

Introduction

A new way of looking at the late Warring States and Han eras has swept away a host of sinological platitudes in the past fifteen years. Gone is the old picture of abstract philosophy formed by debates between Confucians, Legalists, Daoists, Naturalists, et al. In fact there is no longer any reason to believe that there were any such collectivities as the last three, or that public debate played a significant part in that evolution. As for the first, what came to be called the five Confucian classics evolved for centuries before any number of Chinese considered them either classics or in any special sense Confucian. It was not until a century into the Han era that studying them (or anything else) began to be a qualification for official appointment.

It has become obvious that analyzing historic change in terms of isms blurs more than it clarifies. Historians of Chinese thought have for generations used the term “school” to convince each other that they are situating their disembodied discourse on texts somewhere, somehow, in society. These days “school,” if it appears at all, tends to appear in the quotation marks that telegraph an uncomfortable choice of words.¹ The Huang-Lao bandwagon, which came rolling with great velocity out of the Mawangdui excavations, has creaked to a halt in the middle of nowhere. One critical scholar after another has acknowledged that early sources do not reliably identify any excavated text with “the Yellow Emperor and Laozi.” The celebrated Jixia Academy, described repeatedly in the early 1990s as a pre-Han forerunner of modern think tanks, turns out to be another artifact of careless reading ... and so on.²

What we are learning about now is a unity that intimately, if sometimes tacitly, linked morality to cosmology, ritual, and divination. The tightness of that linkage makes it senseless to treat any of these as autonomous—even in the writings of the very few authors who demanded that one or the other be autonomous. We can now see that this mani-

¹ For one of a number of critiques, see the essay by Sarah Queen in this volume.

² On points mentioned in this paragraph and later, see the summaries in Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2001); Sivin, “The Myth of the Naturalists,” in *Medicine, Philosophy, and Religion in Ancient China* (Aldershot, Hants: Variorum, 1995), chap. 4; and G. E. R. Lloyd and Sivin, *The Way and the Word: Science and Medicine in Early China and Greece* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2002).

fold *was* social authority and political power. We are beginning more adequately to understand the political systems of those centuries by making sense of their particular symbolic bases and cultural expressions. In other words, enterprising scholars find no longer useful the academic convention that firmly separates intellectual and social history, and that coerced earlier generations to choose only one.

Young sinologists are also beginning to read books of central importance in early thought that their elders ignored, even in their histories of philosophy, such as the *Springs and Autumns of Lü Buwei* (*Lü shi chungqiu* 呂氏春秋) and the *Supreme Mystery* (*Tai xuan jing* 太玄經). They are finally studying the key Yellow Emperor writings of the Han, a remarkable summa of that era's cosmological syntheses, namely the several Inner Canon (*Huangdi nei jing* 黃帝內經) texts and other medical books in their tradition, such as the Canon of Eighty-one Problems (*Huangdi bashiyi nan jing* 黃帝八十一難經) and the slightly post-Han A-B Classic (*Huangdi jiayi jing* 黃帝甲乙經).³

What we find, in the medical writings as elsewhere, is that the exercise of power, and thought about the order of the universe (which was also that of the state and the body), made and continuously remade each other. The dynamic cosmology that was launched in the late Warring States (largely in the *Springs and Autumns of Lü Buwei*) and matured in the Han became a model for sovereignty and bureaucracy, and provided a staple rhetoric for political rivalry. In omen interpretation and other aspects of ritual, it endorsed a single moral, cosmic, and imperial order. It was not simply a justification for state power, but provided intellectuals with a basis for forming, contesting, and limiting it.

