ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to deal with the role and value of chronological biographies in Chinese historiography. Chronological biography is a unique form of Chinese historical writing, yet a neglected division in the long Chinese historiography. Despite the significant number and long history of chronological biographies in Chinese historiography, there is a lack of an organised and deep study of its origin, its form, its development and its role. Thus, its value and importance are hidden and undermined. This thesis hopes to bring the value and importance of chronological biography in traditional and modern times of Chinese historiography to attention.

This thesis begins with an introduction of the various elements of a chronological biography, followed by looking at the time of its first occurrence and the reason of its flourishing. Secondly, the thesis looks at the form of chronological biography from the standard forms of history in an attempt to portray its uniqueness. Furthermore, the thesis seeks to look at its limitations from the perception of Western historiography. By doing so, it highlights the disparity between the Western and the Chinese historiography and implicitly explains the reason for the lack of such a form in Western historiography. Finally, the study aims to prove that chronological biography itself is the epitome of the disparity of Western and Chinese historiography. The study ends up with bringing out the modern role of chronological biographies, thus recognising their role and value.

In conclusion, chronological biography is an epitome of Chinese historiography. Its imperfections by the Western historiography standards represent the characteristic of the Chinese historiography to a certain extent. There is no absolute standard of a “perfect” form of history; there are only different requirements of history. If one could understand the imperfections of chronological biographies as the features of Chinese historiography, one could recognise the meaning in its imperfections.