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Monarchial Body and Body Monarch

---a comparative study on the physiognomy of monarch in Chinese and Italian literary descriptions

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Somewhere between and among psychoanalysis, political history, and aesthetic criticism there must be some language to talk about images of monarchy. Many studies have made important contributions to the three aspects above, yet there still seems to be more things to do.

In the images of monarchy there are both the deliberate construction and promotion by central governmental authority and the creation by a public projecting their own desires and anxieties on to a prominent figure. In many cases, especially for portraits of ruler in the historical literature, one can see the iconographic tradition. It was the result of "reconstructions" or "inventions", in which the controversial physiognomic thinking had an important role.¹

The divining of human character from external appearances has engaged the attention of man from the earliest periods of which we have record down to the present time.

As a mechanism to make communication between body and the exterior world, physiognomy is one of the most vivid perspectives to examine the relationship between the individual and the world. Just as G. B. Della Porta said, the physiognomy *costume* corresponds the worldly custom.

In this article, the investigation was limited to the rulers in ancient China and Italy, by whatever authority including the governors or emperors, as in Italy, the emperorship was not raised as stably as in China especially in the Renaissance.

Besides those in novels, there are also two types of non-historical elements in the voluminous output of traditional Chinese historical records: the unintentional fictions and the deliberately fabricated falsehoods

The first denotes records or expressions that are historically doubtful by modern reckoning, but which people at a certain stage might have believed, or accepted as factual. They present quasi-scientific expressions or folkloristic motifs shared by the literati and populace, such as ancient myths about the universe, the deities, cosmological manifestations or miraculous stories about prophetic revelations or the superhuman qualities possessed by gifted individuals. They were include in the records either because they were construed by historian as facts, or they were employed, regardless of their veracity or vulgarity, to serve the prescribed historiographical functions warranted by the tradition, such as commemorative adornment, political legitimation or moral persuasion.

The second refers to accounts or statements which historians consciously fabricated or which they adapted from doubtful sources, either literary records or oral traditions, with full knowledge of their spuriousness. They featured inflated or distorted versions about prodigious events or

¹ Per un sommaria disamina della questione rinvio a T. Casini, "La ricerca della verosimiglianza fisionomica nelle biografie illustrate tra cinque e seicento: ritratti dal vero, immaginari e contraffatti", in *Percorsi tra parole e immagini (1400-1600)*, a cura di A. Guidotti e M. Rossi, Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 2000. 75-88

personages, forged episodes or imaginary speeches, rhetoric, stock phrases and the like supposedly transmitted by imperial rulers or scholar-official.² They were incorporated in the records deliberately by historian to dramatize, simulate, and even to distort the account of a given episode or personage in violation of the Confucian convention to fulfill prescribed political or didactic missions or to serve specific contemporary expediencies.³ The physiognomic descriptions of the rulers are mostly in this range.

The physiognomy in Chinese and Italian literary description may be considered from two aspects. The one is the monarchial body, that is, what kind of physical features of the rulers are described, sometimes at the expense of likeness, both in Chinese and Italian literature and how these features are similar and thus might make the rulers in one type. The other is the body monarch, that is, what kind of physical features makes the particular persons rulers and how these features are exclusively stabilized and helps to legitimate the heaven-given or god-given power.

I. Monarchial body

It was a common practice of the Chinese official historiographers to employ pseudo-historical, semi-fictional source materials alongside the factual, ascertainable data in their narratives for prescribed political or didactic purposes despite their commitment to the time-honored principles of the truth and objectivity in the Confucian-oriented traditional historiography.⁴

The emperor in ancient China was usually called *Tian Zi*, meaning the son of the heaven and therefore being provided the power by the heaven which was not permitted to be opposed. In order to demonstrate the natural rationality and inviolability of the royal power, the emperor and the queen were glorified and mystified by changing the description of the appearances of them according to the principles of physiognomy. Till Xi Han Dynasty (206BC-8AD), a fusion of politics and physiognomy had emerged. And physiognomy had affected a lot in maintaining the authority of the dynasty and the union of the state as well as the order of the hierarchy. In the official histories it was like a principle.

