of the vanquished. Instead, in 221 B.C. Ch'in Shih Huang Ti abolished feudalism. He divided the feudal states (270) into 36 administrative districts and named a governor, army commander and inspector to each of them. None of his sons were elevated to be either ruler or royalty. His rationale was that setting his family or generals up as princes would also require

large armies to maintain their positions and that peace would be impossible to maintain.

His rule was harsh, his punishments severe, and his demands of labor and taxes on the people excessive. As he conquered each of the 270 princes he fought, he had their palaces destroyed and exact copies of them built at his capital city, Hsien-Yang. They finally stretched for 20 miles: he conscripted 700,000 to build his tomb (a project he immediately started in 247 B.C.). He totally destroyed the autonomy of the provinces by, as he abolished feudalism, removing all the rich and powerful to his capital. This resulted in 120,000 persons being relocated to there. Along with them he had identified 70 scholars to be "scholars of wide learning" and assembled them at Hsien-Yang and created for them the palace library. He had all the weapons of those who had warred against him brought to the capital and melted down. Bells, bell supports and 12 great metal figures of man were made from them.

He introduced a uniform copper coinage to replace cowry; he unified the ideogram script, creating what is referred to as "the small seal"; he instituted a uniform measure of weights and axle size.[1]

As many rulers have been, he was very superstitious and relied upon his court soothsayers. One stated[2] that he

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[1]Also, named common people "Black-heads."

[2]The prophesy is attributed to Lu Sheng; Hu = Hsuing-Hu = Tartars, or Huns.

should be fearful of "Hu" who would be responsible for destroying his dynasty. Since at that time that was how they referred to the Tartars of the north, he ordered a Great Wall to be constructed to insure the perpetuity of his dynasty. This wall has come to be known to us as the Great Wall of China.

By 213 B.C. his subjects had become so resentful for being exploited in his building projects (tomb, 270 palaces, and the Great Wall of China) that unrest was throughout his empire. He called together his "70 scholars of wide learning," ministers and his prime minister, Li Ssu, at a banquet in his palace to discuss the problem. Among the eulogies presented, then, one was to have a profound effect upon history. Li Ssu, prime minister, is quoted as having said[1]:

> ... of old, the empire was scattered and in confusion, and there was none able to unite it into one. This was because the feudal lords all became active together, and in their discussions they harped on the past so as to injure the present, and made a display of empty words so as to confuse the truth. Men valued what they had themselves privately studied; thus casting into disrepute what their superiors had established.
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> At present Your Majesty possesses as unified empire, he has laid down the distinctions of right and wrong, and consolidated for himself a single position of power and eminence. Yet there are those who with their teachings mutually abet each other, and who teach others what is not according to the laws. When they hear orders promulgated, they criticize them in the light of their

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[1]Really a debate between Li Ssu and Chow Ch'ing opposing Shun-Yu-Yueh. It is interesting to find out that later era Confucian scholars disown Shun-Yu-Yueh as a true Confucian scholar. They contend his argument against feudalism is not Confucian!

own teachings. Within the court they mentally discredit them, and outside they publically criticize them on the streets. To cast disrepute on their ruler they regard as a thing worthy of fame: to accept different views they regard as high conduct; and they lead the people to create slander. If such conditions are not prohibited, the imperial power will decline above, and partisanships will form below. It is expedient that these be prohibited.[1, 2]

Your servant suggests that all books save the records of Ch'in be burned, that all persons in the empire save those who hold a function under the control of the bureau of "Scholars of wide learning" and who dare to store the Shih (works of poetry) or the Shu (works of history) or the discussions of the various philosphers should go to the administrative and military governors so that these books may be indiscriminately burned. Those who dare to discuss the Shih and the Shu among themselves should be executed and their bodies exposed on the market-place. Those who use the past to criticize the present should be put to death together with their relatives. Any official who sees or knows violations of these regulations without reporting them should be considered equally guilty.

Those who have not burned them (i.e. the books) within thirty days after the issuing of the order should be branded and sent to do four years of forced labor on the Great Wall.

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[1]Ch'in Shih was a legalist. He adopted the policy (of Han Fei Tzu) of "using the laws as teachings" and used Legalist ideas to impose a dictatorship over the Confucian ideology of the slave-owning class.

