

# Records Of The Grand Historian Qin Dynasty

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Records of the grand historian Qin dynasty provide an invaluable glimpse into one of China's most transformative eras. As a period marked by the unification of China under the first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, the dynasty's history is rich with significant events, cultural developments, and political reforms. These records, primarily documented by Sima Qian in his monumental work, the Records of the Grand Historian (史記, Shiji), serve as a cornerstone for understanding the early imperial history of China.

Introduction to the Records of the Grand Historian Qin Dynasty

The Records of the Grand Historian is an extensive historical text compiled by Sima Qian during the Han Dynasty. Although completed long after the Qin Dynasty's fall, it covers the history from legendary times up to the Han era, with significant emphasis on the Qin period. These records include biographies, annals, treatises, and chronological tables, offering a comprehensive account of political, military, economic, and cultural aspects of the Qin Dynasty.

Significance of Sima Qian's Recordings

Sima Qian's work remains the definitive historical record for the Qin Dynasty, capturing the complexity of its rise and fall. His meticulous method of collecting oral histories, official documents, and personal observations makes the Records an essential source for historians and scholars. Key contributions of the Records of the Grand Historian include:

- Detailed biographies of prominent Qin figures such as Qin Shi Huang, Li Si, and others.
- Descriptions of major military campaigns that unified China.
- Insights into the political reforms, legal systems, and economic policies of the Qin government.

Records of the Grand Historian: An In-Depth Analysis of the Qin Dynasty's Historical Documentation

The Records of the Grand Historian, known in Chinese as Shiji (史記), stands as one of the most influential and comprehensive historical texts in Chinese history. Compiled by Sima Qian during the Han Dynasty, this monumental work chronicles over two thousand years of Chinese history, including the rise and fall of dynasties, notable figures, and pivotal events. Among these, the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE)—the first imperial dynasty of China—occupies a critical segment. The records of the Qin Dynasty within the Shiji not only document the dynasty's achievements and failures but also serve as a lens through which subsequent generations interpret the birth of imperial China. This article explores the nature, significance, and scholarly value of these records, providing a detailed, analytical perspective on how they shape our understanding of one of China's most transformative eras.

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The Significance of the Shiji in Chinese Historiography

Origins and Composition

The Shiji was completed around 94 BCE by Sima Qian, a court historian and scholar of the Han Dynasty. Its significance lies

not only in its chronological scope—spanning from legendary times to the early Han period—but also in its methodological approach. Unlike earlier annals, chronicles, or genealogies, the *Shiji* employs a comprehensive structure, blending biographical sketches, chronological tables, and thematic essays. The work is divided into five sections:

- Annals (Benji): Chronological records of the reigns of emperors and kings.
- Biographies (Liezhuan): Profiles of notable figures, scholars, officials, and commoners.
- Treatises (Zhuan): Essays on various topics like rites, music, law, economics, and astronomy.
- Herodotesque Anecdotes and Traditions: Stories that provide cultural insights.
- Genealogies: Family lineages and clan histories.

Sima Qian's approach was groundbreaking because it aimed to provide a balanced, nuanced view of history, integrating moral judgments, cultural context, and political analysis.

**Methodology and Historical Perspective**

The *Shiji*'s methodology reflects an attempt to synthesize history with moral philosophy, emphasizing the importance of virtue, governance, and moral rectitude. Sima Qian often embedded moral evaluations within historical narratives, which influenced how subsequent dynasties understood and interpreted their past. Moreover, Sima Qian's candidness—sometimes risking political repercussions by criticizing rulers—marked a shift towards more honest historiography. His records on the Qin Dynasty, in particular, are notable for their detailed accounts of the dynasty's swift rise and brutal methods, which have shaped perceptions of Qin's legacy.

**The Qin Dynasty in the *Shiji*: A Summary of Key Records**

**The Rise of Qin: From Warring States to Empire**

The *Shiji* dedicates substantial sections to the events leading to Qin's unification of China. It details:

- The decline of the Zhou dynasty's central authority, leading to the Warring States period.
- The strategic and military innovations of Qin rulers, especially Qin Shi Huang (Ying Zheng).
- The reforms enacted by the Qin state, such as centralization of power, legalist policies, and military consolidation. Sima Qian emphasizes Qin's strategic brilliance and ruthlessness, portraying Ying Zheng as a figure both admired for his vision and condemned for his brutality.

