The Thoughtfulness of Shiji

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Abstract: From the changes in the title and bibliographic classification of Shi Ji, it can be seen that the text of Shi Ji has multiple features. Shi Ji has the characteristics of Confucian classics, history, philosophy and literature. Readers are familiar with its historical and literary achievements, but ignore its classics and philosophical characteristics. The best way to study the thoughtfulness is that “Taishigong statement” and The preface of Tai Shi Gong should be read together with the text. Shi Ji still affects Chinese civilization and is worth studying.

1. Introduction

What is the title of shiji? Sima Qian claimed it to “the book of tai shi gong”. The preface of Tai Shi Gong(Tai Shi Gong Zi Xu) said that “there are a total of 130 articles and 526,000,500 words, which named The book of Tai Shi Gong “. Sima Qian’s expression is a bit vague .Does”the book of tai shi gong”refer to Tai Shi Gong or The book of Tai Shi Gong ? Qian Mu's explanation is more appropriate. He said that “the book of tai shi gong” refers to Tai Shi Gong, such as “the book of Mencius” refers to Mencius . There is no need to add the word of “book” when making the title. For example, Bangu called Shi Ji to Tai shi gong in his The History of the Han Dynasty.

Shi Ji originally refers to historical records. A search reveals that the term “ Shi Ji “ appears 14 times in Simaqian’s work. All of their meanings refer to historical records. After the Eastern Han Dynasty, Wei and Jin Dynasties, the “Historical Records”, which was written by Sima Qian, gradually became the “Shi Ji”. “Shi Ji” become a proper noun. It was affirmed in the Book of Sui : Record of Classic Works(Sui Shu Jing Ji Zhi), and Shi Ji was listed as the first book of history books written in biographical style.

The origin of the name of Shi Ji is clear, so what kind of book is Shi Ji?

2. Four Textual Festures of Shi Ji

The evolution of the name of Shiji and the adjustment of its classification in bibliography, it can be seen that Shi Ji has four textual properties: Confucian classics, history, philosophy and literature.

2.1 Confucian Classic

The first textual feature is to mimic the Confucian classics. Ban Gu extracted Liu Xin’s Seven Strategies (Qi Lue) and placed the Tai Shi Gong under the “six art strategies”(Liu yi). Of course, on the one hand, there were few history books but not independent, and the history was not divided. For example, Liang Qichao said that “before Sima Qian ,it didn't matter what history was.” When the books were classified, Shi Ji had to be listed after Spring and Autumn Annals(Chun Qiu). Ruan Xiaoxu, bibliographer of the Six Dynasties , also admitted that “ In liu Xin's time, there were few historical books, and it was reasonable to attribute Shi Ji to Spring and Autumn Annals.” On the other hand, it is also related to the intention of Sima Qian's writing. He originally wanted to follow the Spring and Autumn Annals ,and hope to be a part of Confucian classics. Qian Mu said, “But he was a historian, he should write history, and what he want to write is still classics. We can also say that this is the new classics in simaqian’s heart”. Although this kind of New Confucian classics was not like the official classics, it could still be included in the entire Confucian classics of the Han Dynasty. In the The preface of Tai Shi Gong, Sima Qian said that his writing goal was to reconcile the different opinions of Confucian classics and philosophy at that
time. In fact, the masters of Confucianism have been doing this kind of work for more than 400 years. They were trying to absorb pre-Qin academic thoughts. *Shi Ji* are not only historical works, but also classics works.

### 2.2 History

The second textual feature is history, which is even more unquestionable. As soon as *Shi Ji* was copied and spread, there were many continuations of the book. According to the statistics of *Comments on Works of History* (*Shi tong*), there were as many as fifteen people who continue to write *Shi Ji*. During Wei Jin and north-south dynasties, on account of the shift to metaphysics and the decline of Confucian classics, scholars who had passion for writing, can not express their connotations, but send their love to write history books. People who imitated Sima Qian appeared in an endless stream. For example, in the Liang Dynasty of the Southern Dynasties, according to Ruan Xiaoxu's *Seven Records Preface* (*Qi Zhi Xu*), there are 4,596 volumes in the category of “National History Department”.[3] By the Tang Dynasty, history books still increased. According to the *Book of Sui: Record of Classic Works* records, the history books increased to 16,500 volumes. That's a fourfold increase. Later, whether it was official or private bibliography, *Shi Ji* ranked first in the history category. The characteristics of Shiji as a history book are the most familiar to readers.

