From the holdings of the Department of Special Collections , Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ

These documents are either in the public domain, or can only be used for educational and research purposes (Fair use) as per U.S. Copyright law (text below). By accessing this file, all users agree that their use falls in the public domain or within fair use as defined by the copyrightlaw. We do not charge any permission or usage fees for the publication of images of material inour collections, including those provided by Princeton University Library, via our website, catalog, or directly from staff.For more information regarding copyright, credit, and citation please review the information onthe Copyright, Credit and Citation Guidelines page of our website.
https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/policies/copyright-credit-and-citation-guidelines. If you have any questions, including how to order higher-quality images from the collection, contact Special Collections Public Services via our Ask Us! Form. https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/ask-us

---

Doctoral Dissertations, 2011-2026 East Asian Studies

2025

EVER NEW: CONSTRUCTING “NEWNESS” IN THE HAN

Liu, Meihui

Princeton, NJ : Princeton University

---

http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp01p2676z97x

U.S. Copyright law: The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, §108, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of fair use that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve a violation of copyright law. https://www.copyright.gov/title17/title17.pdf

EVER NEW:
CONSTRUCTING "NEWNESS" IN THE HAN

Meihui Liu

A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY

OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE BY

THE DEPARTMENT OF

EAST ASIAN STUDIES

Adviser: Martin Kern

May 2025

© Copyright by Meihui Liu, 2025. All rights reserved.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation delves into the evolution of the concept of newness in early imperial China, arguing that its emergence as a positive attribute was neither self-evident nor inevitable but the result of a deliberate intellectual construction spanning from the third century BCE to first century CE. The Western Han dynasty (206 BCE–9 CE) is often perceived as a period of consolidation and stagnation, dominated by a sanctioned Confucian orthodoxy and marked by a perceived lack of innovation. Yet Han intellectuals actively theorized and valorized "newness" (*xin* 新), shaping a discourse that framed their own time as a moment of renewal and creative transformation.

Drawing on a range of sources, including canonical texts, historiographical narratives, philosophical treatises, and court discussions, this dissertation seeks to reconstruct the intellectual and discursive landscape of the Han dynasty, uncovering perspectives that have been obscured by later historians and modern interpretive frameworks. It foregrounds key figures in the mid-to-late Western Han such as Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BCE), Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE), and Huan Tan 桓譚 (ca. 23 BCE–56 CE), illuminating how their writings contribute to the construction of newness as both a rupture from the past and a continuation of traditions. Rather than merely reflecting historical change, the discourse of newness in this period functioned as a critical agent in shaping imperial ideology, historiography, and intellectual production.

This dissertation thus reinterprets Han intellectual history by demonstrating that its scholars did not merely preserve or systematize earlier traditions but conceptualized their era as one of dynamic transformation. In doing so, it contributes to broader discussions on historical consciousness and intellectual renewal in imperial China, challenging narratives that marginalize the Han in accounts of Chinese intellectual history.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT 3

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 6

CONVENTIONS 8

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES 9

INTRODUCTION 10

CHAPTER 1. WHICH PAST TO FOLLOW?
The Dynamics of Rhetoric Concerning the Past in the Mid-to-Late Western Han Period 28
1.1 Introduction 28
1.2 Multiple Pasts: *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論 (Discourses on Salt and Iron) and its Consequences 30
1.3 "Han Has its Own Affairs": The Establishment and Influence of Precedentism 51
1.4 Past as Ritual Classics or Historical Examples: The Decline and Transformation of the *gu* Faction 71

CHAPTER 2. NEW MASTER WRITINGS:
Liu Xiang's Newly Arranged Anecdotes and Huan Tan's Newly Created Stories 102
2.1 Liu Xiang's *Xinxu* 新序 (Newly Arranged [Events]) and *Xinyuan* 新苑 (New Garden, i.e., *Shuoyuan* 說苑) 102
2.1.1 *Xin* 新 (new): A Distinctive Designation in Western-Han Master Writings 102
2.1.2 *Xu* 序 (to organize): A Crucial Step from Passages to Books 114
2.1.3 Reintegrating Anecdotes into the Contexts of *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan* 126
2.1.3.1 The Structure Across Chapters 126
2.1.3.2 The Context Within One Chapter 135
2.2 *Xinlun*: The Herald of New Master Writings 146
2.2.1 What is New in the *Xinlun* 146
2.2.2 A New and Different *Chunqiu*: From History to Discourses 149
2.2.3 A New History: From the History of Dynasties to the History of Oneself 152
2.2.3.1 Recent Political History: More Contemporary than *Xinyu* and *Xinxu* 152
2.2.3.2 Personal History: Historicizing his Discourses and Friends 167

2.2.4 New Masters Literature: From Political Remonstrations to Comprehensive Literary World 175
2.2.4.1 Comprehensive Talent 175
2.2.4.2 "Trivial" Anecdotes 179
2.3 Summary 187

CHAPTER 3. NEW CLASSIC:
Yang Xiong's Ever-Evolving Model in the *Fayan* 法言 (Exemplary Sayings) 190
3.1 Yang Xiong's "Love of Antiquity"? Love of New Classics 190
3.2 *Fayan*: Speeches in Written Form 204
3.2.1 Emphasizing the Orality 204
3.2.2 Two Oral Traditions: The Disciples Lineage and The *Shijing* Practice 212
3.3 Establishing New Textual Relationship: Two Modes of Ever Evolving Texts 224

CHAPTER 4. NEW MANDATE:
Transforming Recipients, Audience, and Tokens 232
4.1 *Furui* 符瑞 (auspicious signs): From Symbols of the Five Virtues to Reasons for *fengshan* Sacrifices 235
4.2 *Fuming* 符命 (tokens of the mandate): The Greatest Weapon and the Biggest Weakness of an Eclectic 251
4.3 *Tuchen* 圖讖 (prophetic illustrations and texts): The Divergence Between Rulers and Scholars on Predicting and Arguing for the Mandate 267

CONCLUSION:
All That Is Solid Melts into Air 291

APPENDIX 300

BIBLIOGRAPHY 312

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this dissertation has been a journey of intellectual discovery, personal growth, and, at times, sheer perseverance. If this process has taught me anything, it is that no intellectual pursuit is ever truly solitary. I owe an immense debt of gratitude to those who have guided, supported, and encouraged me along the way.

First and foremost, I extend my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Professor Martin Kern. His intellectual generosity, incisive mentorship, and unwavering support have shaped not only this dissertation but also the way I approach scholarly inquiry. His depth and sharp eye for argumentation have been both an inspiration and a challenge—one that I have continually strived to meet. The highest compliment I can give is that even when his feedback dismantled entire sections of my work, the more concise revisions always turned out to be significantly stronger. I have been immensely fortunate to learn from him.

I am also deeply grateful to my committee members, Trenton Wilson, Anna Shields, and Mark Csikszentmihalyi, whose insights and encouragement have been invaluable. Their careful readings, thoughtful critiques, and thought-provoking discussions have helped refine and strengthen this dissertation at every stage. I would also like to extend my thanks to the faculty, staff, and colleagues in the Department of East Asian Studies at Princeton University, where I found a rigorous yet supportive intellectual home. Especially to my cohort-mate, Peter Wong, who boarded the same flight to the United States with me at the start of this journey. Throughout every stage of our doctoral program, we have encouraged each other, shared information, and engaged in scholarly discussions. It was his kindness and support that made my Ph.D. experience not just manageable but filled with cherished memories.

Beyond academia, my deepest thanks go to my mother, whose boundless love and steadfast belief in me have been the foundation of everything I have accomplished. Writing a dissertation while caring for a parent is never easy, but accompanying her through illness has made me more aware than ever of how precious our bond is. She has been my anchor, giving me the courage to weather moments of uncertainty. I am profoundly grateful that she is recovering, and I dedicate this work to her.

To my boyfriend, who has been my steadfast companion through every high and low. Thank you for your patience, your humor, and your ability to troubleshoot every technical crisis. The landscapes we have explored together across the United States are only a fraction of the journey we have shared, and I look forward to many more.

This dissertation may be just one chapter in the larger story of my life, but every conversation, every spark of insight, and every quiet act of kindness from those around me will remain with me as an enduring echo. As I move forward, I hope to carry the same courage and passion into the next chapters, and I hope to repay the kindness I have received by passing it on to others.

CONVENTIONS

1. *References*.

References are provided in the footnotes in accord with the Chicago Manual of Style format in the first instance, with subsequent references given in abbreviated form generally as the surname of the author, followed by the abbreviated title of their work. References to traditional Chinese sources after the first instance present only the title of the text, followed by the volume and page numbers.

2. *Translations*.

I have generally made use of existing English translations of traditional Chinese terms but declared and explained my choices when they are different from specific existing ones in significant respects. When a traditional Chinese source is cited, the translation is normally my own, sometimes with link(s) to existing translation(s) that my version takes as the reference(s). Important Chinese terms in the first instance within the main text are normally followed by a translation that is normally omitted thereafter, unless a new discussion becomes necessary.

3. *Chinese Characters and Romanization*.

Full-form (*fanti* 繁體) Chinese characters and mainland *pinyin* 拼音 romanization are employed throughout my writing. Alternative romanization systems, such as Wade-Giles, are not converted when they appear in the titles and the texts of published works. Chinese characters for specific terms, names, and titles appear in the first instance and are omitted thereafter in the main text and in the footnotes, respectively.

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. Some cases of *wangzhe* in the discourses of the Counselor and Literati 36–37

Table 2. Two similar anecdotes in the *Xinyu* and *Xinyuan* 142

Table 3. The tale of Yang Zhen in the *Xinyuan*, *Zuozhuan*, and *Lüshi Chunqiu* 143–144

Table 4. Huan and Yang's arguments on the Sino-Xiongnu relationship 156–160

Table 5. Evaluations of Han people in the *Fayan* 193

Figure 1. The frequency of the references to the present and the past in the discourses by the Counselor, Worthies, and Literati 33

Figure 2. The frequency of the references to the Qin and Zhou in the discourses by the Counselor, Worthies, and Literati 40

Figure 3. The evaluation of the past by the Counselor, the Literati, and the Worthies 50

Figure 4. The structure of *Xinyuan*'s chapters 134

Figure 5. The radial mode of texts 226

Figure 6. The confluence mode of texts 228

Figure 7. The retrospective mode of texts 230

INTRODUCTION

May he, if he favours the Palatine altars,
Extend Rome's power, and Latium's good-fortune,
Through the fresh ages, show, always, improvement,
Lustra ever new.[1]

——Horace, "Carmen Saeculare"

Topics and Questions

Declarations of "newness" have often accompanied the rise of empires. In 17 BCE, a decade after the Roman Senate conferred the title of Augustus upon Gaius Octavius, Octavius orchestrated a grand spectacle, the Secular Games, intended to mark the end of a *saeculum* (an age, traditionally understood by Romans as the span of a human lifetime, typically one hundred or one hundred and ten years) and herald the beginning of a new era. For this occasion, Augustus commissioned Horace to compose a celebratory hymn, the "Carmen Saeculare" (Song of the ages), in which the poet enthusiastically depicted an emerging empire flourishing under the divine protection of Apollo and Diana, promising an era of peace and prosperity. In contrast to the prevailing Greek belief in a continuous decline from a golden age to an iron age, Augustus and Horace embraced the vision of a new golden age.[2] Both the performance format—where a choir of boys and girls sang before an altar at night—and the content—praising deities and envisioning a new beginning—of Horace's hymn bear a striking resemblance to the suburban sacrificial hymns commissioned by Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141–87 BCE): In one such hymn, which extols the

[1] Translated by A. S. Kline, "Horace: The Epodes And Carmen Saeculare," Poetry in Translation, accessed January 10, 2025, https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceEpodesAndCarmenSaeculare.php.

[2] For the detailed analysis of how the implications and procedures of this ceremony had changed, see Richard Alston, *Rome's Revolution: Death of the Republic and Birth of the Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 293–295.

appearance of an auspicious great star, the poet regards the earlier discovery of an ancient bronze tripod at Fen Sui 汾脽 as the beginning of Heaven's bestowal of blessings.[3] A similar proclamation of the advent of a new and better era can be seen in one of the stone stele inscriptions following the *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪 sacrifices of the First Emperor of Qin (r. 247–210 BCE), where it is recorded: "The emperor created a beginning" (皇帝作始).[4]

To modern readers, such declarations of newness may seem unremarkable. After all, the Roman and Qin-Han Empires undeniably ushered in distinct historical epochs. It may appear only natural that imperial leaders would emphasize notions of renewal and transformation. Yet not all those who initiated profound change explicitly acknowledged, let alone celebrated, their own newness. Newness is not merely a factual designation, an assertion that something has recently emerged, but also a value judgment. Furthermore, the emotional and ideological connotations attached to this judgment vary across time. In ancient China, the notion of newness as something desirable was not intrinsic; rather, it was a consciously constructed ideal that developed over two centuries. Prior to the late Warring States period (476–221 BCE), newness was not an esteemed quality. Quite the opposite, early canonical texts such as the *Shangshu* 尚書 (Book of Documents), *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Odes), and *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo Tradition) repeatedly admonish readers not to forget long-established virtues or regulations (*jiu de* 舊德, *jiu zhang* 舊章, *jiu dian* 舊典). They caution against abandoning old friends, kin, or alliances (*gu jiu* 故舊, *jiu yin* 舊姻).

---

[3] 汾脽出鼎，皇祐元始。See Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書, annot. Yan Shigu 顏師古 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 22.1063. Some scholars also parallel Emperor Wu's *feng* and *shan* sacrifices to the Secular Games of the Roman Empire in their political role, see Rebecca Robinson, "Spectacular Power in the Early Han and Roman Empires," *Journal of World History* 29, no. 3 (2018): 343–345.

[4] Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, annot. Pei Yin 裴駰, Sima Zhen 司馬貞, and Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 6.245. For a detailed introduction and analysis of the stele inscriptions, see Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-Huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 2000).