Emperor Han Gao Zu, founder of Han Dynasty (206BC-220AD), was the first emperor being apotheosized. In *Records of the Grand Historian* Han Gao Zu has an upright nose and dragon-like face. Because he was born of the dragon, so he looks like a dragon with long neck and high nose. He had beautiful beard and there were seventy-two naevi in his left buttock. Some other historical books were recorded in this way such as *Suo Ying*, *Zheng Yi* etc.

Take LIU Bei, one of the main characters in as another example. In *the Three Kingdoms* the

² In comparison with their Western counterparts, Chinese historians seemed to have shown a much more rational attitude towards the supernatural, although quasi-scientific and pseudo-historical expressions nonetheless filled the pages of ancient chronicles. This is illustrated, among others, in Burton Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien: Grand historian of China* (New York 1958), 150,233, n.23; Teng Ssu-yu, "Ssu-ma Ch'ien yu His-lo-to-te ti pi-chiao"(a comparison of Ssu-ma Ch'ien and Herodotus), *CYYY*, 28; 1 (1956), 457ff (English version in *East and West*, N.S., XI (1961)233-40). For individual studies of such fictional interpolations in Chinese historical records, see, for example, Ku Chieh-Kang, et al. ed., *Ku-shih pien*(Verification of ancient Chinese history), vol.V (Peiping 1935), VII (1941); Chou I-liang, "Wei Shou shih shihshueh"(historical writing of Wei Shou), *Yen-ching hsueh-pao*, 18 (Dec, 1935)

³ Hok-lam Chan, "The rise of Ming T'ai-tsu (1368-98): facts and fictions in early Ming official historiography." *Journal of the American oriental society*, vol. 95, no. 4 (Oct.- Dec., 1975) 679-715

⁴ Hok-lam Chan, "The rise of Ming T'ai-tsu (1368-98): facts and fictions in early Ming official historiography." *Journal of the American oriental society*, vol. 95, no. 4 (Oct.- Dec., 1975) 679-715,679

description of his appearance is like this: *His ears were long, the lobes touching his shoulders, and his hands hung down below his knees. His eyes were very big and prominent so that he could see backward past his ears. His complexion was as clear as jade, and he had rich red lips.*⁵ The similar description of long ears can be found in the historical document like *Jingshu, Biographies of CHEN Xun*, when CHEN Xun is telling the fortune of WANG Dao: “your ears are long to your shoulders, so you will long-lived and noble.”⁶ It shows that having long ears is an noble appearance. The physiognomic masterpiece *Shen xiang quan pian* quoted the saying of XU Fu: “if his ears can reach the corner of sun (shoulder), he must have had Immortality medicine.”⁷ And she also said: “Long ears reaching the shoulders mean macrobiosis.”⁸ Besides, long arms are also an important symbol of the alike person. In *on hands of Sheng xiang quan pian*, it is said: “those with long arms to knees are the heroes of the age”, which demonstrate the importance of hands in physiognomy. The description of the arms of LIU Bei fully applied the principle of physiognomy. In the novels thereafter, most of the emperors or immortals have the similar appearance with LIU Bei:

LIU Ban: “He strides like dragon and tiger. His Tian ting (mid-forehead) is plump and his Di ge (chin) is square and fleshy. His ears were long, the lobes touching his shoulders, and his hands hung down below his knees”.

SIMA Yan: “His ears were long, the lobes touching his shoulders, and his hands hung down below his knees”.

King QI: “His ears were long, the lobes touching his shoulders, and his hands hung down below his knees”.

JIAN Wen: “His head is as round as sun”

LI Shimin: “His posture is like dragon and phoenix. He has square head with big ears. His appearance is like the sun in the sky”.

KING Qianlong: “His figure is like the tiger and his eyes are like phoenix.”

ZHU Di: “He strides like dragon and the tiger.”