### 2.3 Philosophy

The third textual feature is like philosophy. you can see the clues from the title of the book. *Tai Shi Gong* is Sima Qian's personal book, carrying his thinking on various issues. The relationship between *Shi Ji* with philosophy is of particular concern in modern times. Liang Qichao said, “The biggest purpose of its book, was published in Sima's 'personal thoughts', such as XunQing's *Xun Zi* and DongZhongShu's *Chun Qiu Fan Lu*. However, his thoughts were borrowed in the form of history. Therefore, Viewing *Shi Ji* in the eyes of modern history, it is impossible to understand *Shi Ji*”. [5] Hou Wailu said, “ *Shi Ji* was a private work that inherits the traditions of hundreds of scholars in the Warring States Period, and runs counter to the work done by the royal scholars and doctors at the time.” [6] Naito Konan, a japanese scholar, said, “ *Shi Ji* was not only a record, and it was not just a writing, but a combination of both the record and the writing.” [7] All of the above have the same meaning. The *Shi Ji* is not purely a historical work, but it is both philosophical and ideological. The emphasis on the ideological nature of *Shi Ji* in modern times is related to the difference between ancient and modern history. Hu Baoguo said, “Modern history was based on interpretation and commentary, supplemented by narration; while ancient history was based on narration, supplemented by interpretation and commentary.”[8] Sima Qian described the history of Yellow emperor to emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty. He not only recorded truthfully, but also implicitly judged. Interpreting historical phenomena from ancient times to the present and exploring the relationship between human and nature fits modern history. Therefore, researchers gradually pay attention to the ideological and philosophical aspects of *Shi Ji*.

The purpose of Sima Qian's book is to inherit the idea of *The Spring and Autumn annals*. This idea come form fulfilling the father’s wish. At the same time, he hope that his book can express his personal thoughts. The historical materials of *Shi Ji* come from Confucian classics and pre-Qin scholars. Subjectively and objectively, *Shi Ji* is mixed with multiple textual features. It belongs to Confucian classics and philosophy. Regarding the textual features of *Shi Ji*, Qian Daxin a Qing historian, summarized the most concisely. In the preface to Liang YuSheng's *The Records of Shi Ji’s Doubleful Points* (*Shi Ji Zhi Yi*), he said:”Sima Qian imitated the *Spring and Autumn Annals* to write his book., so his style of writing was based on the classics, and his discussion was similar to philosophy. Ban Gu and later historians inherited the style of Shiji , which made Shiji a model of history.”[9]

### 2.4 Literature

From the Tang and Song Dynasties to the Ming and Qing dynasties, ancient writers had always admired Simaqian’s writings, and *Shi Ji* even has the nature of literature. Feng Ban, a scholar at the
end of the Ming Dynasty, said that people today only read *Shi Ji* as literature, and never red it as history. Lu Xun said that *Shi Ji* was “the swan song of history, the unrivaled *Li Sao*”.

In short, *Shi Ji* has four textual attributes: Confucian classics, history, philosophy, and literature. Historical and literary attributes are familiar to readers, while Confucian classics and philosophical features are often ignored. The thoughtfulness of *Shi Ji* is reflected here.

### 3. Research Methods

Although *Shi Ji* is philosophical and ideological, Sima Qian imitated Confucius’s *Spring and Autumn Annals* and integrated thoughts into the narrative, which was not a purely theoretical work. Today, people can summarize the political, economic, and cultural thoughts of *Shi Ji*, but it is difficult to construct a theoretical system of Sima Qian. Therefore, Durant said that “no matter how the examiner forced him to submit, he would not be able to produce a ‘system’ of thought in Simaqian’s writings.”[10] Even so, if you still have to try to explore Sima Qian’s philosophy and thought, there is nothing better than the “Tai Shi Gong Statement” and *The preface of Tai Shi Gong* where he directly appeared to express his views, opinions, and discussions. However, Sima Qian combined Confucian classics, history, and philosophy in one furnace, and compiled thousands of histories into one book. As a result, the text of *Shi Ji* was complicated and profound in thought. The meaning of “Tai Shi Gong statement” is not easy to know.