A wise ruler, these texts insist, should adhere to traditional policies (*jiu zheng* 舊政) and appoint experienced officials (*jiu ren* 舊人).[5] Those who sought novelty in human affairs were condemned.[6] It was only during the Warring States period that thinkers from diverse philosophical traditions began to articulate a more favorable view of newness. However, when early proponents of reform, particularly the so-called pre-Qin "Legalists," advocated for innovation, the term *xin* 新 (new) had yet to be fully developed as a conceptual category. Instead, they relied on terms such as *geng* 更 (to alter), *bian* 變 (to transform), and *yi* 易 (to change), or framed their arguments in negative terms—opposing the adherence to antiquated principles rather than explicitly championing the new.[7] As Quentin Skinner observes, "the surest sign that a group or society has entered into the self-conscious possession of a new concept is that a corresponding

[5] For example, in the *Shijing* "Jia yue" 假樂 (Hymn of Praise; Mao no. 249), it says, "Observing and following the old statutes" (率由舊章); in Lord Ai 3, Ji Huanzi 季桓子 (d. 492 BCE) said, "It would be wrong for the old regulations to be lost" (舊章不可亡也); and in the "Pan Geng" 盤庚 chapter of the *Shangshu*, the king said, "Of old, our former kings planned how to employ the men of old families to share in government" (古我先王，亦惟圖任舊人共政).

[6] The *Shijing* contains few instances that present the new in a positive light, with one notable exception: the famous line in "King Wen" 文王 (Mao no. 235), which states, "Although Zhou is an ancient state, its mandate is new" (周雖舊邦，其命維新). Similarly, in the *Zuozhuan*, perhaps the only passage that explicitly acknowledges the renewal of the old is found in Lord Zhao 17, which declares, "A comet sweeps away the old to make way for the new" (彗所以除舊布新也).

[7] In the entire *Shangjun shu* 商君書 (Book of Lord Shang), the term *xin* appears only twice, both in the phrase *xin min* 新民, referring to people newly integrated into Qin. Notably, neither instance is associated with the concept of reform. In the "Geng fa" 更法 (Changing the Laws) chapter of the *Shangjun shu*, the central figure, Gongsun Yang 公孫鞅 (i.e., Lord Shang 商鞅), consistently articulates his innovative ideas through opposition to old customs and ancient rites. He asserts, for example: "A sage does not model himself on antiquity if it strengthens the state, nor does he adhere to established ritual if it benefits the people" (聖人苟可以強國，不法其故；苟可以利民，不循其禮). Elsewhere, he declares: "It is not worthwhile to discuss state affairs with a man enslaved by ritual, nor to debate reform with one bound by established principles" (拘禮之人，不足與言事；制法之人，不足與論變). He further contends: "Those who act against antiquity do not necessarily deserve blame, and those who follow ritual do not necessarily merit praise" (反古者未可必非，循禮者未足多). Similarly, although *xin* appears frequently in the *Hanfei zi* 韓非子, only two cases in the "Wu du" 五蠹 (Five Vermin) chapter convey a genuine sense of "newness" in explicit contrast to the old. In all other cases, *xin* merely denotes recency without any inherent value judgment.

vocabulary will be developed."[8] It was only in the very late Warring States period, in texts such as the *Xunzi* 荀子, *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals), and "Xici zhuan" 繫辭傳, that *xin* began to emerge as a key lexicon, and newness came to be treated as a virtue.[9] The construction of a sophisticated discourse on newness was by no means a seamless process. Finally, in the Western Han, the ideal of newness had been fully articulated and embraced not only in political rhetoric but also in textual culture. Newness had become a defining feature of Han ideological thought.

The concept of newness cannot exist in isolation. It only acquires meaning when juxtaposed with something old. Even when the "old" is not explicitly articulated sometimes, it remains an integral part of the discourse on newness. Thus, whenever we encounter declarations of the new, we must ask: what, precisely, is being designated as old? In classical Chinese, several terms functioned as antonyms of *xin*, including *xi* 昔 (the past), *wang* 往 (previous), *gu* 古 (ancient), *gu* 故 (former), *jiu* 舊 (old), *bi* 敝 (worn-out) and *chen* 陳 (obsolete). However, these terms are not synonymous; each carries distinct connotations. *Xi* can refer to any period in the past, from just a few days prior to the distant past, while *wang* generally denotes the more recent past. *Gu* 古 often evokes an idealized golden age, associated with sagely wisdom and revered traditions. Among these terms, *gu* 古, *gu* 故 and *jiu* were the most frequently used antitheses of *xin* in the pre-imperial period, and they typically carried moral superiority over *xin*. However, as *xin* gained ideological prominence at the end of Warring States period, *gu* and *jiu* gradually took on the

[8] Quentin Skinner, "The Idea of a Cultural Lexicon," in *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 160.
[9] For example, the *Xunzi* states, "If a true king arises, he will surely adhere to old names while also creating new ones" (若有王者起，必將有循於舊名，有作於新名). Similarly, the *Lüshi Chunqiu* declares, "Adopt the new and discard the old" (用其新，棄其陳). The "Xici zhuan" further asserts, "Constant renewal is called supreme virtue" (日新之謂盛德).

more negative meaning of "outdated," and a more explicitly pejorative antonym, *chen*, emerged.[10] Quentin Skinner astutely observes that when the meaning of a cultural lexicon shifts, what is truly changing is "a social or intellectual attitude on the part of those who use the language." He further emphasizes that one of the primary functions of evaluative language is to legitimize, as well as describe, the activities and attitudes of dominant social groups.[11] The evolving discourse on newness and its opposites at the dawn of the Chinese empire thus reflects a broader transformation in social and political thought.

A widely held assertion posits that China has a long-standing tradition of venerating the past as the ultimate source of political and cultural authority. The dominant intellectual ideal in premodern China, according to this view, was a return to an imagined golden age. Some scholars have noted that "restoring the past" was itself often a form of reform or even revolution.[12] I propose, instead, that we shift our focus to a long-overlooked intellectual tradition: the valorization of newness. This is particularly crucial for the study of Han intellectual history, where existing scholarship has overwhelmingly emphasized the Han engagement with ancient models while largely neglecting their innovative proposals. Michael Loewe famously characterized Han intellectual currents as divided between "Modernists" and "Reformists," a dichotomy that distinguished those who derived their tradition from Qin from those who idealized the remote Zhou as

[10] The term *chen* 陳 was also widely used in the pre-Qin period, though in most cases, it functioned as a verb meaning "to display" or as a noun referring to a "battle array." It was only toward the very end of the Warring States period that a new meaning emerged, likely corresponding to the rising significance of *xin*. One of the clearest illustrations of this shift appears in the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, which pairs the two terms in the phrase: "To utilize what is new and abandon what is obsolete" (用其新，棄其陳). The opposition between *xin* and *bi* 弊 can also be observed in Yang Xiong's *Fayan*, as further discussed in Chapter 3.
[11] Skinner, "The Idea of a Cultural Lexicon," 171, 173.
[12] For example, Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 (1910–1998), in his discussion of literary movements that sought to restore the ancient ways, explicitly argued that such movements were, in essence, a form of reform. See Qian, "Lun fugu" 論復古, in *Xie zai rensheng bianshang de bianshang* 寫在人生邊上的邊上 (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian, 2001), 24–25.

their model.[13] However, it is crucial to recognize that both groups emphasized the need for present action and change. Their opposition is more complex than a simple Zhou-versus-Qin framework suggests. In fact, some Han intellectuals argued that they were living in an era suffering from the deterioration of both Qin and Zhou policies (承周秦之弊). Their solution was not a mere return to Zhou or a continuation of Qin, but the establishment of an entirely new system, one that corrected the deficiencies of both. For example, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145 BCE–?) articulated this perspective in his biography of Gaozu (r. 202–195 BCE), where he observed that each of the three ancient dynasties, Xia, Shang, and Zhou, had its own governing principles, yet each also contained inherent flaws that required rectification by its successor. According to Sima, Zhou's weakness lay in its excessive reliance on *wen* 文 (cultural refinement, often associated with ornamentation), a deficiency that Qin's harsh policies failed to remedy. The Han, he suggested, could resolve this issue by adopting the principles of Xia (in Han people's imagine).[14] This line of thinking was influenced by Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 195–105 BCE), proposed that the ideal governance of a true king involved a cyclical alternation between the principles of Shang and Xia, between simplicity and refinement.[15] A similar approach appears in the thought of Du Qin 杜欽, a "Reformist" active during the reign of Emperor Cheng. Du proposed that the Han should adopt the principle of *zhi* 質 (simplicity), which he identified with the Shang dynasty, as an antidote to the decay that had afflicted both Zhou and Qin governance.[16] In both cases,

[13] See Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China: 104 BC to AD 9* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974).
[14] *Shiji* 8.393. （夏之政忠。忠之敝，小人以野，故殷人承之以敬。敬之敝，小人以鬼，故周人承之以文。文之敝，小人以僿，故救僿莫若以忠。三王之道若循環，終而復始。周秦之閒，可謂文敝矣。秦政不改，反酷刑法，豈不繆乎？）
[15] Dong Zhongshu, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 春秋繁露義證, annot. Zhong Zhe 锺哲 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 204. (王者之制，一商一夏，一質一文。)
[16] *Hanshu* 60.2674. （殷因於夏尚質，周因於殷尚文，今漢家承周秦之敝，宜抑文尚質。）

these scholars did not advocate for a direct return to any single dynastic model. Rather, they distilled abstract principles from an imagined antiquity, principles that could serve as the foundation for new Han reforms. Significantly, the very lack of detailed historical records on Xia and Shang at the time afforded Han scholars considerable latitude to construct an idealized vision of the most rational Way of the true King. Whether invoking Xia or Shang, their theories of the past were, in essence, *new* Han beliefs.

Even among mid-to-late Western Han scholars who ardently praised the Zhou dynasty, their supposed calls for restoration often concealed genuine innovations with no real precedent in Zhou history—an aspect largely overlooked by modern observers. A common scholarly consensus holds that, during the Western Han, only Emperor Wu introduced unprecedented changes across ritual, political, military, and economic domains. Earlier emperors largely followed Qin conventions, while later emperors, especially from the reign of Emperor Yuan onward, came under the influence of Ru scholars who fervently advocated a return to the golden era of the Zhou, seeking to implement the teachings of ancient classics in governance. According to this framework, Western Han history can be schematized as follows: adherence to Qin conventions in the early Han, innovation under Emperor Wu, and a turn toward Zhou-inspired restoration from Emperor Yuan onward. It is unsurprising, then, that Emperor Wu's reign has drawn particular scholarly attention for its newness. Martin Kern, for example, examines Emperor Wu's newly created sacrifice hymns, demonstrating that these texts articulated a vision of political legitimacy fundamentally distinct from the Zhou paradigm as followed by Gaozu. Unlike the Zhou model which derived legitimacy from an idealized golden past, Emperor Wu's system sanctified the present as

its own source of authority.[17] At the end of his analysis, Kern discusses Kuang Heng 匡衡 (chancellor from 36–30 BCE), a figure commonly regarded as a representative "Reformist," noting that Kuang later revised these hymns, shaping what Kern terms "a new classicism echoing the model of the Zhou."[18] Nevertheless, Kuang's so-called "Zhou" model was not a faithful reconstruction of Zhou practices but rather a novel creation shaped by newly emerging classics and Han-era innovations. For example, one of Kuang Heng's biggest reforms, his objection to Emperor Wu's choice of sacrificial locations and his proposal to separate the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth in the southern and northern suburbs of Chang'an had no clear precedent in Zhou records. In Zhou ritual practice, the most significant suburban sacrifice (*jiaoji* 郊祭) was dedicated to Heaven, while the sacrifice to the god of soil (*sheji* 社祭) was distinct from the Han-era sacrifice to Earth, and no records specify its precise location. In fact, it was only in 113–114 BCE that Emperor Wu formally established the Heaven-Earth sacrifice system for the first time. Kuang Heng did not reject this system but merely proposed an adjustment to its spatial arrangement. To justify his position, he cited the *Liji* 禮記, a text compiled in the Han period rather than a genuine Zhou classic.[19] The debate initiated by Kuang Heng further illustrates this point. Among fifty-eight Erudites, fifty supported Kuang's proposal, believing it aligned with classical texts, while eight opposed it on the grounds that it deviated from past regulations (*gu zhi* 古制). These dissenters found no reliable textual evidence for Kuang's model in Zhou records, so they disagreed

[17] See Kern, "In Praise of Political Legitimacy: The *miao* and *jiao* Hymns of the Western Han." *Oriens Extremus* 39.1 (1996): 29–67. Also Kern, *Die Hymnen der Chinesischen Staatsopfer: Literatur und Ritual in der Politischen Repräsentation von der Han-Zeit bis zu den Sechs Dynastien*. (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1997).

[18] See Kern, "In Praise of Political Legitimacy," 65. In another article, he examines the "late Western Han ritual classicism," a doctrine asserting that the dynasty's legitimacy rested on its adherence to the venerated past. See Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of *Wen* in Early China," *T'oung Pao* 87.1-3 (2001): 72.