It is obvious that the ways of appearance description are identical. Groups of animals, natural objects and colors are used to make analogy or comparison with some parts of human body. All the descriptions are in according with the principles of physiognomy. In doing so, the characters are characterized into several types, inside any one of which readers cannot tell any differences between the characters. What readers can tell is the differences between the characters belong to different category. The physiognomy thus overrides the novel and become the dominant force in appearance description.

In Italy, as Tommaso Casini observed⁹, much has been studied on the biographies of the rulers

⁵ LUO Guanzhong. *Three Kingdoms*. Beijing: Zhong Hua Book Company, 1998 P6
三国演义 第 6 面。中华书局 1998 年 2 月第一版

⁶ *Jin Shu*. Beijing: Zhong Hua Book Company, 1974 P345
晋书. 卷三十五. 陈训传. 北京: 中华书局, 1974, P3459

⁷ Museum of Imperial Palace ed. *Shen Xiang Quan Bian*. Haikou: Hainan Ren Ming Press, 2000. P35
神相全编 子平集要等三种. 第 35 面, 故宫博物院编, 海南出版社 2000 年第 1 版

⁸ Museum of Imperial Palace ed. *Shen Xiang Quan Bian*. Haikou: Hainan Ren Ming Press, 2000. P50
神相全编 子平集要等三种. 第 50 面, 故宫博物院编, 海南出版社 2000 年第 1 版

⁹ See Tommaso Casini, “La questione fisionomica nei libri di ritratti e biografie di uomini illustri del Secolo XVI.” *Percorsi tra parole e immagini*. A cura di Angela Giudotti, Massimiliano Rossi, Presentazione di Lina Bolzoni. Lucca: Pacini Fazzi, 2000. 103-117

from multiple aspects, while few attentions have been paid on the influence and relationship between the narrative and the physiognomic consciousness in descriptions which has been popular for centuries. For example, in the sixteenth century, the physiognomic works of G. B. Della Porta is a summary of the physiognomy heretofore. It demonstrates the important role that the physiognomy has played in the culture. The majority of the recent study repeatedly touched upon the physiognomic problem; however, the possible intersections between the text and image are ignored.¹⁰

The typical artistic representation of the king in Italy is strikingly handsome and adorned with heroic and even divine attributes. The rulers, whose nobility and royalty are conveyed by his excellence in appearance. It is an ancient tradition from the Roman empire.

Julius Caesar, for example, is tall, handsome, round limbed, somewhat slender; fair of complexion, with bloom of youth as if of divine inheritance; skin soft and white; eyes dark and vivacious; mouth (face?) somewhat full; expression kindly.¹¹

Augustus is notably handsome in entire person and graceful through every period of his life; eyes bluish gray, very large and so bright and piercing that there appeared to be a divine vigor in them; stature below average, but fine proportion and symmetry of figure made lack of height noticeable only by comparison; countenance, when speaking or silent, calm and serene; hair somewhat curly and of shade approaching golden; eyebrows grown together, ears of medium size; nose aquiline; teeth widely set, small and rough...

Claudius II is of obscure Illyrian family, but a man of ability and character; frugal, modest, capable of toil, fit intellectually and physically to be emperor; tall of stature; lustrous eyes and broad, full face; fingers so strong that he could knock out a horse's teeth with his fist.¹²

A good deal of information about the emperors is found in incidental mention of details by writers whose primary purpose is obviously not only to give a personal description. One of the most important frequently mentioned features is that of stature, most of the emperors are described as tall and well proportioned. Physical strength, constitution are also referred such as strong or robust. The eyes are emphasized, too.

We can find the reference from the contemporary manual *Fisionomica* which is ascribed to Aristotle to convey the meaning reflected by some physical features:

...quelli che hanno il naso aquilino, ma bello separato dalla fronte, sono di animo grande: si vedano le aquile.¹³

Le sopracciglia...quando tendono a congiungersi, indicano un uomo molto serio.¹⁴

¹⁰ See also Francio Haskell: "la caratteristica principale di queste collezioni di ritratti accompagnati da note biografiche è forse proprio la mancanza di qualsiasi correlazione tra testo e immagine. Non avviene quasi mai che il biografo faccia riferimento alla somiglianza, né tantomeno che ne tragga delle conclusioni: solo raramente può sembrare che le sue parole rimandino a un qualche banale e semidimenticato trattato di fisionomica." Francis Haskell, *le immagini della storia*, trad.ir., Torino, Einaudi, 1997. 51

