

HUI-CHIAO 慧皎 AS A CHINESE HISTORIAN

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The following discussion is based on a portion of my long article "Biography and Hagiography: Hui-chiao's *Lives of Eminent Monks*," which will appear in English in the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary volume of *Tōhōgaku* 東方學報.

Hui-chiao, in writing his *Kao-seng chuan* 高僧傳, chose to adopt certain of the methods and conventions of Chinese historiography, to write a work which not only recorded the lives of eminent Buddhist monks but also a work which met prevailing Chinese historiographical and literary standards. In doing this he deviated from the patterns of the Indian lives of Buddhist saints. And he also rejected several other Chinese literary genres, for example, the collections of wonderful tales such as the *Sou-shen chi* 搜神記 in which monks had often figured. I should like to suggest here the reasons for the choice he made and to indicate some of the ways in which he drew on Chinese traditional historiography.

From the fragmentary data on the life of Hui-chiao, it is clear that he was a Southerner, that he was either from a wealthy family or enjoyed the patronage of rich men. He was educated —like his secular contemporaries —in the Confucian Classics, in Taoism, and in the traditions of Neo-Taoism 玄學. He was very much a part of the upper class intellectual life of his day. This meant that he was widely read in non-Buddhist literature, but this does not entirely explain his choice of method, style, and form, for it was possible for such a Six Dynasties literary figure as Kan Pao 干寶 to be both an official historian and the compiler of a colle-

ction of highly colored supernatural stories—*Sou-shen chi*. Why then was Hui-chiao so clearly in the main line of Chinese historiography? I believe that he saw himself as carrying out an intensely serious historical task. He wished to compensate for the neglect of monks' lives which characterized most secular histories and biographical collections, for he felt that the great monks had made notable contributions not only to the spread of Buddhism but to Chinese art and culture as well. Since they had been denied the honor of biographies in the dynastic histories, Hui-chiao sought to give them, through his biographies, the dignity and recognition he felt they deserved. To give them this in the eyes of the educated class of his day, Hui-chiao was bound to adopt the most widely accepted and esteemed standards of historical writing, and this he did.

Hui-chiao lived among the educated upper class and he wrote for them. Although the lives of the monks were meant to demonstrate the power and the truth of Buddhism, they could only do so if they were written in a form which appealed to the educated upper class. In terms of his own background, in terms of his conception of his task and of his audience, he wrote a work which was as much Chinese history as it was Buddhist biography.

Hui-chiao believed in a comfortable adjustment between the truth of Buddhism and the norms of Chinese society. He was capable of saying that the Vinaya should be the basis of monastic life but that *Li* 禮 and *I* 義 should govern the lives of the laity. He often quotes the Confucian classics, the *Lao-tzu* 老子 and the *Chuang-tzu* 莊子, and his aim is usually to show that Buddhism and traditional Chinese culture are not in conflict but complementary. His book was thus written with the purpose of reassuring those Chinese who regarded Buddhism as foreign and disruptive; its style, its form, its content reflect such a purpose.

If we need further evidence of Hui-chiao's conception of his purpose and his task, we should look at the terms of evaluation used in the biographies. The biographies devoted to literary figures—translators and exegetes—occupy more than half his book, and they are given the place of honor at the beginning of it. Moreover he uses of the monks all the stereotyped phrases of Chinese biography to describe literary precocity and brilliance. Again and again monks are described as having memorized the Classics at an early age, as being able to memorize a page once read, as being proficient in prose or poetic writing or in calligraphy. Dozens are described as “widely read in Buddhist and non-Buddhist writings” 博覽內外. And the *ch'ing-t'an* 清談 triumphs of many are recorded in detail. In all this he was, I believe, seeking to establish the prestige of the monks in terms of the values of the literate upper class, to stress the accomplishments which would serve to raise the status of monks in the eyes of the Chinese elite.

If such a view of his motivation is accepted, then his adoption of traditional historical methods and forms is readily understood. I should like to mention a few of those here. These are discussed in greater detail, with documentation, in my article in *Tōhōgaku*.