[19] A detailed discussion of this citation can be seen in the first chapter.

with his proposal. This debate reveals that the legitimacy of Kuang's argument rested not on an actual Zhou precedent but on a Han-era reinterpretation of classical authority. His aim was not to "restore" the Zhou model but to construct a new system that had never existed before. Moreover, Michael Nylan, a leading proponent of the theory of late Western Han Classicism, also suggests that it was during Emperor Cheng's reign that a group of reformers at court successfully promoted a "classical turn," persuading many that the Qin model had to be abandoned in favor of an idealized Western Zhou framework for governance and scholarship.[20] She contends that Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) and his contemporaries were the first generation to truly "love antiquity" (*haogu* 好古) in the sense of "wanting to restore a distant past they believed to be significantly better than their own time."[21] Yet there is an irony in this statement: the three so-called most enthusiastic proponents of this *haogu* ideology, Yang Xiong, Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BCE), and Liu Xin 劉歆 (50 BCE?–23 CE), were themselves deeply engaged in renewing texts. Liu Xiang systematically renewed transmitted texts, Liu Xin promoted previously obscure classics,[22]

[20] Michael Nylan, "Han Views of the Qin Legacy and the Late Western Han 'Classical Turn,'" *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 79 (2015): 51–98.
[21] Nylan, "Manuscript Culture in Late Western Han, and the Implications for Authors and Authority," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 1 (2014): 155–85.
[22] The ultimate legitimacy of Liu Xin's arguments in favor of classics written in ancient script, such as the *Zuozhuan*, did not derive from the past but from the authority of the classics and their commentaries (*jing zhuan* 經傳), much like Kuang Heng. I do not agree with the idea that Liu Xin favored the *Zuozhuan* primarily because it was written in ancient characters. In the *Hanshu*, Ban Gu notes that while both Liu Xin and his father, Liu Xiang, "loved antiquity," only Liu Xin championed the *Zuozhuan*, whereas his father remained committed to the *Guliang* 穀梁 tradition. Therefore, the key reason Liu Xin actively promoted the *Zuozhuan*, I argue, was not simply its ancient script but the interpretive flexibility it afforded him. Unlike the modern-script classics, which had a more extensive history of scholarship, the *Zuozhuan* had limited prior commentary, leaving ample room for Liu to introduce new interpretations. This is evident in the *Hanshu*, where Ban Gu observes that earlier *Zuozhuan* scholars could only explicate individual words, whereas Liu Xin claimed to elucidate its deeper meanings. Liu Xin's initial disregard for the *Zhouli* 周禮 further supports this perspective. Although the *Zhouli* was presumably also written in ancient script, Liu did not prioritize it until Wang Mang 王莽 decided to adopt it. The causal relationship is clear: the *Zhouli* was not elevated as an authoritative "ancient-script classic" on intrinsic grounds but was constructed as one after it was politically endorsed. While the association with ancient script provided a layer of legitimacy to Liu's advocacy of *Zuozhuan*, it was not his true motivation. By promoting the so-called "ancient-

and Yang Xiong went so far as to compose new classics.[23] Did these scholars truly wish to "restore" a distant past? Or were they, in reality, constructing a *new* past, one that had never existed before?

Moreover, many Han scholars explicitly proclaimed their pursuit of innovation, yet their efforts have often been overshadowed by the prevailing tendency to categorize them broadly as mere attempts to "revive the past." This dissertation seeks to reframe the intellectual history of the Western Han, particularly its mid-to-late period, as an ongoing process of pursuing newness. During this era, literati actively constructed their intellectual world by theorizing about newness and implementing novel initiatives. Their diverse attempts to redefine the intellectual and political landscape form the central subject of this study.[24] Liu Xiang and Yang Xiong, two of the most eminent authors of the late Western Han, are commonly regarded as representatives of the so-called "Reformist" faction. However, a closer examination of their works reveals their strong will to innovate. Liu Xiang's compilation projects, for instance, reflect a fundamentally new conceptualization of both the book as a unified entity and the author function. No longer treated as a mere assemblage of disparate materials, the anthology was reimagined as a structured entity,

---

script texts," Liu effectively seized control over interpretation, thereby consolidating his intellectual authority and strengthening his arsenal of political arguments.

[23] Yang's *Fayan* and *Taixuan* were regarded as classics by his contemporaries, and he faced criticism for his audacity in composing works of this stature despite not being a sage. Huan Tan countered such criticisms, arguing that these detractors valued only the past while dismissing the present. Ultimately, Huan Tan believed that Yang's writings would surpass those of the earlier Masters and attain the status of true classics. In other words, from the perspective of Huan Tan and others, the defining characteristic of a classic was not its antiquity but the identity and intellectual authority of its author. Thus, rather than merely "loving antiquity," Liu Xin, Yang Xiong, and their intellectual circle sought both to reinterpret existing classics and to establish themselves as the authors of new ones.

[24] The discourse on newness extended beyond the writings of these scholars, manifesting in various domains such as literature, history, music, and imperial projects. For example, Martin Kern has examined this theme from the perspective of Han ritual music, both old and new. See Kern, "In Praise of Political Legitimacy," 29–67. Kern highlights how debates over sacrificial hymns from the reign of Emperor Wu to Emperor Cheng reflected shifting evaluations of "new music," making them crucial to any analysis of the evolving discourse on newness in the Han dynasty.

with coherence deliberately embedded into its organization. Correspondingly, the compiler was no longer an anonymous transmitter of inherited knowledge but an active authorial figure who imparted new meaning to the collected material. Yang Xiong, too, explicitly rejected the role of a mere transmitter of tradition. He argued that revered ancient classics might no longer be applicable in a changing world and that authors of the new age bore the responsibility of creating new classics. This sentiment was later echoed by Huan Tan, who consciously identified himself as part of a lineage of scholars engaged in the practice of naming their works "new." Huan redefined the genre of master texts: Through the anecdotes associated with him, a distinctly modernized image of the author emerges: one in which master writings were no longer conceived solely as vehicles for political and philosophical discourse but increasingly functioned as literary autobiographies. Beyond textual innovations, rulers from the Western Han to the Xin dynasty and into the early Eastern Han also experimented with different ways to renew the Mandate of Heaven. Unlike earlier traditions, which grounded political legitimacy in hereditary lineage or moral authority, the claims to power asserted by Emperor Wu, Wang Mang, and Emperor Guangwu (r. 25–57) increasingly relied on immediate, tangible signs and symbols. While these symbols sometimes drew upon historical precedents, they collectively constituted an unprecedented and dynamic system of legitimation. Each new dynasty's ruler deliberately distanced himself from the heavenly symbols of the preceding regime and sought to establish his own. The creation of new symbols thus signified the emergence of an evolving discourse on the Mandate of Heaven. However, these newly crafted symbols and their interpretations were far from universally accepted, particularly among the literati. Later historians, especially the father-son duo Ban Biao 班彪 (3–54 CE) and Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE), inevitably imposed their own interpretative framework when narrating this period. This intervention serves as yet another reminder of a

central argument of this dissertation: any attempt to understand Western Han history must take into account the Eastern Han scholars who shaped its narrative. Yet their perspectives may have diverged significantly from those of the Western Han intellectuals themselves. When Ban Gu praises Liu Xiang, Liu Xin, and Yang Xiong for their love of antiquity, we are compelled to ask: was it truly they who revered the remote past, or was it Ban Gu's own lens that framed them as such?

All these efforts, whether in textual reform, political symbolism, or historiographical construction, contributed to an evolving discourse on newness. This dissertation examines the diverse approaches through which Han scholars and political actors conceptualized and justified newness, posing the following key questions: What did newness signify to them? Which aspects of newness were most central to their concerns? How did the discourse of newness intersect with or respond to contemporary political and intellectual developments? By addressing these inquiries, this study not only offers a reassessment of individual scholars and their contributions but also reexamines broader assumptions within the field of early imperial Chinese intellectual history.

Outline of Chapters

This dissertation comprises four chapters, with the initial chapter focusing on the ideology of oldness before transitioning to the exploration of newness. Reverence for the past has historically been a more prevalent and earlier theme than the advocacy for newness, especially evident in pre-Qin and Han texts. Notably, from Emperor Yuan's reign (48–33 BCE), the "Reformists," who idolized the distant past, were said to gain a dominant influence at court, a development some scholars interpret as the triumph of Confucianism. However, this ascendancy was contested

by the "Precedentists," who venerated a specific aspect of the past: the Han *gushi* 故事 (precedents), achieving not only the capacity to interpret the past but also accruing political power after Emperor Zhao's reign (r. 87–74 BCE). This scenario pressured the "Reformists," for whom a nebulous and unfounded past was inadequate for winning debates. Amid this dynamic, two novel attitudes towards the past emerged. The dissertation introduces the term "Ritualists" for those who formulated new ritual classics with a primary focus on the emperor, basing their reverence for the past on textual interpretation rather than historical fact. Conversely, the "Paradigmists" sought to draw parallels between historical events and contemporary situations, arguing that references to the past gained significance only when anchored in verifiable historical occurrences. Without such a foundation, discussions about the past were considered empty rhetoric. These two perspectives represented fundamentally different views of the past, leading to inevitable conflicts between them. While many Ru scholars couched their arguments in the rhetoric of the past, their pasts were never confined with a single intellectual resource and never stopped evolving.

Chapter 2 explores Liu Xiang's newly arranged anecdotes (*Xinxu* 新序 and *Xinyuan* 新苑)[25] and Huan Tan's newly created stories (*Xinlun* 新論). This trend among Western Han dynasty literati of prefixing their works with "*xin*" (new), exemplified earlier by Lu Jia's 陸賈 (ca. 240–170 BCE) *Xinyu* 新語 (New Discourses) and Jia Yi's 賈誼 (200–168 BCE) *Xinshu* 新書 (New Writings), underscores a distinctive characteristic of the era's master writings. Although the *Hanshu* 漢書 (Book of Han) explicitly attributes authorship of *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan* to Liu Xiang,[26]

[25] According to the "*Shuoyuan* xulu" 說苑敘錄, Liu Xiang originally titled the work *Xinyuan*, but it was later renamed *Shuo yuan* by either Liu Xin or Ban Gu.

[26] Yan Lingfeng 嚴靈峰 believed that *xinxu* means "newly compiled." Therefore, *xinxu Shuo yuan* refers not to two separate books, but one single work. See Yan, "Liu Xiang *Shuoyuan* xulu yanjiu" 劉向《說苑序錄》研究, in *Wuqiubeizhai xueshu xinzhu* 無求備齋學術新著 (Taibei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1987), 372. However, in the preface, Liu Xiang explicitly refers to a book titled *Xinxu* and states that when

considerable debate surrounds the nature of these texts and Liu's role in their composition.[27] Previous scholarship has primarily focused on the materials Liu compiled from pre-Qin and early Han sources.[28] This chapter shifts the emphasis toward the innovative aspects of these works by analyzing Liu's adaptations of certain anecdotes in comparison to earlier sources, illuminating how he actively renewed them.[29] Liu's decision to label his works "new" was not merely a reference to his compilation efforts, since there is no evidence that he designated any text in the imperial library as "new" after his editorial interventions,[30] but rather a reflection of his evolving conception of authorship. Drawing on the precedent of figures like Kongzi and Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, Liu saw the act of organizing and structuring a text as an assertion of authorial authority. This perspective set him apart from previous anecdote collectors. In his works, textual units were no longer freely interchangeable modules; instead, they were carefully arranged within a structured

compiling *Xinyuan*, he removed materials that overlapped with *Xinxu*. Given this evidence, I follow the scholarly consensus in treating *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan* as two distinct works.

[27] Scholars have debated Liu Xiang's role in the creation of these texts. Some argue that he merely compiled existing materials without introducing new content. For a detailed discussion of this debate, see Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Liang Han sixiangshi* 兩漢思想史 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001), vol. 2, 39–42.

[28] For example, see Xu Jianwei 徐建委, *Shuo yuan yanjiu: yi Zhanguo Qin Han zhijian de wenxian leiji yu xueshushi wei zhongxin*《說苑》研究：以戰國秦漢之間的文獻累積與學術史為中心 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2011).

[29] Paul Goldin made such a comparison in one of his articles, See Goldin, "Women and Moral Dilemmas in Early Chinese Narrative," in *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy and Gender*, ed. Ann A. Pang-White (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 31–32.

[30] Among Liu Xiang's extant prefaces, the only one explicitly mentioning "new writings" (*xin shu* 新書) appears in the preface to the *Liezi* 列子. While the preface to the *Xunzi* 荀子 does not contain this phrase, its title does, though it remains uncertain whether Liu himself named it or if the designation was added later. Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫 (1884–1955) and other scholars have argued that all texts edited by Liu were renamed with the prefix "new." However, I propose that the so-called preface to the *Liezi* attributed to Liu was a later fabrication. Moreover, evidence from the *Hanshu* bibliography, where *Guoyu* 國語 and *Xin Guoyu* 新國語 appear as distinct entries, suggests that Liu did not apply the label "new" to his editorial texts unless the revised version contained fundamentally different materials from the existing one. Liu was highly conscious of the concept of newness. A detailed discussion can be found in chapter 2.

framework that bore the imprint of the author's individuality.[31] The use of *xin* in Liu Xiang's titles thus signified a deliberate effort to reorganize existing materials into cohesive, thematically curated collections, imbuing them with renewed significance and meaning. In contrast, Huan Tan's *Xinlun* represents a fundamentally different approach to newness. While Liu Xiang reorganized inherited materials into collections, Huan Tan innovated by incorporating narratives drawn from personal experiences, particularly from the tumultuous period of Wang Mang's reign. Unlike traditional anecdotal literature, which heavily relied on historical examples, Huan replaced these with contemporary accounts, transforming master discourse into a medium of lived experience. By embedding personal anecdotes and circulating stories from within his intellectual community, Huan fostered a novel form of engagement with his readership, one that cultivated a shared sense of identity and reflection. Huan's *Xinlun* marks a critical transition in masters literature from an impersonal, archival tradition to a more personal and reflective mode of writing. In this sense, Huan Tan's innovations foreshadow the evolution of medieval Chinese literature, signaling a shift toward a more self-conscious authorial presence.

Chapter 3 examines the emergence of "new" classics at the end of the Western Han, with a particular focus on Yang Xiong's *Fayan*. Our perception of Yang as an ardent admirer of antiquity is largely shaped by Ban Gu's retrospective assessment, yet Yang himself resists such a narrow characterization. While he does engage with historical sources, his intellectual model is not rooted in a distant golden past but in the more immediate traditions of the early Han, a period

[31] Gu Yixin 顧一心 observed that Liu Xiang's library project "produced a number of physically, and also essentially, new texts, with their new positions located in a new system." Furthermore, he noted that, beginning in the late Western Han, scholars asserted their individuality by recycling, transforming, and reconfiguring existing materials within self-created structures. While Gu did not specifically discuss Liu's *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan*, his observation aligns closely with Liu's approach to textual compilation and reinterpretation. See Gu Yixin, "The Enchantment of Erudition: Models and Manifestations of Literary Culture in Han-Wei China" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2022), 57, 290.

only a century prior. This chapter highlights Yang's significant innovations by emphasizing the role of orality in the *Fayan*. First, by reintroducing interlocutors into the text, Yang reasserts the authority of the master while simultaneously ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the information conveyed. By composing these imagined dialogues himself, he exercises authorial control over the discourse. Second, within Yang's theoretical framework, in which language is an extension of spontaneous mental activity, speech is accorded the same status as poetry. By revitalizing the master-disciple dynamic and reinterpreting the concept of "stimulus" (*xing* 興) from the *Shijing* tradition, orality becomes central to both the composition and reception of the *Fayan*. Moreover, Yang emerges not as a static preserver of tradition but as a thinker who envisions an ongoing process of refinement in both text and philosophy. He promotes an ever-evolving intellectual lineage, in which the ideal author or sage is not merely the most faithful disciple of the past but also the foremost innovator of the future.