¹¹ Suet., *Jul.*, 45 ; Cic., *Brutus*, 75; Vell., 2, 41, 1: Plu., *Caes.*, 4 :17 ; Appian, *B.C.*, 2, 90 ;2, 110 ;2,151; Dio Cass., 42, 40 ;43 ; 44 ; 38 ; *Julian, Caesars*, 309 ; Auct. *Bell. Alex.*, 21,2; Macrobi., *Sat.*, 2,3,9. See also Deutsch, "Concerning Caesar's Appearance," *Class. Journ.*, XII (1917), 247-253. translated by H. V. Canter, "Personal appearance in the biography of the roman emperors". *Studies in Philolog*, vol. 25. No. 3 (Jul., 1928). 385-399

¹² Treb. Poll., *Vita*, 13, 5-6; Eutrop., 9, 11; Aurel. Vict., *Liber de Caes.*, 34, 1.

¹³ Pseudo-Aristotle, *Fisionomica*. Introduzione, traduzione e note di Giampiera Raina, Milan: Rizzoli Libri S.P.A. 1993.104

¹⁴ Pseudo-Aristotle, *Fisionomica*. Introduzione, traduzione e note di Giampiera Raina, Milan: Rizzoli Libri S.P.A. 1993. 149

Gli occhi che luccicavano come le goccioline di un liquido lucente indicano un carattere dolcissimo e gradevolissimo.¹⁵ ...quando sono di moderata grandezza, umidi e molto lucidi indicano una persona nobile che pensa e riesce a realizzare grandi progetti.¹⁶

Allora (le orecchie) devono essere pressoché squadrate e di giuste proporzioni e tali che sembrino modellate.¹⁷

...ma talvolta si arla di giusto mezzo non quando questo si pone effettivamente come intermedio tra due estremi, ma quando è un po' spostato da una parte.¹⁸ Il giusto mezzo non corrisponde mai alla metà, ma comporta sempre uno spostamento in una direzione o nell'altra. A seconda di come imponga l'epiprepeia (aspetto complessivo): è questa infatti deve fissare il giusto mezzo e le giuste proporzioni.¹⁹

Francesco Sansovio in *istoria della casa Orsini*, published in 1565 in Venice wrote:

“...ora in queste immagini di uomini così chiari, habbiamo da notare, che nella gente Orsina si vede grandezza et maestà nel sembiante et nel volto, perché essendo pieni di spirito et di vigor militare, con le fronte aperte, et con le bocche per la maggior parte assai grandi, significative di uomini di molta eloquenza, et con aspetti veramente reali, possiamo chiaramente credere che ...essi siano senza alcun dubbio discesi dall' altissimo e nobile sangue, se dalla faccia si dee far coniettura della grandezza de' generosi pensieri.”²⁰

Sansovio thus make us see the role of physiognomy in which the relationship between the physical features and characters is observed, just like in the “bocche grandi significative di molta eloquenza.” (big mouth means eloquence.) However, the reading of physiognomy does not stop here. Another example is on Camillo Giordano Orsini:

“questo volto così asciutto e di color macilente, dimostrativo di qualità di huomo nervoso e per natura agile e forte è il vero ritratto del signor Camillo Orsino.”²¹

There is also other way to convey the characters of the emperor. With the physiognomic concept that the soul is mirrored by the appearance, the characters can be expressed directly.

Marsilio Ficino told Niccolo Michelozzi that he recognized in Cosimo as an old man “not human, but heroic virtue”.²²

And the description of Paolo Giovio on Cosimo, making the face and the soul related again, is like this: “onoratamente temprato fra la severita e l'allegrezza; severa e minacciosa fronte.”(honorably tempered between the severity and gladness; severe and threatening in front.) and Alessandro de' Medici: “forte fisicamente e intellettualmente²³” (strong physically and intellectually).