**Records Of The Grand Historian Qin Dynasty 3 The Reign of Qin Shi Huang**

The records depict Qin Shi Huang as a transformative but controversial ruler:

- Legal Reforms: The implementation of Legalism as the state philosophy, emphasizing strict laws, centralized authority, and uniform standards.
- Unification Edicts: Standardization of weights, measures, currency, and writing, which facilitated economic and administrative integration.
- Infrastructure Projects: Construction of roads, canals, and the early segments of the Great Wall.
- Territorial Expansion: Military campaigns against the states of Chu, Zhao, Han, Wei, Yan, and Qi, resulting in a unified China. Sima Qian's narrative also notes the oppressive aspects of Qin policies—forced labor, heavy taxation, and suppression of dissent—that sowed seeds of widespread dissatisfaction.

**The Fall of the Qin**

The records portray Qin's downfall as a consequence of both internal and external factors:

- The harshness of Qin laws and policies led to widespread unrest.
- The death of Qin Shi Huang and subsequent succession crises destabilized the regime.
- Rebellions, notably led by figures like Liu Bang (later Emperor Gaozu of Han), culminated in the Qin's collapse after just fifteen years.

Sima Qian emphasizes that despite its achievements, Qin's oppressive rule and lack of benevolent governance contributed to

its rapid demise. --- Analytical Perspectives on the Qin Records Historical Accuracy and Bias While the *Shiji* is lauded for its comprehensive scope, scholars recognize that Sima Qian's accounts reflect certain biases, especially against Qin. His portrayal of Qin Shi Huang emphasizes both his achievements and his tyranny, often highlighting the dangers of authoritarian rule. This dual perspective influences modern interpretations, emphasizing the moral lessons embedded in the narratives. Some historians argue that Sima Qian's emphasis on morality and virtue sometimes color the historical facts, potentially exaggerating the oppressive aspects or downplaying the dynasty's innovations. Nonetheless, his meticulous cross-referencing of sources and inclusion of various perspectives lend credibility and depth to his work. Influence on Chinese Political Culture The records of the Qin Dynasty within the *Shiji* have had profound impacts on Chinese political thought: - The cautionary tales about tyranny and the importance of benevolent governance echo through subsequent dynasties. - The emphasis on centralized authority and legal standards influenced imperial governance models. - The narrative of Qin's rapid rise and fall has served as a historical lesson on the dangers of excessive legalism and Records Of The Grand Historian Qin Dynasty 4 authoritarianism. In modern times, these records continue to shape discussions on governance, law, and statecraft in China. Scholarly Debates and Interpretations Scholars have debated the reliability and interpretive frameworks of the Qin records: - Some view the *Shiji* as a moral critique disguised as history, emphasizing lessons over strict factual recounting. - Others appreciate its pioneering narrative techniques and comprehensive coverage, considering it a primary source for understanding early Chinese imperialism. Recent archaeological discoveries, such as the Terracotta Army and Qin-era artifacts, have enriched our understanding of the period and sometimes challenge or confirm the narratives in the *Shiji*. --- The Legacy of the Qin Records in Modern Historiography Reevaluation of Qin's Achievements and Failures Modern scholarship often reevaluates the Qin Dynasty's legacy through the lens of the *Shiji*. While traditional narratives emphasize tyranny and brutality, contemporary historians recognize Qin's innovations in statecraft, infrastructure, and standardization that laid the groundwork for subsequent Chinese empires. The records serve as a reminder that the Qin Dynasty's achievements were inseparable from its oppressive methods, prompting debates on the balance between authoritarian control and administrative efficiency. Influence on Later Historiographical Works The *Shiji* set the standard for Chinese historiography, inspiring later works such as the *Book of Han* and the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*. Its blend of moral commentary, detailed narrative, and critical analysis became a template for historical writing in East Asia. The Qin section, in particular, became a reference point for understanding the dynamics of unification, legalism, and imperial authority. Contemporary Reflections and Cultural Impact Today, the records of the Qin Dynasty continue to influence popular culture, literature, and political discourse. The image of Qin Shi Huang as a ruthless but visionary ruler appears in novels, films, and scholarly debates, symbolizing the complex interplay between power and morality. Moreover, the archaeological findings related to Qin's projects, such as the Terracotta Army, have made tangible the historical narratives preserved in the