The division of a collection of biographies into categories is an old device in Chinese historiography. Although it appeared in the *Shih-chi* 史記 and *Han-shu* 漢書, it was given new and conscious development by Fan Yeh 范曄 in his *Hou Han-shu* 後漢書. According to Miyakawa Hisayuki, this development reflects the new up-valuing of the individual—especially the non-political figure—which characterized the Six Dynasties period. It was generally used in biographical works of the period, in most of those special biographical collections which are so characteristic of Six Dynasties literature. If one needs an example of its use by one of

Hui-chiao's secular contemporaries, one might mention the *Chung-ch'en chuan* 忠臣傳 by the Liang Emperor Yüan 梁元帝. Although Hui-chiao was not the first to use this device for clerical biographies, he was the first to adapt it successfully to the requirements of Buddhist history.

The *lun* 論 or critical estimate following a group of biographies was also sanctioned by long usage. According to the *Shih-t'ung* 史通, the device goes back to the *Tso-chuan* 左傳. It was with the *Hou-Han-shu* 後漢書 that these discourses were sometimes placed, for the first time, as they are in the *Kao-seng chuan*, after a group of biographies and introduced with the phrase *lun-yüeh* 論曰. For Hui-chiao, as for secular historians, these *lun* provided the means of expressing the historian's own view of the meaning of the preceding group of biographies. They were also the place where Chinese secular historians and Hui-chiao alike discussed problems of credibility and standards of judgment. Hui-chiao's *lun* are brilliant essays in which both interpretation and methodological problems are presented. They are also full and detailed essays on ten important aspects of the history of Chinese Buddhism. This suggested to the late Yamanouchi Shinkyō 山内晉郷 that they were meant also, in part, to serve the same purpose as the *chih* 志 in the standard histories.

The *tsan* 贊, short poetical appreciations which follow the first eight *lun*, were first put into four word verse by Pan Ku 班固 and were first called *tsan* by Fan Yeh 范曄. It was Fan Yeh also who first placed his *tsan* immediately following the *lun*. Hui-chiao's *tsan* follow the same poetical rules, have the same purpose and the same position as those in some of the most esteemed secular histories of his day.

The *fu-chuan* 附傳 or subordinate biography was often used in secular histories as a means of dealing with the lives of important relatives of a principal subject. Hui-chiao successfully adapts this to Buddhist purposes

and devotes a subordinate biography to a lesser monk who was linked to the major subject by the disciple-master relationship, by some common activity, or geographical propinquity.

Perhaps these formal elements will serve to suggest Hui-chiao's relation to secular historiography. When we turn to his historical method we find that a similar relationship exists. Here I can only touch on a few aspects of this relationship. For fuller treatment the reader is referred to my study in *Tōhōgaku*.

As Hui-chiao tells us in his preface, his work began with a massive collection of written materials which he supplemented, like Ssu-ma Ch'ien 司馬遷 and other secular historians, with interviews. Then he proceeded, as a secular historian of his day would have done, to sift and compare the records he had collected, filling in the gaps of one with the data of others. Sometimes—again as we find in the *Shih-chi* and secular histories generally—an earlier biography is copied, *in toto* simply because it appeared to be the best account available. In general, in writing his biographies, Hui-chiao remains anonymous, but occasionally he emerges to discuss a conflict of testimony, introducing himself with the traditional 余 or 余案. In resolving problems of dates or of geography or of the conflict of testimony, he tended to use the same commonsense standards of earlier secular historians.

But when we come to his judgments of the credibility of spectacular deeds of great men or of the timely appearance of supernatural events, we find that he is typically a man of the Six Dynasties. Every development following the breakdown of the Han Empire and of its Confucian orthodoxy had tended to increase the estimate of an individual's potentialities. Taoist and neo-Taoist works continually stressed man's capacity to transcend the rules of ordinary existence. The strong vogue of the *shen-*

hsien 神仙 stories both reflected and promoted this tendency. So we find that his is neither a Han nor a T'ang estimate of biographical event but typically one of his age. This statement, however, has one important qualification. Secular historians did indeed take the view: "Who can say that this strange thing did not befall this man?" But Hui-chiao was also a devout Buddhist, and an account that manifested the working of the law of karma or the intervention of Bodhisattvas in the lives of men was, to Hui-chiao, inherently credible. Prevailing standards of credibility plus his own Buddhist faith influenced the accounts which Hui-chiao has left us.

Yet it seems to me, looking at Hui-chiao from another culture and across the span of 1400 years, that his book should always be considered not only as a vital record of the first 500 years of Chinese Buddhism but as an important and integral part of the Chinese historiographical tradition.