In the final chapter, the focus shifts to the political dimension of establishing a "new start," which includes the receiving and renewal of the Mandate of Heaven. I examine three emperors' efforts to legitimize their rules: Emperor Wu, Wang Mang, and Emperor Guangwu. From the beginning to the mid-Western Han, the significance of *furui* 符瑞 (auspicious signs) evolved. Initially, they symbolized the virtue of a dynasty. Later, they became closely associated with the emperor's personal morality and achievements. Ultimately, they were interpreted as Heaven's explicit encouragement for the emperor to perform the *fengshan* 封禪 ceremony under Emperor Wu's reign. While Wang Mang eclectically gathered elements from a wide array of sources to serve his agenda, his reliance on a more humanly intervened version of *furui*, *fuming* 符命 (tokens of the mandate), was central to his strategies of legitimation. As the credibility of *fuming* quickly deteriorated under Wang Mang and some opportunists' overuse, *fuming* rapidly

disappeared from the historical stage after Wang Mang's downfall. Replacing it was a more textualized and dematerialized new symbol of the Mandate of Heaven: *tuchen* 圖讖 (prophetic diagrams and texts). Similarly, just as *fuming* provoked polarized attitudes among rulers and ministers during Wang Mang's era, *tuchen* also elicited such divided responses during the rise of the Eastern Han. The *Hanshu* reflects the Ban family's efforts to shape narratives in favor of their stance on Mandate renewal, revealing the complex interplay between political ideology and historical writings.

In sum, this dissertation examines the development of the concept of newness, primarily from textual and political perspectives. Chapter 1 explores the debates among the so-called "Reformists" from the mid-Western Han onward, whose writings forged a crucial link between political discourse and textual scholarship. While these thinkers often positioned themselves as ardent advocates of the past, their visions of antiquity varied widely, and few genuinely sought to restore a distant golden age. Rather than a uniform return to a single past, their competing interpretations reveal a more dynamic engagement with historical precedents. Chapters 2 and 3 trace the tradition of "new writings" within the domains of master writings and classics. Although Liu Xiang, Huan Tan, and Yang Xiong approached "new" writings with distinct objectives and emphases, they shared a common imperative: the pressing need to establish a new intellectual era and to break from the immediate past. Chapter 4 shifts the focus to the political sphere, examining imperial projects and ideological efforts to renew the dynasty from the early Western Han through the Eastern Han. This chapter highlights the subtle contest between rulers and scholars over the construction of orthodoxy, revealing the competing narratives that shaped the legitimacy of political and intellectual authority. By tracing Reformist debates, the evolution of new writings, and imperial renewal projects from the second century BCE to the first century CE, this

dissertation illuminates how the concept of newness was theorized, articulated, and enacted in early imperial China.

- CHAPTER 1 -

Which Past to Follow?

The Dynamics of Rhetoric Concerning the Past in the Mid-to-Late Western Han Period

1.1 Introduction

Before delving into the concept of newness, it is necessary to scrutinize the ideology of oldness. Historically, the valorization of newness emerged later, and often less prominently, than the prevailing reverence for the past observed in the pre-Qin and Han texts.[32] Especially since the reign of Emperor Yuan, the so-called "Reformists," who worshipped the remote past, were said to have gained a dominant influence at court.[33] Some scholars have postulated this dominance as the "victory of Confucianism."[34] Yet, it is an oversight to view the "Reformists" as a monolithic group of Confucians celebrating a unanimous past. With different educational backgrounds and political stances, they interpreted the past through diverse lenses and held often divergent valuations of it. Although a few pre-Qin texts like the *Shangjun shu* 商君書 and *Han Feizi* 韓非子

[32] For an analysis of the early Chinese ideology that emphasized venerating antiquity, see Poo Mu-chou 蒲慕州, "Xian Qin liang Han de zungu siwei yu zhengzhi quanwei" 先秦兩漢的尊古思維與政治權威, in *Han diguo de zhidu yu shehui zhixu* 漢帝國的制度與社會秩序, ed. Lai Ming-chiu 黎明釗 (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–45.

[33] For the division of "Modernists" and "Reformists," see Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 104 B. C. to A. D. 9*, 11. For a reconsideration of Loewe' dichotomy, see Hans van Ess, "The Apocryphal Texts of the Han Dynasty and the Old Text/ New Text Controversy," *T'oung Pao* 85 (1999): 46. Ess mainly scrutinizes Loewe's allocation of the so-called *guwen* 古文 and *jinwen* 今文 factions within this dichotomy without extensively discussing the dichotomy itself.

[34] Homer H. Dubs was the first scholar who proposed this phrase, see *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, By Pan Ku. A critical translation with annotations by Homer H. Dubs (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1938–1955), especially "The Victory of Confucianism" in vol. 2, 196–98. Hans van Ess revisits this theory in his "Ban Gu's View on the 'Second Victory' of 'Confucianism' and the Fall of the Former Han," *Early China* 45 (2022): 15–49. Van Ess largely focuses on the nuanced attitude of Ban Gu without refuting the ascension of the Reformists in the late Western Han.

have hinted at varying pasts,[35] the problem of constructing multiple—and at times, contradictory—pasts became unprecedentedly significant after the reign of Emperor Wu. As Emperor Wu became the "late emperor" (*xiandi* 先帝) and his innovations became part of history, those critiquing or supporting him needed to recalibrate their discourses. The division of multiple pasts and the varied reconstructions of the same historical period are evident in the *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論 (Discourses on Salt and Iron).

While advocates of newness had to defend their positions, the "Reformists" also faced real challenges from the "Precedentists," a term I coin here to describe those who championed a specific kind of past, the Han *gushi* 故事 (precedents). With the Precedentists gaining not just the interpretive power of utilizing the past but also political authority after Emperor Zhao (r. 87–74 BCE), a vague and ill-founded past became insufficient for the "Reformists" to win the debate. Under such pressure, two new attitudes towards the past were developed. The "Ritualists," as termed in this dissertation, constructed new ritual classics that primarily targeted the emperor's actions as their foundation for arguments, unlike earlier ritual texts, which lacked such direct prescriptions for imperial conduct. For them, the reverence for the past was anchored in textual interpretations, not historical occurrences. In contrast, the "Paradigmist" drew parallels between historical instances and current events, asserting that the rhetoric of the past obtained potency only when rooted in historical events that had occurred multiple times, demonstrating consistent patterns. Absent such antecedents, the discussion of past was rendered mere vacuous conversations. These two beliefs had fundamentally disparate views on the past and were inevitably in

[35] In the *Shangjun shu*, Shang Yang challenges his reform adversaries by questioning which past shall one follow when the past teachings vary (前世不同教，何故之法). The *Han Feizi* also distinguishes three different *gu* (*shanggu* 上古, *zhonggu* 中古, and *jingu* 近古). See Jiang Lihong 蔣禮鴻, *Shangjunshu zhuizhi* 商君書錐指 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 4; and Wang Xianshen 王先慎, *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 442.

competition. Therefore, labeling both groups as "Reformists" is inaccurate, as they neither esteemed Zhou traditions nor aimed to restore them:[36] The "Ritualists" were more focused on the texts than specific historical periods, while the "Paradigmists" were more inclined to consult the past than to revive it. A closer examination of the memorials and discourses from mid to late Western Han period indicates that even though most Ru scholars often couched their arguments in the rhetoric of the past, their pasts were never confined to a single intellectual resource and never stopped evolving.

1.2 Multiple Pasts: *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論 (Discourses on Salt and Iron) and its Consequences

"Past" is an aggregate of concepts, and within its expansive semantic range, terms such as *xi* 昔 ("the past"), *wang* 往 ("previous"), *gu* 古 ("ancient"), and *gu* 故 ("former") emerge as predominant designations. Nonetheless, these terms are not always interchangeable and often allude to diverse pasts. As the present perpetually transitions into the past, people's understanding of the general past becomes increasingly subdivided into specific historical stages, too.

Within the *Shijing* and *Shangshu*, *gu* 古 (ancient) is deployed to denote a generalized golden age, characterized by sagacious individuals (*guren* 古人)[37] imparting invaluable instructions (*guxun* 古訓)[38] without definitive temporal markers. By the end of the Warring States period, there seems to have been a discernible inclination to divide *gu* into several eras: *shanggu* 上古

[36] For such arguments regarding the "Reformists," see Loewe, *Chang'an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China*, eds. Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 229; and Nylan, "Manuscript Culture in Late Western Han," 165.
[37] For example, in the "Mu shi" 牧誓 (Harangue at Mu), "Jiu gao" 酒誥 (Announcement about Drunkenness), and "Qin shi" 秦誓 (Harangue of the Marquis of Qin) chapters of the *Shangshu*, there are many quotations from ancient people (古人有言) in the speeches.
[38] For example, in the *Shijing* "Zheng min" 烝民 (The Multitudes of the People; Mao no. 260), it says "following ancient teachings" (古訓是式).

(or *taigu* 太古, remote antiquity), *zhonggu* 中古 (middle antiquity), and *jingu* 近古 (late antiquity).[39] *Shanggu* typically refers to the dawn of human civilization, while the understanding of *zhonggu* varies, spanning from the Xia dynasty to the Western Zhou dynasty. The Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE) accentuated the dichotomy between *gu* and *jin* 今 (the present), delineating the end of the past. Decades later, when Jia Yi analyzed the causes for Qin's collapse at the beginning of the Western Han, he still situated the Qin within the present, not the past. Until then, *gu* remained the primary term for a past that was largely static.

It was only after Emperor Wu's reign that many Han scholars began recognizing the inadequacy of *gu* as a solitary descriptor for the entire historical continuum. For one thing, the fall of Qin had transitioned from being a current event to a historical occurrence over a century old.[40] For another, Some of Emperor Wu's radical policies clearly provoked dissatisfaction, not only among the common people but also within certain official circles.[41] After his death, there seemed to be an eagerness to distance the present from his reign, which led to the remarkably swift relegation of Emperor Wu's era to the past. However, the Qin dynasty and Emperor Wu's reforms are significantly different from other pasts, especially the antiquity evoked by Ru scholars.

---

[39] For example, all the three terms are found in the *Han Feizi*, see *Han Feizi jijie*, 442. Also, an edict from the First Emperor of Qin references *taigu* and *zhonggu*, see *Shiji* 6.236.

[40] In Jia Yi's "Guo Qin lun" 過秦論 (Disquisition Finding Fault with Qin), he refers to Qin's history as "contemporary" (*dangshi* 當世). Given that he was born only seven years after Qin's collapse, this perspective is understandable. More importantly, Jia Yi sought to use Qin as a cautionary example to critique certain Han policies that perpetuated Qin practices, making it natural for him to treat Qin as part of the present age. However, after the reign of Emperor Wu, as the Han dynasty's identity became firmly established, Qin was no longer regarded as a contemporary regime but as a past dynasty.

[41] This attitude is evident in the debate over Emperor Wu's temple music shortly after Emperor Xuan's accession. Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝 (fl. 70 BCE) claimed that the social turmoil caused by Emperor Wu had not yet been rectified to this day (至今未復), clearly framing his reign as belonging to a past historical period.

Therefore, discussants sought alternative terms, such as *wang* and *xi*, to articulate this nascent "past" encompassing the Qin era and Emperor Wu's reign, a trend evident in the *Yantielun*.

Yantielun, composed by Huan Kuan 桓寬 during the reign of Emperor Xuan (r. 74–48 BCE),[42] preserves records of a fervent court debate in 81 BCE. This debate occurs between the ministers —namely, the Counselor (*dafu* 大夫), the Imperial Clerk (*yushi* 御史), the Chancellor (*chengxiang* 丞相), and the Chancellor's Clerk (*chengxiang shi* 丞相史) —and the critics of the government categorized as the Worthies (*xianliang* 賢良) and the Literati (*wenxue* 文學).[43] The vehement exchanges spanned a spectrum of state affairs, encompassing administrative strategies, economic paradigms, foreign relations, and overarching governance principles. Consequently, *Yantielun* is often interpreted as epitomizing the stark dichotomy between two political, intellectual, or scholastic parties.[44] No matter how scholars define the critics in this debate, they largely agree that these Worthies and Literati invoked an idealized past, setting them at odds with the ministers, who primarily engaged with contemporaneous issues.[45] However, such a reading

[42] Although the *Hanshu* clearly states that *Yantielun* was written in the reign of Emperor Xuan, Michael Loewe proposes that it was written after the accession of Emperor Yuan, since Emperor Yuan attempted to abolish the state monopolies on salt and iron. See Loewe, "'Confucian' Values and Practices in Han China," *T'oung Pao* 98 (2012): 26. Even if the *Yantielun* was compiled in the early years of Emperor Xuan's reign, there would be a decade gap from the actual court debate it discusses, and the gap would become over thirty years if it was compiled in the reign of Emperor Yuan. For the dating of the *Yantielun*, see Anatoly Polnarov, "Looking Beyond Dichotomies: Hidden Diversity of Voices in the *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論," *T'oung Pao* 104, 5-6 (2018): 466 and Wang Yong 王永, *Yantielun yanjiu* 鹽鐵論研究 (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 2009), 20–23.

[43] In 81 BCE, the Imperial Counselor (*yushi dafu* 御史大夫) was Sang Hongyang 桑弘羊 (d. 80 BCE), and the Chancellor was Tian Qianqiu 田千秋 (d. 77 BCE). Huan mentions Sang as the Counselor, yet the identity of the Imperial Clerk and the Chancellor's Clerk remains speculative. The official titles are translated in accordance with Loewe's *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Western Han and Xin periods (221 BC - AD 24)* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

[44] They are variously categorized by scholars as Modernists versus Reformists, Legalism versus Confucianism, or proponents of New Text versus the Old Text Learning. Polnarov critiques these binary classifications, see Polnarov, "Looking Beyond Dichotomies," 467.

[45] For example, Loewe describes the division as Modernists versus Reformists, noting the critics' nostalgia for the Zhou's governance contrasted with the ministers' stance on the irrelevance of ancient traditions to contemporary issues. See Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China*, 105–106. A similar argument can

might elide the complicated attitudes both groups held towards the multiple pasts and the present.