Shiji, bridging the gap between ancient records and modern understanding. --- Records Of The Grand Historian Qin Dynasty 5 Conclusion: The Enduring Value of the Qin Records The Records of the Grand Historian, especially those concerning the Qin Dynasty, represent an invaluable resource for understanding China's transition from a fragmented collection of states to a unified empire. Sima Qian's meticulous and morally reflective approach offers insights beyond mere dates and events, highlighting the moral and political lessons embedded in history. While acknowledging potential biases and the limitations of ancient sources, modern scholars continue to rely on these records to interpret the complexities of Qin governance, military conquest, and societal transformation. Their enduring influence underscores the importance of comprehensive historical documentation—an achievement that has shaped not only Chinese historiography but also global understandings of empire-building, legalism, and statecraft. In essence, the Qin records within the Shiji serve as a mirror reflecting the ambitions, innovations, and contradictions of one of China's most pivotal dynasties—an enduring testament to the power of history to inform, educate, and caution future generations. Qin dynasty, grand historian, historical records, Shiji, Sima Qian, ancient China, Chinese historiography, Qin history, historical documentation, Chinese annals

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*Qian Sima Sima Qian Qian Sima Qian Sima Grant Hardy Li Shi Sima Guang Sima Qian Li Shi Thomas R. Martin Haraprasad Ray 池田雄一  
Qian Sima Li Shi Russell McLeod The Editorial Committee of Chinese Civilization: A Source Book, City University of Hong Kong On-cho Ng  
Henry J. Brun*

sima qian 145 90 bce was the first major chinese historian his shiji or records of the grand historian documents the history of china and its neighboring countries from the ancient past to his own time these three volumes cover the qin and han dynasties

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the following year qin unified all under heaven and the title of august emperor was immediately adopted the short lived qin dynasty unified china in 221 bc and created an imperial legacy that lasted until 1911 the extraordinary story of the first emperor founder of the dynasty is told in the historical records of sima qian the grand historiographer and the most famous chinese historian he describes the emperor s birth and the assassination attempt on his life as well as the political and often brutal events that led to the founding of the dynasty and its aftermath sima qian recounts the building of the great wall the burning of the books and the construction of the first emperor s magnificent tomb a tomb now world famous since the discovery of the terracotta warriors in 1974 sima qian s love of anecdote ensures that his history is never dull and raymond dawson s fluent translation captures his lively and vivid style chronicling recent archaeological developments and questioning sima qian s biases k e brashier s preface highlights the importance of the grand historiographer s account and dawson s translation in the twenty first century about the series for over 100 years oxford world s classics has made available the widest range of literature from around the globe each affordable volume reflects oxford s commitment to scholarship providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features including expert introductions by leading authorities helpful notes to clarify the text up to date bibliographies for further study and much more

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the historical records or shiji is a vast history of the chinese world from its beginnings up to the late second century bc its author the grand historiographer sima qian c 145 86 bc is the most famous chinese historian and a great writer whose work has powerfully influenced

chinese and other far eastern literatures the historical records is an immense and complex work this translation concentrates on the vital but short lived qin dynasty which unified china in 221 bc and created the vast empire that lasted until 1911 the introduction is aimed at bringing the history to a general audience offering a lucid examination of sima qian in the tradition of history writing and placing the qin dynasty in its wider historical context this accessible new translation by one of the foremost scholars of classical chinese is supplemented by an index map and clear notes