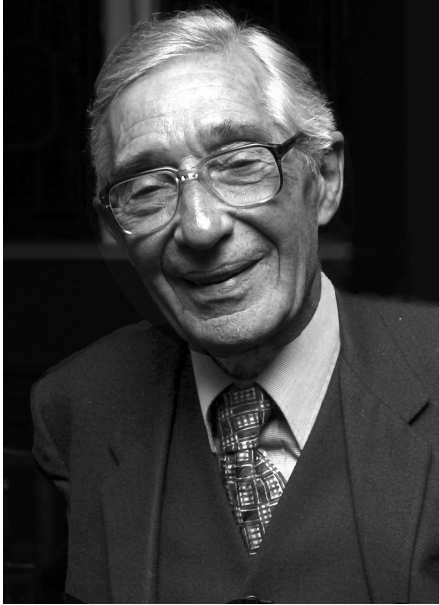
This amounts to a new way of reading ancient Chinese texts—as assertions of individuals with interests, ideals, frustrations, and prejudices rather than as authoritative, objective documents. Some sinologists have been doing that for a long time. The innovation lies in a style of interpretation deeply informed by insights of anthropology, sociology, religious studies, and other fields that affected most domains of historiography much earlier. Even some philologists are now quite attentive to the concrete circumstances that gave their texts meaning.

It is impressive that so many pieces of this new view have emerged from doctoral dissertations and other productions of scholars at the be-

³ Most historians of medicine have overlooked the significance of these earliest titles of what they usually call the *Nan jing* and the *Jiayi jing*.

ginning of their careers. It is equally remarkable that a large contribution to the educations of so many of them, informal as often as formal, as well as the greatest provision of aids to their work, comes from the man whose eightieth birthday this *Festschrift* honors. His name is ubiquitous in the acknowledgements of consequential first books.

Inevitably, many historians in their sixties or even fifties find



Michael Loewe at a celebration for his eightieth birthday. Photo by Michael Nylan.

it acutely uncomfortable to question the assumptions that have undergirded their work for decades. It is striking that Michael Loewe should have avoided this intellectual stasis because of a mind that has always insisted on the complexity and subtlety of the primary sources (see his doubts on many of the issues mentioned above, set out in his 1994 essay-review on the *Huainanzi*). The unexceptionable quality of his massive contribution to learning, and the eminence of his service to his profession, contrast with his great personal modesty. It is these characteristics, I think, that have kept his mind open and expanding even after more than a decade of retirement.

As a generalist, I value in friends an appetite for argument, the idea that one works toward understanding in cooperation with others by wrangling with them. Because of his open-mindedness, I have always relished challenges from Michael Loewe, and his responses to mine. For both of us, scholarly disagreement is a kind of collaboration from which one is likely to learn something really new.

British historians often point out that the greatest generational watershed was the period of World War I (the Great War, as they call it). Michael Loewe was born a little after its end, in 1922, but, perhaps because he was the child of an academic family, his education and early

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life followed a pattern that had not yet changed very much. He attended the Perse School in Cambridge, and then Magdalen College, Oxford. He did not complete his degree there; the world changed abruptly and definitely as World War II broke out. By its end he had become one of the first Englishmen to be trained in Japanese for military purposes, and had participated in the remarkable group that broke important Japanese secret codes and ciphers.⁴ Employed in the British civil service, he continued with work comparable to his military duties until 1956, finishing during that period a First Class Honors degree in Classical Chinese at the University of London. In 1963 he took a doctorate at the same university with a dissertation entitled “The Han Documents from Chü-yen.” It was idiosyncratic in those days to involve oneself in excavated and other non-classical documents. Although everyone knew about the rich finds of Dunhuang, Turfan, and other sites, few studied them. Various publications of his from 1959 on, especially his *Records of Han Administration* (1967), persuaded many scholars to use them as readily as any other source.