[2]Legalists taught: "If war can end war, then war is justified; if killing can stop killing, then killing is justified" ("Strategy" book of Lord Shang). Also, "Soldiers are used to suppress violence and eliminate harms" ("On Soldiers," Hsun Tzu).

Confucians, on the other hand, taught: "Those who are skillful in war should be given the most severe punishment" (Li Lou, Mencius).

N.B. Sun Pin's Art of War opposed "advocating humaneness and righteousness" as trumpeted by Confucians, and instead advocated "settlement by warfare"!

> All the books should be destroyed except those of medicine, agriculture, and devination. As for persons who wish to study the laws and ordinances, let them take the officials as their teachers.

An imperial decree was issued granting approval, and so it came to pass that the dastardly deed was perpetrated from which the world has never recovered. One thousand seven hundred years of written poetry, history, and philosophy was burned. There were three classes of literature that the burning was directed against: first, the collections of poetry and of historical speeches, known respectively as the Shih (Shih Chung, Book of Odes) and the Shu (Shu-King, Book of History, i.e. ancient writings); second, histories of other states beside Ch'in; and, third, the discussions of various philosophers, especially Confucius. The Shu-King was found to be especially distasteful since it contained the Mandate of Heaven and was constantly being invoked by the Confucians as a mirror for an ancient golden age of universal peace and prosperity, under the sage-kings who ruled not by force, but by virtue, and whose government, incidentally, was founded on feudalism.

The histories of the other feudal states were likewise detested, since Ch'in wished all future generations to believe that history had started with his dynasty. The writings of the philosophers were in displeasure since they invariably proposed their own precepts for life and government, which opposed the existing system and placed the unity

of the state at danger. Among the reasons cited by scholars for Ch'in Shih Huang Ti to perpetrate such a deed are three: (1) it fit his grand design of history, wherein he would be forever known as the first emperor, and all written history would start with him; (2) it would destroy the historical basis for the scholars of his country to refer to in their objections to how he governed; and (3) it would make knowledge a monopoly of his government.

How successful was his edict? Devastating.[1] All the known historical records of China were burned, save those in the royal palace's library (and they didn't last too long after that either). Four hundred sixty scholars who objected were buried alive (including 62 of the 70 "scholars of wide learning"). Even his own oldest son Fu Su was exiled to the Great Wall of China because he objected to the scholars' deaths.

Within three years Ch'in Shih Huang Ti died, and with suitable court intrigue was succeeded by a younger son, Hu Hai. Hu Hai had plotted with the court eunuch Chao Kao to have Fu Su killed when the emperor had died. Within three years the court eunuch became greedy and killed Hu Hai and had placed on the throne Fu Su's oldest son Tzu Ying. Chao Kao, recognizing a new rising warlord from Han as a threat, made Tzu Ying king, not emperor, and formed a liaison with Liu Pang to solidify his own position. Tzu Ying

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[1]For reasons not known, the edict was not rescinded until 191 B.C., 21 years later under the Han Dynasty.

as soon as he became king realized that he too could be killed by Chao Kao whenever his plans dictated and had the eunuch assassinated. He himself lasted only for a few months. Liu Pang went on to become the first Emperor (Kuo-Tsu) of the next dynasty, called the Han Dynasty, which lasted for the next 400 years, until 200 A.D. Unfortunately, the transition from the Ch'in Dynasty to the Han Dynasty was fierce and bloody. There was considerable infighting among the various war lords. In the course of such fighting the royal palace, its 270 adjacent palaces, and the palace library were burned to the ground.[2] It is said that the conflagration lasted three months before being extinguished.

Immediately the Han Dynasty did all that was feasible to search out what had escaped destruction,[1] and to have all the remaining scholars write down what they had committed to memory. Fortunately, most scholars were Confucian at that time, and as part of their beliefs had placed great faith in memorizing their texts. One old scholar, Fu Sheng, then ninety , was able to recite from memory what were thought to be 29 chapters of the 100 chapters of the Shu-King. (There were those who contended that he really had hidden all 100 chapters but when he went to retrieve them found only 29.) This was written down, and, for the next 113 years was the oldest preserved work.

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[1]The Emperor then was Wen-Ti.

[2]The greatest loss was the written history of each of the 270 feudal princes he conquered.