It is incontrovertible that the Worthies and the Literati recurrently allude to the examples of the past, with the Zhou paradigm occupying a position. However, it is pivotal to recognize that the ministers, notably the Counselor, Sang Hongyang 桑弘羊 (d. 80 BCE), also exhibit a robust inclination towards historical citations, even surpassing the Literati in frequency.

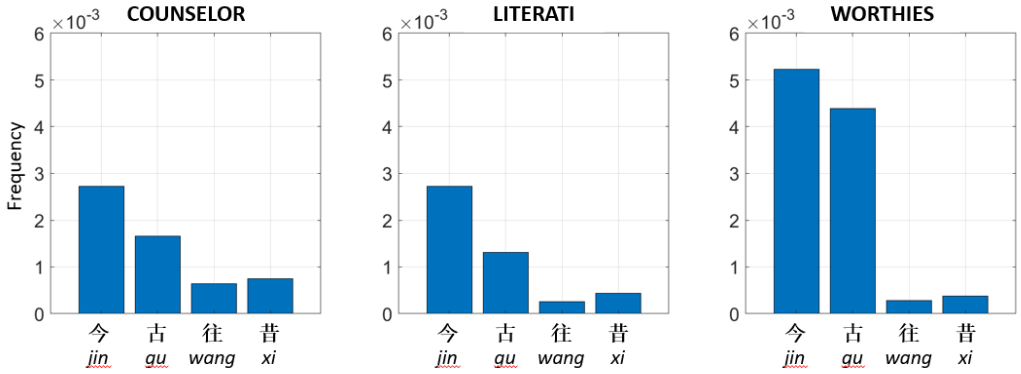

Figure 1. The frequency of the references to the present and the past in the discourses by the Counselor, Worthies, and Literati[46]

be seen in Esson M. Gale, *Discourses on Salt and Iron: A Debate on State Control of Commerce and Industry in Ancient China, Chapters I–XXVIII, Translated from the Chinese of Huan K'uan with Introduction and Notes* (Taipei: Ch'eng Wen Publishing Co., 1967), xxiv. Ming Wan interprets the divide as Legalism versus Confucianism, observing that "the government officials had the advantage of knowing state affairs and state needs…. Men of learning appeared to be removed from political realities…. Their most lethal argument was that things were not as good as they used to be." See Ming Wan, "Discourses on Salt and Iron: A First Century B.C. Chinese Debate over the Political Economy of Empire," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 17 (2012): 161.

[46] In Figures 1 and 2, the frequency of selected keywords is calculated for each group by dividing the total number of occurrences of these keywords by the length of their respective discourses. Only the characters *gu*, *wang*, and *xi* which signify the meaning of "past" were included in the statistical chart. *Jin* can function as a noun, adverb, conjunction, or pronoun. As a noun, it refers to the present. As an adverb, it conveys meanings such as "soon," "immediately," or "at once." As a conjunction, it expresses conditional or concessive relationships, meaning "even if" or "if." As a pronoun, it denotes "this." Only instances where *jin* functions as a noun were included in the statistics. For a detailed list and categorization of these cases, see the Appendix.

Contrary to the initial impressions, the debate within *Yantielun* does not merely pivot around binary oppositions of past versus present, but rather, it reveals a nuanced interplay between these temporal dimensions. While the Counselor reproaches the Worthies and the Literati, accusing them of an unwavering fidelity to antiquity at the expense of contemporary relevance, which was encapsulated in the phrase "truly adhere to the past, yet deviate from the present" (信往而乖於今)[47], an analytical dive into the discourse suggests that all participating factions manifest a pronounced inclination towards addressing the immediacies of the present. Given that the debate's primary objective was to navigate current challenges, even stalwarts championing the past found it imperative to tether their arguments to present-day realities. A closer examination reveals that the Counselor's invocation of *gu* outstrips that of the Literati, and his references to *wang* and *xi* are more frequent than both the Worthies and the Literati. Certainly, a small portion of the references to *gu* by the Counselor are critical, targeting the critics' tendency to persistently appeal to antiquity. However, these critiques comprise only a minority of the mentions (4 out of 28 cases). The predominance of *gu*, *wang*, and *xi* references suggests a more complex engagement with the past-oriented rhetoric by the Counselor, beyond mere opposition. This then poses pertinent questions: Does the Counselor's deployment of the past diverge from that of the critics? How do he and his critics segment and interpret the multiple pasts?

The Counselor occasionally amalgamates various terms of the past, such as *gu*, *wang*, and *xi*, seemingly indifferent to their distinct connotations. In statements such as "the matters of the ancient past and the words spoken long ago can already be seen" (夫往古之事，昔有之語，已可覩矣) , he underscores the repetition of mentioning the past in the Literati's arguments and

[47] Wang Liqi 王利器, *Yantielun jiaozhu* 鹽鐵論校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 10.130.

invites the Worthies to introduce new perspectives.[48] Furthermore, he criticizes his opponents for their overly nostalgic stance which is "extolling the ancient past, yet notably at odds with worldly affairs" (稱引往古，頗乖世務).[49] The Literati also invoke the compound *wanggu* 往古 (the ancient past) twice,[50] articulating their objective as an endeavor to "revive the ways of the ancient past, and rectify the errors of the present" (復往古之道，匡當世之失).[51] However, when these terms of the past are employed independently, they each bear unique implications and resonate differently within their contexts.

Let us examine the term *wang* first. Prior to the *Yantielun*, it was primarily employed to signify "to depart for," serving as the antithesis of *lai* 來 (to come). It was rather rare for this term to denote the past, although it sometimes manifested in the phrase *wangzhe* 往者 (those of the past). In the whole *Shiji*, despite over 500 instances of *wang*, its association with the past occurs fewer than 10 times. Moreover, this term does not specify a particular historical period but rather alludes to a generalized, overarching past.[52] This semantic field, however, underwent a significant transformation in the *Yantielun*.

In the *Yantielun*, *wang* appears 38 times, of which 23 instances mean the past. It is evident that the primary connotation of *wang* has transitioned from "to depart for" to "the past." Of

[48] *Yantielun* 28.333.
[49] Ibid. 42.471.
[50] Ibid. 4.57, 27,323.
[51] Ibid. 27.323.
[52] For example, in the postface of the *Shiji*, Sima Qian stated that: "'Hence, in narrating the events of the past, one reflects on what is to come.' I then proceeded to recount from the times of Tao Tang onward, up to the appearance of the unicorn" (「故述往事，思來者。」於是卒述陶唐以來，至于麟止). Sima's usage of *wangzhe* includes all historical eras for which he found credible records. See *Shiji* 130.3300.

these, the instances of *wangzhe* are of particular interest. I have categorized these occurrences based on their usage by the Counselor and the Literati.[53]

The Counselor	The Literati
In the past, before the emperors had dealings with the Barbarians of the North and South, the border towns faced enemies on all four sides, with the northern border especially suffering hardships. The late emperor eliminated disasters from three directions... to campaign against the Xiongnu. **往者**，縣官未事胡、越之時，邊城四面受敵，北邊尤被其苦。先帝絕三方之難……以討匈奴。[54]	We have heard that **in the past**, before campaigns against the Barbarians of the North and South, labor conscriptions and levies were few. The people were prosperous, dressed warmly, and were well-fed.... However, later on, because of numerous military expeditions, there was such lack of battle-horses. 聞**往者**未伐胡、越之時，繇賦省而民富足，溫衣飽食……其後，師旅數發，戎馬不足。[55]
In the past, the Xiongnu took advantage of the rivers and mountains... and often intruded as invaders.... During Emperor Wen's reign, the invaders penetrated Xiao Pass, and beacon fires were lit all the way to the Ganquan Palace.... The late emperor, through strategic diplomacy and military maneuvers, acquired broad and fertile lands, establishing territories up to and beyond Zhangye, isolating the Qiang and the Hu. **往者**，匈奴據河、山之險……行入為寇。……文帝時，虜入蕭關，烽火通甘	**In the past**, the passes and bridges were open, and there was trade and exchange; from the Chanyu downwards, all were close and submitted to the Han, traveling back and forth below the Great Wall. Later on, due to Wang Hui's ill-conceived plot at Mayi, the Xiongnu broke off the marital alliances... and warfare ensued continuously. **往者**，通關梁，交有無，自單于以下，皆親漢內附，往來長城之下。其後，王恢誤謀馬邑，匈奴絕和親……兵連而不息。[57]

[53] Although there are six parties involved in the debate, the Counselor and the Literati are predominant due to their unmatched frequency and length of discourse. The Worthies, as the third most activate group, differ in their rhetorical strategies and political stances from the Literati, as delineated by Polnarov, so the Worthies and the Literati will be discussed separately below. See Polnarov, *Looking Beyond Dichotomies*, 468.

[54] *Yantielun* 42.471. This statement echoes in *Yantielun* 38.445: "In the past, all four barbarian tribes were strong and jointly committed acts of aggression and cruelty.... Now, three fronts have been subdued, only the northern border remains unsettled" (往者，四夷俱強，並為寇虐；……今三垂已平，唯北邊未定).

[55] Ibid. 15.190. For translations of excerpts from chapters 1 to 19, I have consulted Gale's translation in *Discourses on Salt and Iron*.

[57] Ibid. 48.513. This historical account parallels arguments made earlier in *Yantielun* 43.479: "In the past, the Xiongnu formed alliances through marriage, and various barbarian tribes offered tributes. As a result, there was mutual trust between sovereign and subjects, both internally and externally, and no troubles arose from the Hu or Yue peoples.... However, since then, there has been a decline in civil governance and an over-reliance on military force, which has led to wearying the army and exhausting the people." (往者，匈奴結和親，諸夷納貢，即君臣外內相信，無胡、越之患。……自是之後，退文任武，苦師勞眾).

泉……先帝推讓斥奪廣饒之地，建張掖以西，隔絕羌、胡。[56]	
In the past, financial resources were insufficient, and our fighting force occasionally could not get their pay. Due to natural calamities at eastern provinces, Qi and Zhao suffered from severe famine. It was thanks to the stored accumulated through the system of balanced transportation…that the troops were provided for and the starving populace succored. 往者財用不足，戰士或不得祿，而山東被災，齊、趙大饑，賴均輸之蓄……戰士以奉，饑民以賑。[58]	**In the past**, military campaigns frequently commenced, and the resources were insufficient. Therefore, increased taxes were frequently levied on the common people.... As a result, farmlands became daily more desolate, and cites were left deserted. 往者，軍陣數起，用度不足，以訾徵賦，常取給見民 ……是以田地日荒，城郭空虛。[59]

Table 1. Some cases of *wangzhe* in the discourses of the Counselor and Literati

The disparate attitudes of the Counselor and the Literati towards the historical period termed *wangzhe* are immediately evident. The Counselor predominantly portrays this period as one marked by turmoil and hardship, with a subsequent improvement arising from Emperor Wu's policies, some of which were proposed by Sang himself. Conversely, the Literati extol this era for its tranquility and harmony. They argue that disruptions only surfaced "later on" (*qihou* 其後), with Emperor Wu's military endeavors wreaking havoc on both diplomatic ties and the everyday lives of common people. In a few instances, the Literati also critique *wangzhe*, pointing towards Emperor Wu's policies.[60] Generally speaking, there appears to be a consensus between the Literati and the Counselor that *wangzhe* primarily encapsulates the Han period preceding Emperor Wu, particularly during Emperor Wen's reign. However, the divergence arises in their respective evaluations of this history. The Counselor emphasizes that Emperor Wu's policies were formulated in response to the pre-existing chaotic milieu and thus should be followed;

[56] Ibid. 46.499.
[58] Ibid. 2.27.
[59] Ibid. 15.191.
[60] The passage presented in *Yantielun* 44.489: "In the past, weapons were frequently mobilized, and military expeditions were often launched" (往者，兵革亟動，師旅數起) and the excerpt from *Yantielun* 15 in the table are the only two examples where the Literati depict a miserable *wangzhe*.

while the Literati propound that the pre-Emperor Wu era was much better, rendering the emperor's policies detrimental. In essence, *wangzhe* becomes a contentious temporal space of the immediate past, with both groups vying to portray Han history. For example, their differing accounts of foreign relations prior to Emperor Wu's reign are rooted in actual events but focus on different aspects. According to the "Biography of Xiongnu" 匈奴列傳 in the *Shiji*, during the reign of Emperor Wen (r. 180–157 BCE), Xiongnu launched at least three major incursions. In 166 BCE, Xiongnu penetrated Xiao Pass, and in 158 BCE, "beacon fires were lit all the way to the Ganquan Palace."[61] The policy of marital alliances did not spare Han from warfare. Yet, it is also undeniable that during the initial years of Emperor Wu's reign, "the passes and bridges were open, and from the Chanyu downwards, all were close to the Han, traveling back and forth below the Great Wall."[62] Later, the Scheme of Mayi in 133 BCE marked the onset of the protracted Han-Xiongnu conflict, which exacted a heavy toll on the common people. The Literati are undoubtedly aware of the numerous invasions Han suffered prior to Emperor Wu's military endeavors. Similarly, the Counselor is cognizant of the relatively prosperous and harmonious conditions during Emperor Wen's reign.[63] Nevertheless, the charm of *wangzhe* lies in its undetermined status, allowing ample space for varied interpretations and evaluations. Compared to the Literati and the Worthies, the Counselor exhibits a more fervent inclination to discuss *wangzhe*. Beyond addressing the policy concerning the Xiongnu, he leverages the same argumentative approach when deliberating on the imperative of maintaining state monopolies on salt and iron, the

[61] *Shiji* 110.2901–2904.
[62] *Shiji* 110.2904.
[63] The Counselor once acknowledged the effective governance of Emperors Wen and Jing, as noted in *Yantielun* 28.333: "During the reigns of Emperors Wen and Jing, and at the beginning of the Jianyuan era, the people were simple and returned to the foundation, while officials were incorruptible and conducted themselves with dignity" (文、景之際，建元之始，民朴而歸本，吏廉而自重).

equalization through transportation, and the harsh control over the people.[64] This underscores the Counselor's adept harnessing of *wangzhe* as a rhetorical tool.