sima qian c 100 b c e was china s first historian he was known as grand astrologer at the court of emperor wu during the han dynasty and along with confucius and the first emperor of qin was one of the creators of imperial china his shiji published for columbia in a translation by burton watson as records of the grand historian not only became the model for the twenty six standard histories that the historians of each chinese dynasty wrote to legitimize the dynastic succession but also has been an enormously influential resource to historians literary scholars philosophers and many others seeking an understanding of early chinese history in worlds of bronze and bamboo grant hardy presents convincing evidence that the shiji is quite unlike such western counterparts as the histories of herodotus and thucydides for hardy argues sima qian s work seeks not only to represent but to influence the world in a manner based on confucian concepts of sageliness and the rectification of names although many scholars have sought close parallels between sima qian and the greek historians either criticizing sima s work as if western models of historical interpretation could serve as a template by which to read it or overemphasizing his objectivity to more closely align his text with these respectable greek models hardy boldly contends that the chinese historian never intended to produce a consistent closed interpretation of the past instead hardy argues the shiji is a microcosm in which sima qian sought to represent the open endedness and multivalence of the world around him revealing and reinforcing the natural order in mapping out this model of the world sima embodies the historian as sage rather than chronicler transcending mere accuracy in recording events such a historian seeks not to present an opinion about what happened in the past buttressed with rational arguments and pertinent evidence but to penetrate the outer details of an incident and discover the moral truths it embodies thus intuiting the moral significance of events the sage historian delineates the way and offers his readers a chance to become more in tune with the natural order illustrating his provocative theses about the shiji by analyzing sima qian s handling of specific historical personages and episodes such as the first emperor of the qin the hereditary house of confucius and the conflicts that ended with the founding of the han dynasty hardy both extends and challenges existing interpretations of this crucial yet understudied text and sheds light on its puzzles and incongruities

the book is the volume of the history of science and technology in qin and han dynasty among a series of books of deep into china histories the earliest known written records of the history of china date from as early as 1250 bc from the shang dynasty c 1600 1046 bc and the

bamboo annals 296 bc describe a xia dynasty c 2070 1600 bc before the shang but no writing is known from the period the shang ruled in the yellow river valley which is commonly held to be the cradle of chinese civilization however neolithic civilizations originated at various cultural centers along both the yellow river and yangtze river these yellow river and yangtze civilizations arose millennia before the shang with thousands of years of continuous history china is one of the world s oldest civilizations and is regarded as one of the cradles of civilization the zhou dynasty 1046 256 bc supplanted the shang and introduced the concept of the mandate of heaven to justify their rule the central zhou government began to weaken due to external and internal pressures in the 8th century bc and the country eventually splintered into smaller states during the spring and autumn period these states became independent and warred with one another in the following warring states period much of traditional chinese culture literature and philosophy first developed during those troubled times in 221 bc qin shi huang conquered the various warring states and created for himself the title of huangdi or emperor of the qin marking the beginning of imperial china however the oppressive government fell soon after his death and was supplanted by the longer lived han dynasty 206 bc 220 ad successive dynasties developed bureaucratic systems that enabled the emperor to control vast territories directly in the 21 centuries from 206 bc until ad 1912 routine administrative tasks were handled by a special elite of scholar officials young men well versed in calligraphy history literature and philosophy were carefully selected through difficult government examinations china s last dynasty was the qing 1644 1912 which was replaced by the republic of china in 1912 and in the mainland by the people s republic of china in 1949 chinese history has alternated between periods of political unity and peace and periods of war and failed statehood the most recent being the chinese civil war 1927 1949 china was occasionally dominated by steppe peoples most of whom were eventually assimilated into the han chinese culture and population between eras of multiple kingdoms and warlordism chinese dynasties have ruled parts or all of china in some eras control stretched as far as xinjiang and tibet as at present traditional culture and influences from other parts of asia and the western world carried by waves of immigration cultural assimilation expansion and foreign contact form the basis of the modern culture of china

zizhi tongjian vol 1 8 warring states and qin translated by joseph p yap sima guang 1019 1086 ce completed his zizhi tongjian comprehensive mirror in aid of governance in 1084 a monumental historiography that commences in 403 bce and ends in 959 ce covering a span of 1362 years of ancient and medieval chinese history qin mu the eminent contemporary chinese historian remarks sima guang successfully merged the three disciplines of literature history and philosophy into one entity the zizhi tongjian is about historical experience and sima guang maintains that the heads of states can learn so much by studying history the book has earned high acclaim among chinese and asian scholars ever since its publication however only a very small part of the work has been translated into english hence the work is not widely read this volume of this translation begins in 403 bce and concludes with the fall of the qin dynasty in 207 bce the zizhi tongjian assimilated