Corresponding to its text features, there are roughly three types of research in *Shi Ji*: history, literature, and philosophy. Historical research includes two aspects: events and texts, that is, to examine the authenticity of historical events recorded by Sima Qian and the text of the *Shi Ji*; Event research includes confirming the exact time and place of the event, the social system at that time, the name of the artifacts, etc. Text research includes the identification of the missing and continuation of the article, and the correction of words and sentences. This kind of research strives to seek truth, which is corresponded to the historical feature. The second is literary research, including the artistic techniques of modern prose, novel, etc. For example, we can analyze the narrative methods of *Shi Ji*, or summary the skills of shaping characters and arranging plots. Such research strives for beauty and can correspond to its literary attributes. The third type is philosophical research. The third type is philosophical research. Mencius once said, “Confucius wrote *Spring and Autumn annals*, historical events was Qi Huan and Jin Wen’s seeking hegemony, historical materials are official records, and Confucius said, ‘The meaning of history is given by oneself’”. The philosophical study of *Shi ji* is to explore the rationale behind history, that is, to explore profound and subtle ideas from obvious historical events. This can correspond to its classic and philosophical attributes.

#### 3.1 Read “Tai Shi Gong Statement” and the the Preface to Tai Shi Gong Together

“Tai Shi Gong Statement” is often placed at the end of an article, occasionally seen at the beginning of the article and in the article, and sent out with feelings. The content and form are flexible and changeable; *The Preface to Tai Shi Gong* is affixed to the end of the book. It is not only the autobiography of Sima Qian, one of the seventy biographies, but also the preface of the book. “Tai Shi Gong Statement” and the *The preface of Tai Shi Gong* are connected with each other. Although the preface is the most important when looking at Sima Qian's insights. They should be read in conjunction. Only in this way can we see the “multi-layered past” described by Sima Qian.

#### 3.2 Multiple Readings of”Tai Shi Gong Statement”

Sima Qian’s “Taishigong Statemend” is sometimes written by feelings, and some chapters on the “Taishigong Sayings” can be found in the context and can be viewed. Fox example, many chapters can be read together, “Tai Shi Gong Statement” of Guan Yan, Lao Zi Han Fei, Sima Rangju, Sun Tzu Wu Qi, Shang Yang, Zhong Ni’s disciples, Su Qin Zhang Yi, Mencius Xunqing and other scholars' biography can explore Sima Qian’s influence on the pre-Qin Dynasty Academic judgment and so on.
As a word, in order to study the thoughts of Shi Ji, “Tai Shi Gong statement”, The preface of Tai Shi Gong and the texts, should be understood together. Shiji is a great work, and “taishigong statement” is the key point of each article, and also the clue to understand the purpose of Sima Qian's works. Therefore, we can't look at it in isolation.” Tai Shi Gong Statement” and The preface of Shi Ji should be read together with the text. “Tai Shi Gong Statement” and The preface of Shi Ji have their own characteristics in content and form, some positive, some negative, so when we put them together, the main purpose is complete. Sima Qian often put his judgment in narration, which is corresponding to “Tai Shi Gong Statemen”. “Tai Shi Gong Statemen” connect each other, which is a large text, so we should read it actively.

4. Discussion

Shi Ji is a great work. Its writing background is a long period of great changes. When Sima Qian was writing, he was also at a major turning point in the history of the Qin and Han Dynasties. Shi Ji started with Emperor Huang and ended with Emperor Wu. It sorted out the development context of civilization that had been chaotic and gradually restored to order. Tai Shigong wrote history just like Confucius sorted out the Six Classics, which was of great significance to Chinese civilization. The Biography style created by Shi Ji established a narrative order for the complicated and long history. Once this order was established, it became a model. For more than two thousand years, Shi Ji was followed by twenty-four histories, which have formed a blood-and-blood relationship with the Chinese nation. The thought of Shi Ji is still worth exploring. The purpose of exploring history is to understand the present.

References