Transitioning to the term *xi*, unlike *wang*, its usage as a denotation for the past was already well-established before the *Yantielun*. *Xi* has an expansive semantic reach, spanning from the far-remote past to merely days ago. Typically, it is complemented by specific events, which serve either as commendations or censures. This convention is maintained in the *Yantielun*. Among the 29 cases where *xi* represents "the past," the Counselor and the Literati are each responsible for 12 cases, and the Worthies mention it four times. The historical contexts associated with *xi* span from the Three Dynasties era to the Qin dynasty. Surprisingly, the instances of the Qin dynasty are discussed more frequently than those of Zhou. The Worthies extol the Zhou's monumental achievements once, and the Literati do so twice. In contrast, the Counselor rarely heralds the Duke of Zhou or Zhou monarchs as exemplars.[65] Yet, Shang Yang 商鞅 (390–338 BCE) is lauded twice. The Literati spend more energy vigorously attacking Qin and Shang Yang—citing them as negative exemplars seven times. This pronounced focus on the Qin aligns with the overall frequency of mentions of these two dynasties throughout *Yantielun*.

---

[64] On the topic of the state monopoly on salt and iron, refer to *Yantielun* 6.78: "In the past, the powerful great families obtained control of the profit of the mountains and sea, mined ironstones and smelted them, and they manufactured salt by boiling sea water…. They established wicked and counterfeit business, seeking to build up the power of their clique" (往者，豪強大家，得管山海之利，采鐵石鼓鑄，煮海為鹽。……成姦偽之業，遂朋黨之權). For discussion on equalization through transportation, see *Yantielun* 1.4: "In the past, federal lords in the provinces and states sent in their respective products as tribute. The transportation was vexatious and disorganized. The goods were usually of distressingly bad quality" (往者，郡國諸侯各以其方物貢輸，往來煩雜，物多苦惡). For the advocacy of strict governance, see *Yantielun* 59.604: "In the past, people like Ying Shao and Bozheng led to the collapse of Liang and Chu, while individuals such as Kunlu and Xu Gu incited chaos in Qi and Zhao. In the eastern provinces and within the [Hangu] Pass, violent groups relied on their people and occupied strategic positions" (往者，應少、伯正之屬潰梁、楚，昆盧、徐穀之徒亂齊、趙，山東、關內暴徒，保人阻險).

[65] Although the Counselor also praised King Wen and Duke of Zhou in a few cases, his appreciation seems superficial, as he also criticized their lack of planning for their successors. Moreover, he cited the Di barbarians' attacks on the Great King of Zhou twice to argue that benevolent monarch cannot subdue barbarians. See *Yantielun* 52.544, 38.444, 44.488.

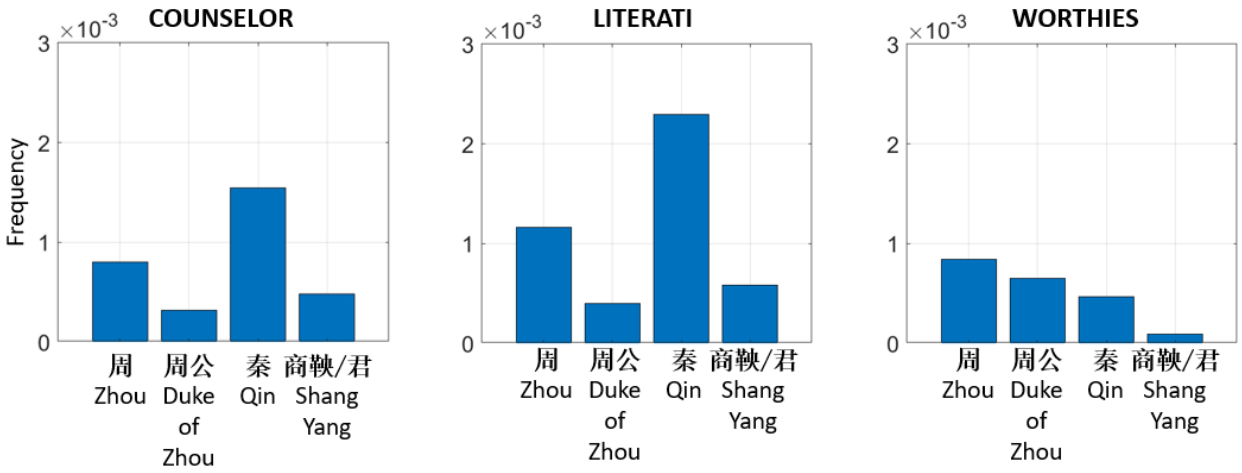

Figure 2. The frequency of the references to the Qin and Zhou in the discourses by the Counselor, Worthies, and Literati[66]

As illustrated in Figure 2, contrary to common impression, neither the Worthies nor the Literati show an unwavering fixation on the Zhou paradigm. In fact, their focus on the Qin dynasty is equally pronounced, if not more so, mirroring the Counselor's perspective. This observation resonates with the data in Figure 1, which underscores that all three factions are primarily attuned to contemporary matters, rather than dwelling on bygone eras. Even though the Qin dynasty is technically categorized within the domain of *xi*, its intimacy with the present and parallels with Emperor Wu's reign render it a period that straddles both the past and the present.[67] Therefore, references to the Qin dynasty transcend mere historical commentary and serve as a lens through which to evaluate current conditions.

Shifting our attention to the term *gu*, the most prevalent descriptor for the past, Figure 1 underscores that the Counselor's frequency of referencing *gu* closely mirrors that of the Literati.

[66] The Counselor always refers to Shang Yang as "Lord Shang" (*shangjun* 商君), whereas the Literati and Worthies mention him by name, reflecting their different attitudes. For the statistical purposes, the two keywords "Shang Yang" and "*shangjun*" are combined in Figure 2.

[67] In discussing the Qin dynasty, the events are portrayed as both historical and contemporary. For example, the Literati also stated multiple times, "Now Shang Yang…/ Now the Qin…" (今商鞅/今秦), see *Yantielun* 7.94, 96; 56.579.

The rhetoric surrounding *gu* is not solely the domain of the so-called "Reformists," but is also astutely employed by those often categorized as "Modernists." There are, broadly speaking, four tactics through which the Counselor and the Imperial Clerk leverage the persuasive potential of *gu*:

First, given that Emperor Wu's policies have transitioned into the past, the ministers have co-opted some of the predominant strategies traditionally associated with the "Reformists." For instance, they assert that the phenomena critiqued by the Literati have "been in existence since ancient times" (自古有之),[68] are in alignment with "the ancient way" (古之道也)[69], and have "persisted for a long time" (所由來久矣).[70] Conversely, the Literati find themselves on the defensive, compelled to adopt argumentative techniques that were historically championed by figures like Shang Yang and Han Fei. This role reversal becomes particularly evident in the following dialogue:

> The Counselor said, "…. Thus, when a ruler passes away, his ministers do not change his policies. When a father dies, his son does not alter his ways.... The policies of salt, iron, and equalization through transportation are long standing. To abolish them, would not it harm the accomplishments of the late emperor and obstruct the virtues of the sagacious ruler?" The Literati replied, "The enlightened adapt with the times, and the wise devise systems to conform with the contemporary needs …."
> 大夫曰：「……故君薨，臣不變君之政，父沒，則子不改父之道也。……今鹽、鐵、均輸，所從來久矣，而欲罷之，得無害先帝之功，而妨聖主之德乎？」
> 文學曰：「明者因時而變，知者隨世而制……」[71]

If we were to excise references to "the policies of salt, iron, and equalization through transportation" from this dialogue, it could easily be situated in the initial chapter of the *Shangjun shu*, wherein Shang Yang debates with conservatives about the imperative for reform. Intriguingly, in

[68] *Yantielun* 3.43, 38.446.
[69] Ibid. 9.121.
[70] Ibid. 49.520.
[71] Ibid. 12.162–163.

the current scenario, the Counselor adopts the position of the conservatives, while the Literati advocate for change. Surely, these are merely tactical postures for the sake of debate. The Counselor shows no qualms about amending the policies set by the previous emperors during Emperor Wu's reign, while the Literati, steeped in tradition, are unlikely to deviate from the ancient ways. Nevertheless, once the argumentative techniques previously monopolized by conservatives are co-opted by the ministers, they cease to be effective tools for the critics to secure a debate victory.

Second, the ministers have demonstrated a deep familiarity with classical texts and have employed them strategically. Whenever the critics highlight a particular vision of an ideal past grounded in certain classics, the ministers can invariably counter with an alternative past derived from other classics.

> The Literati said: "In ancient times, virtue was valued, and resort to arms was discredited. Confucius said: 'If distant people are not submissive, then cultivate moral virtue to attract them. Once they come, pacify them.' Now, abandoning moral virtue and relying on military force... is not a sustainable strategy. Therefore, it is favorable to abolish it."
> The Counselor replied: "The ancient founders of states paved the way for both primary and secondary industries, and facilitated the mutual exchange of needed products... The *Book of Changes* says: 'Facilitate exchange so that the people will be unflagging.'... Therefore, with regards to the policies on salt, iron, and equalization through transportation... abolishing them is unfavorable."
> 文學曰：「古者，貴以德而賤用兵。孔子曰：『遠人不服，則修文德以來之。既來之，則安之。』今廢道德而任兵革……非長策也。故以罷之為便也。」
> 大夫曰：「古之立國家者，開本末之途，通有無之用……易曰：『通其變，使民不倦。』……故鹽、鐵、均輸……罷之，不便也。」[72]

In this dialogue, the Literati reference a version of "ancient times" drawing authority from the teachings of Confucius. In contrast, the Counselor counters by invoking an alternative rendition of "ancient times," drawing from the *Book of Changes*. Their dispute does not center around a

[72] Ibid. 1.2–3.

simple dichotomy of past versus present; rather, it evolves into a nuanced argument over varying versions of "the past." Given that both parties ground their perspectives in *gu*, the debate predictably reaches an impasse.

Third, instead of focusing on the golden era of sage kings, the ministers strategically highlight episodes from the Warring States period, suggesting that such an "ancient" era was far from ideal. For example, the Imperial Clerk asserts, "In ancient times, the feudal lords competed for power, leading to the rise of the Warring States, where arms and troops were constantly mobilized.... Now, by virtue of Your Majesty's divine powers, military forces have not been used for a long time" (古者，諸侯爭強，戰國並起，甲兵不休……今賴陛下神靈，甲兵不動久矣).[73] By positing the contemporary era as superior to those tumultuous times, the legitimacy of the past is questioned while that of the present is underscored.

Fourth, even when the ministers acknowledged the golden past championed by the Literati, they contend that the Han emperors have surpassed such historical benchmarks. For example, the Imperial Clerk notes that Emperors Wen and Jing established a tax rate at one-thirtieth, a more benevolent imposition compared to the ancient rate of one-tenth.[74] As a result, the revered stature of "ancient times" is considerably diminished.

Confronted with the relentless critiques of the ministers, the Literati seemingly recognize the waning efficacy of the *gu* rhetoric and consequently refrain from overly resorting to this line of argumentation. Figure 1 highlights that it is the Worthies, not the Literati, who are the most ardent proponents of invoking *gu*. In Chapter 29, the Worthies engage in an extended discourse contrasting the ancient with the contemporary, invoking *guzhe* 古者 (ancient times) thirty-one

[73] Ibid. 15.191.
[74] Ibid. 15.191.

times and referencing *gu shengren* 古聖人 (ancient sages) once. This passage is especially noteworthy not only because it stands out as the lengthiest monologue within the *Yantielun* but also due to its distinctive composition, resembling more of a rhapsody than a typical dialogical exchange. In instances where only *gu* and *jin* are brought into juxtaposition, the former invariably holds a position of superiority. This could lead one to hastily label the Worthies as idealists firmly anchored to a distant past. However, the introduction of the term *qihou* 其後 (later) complicates such a simplistic interpretation. To further elucidate this complex interplay between *gu*, *qihou*, and *jin*, let us consider two emblematic examples from this passage.

> In ancient times, people lived in huts made of wooden sticks and covered with thatch, or in caves with clay beams, which were just enough to protect against the cold and heat, wind and rain. In later eras, rafters were not trimmed, and thatches were left uncut.... High officials had squared timber beams, middle officials had adorned rafters, and common people constructed houses from roughly hewn wood chopped with axes. Nowadays, the wealthy have intricately designed ceilings, carved door sills and railings.
> 古者，采椽茅茨，陶桴復穴，足禦寒暑、蔽風雨而已。及其後世，采椽不斲，茅茨不剪，……大夫達棱楹，士穎首，庶人斧成木構而已。今富者井幹增梁，雕文檻楯。
> In ancient times, people roasted millet and ate wild grains, breaking off pork to share together. Later on, when local people drank wine, the elderly had double dishes, and the young stood while eating. There were just one sauce and one meat dish, and people drank together.... Nowadays, among common people, feasts are lavish with piled-up dishes, and roasted foods fill the tables.
> 古者，燔黍食稗，而捭豚以相饗。其後，鄉人飲酒，老者重豆，少者立食，一醬一肉，旅飲而已。……今民間酒食，殽旅重疊，燔炙滿案。[75]

The two references to *guzhe* delineate a primitive stage of human society where rituals had yet to crystallize. The act of "roasting millet and eating wild grains" stands as a representation of the initial phases of ceremonial practices,[76] and "caves" are often conceived as the primordial

[75] Ibid. 29.349–351.
[76] Similarly, the *Liji* also details the inception of rituals as such: "At the inception of rites, they began with food and drink. Roasting millet and splitting pork, they used wine vessels made by hollowing out the ground and scooped up the drink with their hands to consume" (夫禮之初，始諸飲食，其燔黍捭豚，污尊而抔飲), see *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義, Ruan Yuan 阮元 ed., *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), 777.

dwellings of early civilization.[77] *Qihou*, on the other hand, signifies a more advanced societal phase characterized by simple yet orderly rituals and artifacts. While some scholars perceive the ancient times alluded to by the Worthies as echoing the Zhou model,[78] a consistent endorsement of this paradigm is not evident within their discourse. Indeed, the wine-drinking ritual in the second instance undeniably has its origins in Zhou traditions,[79] but the first instance does not necessarily evoke any Zhou customs. The motifs of uncut rafters and untrimmed thatches are predominantly resonant of Mohist depictions of Yao's 堯 austerity.[80] In fact, the exposition here by the Worthies intriguingly amalgamates Confucian admonitions about adhering to socio-status-bound rites and Mohist tenets advocating against opulence. It offers insights into the Counselor's penchant for labeling his adversaries as both "Ru" and "Mo."[81] Nevertheless, while Mo scholars often critique the indispensability of rituals, the Worthies appear to be managing a synthesis between Ru and Mo, laying emphasis only on elemental rituals. For example, although the wine-drinking ritual, as recorded in the *Yili* 儀禮 (Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial), can be

[77] For example, the *Huainanzi* describes the beginning of human civilization as: "In ancient times, people dwelt in caves by the marshes. In winter, they suffered from frost, snow, mist, and dew; in summer, from the heat, pests, mosquitoes, and horseflies. The sages then rose, constructing edifices from earth and wood" (古者民澤處複穴，冬日則不勝霜雪霧露，夏日則不勝暑蟲蚊虻。聖人乃作，為之築土構木). See He Ning 何寧, *Huainanzi jishi* 淮南子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 913–14.