¹⁵ Pseudo-Aristotle, *Fisionomica*. Introduzione, traduzione e note di Giampiera Raina, Milan: Rizzoli Libri S.P.A. 1993. 151

¹⁶ Pseudo-Aristotle, *Fisionomica*. Introduzione, traduzione e note di Giampiera Raina, Milan: Rizzoli Libri S.P.A. 1993.169

¹⁷ Pseudo-Aristotle, *Fisionomica*. Introduzione, traduzione e note di Giampiera Raina, Milan: Rizzoli Libri S.P.A. 1993., 185

¹⁸ Pseudo-Aristotle, *Fisionomica*. Introduzione, traduzione e note di Giampiera Raina, Milan: Rizzoli Libri S.P.A. 1993. 255

¹⁹ Pseudo-Aristotle, *Fisionomica*. Introduzione, traduzione e note di Giampiera Raina, Milan: Rizzoli Libri S.P.A. 1993. 256

²⁰ Francesco Sansovino, *L'istoria di casa Orsina*, Venezia, Bernardino et Filippo Stagnini, 1568. c. 63

²¹ Francesco Sansovino, *L'istoria di casa Orsina*, Venezia, Bernardino et Filippo Stagnini, 1568. c.81

²² Opera , I, P. 622 (Cogniovi in eo sene non humanam virtutem sed heroicam)

²³ Paolo Giovio, *Elogia*, libro sesto, xvi 887

The problem is, the descriptions of these rulers are so idealized that in many cases the real appearances are lost. Just like the portraiture of the rulers in the Renaissance, sitters habitually gave instructions to be *ritratto al naturale*, (portrayed as if from nature or life) and the resulting portrait was routinely characterized as *una vera effigie* (a true likeness)²⁴ These true likenesses from life, however, were acceptable to most Italian sitters only when presented under an idealized guise.²⁵

II. Body monarch (uniqueness and pre-destinedness)

Physiognomy is an ancient knowledge with which one can not only convey the character and nature of person, but also tell the future of him. Therefore it is something divine. The physiognomy thus helps to deify the power of the emperors or rulers.

Both in China and in Italy, the physical appearances of rulers have something in common as it's observed before. In fact, to be an easily recognizable and acceptable ruler, he or she had better have some feature unique. In Chinese culture, Ban Gu said in *Bai Hu Tong De Lun*: "the sage has his extraordinary appearance."²⁶ There are many records on the extraordinary features of the pre-destined king or emperor in *Tai Ping Yu Lan*. For instance, the king Yao has "the forehead of bird, [] ...eight eyebrows."²⁷ "King Shun has a dragon's look; his has double pupils and big mouth."²⁸ Emperor in Han Dynasty Liu Ji "has temples like sun and moon, narrow chest, back like turtle's shell. He has dragon-like appearance. He is as tall as 7 chi 8 cun (more than 2 meters). He is a ruler wise and tolerant."²⁹

In *Han Shu*: "Emperor Gao Zu (founder of Han Dynasty) has 72 naevi in the left leg."

In *Hou Han Shu*, Emperor Yuan Di in Jin Dynasty: "when he grew up, there are white hair in the left of the temple. His nose is straight like that of a dragon." (vol. 6) and "the physiognomist said that he would be an emperor." (vol. 76)

Liu Bei, the king of Shu in Three Kingdoms Period, "is as tall as 7 chi 5 cun (more than 2 meters). His hand are so long that can reach the knees. He can see his own ears."³⁰

Emperor Wu Di in Han Dynasty, named Liu Yu, "walks in a manner of dragon and tiger, watches in a way uncommon. It's possible that he could not obey."³¹ (vol. 1 *Emperor Wu Di Annual*)

Emperor Guang Wu in eastern Han Dynasty, before his enthronement was said that he: "has a physiognomy of sun, it is a sign of destiny."³²

The uniqueness is what the emperors intended to convey. The ancient rulers often referred to themselves as the "one man" (yi ren 一人) or the "solitary one" (gu 孤). This highlights loneliness in the exercise of power and responsibility. It also serves to reinforce the notion of the king as collective man, as mediator between Heaven and earth. He is, in fact, the "one man" who

