ABSTRACT

Sima Guang (1019-1086) was a statesman and a scholar who lived in the middle period of the Northern Song dynasty. During his times, the Northern Song was not only threatened by its powerful non-Han neighbours but was also weakened by internal political instability as a result of the reform introduced by Premier Wang An-shi. Sima Guang, then a senior official was very much against the reform and was thus demoted as well as banished from the court of Premier Wang. Thereafter, Sima Guang devoted his time to the writing of history before he made a political comeback and became the Premier himself fifteen years after he was banished and ten years after the demise of Wang An-shi.

This study of the historiography of Sima Guang examines all the historical writings of Sima Guang notably the "Zi-Zhi-Tong-Jian" (资治通鉴), "Ji-Gu-Lu" (稽古錄) and "Shu-Shui-Ji-Wen" (涑水记闻) and discusses his methods of history writing.

In his writings, particularly his most outstanding book "Zi-Zhi-Tong-Jian", Sima Guang created a systematic method in collecting historical materials from a wide range of sources. He was also the first man in Chinese history to write a book of footnotes on all the conclusions he used in "Zi-Zhi-Tong-Jian", revealing the sources of his materials and explaining the use of certain historical facts and the omission of others.

Other eminent achievements in the historiography of Sima Guang were that he gave impartial evaluation to the non-Han leaders, a break from the Sinocentric tradition. He was also credited for not involving in the traditional argument about the legitimacy of the various dynasties. He also omitted historical myths from his writings and had expressed his distaste about superstitious beliefs.

The study concludes with a summary of findings and a critical evaluation of Sima Guang’s historiography.