[78] For example, Loewe argues that the Worthies and the Literati frequently cite the example of Zhou and its famous Duke when they discuss the past, a notion contradicted by Figure 2. Cf. Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China*, 111–112.

[79] The *Yili* provides a detailed account of the local wine-drinking ritual. For a further elaboration of this ritual, see *Liji zhengyi*, 1904: "The ceremonial rites of local wine-drinking: Those aged sixty sit, while those aged fifty stand in attendance…. Those aged sixty are given three dishes, seventy-year-olds receive four, those aged eighty receive five, and those aged ninety receive six, thus emphasizing the nurturing and care for the elderly" (鄉飲酒之禮：六十者坐，五十者立侍，……六十者三豆，七十者四豆，八十者五豆，九十者六豆，所以明養老也).

[80] For example, Sima Tan's summary of Yao and Shun's virtuous conducts, as esteemed by the Mohists, includes: "The hall rises three feet high, with three levels of earthen steps, thatches left uncut, and rafters not trimmed" (堂高三尺，土階三等，茅茨不翦，采椽不刮), see *Shiji* 130.3290.

[81] For example, the Counselor said, "Now, when discussing well-regulated governance, the Literati praise Yao and Shun; when it comes to conducts, they speak of Confucius and Mozi" (今文學言治則稱堯、舜，道行則言孔、墨). See *Yantielun* 20.256.

exhaustively detailed, the Worthies accentuate merely the basic culinary elements of this ritual. Ultimately, the Worthies' core objective in this discourse is to champion frugality, a virtue that seems to find less resonance in the Zhou archetype than in more antiquated eras.[82]

That being observed, this monologue also underscores the importance of the ritual system. As highlighted by the Worthies at the outset, the core issue is not merely that the common people indulge excessively in luxuries; it is also that they transgress boundaries set by their social status.[83] These boundaries and protocols are manifestations of rituals. This correlation explains why numerous references to ancient times within the discourse resonate with those in the *Liji* 禮記 (Record of Rites). Notably, 29 out of the 31 *guzhe* instances deviate from the main topics of debate, such as state monopolies on salt and iron, equalization through transportation, and administration. Instead, these instances center on the profligacy of the common people (*shuren* 庶人) and subordinates—a predicament not exclusive to this era and one previously addressed in depth by Jia Yi.[84] In this context, the Worthies' *gu* does not allude to the Literati's conceptual principles

[82] The Zhou dynasty is normally characterized by its cultural sophistication (*wen*) rather than simplicity (*zhi*) in early China. One quote attributed to Confucius aptly summarizes this: "The natural simplicity of the Yu and Xia, and the culture of the Yin and Zhou, were perfect. The culture of the Yu and Xia did not outshine their natural simplicity; the natural simplicity of the Yin and Zhou did not outshine their culture" (虞夏之質，殷周之文，至矣。虞夏之文不勝其質；殷周之質不勝其文). See *Liji zhengyi*, 1735.

[83] The Worthies said, "Palaces and chambers, carriages and horses, clothing and implements, funeral rites, food and drink, music and beauty, pleasures and luxuries, are human desires that cannot be easily curbed. Therefore, the sagacious set regulations and standards to guard against excess. However, of late, the nobles and officials have been preoccupied with power and gains, neglecting the principles of propriety and righteousness. As a result, the common people, following their lead, have greatly exceeded these established norms" (宮室輿馬，衣服器械，喪祭食飲，聲色玩好，人情之所不能已也。故聖人為之制度以防之。間者，士大夫務於權利，怠於禮義；故百姓倣傚，頗踰制度). See *Yantielun* 29.349.

[84] Jia Yi's advocacy for frugality and regulation is clear: "Now, we shall eliminate the customs of extravagance and indulge in the practices of frugality, ensuring that carriages have standards, and clothing and tools have their set limits. Once these limits are established, distinctions between ruler and minister become clear, and the roles of superiors and subordinates are well-defined" (今去淫侈之俗，行節儉之術，使車輿有度，衣服器械各有制數。制數已定，故君臣絕尤，而上下分明矣). Some arguments by the Worthies seem to directly stem from Jia Yi's thoughts. See Yan Zhenyi 閻振益 and Zhong Xia 鍾夏, *Xinshu jiaozhu* 新書校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 103–104.

of ideal governance. Rather, it pertains to concrete regulations rooted in ritual classics. Consequently, the *guzhe* presented by the Worthies is less susceptible to the criticisms that the Literati encountered from the ministers. Merely two cases of *guzhe* criticize the emperor and the prevailing state policies. One possible reason for this might be the ritual classics' emphasis, before mid-Han, on the *shi* 士 or the lower officials. Such classics were not robust enough to furnish the Worthies with substantial grounds to critique the emperor. This dynamic began to shift once several disciples of Hou Cang 后倉, active during the reigns of Emperors Wu and Xuan, amassed new ritual materials. This led to the rise of a new ritual system and a new generation of "Reformists," whose primary objective was to recalibrate the emperor's conduct.[85]

Given the Worthies' endorsement of both the Ru's ritualistic ideal and the Mo's advocacy for simplicity, the monologue lacks overt indicators revealing a marked preference for *guzhe* over *qihou* or vice versa. Certainly, *guzhe* evokes an idealized dawn of human civilization characterized by simplicity and lack of encumbrances. Yet, *qihou* also has its charm, perhaps even stronger. For instance, structured dwellings are undeniably more hospitable than rudimentary shelters and caves. Similarly, the simple wine-drinking ritual stands on par with, if not surpasses, the sharing of pork. Hence, both *guzhe* and *qihou* seem to receive equal laudations from the Worthies. This suggests that their allegiance is not solely to antiquity but rather to any epoch that exemplifies such principles.

This perspective becomes increasingly lucid in the Worthies' first talk in the *Yantielun*, which sets the stage for their subsequent, more extensive discourse on the *gu*.

[85] For an in-depth exploration of the disorganized state of ritual classics prior to Hou Cang's organization and their subsequent flourishing, see Wang Baoxuan 王葆玹, *Xi Han jingxue yuanliu* 西漢經學源流 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1994), 110–118.

> From what I have heard from the elders in the neighborhood, in the past, ordinary people wore warm clothing that was not extravagant. Their tools were simple but durable, suited to their purposes…. Wine was enough to bring joy but not to excess; music was sufficient to soothe the mind but not lead to indulgence. Inside, there were no sounds of lavish entertainment; outside, there were no sights of idle leisure…. The expenditure was little, which led to abundance. By focusing on the basics, the people prospered. Funerals were mourned with genuine sorrow without showiness, and lives were lived comfortably without excess. High officials were righteous without desires, those in governance were lenient without being oppressive; as a result, the common people lived in peace, and officials remained their positions. At the start of the Jianyuan era, there was a focus on culture and virtues, and all under Heaven was in peace. Later on, corrupt officials, each with their cunning skills, undermined the great rule. They fortified boundaries with mountains and seas, and domestically promoted various profit-making ventures.... When the wise ruler realized this, he meted out punishments and executed the likes of [Jiang] Chong[86] and others…. As a result, the common people once again lived in peace. However, the repercussions of these calamities lingered for generations, and the scars and wounds still have not fully healed today.
> 竊以所聞閭里長老之言，往者，常民衣服溫暖而不靡，器質朴牢而致用，……酒足以合歡而不湛，樂足以理心而不淫，入無宴樂之聞，出無佚游之觀，……用約而財饒，本修而民富，送死哀而不華，養生適而不奢，大臣正而無欲，執政寬而不苛；故黎民寧其性，百吏保其官，建元之始，崇文修德，天下乂安。其後，邪臣各以伎藝，虧亂至治，外障山海，內興諸利。……聖主覺焉，乃刑戮充等……故居民肆然復安。然其禍累世不復，瘡痍至今未息。[87]

The term *wangzhe* in this context evidently refers to the reigns of Emperors Wen and Jing, knowledge of which could be gleaned through the accounts of the older generation. This excerpt indicates that the Worthies hold *wangzhe* in as high regard as *guzhe*. To them, the *wangzhe* era epitomizes a perfect period analogous to the distant past, marked by universal peace and prosperity. The reliability of this account is debatable, especially considering Jia Yi's prior record of the pervasive profligacy among the wealthy during this era. Nevertheless, as the contrasting

[86] In 91 BCE, Crown Prince Liu Ju 劉據 (128–91 BCE), heir to Emperor Wu, was falsely accused by Jiang Chong 江充 (?–91 BCE) and others of using witchcraft to curse his father. Unable to defend himself, Liu Ju took up arms against Jiang Chong, leading Emperor Wu to believe his son was rebelling, prompting him to dispatch forces to suppress the perceived insurrection. The ensuing conflict in the capital resulted in over ten thousand casualties. Ultimately, the Crown Prince was defeated, fled, and committed suicide, which is historically known as the "Disaster of Witchcraft." Later, Emperor Wu realized his mistakes and posthumously exonerated his son. Although Jiang Chong was not killed by Emperor Wu himself, Jiang's execution symbolized the emperor's introspection and acknowledgment of his errors here.

[87] *Yantielun* 28.334.

perspectives of the Literati and the Counselor regarding *wang* have illuminated, the focal point is not necessarily historical accuracy but rather the participants' interpretative reconstructions of said era. While both the Worthies and the Literati hold the remote past in high regard, their views diverge when it comes to more recent history. The Worthies extol *wangzhe* with an esteem paralleling that of the Three Dynasties, whereas the Literati, while recognizing *wangzhe* as a commendable era, refrain from exalting it to the status of the golden age. Their views on Emperor Wu also diverge. The Literati distinctly assert that the conflict with Dayuan 大宛 was mainly instigated by Emperor Wu's personal desires, deeming it imprudent.[88] The Worthies, on the other hand, exempt Emperor Wu from any culpability for the turmoil, going so far as to laud him for restoring tranquility. In summary, the triad of voices in this discourse—the Counselor, the Literati, and the Worthies—articulate nuanced views on different historical periods, debunking any notion of a monolithic past. Their varied evaluations of these epochs are illustrated in Figure 3 below.

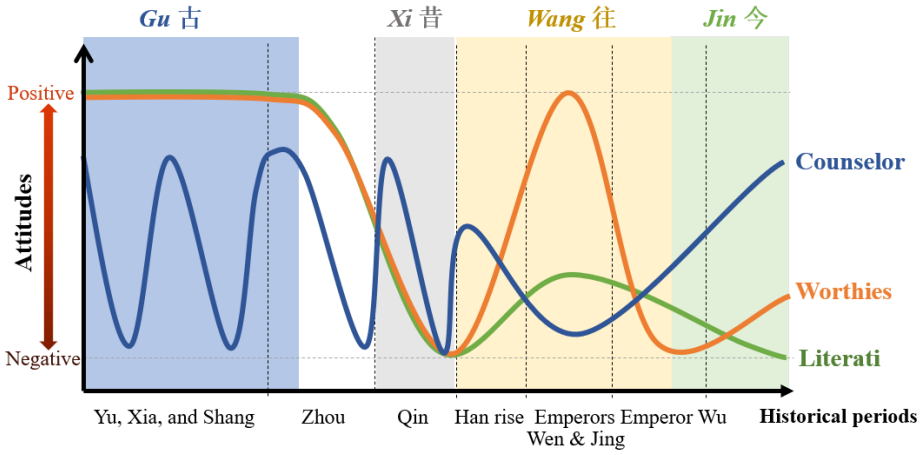

Figure 3. The evaluation of the past by the Counselor, the Literati, and the Worthies

[88] Ibid. 46.501. The Literati's words resonate the records in the "Biography of Dayuan" 大宛列傳. See *Shiji* 123.3170.

This schematic diagram, while not accurate, provides a rough delineation of the divisions between different pasts (*gu*, *xi*, and *wang*)[89] and the stances adopted by the three debating parties. The remote past encompassing figures such as Yao, Shun 舜, Yu 禹, Tang 湯, and the early Zhou rulers, is revered as a golden age by both the Literati and the Worthies, who cite this era as an unequivocal paradigm of exemplary governance. While the Counselor and the clerks also recognize the meritorious leadership of these monarchs, they posit that this golden epoch was not without its own vicissitudes. They assert that the first rulers of the Shang and Zhou dynasties confronted chaos analogous to that faced by the early Han.[90] Furthermore, they argue that precedents from this distant past have waned in their applicability to contemporary contexts.

Figure 3 indicates three major areas of discord among the debaters. Firstly, the attitudes towards the Qin dynasty separate the ministers and the critics. The critics trace the root of Qin's downfall to Shang Yang's policies, while the ministers laud Shang Yang's reforms and ascribe the fall of Qin to the malign influences of Zhao Gao during the reign of the Second Emperor. The second prominent difference emerges in the evaluation of Emperor Wen's reign. The Worthies extol it as a radiant epoch, whereas the Literati, while appreciative, resist idealizing it. In contrast, the Counselor portrays this era as marked by poverty and war. Lastly, their perspectives

[89] Such divisions could not fully align with each group's proposal, as they might hold differing views of the past. For example, while the Imperial Clerk classifies the Warring States period as *gu*, this is not recognized by the critics. Therefore, in Figure 3, *gu* ends at the beginning of Western Zhou. *Xi* covers a long historical period from the remote past to the Qin dynasty. However, since all three camps primarily focus on the Qin events, *xi* in the diagram highlights this era. *Wang* normally denotes Han events, especially those during the reigns of Emperor Wen and Jing, and occasionally Emperor Wu's reign as well.