²⁴ See, for instance: Ulisse Aleotti, in G. Vasari, *Le Vite*. Ed. A. Venturi, Florence, 1896. 46

²⁵ Joanna Woods-Marsden, "Ritratto al Naturale: questions of realism and idealism in early renaissance portraits." *Art Journal*, vol. 46, No. 3, Portraits: the limitations of likeness (Autumn, 1987), 209-216, 209

²⁶ Ban Gu, *Bai Hu Tong De Lun*. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press, 1989, 51
班固. 白虎通德. 上海: 上海古籍出版社, 1989, 51

²⁷ *Tai Ping Yu Lan*, Beijing: Zhong Hua Press, 371 太平御览. 北京: 中华书局. 1960. 371

²⁸ *Tai Ping Yu Lan*, Beijing: Zhong Hua Press, 377 太平御览. 北京: 中华书局. 1960. 377

²⁹ *Tai Ping Yu Lan*, Beijing: Zhong Hua Press, 412 太平御览. 北京: 中华书局. 1960. 412

³⁰ *San Guo Zhi*. Beijing: Zhong Hua Press, 1959 三国志. 北京: 中华书局, 1959

³¹ *Song Shu*. Beijing: Zhong Hua Press, 1874. 宋书. 北京: 中华书局, 1974

³² *Hou Han Shu*, Beijing: Zhong Hua Press, 1965, 769 后汉书. 北京: 中华书局, 1965. 769

represents all human beings on earth in the presence of a superior Heaven.

It is different in Italy. There is much less descriptions alike to demonstrate the divine qualities of the rulers. One example is Sertorius, the general, who retained only one eye and such a condition is a symptom indicating superior and military capacity.

The logic that if you have a royal face you are destined to be a king is still in the Italian culture. As early as the times of Polybius, Antiochus III judged Demetrius, the son of Euthydemus I of Bactria, “worthy of kingship on account of his appearance, demeanour and bearing.”

The story of Romulus and Remus instruct the readers on the discriminating appreciation of royal physiognomy. When the twins are born to Ilia, the pair are described concisely and in a manner efficient to the advancement of the narrative: “and she bore two sons who were extraordinary in size and beauty; for this reason Amulius was even more frightened and ordered a slave to take the boys and cast them away.”³³

The founders of dynasty in China seemed fond of this kind of story in which the physiognomy is involved. In both official and private history, there are narrations alike.

There was an old man Lv Gong who was good at physiognomy. Once he met LIU Bang (the future founder of Han Dynasty) and was shocked by his appearance. So he respected LIU Bang very much and invited him to dinner. After the dinner he said to LIU Bang: “I like physiognomy and had done it on many people. None of them has an looking as noble as you. So I hope you to take care of yourself. I have a daughter and I allow you to marry her”.³⁴ So he married his daughter LV Zhi, who became the queen later.³⁵

Since LIU Bang was born of dragon, which means he was the son of dragon, he was born noble. So he had dragon-like face with upright nose. His neck was long and he had 72 naevi in his left buttock. In the eyes both of his father in law and the old man, his face is that of the noblest emperor’s. “because of him, all his family member would be noble.”³⁶

The basic official accounts of the Ming founding are the *Ming Tai Zu Shi Lu* (records on Emperor

³³ Plutarch. *Rom.*, 3. 4-5

³⁴ SIMA Qian (Xi Han Dynasty 206BC-8AD) *Records of the Grand History*. Beijing: Zhong Hua Book Company, 1959 P874

司马迁. *史记*. 北京: 中华书局, 1959 P874

³⁵ SIMA Qian (Xi Han Dynasty 206BC-8AD) *Records of the Grand History*. Beijing: Zhong Hua Book Company, 1959 P1287

司马迁. *史记*. 北京: 中华书局, 1959 P1287

³⁶ There was also a physiognomic story of LV Zhi, the queen when LIU Bang, the emperor was still a peasant before his career. One day LV Zhi and two of her sons were working in the field. Came a old man to ask for water. So LV Zhi did. When the old man caught sight of her face, he said: “madam, you are the most honorable nobleman in the country.” And then he saw the two sons. He pointed the son Xiao Xian and said: “you are noblest because of this boy”. Also he said that the other son was noble. Soon after the old man left, came back LIU Bang. His wife told him all what the old man said. He was so curious about it that he pursued the old man to ask him his own fate. The old man answered: “your wife and your sons are all noble because of you.” Gao Zu was very delighted and said: “if it is true, I will never forget your goodness.”