the exceptional attributes and defining qualities of the zuozhuan the commentary of zuo and the shiji records of the grand historian since its publication it has held a very special and esteemed position among chinese scholars and historians although the work was principally sponsored and financed by the song imperial court it was organized and written by private individuals it therefore deviated significantly from historical texts prepared by court officials during previous dynasties in 403 bce the once powerful jin hegemonic state was partitioned into han wei and zhao together with qi qin chu and yan they came to be known as the seven warring states sima guang in his annotation on the enfeoffment of the three fief lords by the king of zhou laments over the breakdown of li rites he says it was not the three jin ministers who bankrupted the instituted rites rather the son of heaven brought on the collapse he contends that as the illegitimate act of partitioning a state by its subjects was legitimized by the son of heaven the zhou king was wholly accountable for the demise sima guang thus chose to commence his chronicle of zizhi tongjian during the 23rd year of king weilei of zhou 403 bce when the son of heaven enfeoffed the jin ministers the times of the warring states was about reforms political strategies intrigue warfares conquests and wholesale massacres when the major states vied for control of china wei was the first state that made reforms and enjoyed of decades of prosperity and military strength it was followed by others in varying forms the tide turned when duke xiao of qin ascended to the throne he made resolve to strengthen his state and it was the turning point of the warring states through shang yang s reform qin basically laid down the foundation for the final conquest of the six states this volume offers the readers a glimpse of the political struggles between the seven states culminating in the final unification of china by by the first emperor qin shihuang in 221 bce the book ends with the demise of qin when sima qian 145 90 bce composed the shiji records of the grand historian he used all the information that was available to him numerous errors were incorporated sima guang while conducted extensive research drew copiously on the information from shiji on the parts of warring states qin and early han and his work included many of the mistakes made ever since much textual and archaeological information on the warring states have become available yang kuan one of the most eminent contemporary scholars had conducted extensive textual and archaeological research on the warring states shedding much light on the errors on shiji zhanguoce warring states strategies and zizhi tongjian the author translated some of his more outstanding articles

史□ historical records was written by sima qian the western han dynasty historian the biographical history book is the first biographical general history in china documented on to the ancient legend of the yellow emperor era down to the han dynasty between the beginning four years a total of 3 000 years of history in 104 b c sima qian began the creation of a history book called tai shi gong shu which was later called 史□ or historical records it took 14 years before and after to complete the historical records book includes twelve origins volumes recording the emperor s political achievements 十二本□ thirty family volumes remembering the vassal state and dynasty princes 三十世家 honors and dying seventy fame verses remembering the deeds of important people 七十列□ ten tables chronology of major events 十表

eight books remembering various rules and regulations ritual music temperament calendar astronomy meditation water conservancy financial use 八□ a total of 130 articles 520 thousand words the book is translation of full text of historical records covering all contents aforementioned

the book is the volume of the history of customs in qin and han dynasty among a series of books of deep into china histories the earliest known written records of the history of china date from as early as 1250 bc from the shang dynasty c 1600 1046 bc and the bamboo annals 296 bc describe a xia dynasty c 2070 1600 bc before the shang but no writing is known from the period the shang ruled in the yellow river valley which is commonly held to be the cradle of chinese civilization however neolithic civilizations originated at various cultural centers along both the yellow river and yangtze river these yellow river and yangtze civilizations arose millennia before the shang with thousands of years of continuous history china is one of the world s oldest civilizations and is regarded as one of the cradles of civilization the zhou dynasty 1046 256 bc supplanted the shang and introduced the concept of the mandate of heaven to justify their rule the central zhou government began to weaken due to external and internal pressures in the 8th century bc and the country eventually splintered into smaller states during the spring and autumn period these states became independent and warred with one another in the following warring states period much of traditional chinese culture literature and philosophy first developed during those troubled times in 221 bc qin shi huang conquered the various warring states and created for himself the title of huangdi or emperor of the qin marking the beginning of imperial china however the oppressive government fell soon after his death and was supplanted by the longer lived han dynasty 206 bc 220 ad successive dynasties developed bureaucratic systems that enabled the emperor to control vast territories directly in the 21 centuries from 206 bc until ad 1912 routine administrative tasks were handled by a special elite of scholar officials young men well versed in calligraphy history literature and philosophy were carefully selected through difficult government examinations china s last dynasty was the qing 1644 1912 which was replaced by the republic of china in 1912 and in the mainland by the people s republic of china in 1949 chinese history has alternated between periods of political unity and peace and periods of war and failed statehood the most recent being the chinese civil war 1927 1949 china was occasionally dominated by steppe peoples most of whom were eventually assimilated into the han chinese culture and population between eras of multiple kingdoms and warlordism chinese dynasties have ruled parts or all of china in some eras control stretched as far as xinjiang and tibet as at present traditional culture and influences from other parts of asia and the western world carried by waves of immigration cultural assimilation expansion and foreign contact form the basis of the modern culture of china