Michael Loewe taught courses on what was called “the History of the Far East” at London until 1963, and from then on lectured in the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Cambridge. He has also held visiting professorships at Chicago, Harvard, and Stockholm, and has been a visiting or exchange scholar in the Chinese mainland, Taiwan, and Japan. The many colleagues from all over the world who partook of his hospitality will be aware that he was also a Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge, and its Vice-President in 1989–90. After his retirement from teaching in 1990, he served for two years as Deputy Director of the Needham Research Institute in Cambridge before devoting himself entirely to research. He has been President of the European Association of Chinese Studies and of the China Society of London, a council member of the Universities’ China Committee of London and the Royal Asiatic Society, and a participant in many capacities in other organizations that worked to raise sinological standards.

As for his publications, they are listed separately at the end of this introduction. They show him to be a true generalist within his chosen period, writing on topics from the locations of imperial tombs, to the everyday lives of ordinary people, to mythology and divination. The truest test, of course, is his willingness to ignore the awesome taboo that

⁴ He characteristically has not written about this experience for publication, but see F. H. Hinsley and Alan Stripp, *Codebreakers: The Inside Story of Bletchley Park* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1993), pp. 257–63, 300–5.

has kept sinologues from reading scientific texts. He has indeed contributed from time to time to the history of astronomy and medicine.

Particularly remarkable is the succession of basic reference books that he has produced since 1986. They include the first volume of *The Cambridge History of China* (with Denis Twitchett); *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*; *The Cambridge History of Ancient China* (with Edward Shaughnessy); and *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han & Xin Dynasties*, with a similar volume on the Later Han by Rafe de Crespigny in the works. As editor or co-editor of the first three, he also wrote important chapters, and his editing went far beyond the call of duty. He himself wrote the more than eight hundred pages of the *Biographical Dictionary*, which benefits not only from his fifty years of steady reading but from his commodious point of view, precise in disentangling institutional complexities but sensitive to odd human details. His study of the imperial tombs of the Western Han period exemplifies the former, showing how the very complicated disputes over their siting and maintenance reflect political contention about very large issues. The book's introduction ends with a fine instance of the latter: "... in 38 BC a panic ensued when a bear broke loose at a circus that Yuandi was attending. It was one of his minor consorts, named Feng Yuan 馮媛, who shielded him from danger, at considerable risk to her own safety; in the fullness of time, she was to become the grandmother of Liu Kan 劉訢 (Jizi 箕子), known as the last of the Han Emperors under the name of Pingdi."

One tends to remember Cambridge friends in one of that town's many remarkable settings. I believe I first met Michael Loewe in Kyoto, where a long evening in Ponto-chō with Carmen Blacker and himself, talking mostly about the Yamabushi and their mountain rituals, left an indelible imprint on my mind. But the most familiar recollection is of the many late afternoons, in one summer after another, when the four of us and other mutual friends met for what we called seminars (more or less at teatime, but with wine instead of tea) in someone's garden, especially in that of Willow House, Grantchester, overlooked by two-story-high hollyhocks.

As for Michael Loewe's intellectual formation, he has expressed in unpublished writing his deep debt to his father, who revealed to him the value and ideal of learning for the sake of learning; to scholars who guided him such as Walter Simon and A. F. P. Hulsewé, to name but two; and to Carmen Blacker for her unfailing encouragement over thirty years and more.

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A seminar at Willow House, 1987. Left to right: Carmen Blacker, David McMullen, Nathan Sivin, Michael Loewe, Bassim Musallam.

The varied essays in these two volumes of *Asia Major*, which bear in various facets of Han culture, are presented to Michael Loewe with grateful felicitations by a few of the scholars who have “received instruction (*lingjiao* 領教)” from him, whether as a student, scholarly acquaintance, or colleague. They present these writings at the same time to the community of learning, to which he continues to contribute with unquenchable generosity.

Finally, we must sadly note the death of one of our contributors. Professor Ōba Osamu 大庭修, a scholar of exceptionally broad and deep learning, died on November 27, 2002, shortly after submitting his essay for this volume.⁵ His completing it in very difficult circumstances was typical of his intellectual munificence.

Nathan Sivin

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⁵ Professor Ōba’s article appears in the second number of this *Festschrift* volume.