WANG Chong (Han Dynasty 206BC-220AD). *Lun Heng • Phrenology*. Shanghai: Shanghai Gu Ji Press, 1990 P26
王充 (汉). *论衡 • 骨相篇*. 上海: 上海古籍出版社, 1990 P26

Tai Zu in Ming dynasty), completed in 1418 after two consecutive revisions and the Annals of Tai Zu in *Ming Shi* (history of Ming dynasty), compiled during the early Ch'ing which synthesizes the extant Ming sources, both official and private. In *Ming Tai Zu Shi Lu*, there is a story relating of how the future emperor met an elderly scholar who predicted his destiny by observing his physiognomy when he was a sixteen-year-old Buddhist novice caught in the midst of rebel upsprings:

...when he arrived at Liu-an, (his Majesty) met an elderly scholar, looking rather weary with a basket of books on his back. Pitying his advanced age, His Majesty volunteered to bear it for him. The elderly scholar made no objection and the two journeyed together. On reaching Chu-sha-chen, as they were resting at the foot of a locust tree, the elderly scholar said to His Majesty: "as I examined your features I found them extraordinary. I am well versed in astrology, let me have your date and year of birth and I shall make a prognostication for you." His Majesty complied. The elderly scholar remained silent for a long while and said: "I have made prediction for many people, but no one was as noble as you. I wish yo could be cautious. It will favor you if you proceed northwest but not southeast...."³⁷

This presents a vivid example of fusion of historical facts with a cycle of fictional anecdotes in the popular imagination. The physiognomic story has recast the Ming founder from a muscular, illiterate beggar, mendicant monk an ambitious rebel leader, in the image of a righteous hero, dynasty founder and exemplary ruler.

The other was the equally publicized story about the rise of the Song dynasty founder Zhao Kuang Yin (927-76) who is said to have met, during his residence in a monastery in Xianyang in his early years of obscurity, a strange monk gifted in physiognomy who foretold his destiny and advised him to proceed north. This anecdote, transmitted in ficional miscellanies presumably drawing on the popular tradition, was laer copied into the imperial annals of the official Song History.³⁸

III. Expression of power

"The earliest known religion is a belief in the divinity of kings..."³⁹ in his well-known book, Arthur M. Hocart speaks of kingship as a gift of the gods, which is inherited through a special lineage.

What we observed above demonstrated clearly how physiognomic descriptions of the rulers could be manipulated for propaganda and persuasion. It is expected to shape the attitudes of the populace. In our own time as well as in the past, portraits have been viewed by rulers and peoples alike as symbols with special potency and significance.⁴⁰ The physiognomy that both the ruler and the people understand is therefore the bridge.

In China, traditionally, the ruler has also been called *Tian Zi* (天子), literally, son of Heaven, a title going back to Zhou times. The Zhou was the first concrete case of heaven worship, or one

³⁷ by *Ming Tai Zu Shi Lu* (1418), ed. Yao Kuang Hsiao (1335-1418) et al., 257. Academia Sinica, Taipei. 1962. 1/2-3. The passage is translated by Hok-lam Chan in "the rise of Ming T'ai-tsu (1368-98): facts and fictions in early Ming official historiography", *Journal of the American oriental society*. Vol.95. no. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1975.) 670-715, 692

³⁸ Hok-lam Chan in "the rise of Ming T'ai-tsu (1368-98): facts and fictions in early Ming official historiography", *Journal of the American oriental society*. Vol.95. no. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1975.) 670-715, 695

