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Where Had the Barbarians Gone?

The Cultural Other in Early Chinese Historiography*

There are many fascinating parallels between early development of Greek and Chinese historiography. Both traditions appeared almost simultaneously (the compilation of what is dubbed as China's earliest narrative history, the Zuo zhuan, might have conveniently begun in the fifth century BCE, between the life-times of Herodotus and Thucydides); both were born during the period of political fragmentation of the Greek and Chinese oikoumenē; and both served as an important means of perpetuating cultural unity of their respective realms. These parallels can be easily multiplied; and among them many would naturally add the depiction of the 'barbarian' Other in both traditions. In both cases, the Other appears in the earliest layers of historiographic tradition; in both, its images are utilized to buttress self-identity of the members of the 'civilized' world; and in both, the depictions may alternate between those of the 'barbarian menace' and the 'wise barbarian', the wisdom of the latter being juxtaposed with the decadence of the native political and cultural tradition.

While all these topoi are well-known and had been repeatedly discussed by the scholars, there is one fundamental difference, which becomes striking when one goes beyond the search for parallels and similarities. Namely, the relative weight of the 'barbarians' in Chinese historiography in general, and especially during its pre-imperial, Eastern Zhou (771-221 BCE), stage is incomparably lower than in the case of Greece. In the latter case, one may ask a question whether or not "contacts with Oriental nations and life under the Persian rulers gave an impulse to Greek historiography" (Momigliano 1978: 3). Whatever is the

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The principle of thezhmum: in its various forms, the Zhlmum is a guide for Chinese scholars, who, through its study, understand the culture and history of China. The zhlmum is a tool for understanding the complex relationship between the past and the present, between the individual and society, and between the natural and the spiritual. It is a reflection of the profound wisdom of Chinese culture, which has shaped the development of Chinese society and influenced the lives of Chinese people for centuries.

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The internal, external focus of Chinese historians was written in the Hegemony, the Chinese encounter with the Western world, and the differences between the Chinese and the West. The Chinese historians emphasized the importance of the West in shaping Chinese thought and culture. They argued that the West was a source of new ideas, and that it provided the Chinese with a new perspective on their own history. The Chinese historians also argued that the West was a source of new knowledge, and that it provided the Chinese with a new understanding of the world. This understanding of the West was not accidental; it was a result of the West's influence on Chinese thought and culture.