Then, in about 100 B.C. the twelfth degree descendant of Confucius, called K'ung An'Kuo, ripped down Confucius's house, which was then 400 years old. In so doing he discovered an original Shu-King consisting of 59 of the 100 chapters. History does not tell us how it got there nor who had hidden it. It was written in what were called "tadpole characters," and therefore before the Ch'in Dynasty.

When K'ung An'Kuo compared the text with that of Fu Sheng's 29 chapters he found that Fung Sheng's writings were accurate but because of faulty partitioning were really 34, not 29, chapters.

For the next 400 years these two original documents existed and scholars studied from them and wrote versions of them. Then, in 300 A.D. China experienced great political chaos, and they were lost. But once again a learned man, Mei Tse, 20 years later stepped forth in 320 A.D. and presented to the then emperor a copy of the Shu-King consisting of K'ung An'Kuo's 59-chapter version. It is this edition that has become for us the traditional text today.

For the next 400 years this text was copied and varied by scholars, to such an extent that finally in 744 A.D. Emperor Huan-Tsung of the T'ang Dynasty commanded a learned man, Wei Pao, to produce a cleansed version. This was done in 744 A.D. Between 744 A.D. and 1,400 A.D. both versions were available to scholars, but from 1,400 A.D. onward all the versions other whan Wei Pao seem to have disappeared.

As hard as the Chinese have struggled to restore their history, great portions are lost forever, especially history by Confucius and the 270 princes' history. Recently, in the 1970's a large number of bamboo slips (4,900 in all) were unearthed from the Han tombs (Emperor Wu) at Yin-Ch'ueh-shan in Lin-i Shantung[1]. A preliminary examination shows that they comprise a very large number of ancient books written before the Ch'in and Han dynasties[2]. The bamboo slips unearthed have two remarkable characteristics: most of them are works about military affiars, and while some are works by pre-Ch'in philosophers, there are no Confucian classics at all.

In conclusion, it is my contention that while many great writings have been lost forever, far from blotting

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[1]If it were not for Szuma Chien of the Han Dynasty (145 B.C.) we would know little about the Ch'in Dynasty. Through his monumental works of recording the Han history he invoked the Mandate of Heaven and described the Ch'in Dynasty and Ch'in Shih Huang Ti. It should be pointed out, though, that some scholars think that he favored the Ch'in dynasty history darkly to reconfirm the mandate for the Han Dynasty.

[2]Significant among the 1970's findings was Sun Pin's Art of War, which had been lost for over 1,700 years. Lost portions and differences in wordings from extant texts were discovered for: Sun Tzu's Art of War, Wei Liao Tzu, the Six Tactics, Mo Tzu, Kauan Tzu, and Yen Tzu. The only other time that pre-Ch'in works of any significance have been recorded as being unearthed was in 281 A.D. from a tomb in Honan, in the second year of the T'ai reign of Han (281 A.D.). And there, too, again no Confucian works were discovered. The two most significant then were The Bamboo Annuals and the Biography of King Mu.

out antiquity, Ch'in Shih Huang Ti has made the Chinese inordinately greedy for history. China has experienced the development of what one may call a cult of books, and a tremendous reinforcement of this interest, already strong, of historically-minded Chinese in their historical records. The net result has been to strengthen immeasurably the backward- rather than the forward-looking psychology of the Chinese people.

A Greed for History

CHINA = Chung Kuo (Mandarin) = Central Nation



Period	Duration	Dynasty	Ruler	Significant Individuals
2205 - 1766 B.C.	439 years	Hsia		
1766 - 1122 B.C.	644 years	Shang		
1122 - 230 B.C.	792 years	Chou		(Kung Fu Tzu) Confucius (500 B.C.)
230 - 206 B.C.	24 years	Ch'in	Ch'in Shih Huang Ti Hu Hai Tzu Ying	Fu Su Li Ssu Chao Kao
206 - 200 A.D.	394 years	Han	Liu Pang (247 - 195 B.C.) (Emperor Kao-tsu)	Szuma Chien (145) Fu Sheng K'ung An'Kuo
200 - 608 A.D.	--	various		Mei Tse (320) Wei Pao (744)

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1970 diggings - Yin-Ch'ueh-shan in Lin-i Shantung, China

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