³⁹ A. M. Hocart, *Kinship*. London: Watts, 1941. 1

⁴⁰ Eugene F. Miller and Barry Schwartz, "The icon of the American Republic: a study in political symbolism". *The Review of politics*. Vol. 47, no. 4 (oct., 1985)516-543

may say a “heaven cult”. It also established for the first time in Chinese history the concept that the king was a “son of Heaven.” Philosophically, this justified by the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven (*Tian Ming* 天命), according to which the ruler possesses the mandate to rule, given to his dynastic founder, which is, however, only maintained by good government. And the title is more than just symbolic. It signifies a special relationship between the ruler and the supreme. Deity called Heaven, represented by the celestial firmament.⁴¹ The traditional conception is “one who is living must have a physiognomy and one who has a physiognomy must be living, both the life and the physiognomy are given by the heaven. ... when one is born, the physiognomy and the destine is decided, which cannot be changed by neither ghost nor god and cannot be transformed by neither sage nor wise.” With this conception, the heaven-given kingship is legitimated.

In the ancient autocratic country, the writing is controlled by the king or emperor, who met no difficulty in supervising how to describe his appearance. The ancient China is in this situation. Official historical records, compiled for or by the ruling class, served the interest of the state and the literati and expounded the orthodox ideology and views of the great tradition. Therefore, traditional Chinese historical records are the product not only of a general conception of what constituted the facts of history in the pre-scientific reasoning, but also a prescribed criterion of the purposes of historical records indigenous to the Chinese intellectual and cultural traditions.⁴²

Deliberate construction and promotion by central governmental authority can also be found in ancient Italy, but there is some difference.

Smuts usefully observes that just as monarchs needed writers and artists to forge their public image, so writers and artists needed monarchs to give them inspirational material and to personify their values and aspirations.⁴³

A group of artists and writers was as eager to be made into the ruler’s instruments as he was interested in using them for the realization of his cultural plans. The success of their work depended primarily on the success of their adaptation and thereby subordination to ruler’s will. For example, while the patronage of Cosimo Vecchio was essentially directed at institutions and hence dominated by architecture and books, Lorenzo Magnifico built very little and commissioned few works from established artists, but he collected preciousities and sponsored crafts neglected by traditional patrons. Lorenzo realized the value of art and artists for diplomatic and propagandistic purposes; Cosimo I picked up where Lorenzo had left off. The duke drew art and scholarship fully into the service of politics.⁴⁴ It was the job of the court humanists to articulate the princes’ taste and values, and their enthusiastic literary efforts reveal that sometimes, the art corresponded to an ideal fostered in court circles.

Conclusion

By examining the physiognomy in the physical descriptions of rulers both in Chinese and Italian

⁴¹ See Julia Ching, “Son of Heaven: Sacral Kingship in Ancient China”. *T’oung Pao*, Second series, vol. 83, Fasc.1/3. State and Ritual in China (1997). 3-41. 16

⁴² Hok-lam Chan, “The rise of Ming T’ai-tsu (1368-98): facts and fictions in early Ming official historiography.” *Journal of the American oriental society*, vol. 95, no. 4 (Oct.- Dec., 1975) 679-715,680

⁴³ R. Malcolm Smuts, *Culture and power in England, 1585-1685* (Basingstoke, 1999). P60

⁴⁴ See Kurt W. Forster. “Metaphors of rule: political ideology and history in the portraits of Cosimo I de’ Medici.” *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 15. Bd., H. 1 (1971) 65-104

literature, the imperial power is demonstrated from a perspective that has not emphasized much. The physiognomy as a bridge connecting the royal and the populace is employed by the ruling class as an expression of power itself. It is interesting that the period when the physiognomy was in flourish is almost the same in China and Italy (esp. in 2nd century and 16th century). The physiognomic consciousness as a common consciousness influenced art, literature and culture. Besides, what we have discussed in the article furnished us with vivid examples of the adaptation of the expressions of the mass heritages into the use of the great tradition and help to enlighten our understanding of the multi-faceted Chinese and Italian cultural tradition.