in this accessible volume thomas r martin compares the writings of herodotus in ancient greece with those of sima qian in ancient china to demonstrate the hallmarks of early history writing while these authors lived in different centuries and were not aware of each other s works

martin shows the similar struggles that each grappled with in preparing their historical accounts and how their efforts helped invent modern notions of history writing and the job of the historian the introduction s cross cultural analysis includes a biography of each author illustrating the setting and times in which he worked as well as a discussion of how each man introduced interpretation and moral judgment into his writing the accompanying documents include excerpts from herodotus the histories and sima qian s shiji which illustrate their approach to history writing and their understanding of their own cultures also featured are maps and illustrations a chronology questions to consider and a selected bibliography

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the book is the volume of the history of education in qin and han dynasty among a series of books of deep into china histories the earliest known written records of the history of china date from as early as 1250 bc from the shang dynasty c 1600 1046 bc and the bamboo annals 296 bc describe a xia dynasty c 2070 1600 bc before the shang but no writing is known from the period the shang ruled in the yellow river valley which is commonly held to be the cradle of chinese civilization however neolithic civilizations originated at various cultural centers along both the yellow river and yangtze river these yellow river and yangtze civilizations arose millennia before the shang with thousands of years of continuous history china is one of the world s oldest civilizations and is regarded as one of the cradles of civilization the zhou dynasty 1046 256 bc supplanted the shang and introduced the concept of the mandate of heaven to justify their rule the central zhou government began to weaken due to external and internal pressures in the 8th century bc and the country eventually splintered into smaller states during the spring and autumn period these states became independent and warred with one another in the following warring states period much of traditional chinese culture literature and philosophy first developed during those troubled times in 221 bc qin shi huang conquered the various warring states and created for himself the title of huangdi or emperor of the qin marking the beginning of imperial china however the oppressive government fell soon after his death and was supplanted by the longer lived han dynasty 206 bc 220 ad successive dynasties developed bureaucratic systems that enabled the emperor to control vast territories directly in the 21 centuries from 206 bc until ad 1912 routine administrative tasks were handled by a special elite of scholar officials young men well versed in calligraphy history literature and philosophy were carefully selected through difficult government examinations china s last dynasty was the qing 1644 1912 which was replaced by the republic of china in 1912 and in the mainland by the people s republic of china in 1949 chinese history has alternated between periods of political unity and peace and periods of war and failed statehood the most recent being the chinese civil war 1927 1949 china was occasionally dominated by steppe peoples most of whom were eventually assimilated into the han chinese culture and population between eras of multiple kingdoms and warlordism chinese dynasties have ruled parts or all of china in some eras control

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written with precision and flair by a host of leading academics from beijing and hong kong this single volume is a welcome addition to the study of world civilizations a broad yet detailed chronological sweep through time every aspect of chinese civilization is explained interpreted contextualized and brought to life with well balanced commentary and photographic documentation published by city university of hong kong press 香港城市大學出版社出版

china is known for its deep veneration of history far more than a record of the past history to the chinese is the magister vitae teacher of life the storehouse of moral lessons and bureaucratic precedents mirroring the past presents a comprehensive history of traditional chinese historiography from antiquity to the mid qing period organized chronologically the book traces the development of historical thinking and writing in imperial china beginning with the earliest forms of historical consciousness and ending with adumbrations of the fundamentally different views engendered by mid nineteenth century encounters with the west the historiography of each era is explored on two levels first the gathering of material and the writing and production of narratives to describe past events second the thinking and reflecting on meanings and patterns of the past significantly the book embeds within this chronological structure integrated views of chinese historiography bringing to light the purposive didactic and normative uses of the past examining both the worlds of official and unofficial historiography the authors lay bare the ingenious ways in which chinese scholars extracted truth from events and reveal how schemas and philosophies of history were constructed and espoused they highlight the dynamic nature of chinese historiography revealing that historical works mapped the contours of chinese civilization not for the sake of understanding history as disembodied and theoretical learning but for the pragmatic purpose of guiding the world by mirroring the past in all its splendor and squalor

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