[90] The Counselor claimed that "Tang and King Wen came after a period of decline, and Han rose upon an era of decay…. Anything overripe tends to decay, as end and beginning alternate in cycles" (湯、文繼衰，漢興乘弊。……物極而衰，終始之運也). In contrast, the Literati, while acknowledged the challenges faced by the Three Kings, emphasized their illustrious accomplishments rather than the failures. For example, they noted: "During the Three Kings' era, periods of prosperity and decline alternated, but they managed to support the declining and stabilize the unstable" (三王之時，迭盛迭衰。衰則扶之，傾則定之). See *Yantielun* 4.56–57.

diverge sharply when evaluating the present. The Counselor lauds the present as a grand age rivaling the distant past, while the Literati offer a scathing critique. The Worthies adopt a more nuanced perspective, acknowledging that Emperor Wu implemented corrective measures, but emphasizing that the challenges remain acute.

As shown above, the interpretation of *wang*, or previous Han events, is intrinsically linked to the evaluation of the present. Therefore, anyone aiming to exert influence over contemporary issues must cope with this period. In subsequent discussions, we observe the rise of a new political force during Emperor Xuan's reign, distinguished by their references to Han precedents. Their influence persisted until the end of Western Han. Proponents of the remote past encountered formidable challenges under Emperor Xuan's reign, necessitating the formulation of new defensive strategies to uphold the integrity of *gu*. Consequently, the monolithic designation of "Reformists" became too reductive. Some among them drew upon the insights of emergent ritual classics, while others incorporated some principles of the Precedentists, thereby augmenting the spectrum of "precedents" at their disposal.

1.3 "Han Has its Own Affairs": The Establishment and Influence of Precedentism

When Emperor Wu declared in the edict that "The Han Dynasty also has its own affairs, and if its canons and regulations are not passed down, upon what can our descendants lean?" (漢亦一家之事，典法不傳，謂子孫何),[91] he unequivocally emphasized the need to carve out a distinct

[91] *Shiji* 23.1161. Upon his accession, Emperor Wu summoned Confucian scholars to establish ritual protocols, but after more than a decade, no consensus was reached. Some scholars argued that in ancient times, only after achieving great peace did rulers create rituals and music. Emperor Wu was dissatisfied with this perspective, as he believed that Han should create new rituals now rather than waiting for an ideal state of peace. Consequently, he declared his intention in this edict, reformed the calendar, changed the color of attire, offered *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, and established rituals for ancestral temples and government officials, setting standards for future generations.

legacy for the Han Dynasty, one that was not a mere emulation of preceding dynasties. Prior to him, no Han emperor had articulated a desire to demarcate this dynasty as being distinct from its predecessors. Through Emperor Wu's multifaceted reforms, he set forth a model (albeit not endorsed by the Ru scholars) that others could emulate. This paradigm encompassed the construction of new palaces and gardens, extending invitations to scholars and individuals possessing diverse expertise to the court, taking grand tours, traveling incognito, conducting varied sacrificial rites, pursuing longevity, and so on.

Yet, it was not until nearly three decades later, during the reign of Emperor Xuan, that there was a pronounced inclination to venerate and emulate Emperor Wu's "affairs." By that time, these affairs had transitioned from their original novelty and were specifically identified as *gushi* 故事(literally translated as "old affairs," but contextually signifying "precedents").[92] The term *gushi*, prior to Emperor Xuan's reign, was not commonly used as a standard compound term. When it was occasionally used, it generally referred to "old stories" without particular implications.[93] Emperor Xuan stands out not only as the first monarch who adhered to these *gushi* but also as the most frequently cited (on five distinct occasions) exemplar of such behavior in the *Hanshu*. An overview of the specific facets of *gushi* that Emperor Xuan emulated is elucidated in the "Treatise on Suburban Sacrifices" 郊祀志.

> At that time, the General-in-Chief Huo Guang was assisting in the governance. The emperor conducted himself with great decorum, facing due south and only leaving [the palace] for

[92] For a comprehensive study on the use of *gushi* during the two Han dynasties, see Xing Yitian 邢義田, "Cong 'ru gushi' he 'bianyi congshi' kan Handai xingzheng zhong de jingchang yu quanbian" 從"如故事"和"便宜從事"看漢代行政中的經常與權變, in *Qin Han shi lungao* 秦漢史論稿 (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1987), 333–410. While Xing provides an extensive overview of the term's usage, he tends to treat this term as a static and monolithic concept, not delving into its varied interpretations and evolutions across different users and eras.

[93] For example, Sima Qian, in the postface of *Shiji*, used the phrase "narrated past events" (述故事), encompassing historical events from the Yellow Emperor to Emperor Wu. See *Shiji* 130.3299–3330.

> rituals associated with the ancestral temple.... The following year [61 BCE], in the first month, the emperor made his first visit to Ganquan. He offered sacrifices at the Taiyi shrine and there were several auspicious signs. He followed the *gushi* established by Emperor Wu, made magnificent carriages and attire, gave respect to the ceremonial rituals, and composed many poems and songs. In the third month of this year, he traveled to Hedong to offer sacrifices to the Houtu.... The Governor of the Capital, Zhang Chang, submitted a memorial saying, "I hope the enlightened ruler will soon forget his fondness for carriages and horses, dismiss the empty words of men of methods, and devote his heart to the art of emperors. Only then can lasting peace and prosperity be achieved."
> 時，大將軍霍光輔政，上共己正南面，非宗廟之祀不出。……明年正月，上始幸甘泉，郊見泰畤，數有美祥。修武帝故事，盛車服，敬齊祠之禮，頗作詩歌。其三月，幸河東，祠后土，……京兆尹張敞上疏諫曰：「願明主時忘車馬之好，斥遠方士之虛語，游心帝王之術，太平庶幾可興也。」[94]

This short excerpt illuminates that it was not until the eradication of Huo Guang and his family's political sway that Emperor Xuan's intentional replication of *gushi* became palpable.[95] Five years after the suppression of the Huo family rebellion, Emperor Xuan expanded his ritual practices from attending simple ancestral rites to sacrifices of gods and spirits, asserting his authority as the chief religious figure, thereby enriching the dimensions of his imperial persona. While the roots of such rituals can be traced back to the Qin dynasty, it was Emperor Wu who instituted the sacrifices at Ganquan Palace and Hedong. Mirroring Emperor Wu's initiatives, Emperor Xuan further inaugurated additional sacrificial sites, encompassing both natural phenomena and ethereal entities such as mountains, rivers, celestial bodies, deities, a captured white tiger, and the treasures of the golden horse and jade fowl. Beyond these expansive rituals, Emperor Xuan's adoption of *gushi* is also manifested in the flaunting of ornate chariots and regalia, the summoning of men of method and erudite scholars (with an emphasis on those with literary talent) to the court, and the crafting of literary compositions. Not surprisingly, some of those endeavors were

[94] *Hanshu* 25B.1248–1251.
[95] Emperor Xuan had established temples for Emperor Wu at the second year after his ascension and promptly initiated military campaigns against the Xiongnu. However, as Huo Guang held significant power at that time, it remains uncertain whether it was Huo or Emperor Xuan who was intentionally following Emperor Wu's *gushi*.

met with skepticism from subordinates, exemplified by Zhang Chang's 張敞 (d. 47 BCE) censure, which would have remained apt even during Emperor Wu's reign.

Diverging from the aspects distinctly articulated in this excerpt, some other accounts in the *Hanshu* can also be regarded as Emperor Xuan's commitment to perpetuating *gushi*. He adopted Emperor Wu's diplomatic policies, deploying troops to the frontiers. In 59 BCE, he commissioned the construction of Leyou Garden 樂遊苑. In the Wufeng period 五鳳 (56–53 BCE), he favored Geng Shouchang 耿壽昌, the Deputy to the Superintendent of Agriculture, distinguished for his proficiency in economic tactics and wealth accumulation. In 54 BCE, he mandated all border counties establish Constant Balance Granaries, aiming to equilibrate grain prices. In 51 BCE, he instituted Erudite positions dedicated to classical studies. He elevated the influence of eunuchs within the inner court.[96] All these initiatives closely echo Emperor Wu's preceding policies. Conscious of his ascension to the throne due to his continuation of Emperor Wu's lineage, Emperor Xuan probably perceived *gushi* as an invaluable reservoir of his legitimacy. Thus, in his view, *gushi* was not merely a set of general precedents, despite the plethora of Han examples at his disposal, it was singularly Emperor Wu's legacy.

"When a monarch exhibits a predilection, his subjects amplify it." It is therefore not unexpected that in his reign, there was a surge of subordinates advocating for *gushi*. These people fall into two discernible factions. The first consists of righteous officials operating in the outer court, whose virtues are extolled in the *Hanshu*.[97] The second comprises the more malevolent eunuchs of the inner court, often maligned by subsequent historians. Nonetheless, a shared characteristic

[96] See *Hanshu* 8, 24, 78.
[97] Van Ess claims that Ban Gu prefers them over the typical Ru scholars, but he presents the difference between them as "legal specialists versus classical experts," which oversimplifies their backgrounds. See Van Ess, "Ban Gu's View on the 'Second Victory' of 'Confucianism' and the Fall of the Former Han," 32–36.

unites these seemingly disparate groups: their focus on Han affairs over an idealized past. Consequently, both factions merit the designation "Precedentists" in my discussion. The latter group, represented by Hong Gong 弘恭 (d. 7 BCE) and Shi Xian 石顯 (d. 33 BCE), did not amass significant influence until Emperor Yuan's era, and their commitment to *gushi* is only cursorily documented.[98] In contrast, the former dominated the political landscape during this epoch, with abundant accounts highlighting their allegiance to *gushi*. This group warrants a more thorough examination.

A paragon within this cohort is undoubtedly Wei Xiang 魏相 (d. 59 BCE). Wei was the first Chancellor being selected directly by Emperor Xuan, uninfluenced by Huo Guang. His rapid rise should not be solely attributed to his pivotal role in neutralizing the Huo clan's dominance, but also, in part, to his political stances. Although Wei received classical education and was elevated as a Worthy by local officials,[99] he revealed an explicit predilection for Han precedents. This inclination markedly differentiated him from the critics engaged in the salt and iron discourse. Wei notably eschewed *gu*, either citing figures from antiquity or ancient principles, as example in his political arguments,[100] a tenet held in high regard by both the Worthies and Literati, and instead championed the principle of *wang*. The *Hanshu* portrays him as "fond of studying the historical precedents of the Han and the expedient memorials and proposals. He believed that the systems of ancient and current times differed, and the present task was only to adhere to the *gushi*" (好觀

[98] According to the *Hanshu*, Hong Gong and Shi Xian "often solely adhere to *gushi* in discussions" (論議常獨持故事). See *Hanshu* 78.3284.

[99] Wang Liqi posits that Wei Xiang was a participant in the 81 BCE debate on salt and iron as one of the Worthies, although the evidence supporting this claim is not entirely convincing. For more details on this assertion, see Wang, "Qianyan" 前言, in *Yantielun jiaozhu*, 4–5.

[100] Within Wei's three memorials documented in his biography, there is a conspicuous absence of references to *gu*, nor does he mention the names of any ancient sages or dynasties. While some of his idealized descriptions align with traditional portrayals of sage-kings and past dynasties, he deliberately avoids explicit references to them.

漢故事及便宜章奏，以為古今異制，方今務在奉行故事而已).[101] Such precedents encompass court discussions, edicts, memorials, and the writings by virtuous ministers like Jia Yi, Chao Cuo 晁錯 (200–154 BCE), and Dong Zhongshu. Analyzing Wei's perspective of the past, it is evident that he adeptly amalgamated the viewpoints of both ministers and critics: while he concurred with the ministers that distant histories lacked contemporary relevance, his reverence for *gushi* was in harmony with the Worthies, viewing the principles of *wang* as laudable guidelines. Notably, Wei's notion of *gushi* encompasses more than merely Emperor Wu's undertakings; it extends to all Han antecedents. This raises an intriguing conundrum: Given that some Han precedents are overtly contradictory, which did he prioritize?

Wei's memorials offer a chance to examine his adept handling of contentious matters. In one particularly revealing memorial, wherein he endeavored to dissuade Emperor Xuan from deploying troops against Xiongnu, Wei first categorizes armies into five distinct types: from the righteous and reactive ones (*yibing* 義兵, *yingbing* 應兵) to the resentful, greed, and arrogant ones (*fenbing* 忿兵, *tanbing* 貪兵, *jiaobing* 驕兵), subsequently elucidating their varied outcomes.[102] Wei posits that given the Xiongnu's recent restraint from invading Han territories, a military offensive lacks merit. Wei then enumerates five *jin* 今, emphasizing the myriad challenges currently besieging the Han dynasty. Within these *jin*, he traces a spectrum of concerns, starting with the plights endured by the ordinary people and culminating with the flawed proposals of high-ranking officials. He underscores his argument by referencing the criminal data of that year, highlighting an alarming 222 instances in which sons killed their fathers and siblings,

[101] *Hanshu* 74.3137.
[102] A parallel description of the five types of armies is also present in the *Wenzi* 文子. See Wang Liqi, *Wenzi shuyi* 文子疏義 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 235–236.

and wives killed their husbands. Invoking the words of Confucius, he posits that the genuine crises are not extrinsic threats but rather are burgeoning from within the empire. It is noteworthy that despite the memorial's focus on foreign relations, a topic abundant with Han precedents, Wei deliberately avoids mentioning historical policies like Emperor Wen's marital alliances or Emperor Wu's military campaigns, but maximizes the rhetorical power of the present. This omission, likely a strategic move, aims to sidestep accentuating existing discrepancies, thus preserving the sanctity of *gushi*. In other words, when confronted with various conflicting *gushi*, Wei refrains from showing a preference for specific Han precedents, opting instead to derive support from the *jin*, including employing detailed administrative archives.

In another memorial, aimed at urging Emperor Xuan to implement measures to alleviate the burdens borne by the commoners, Wei seeks to reconcile various *gushi* from another angle.

> I have heard that when a wise ruler is above and virtuous advisors are below, the monarch can be at peace, and the people harmonious.... I contemplate the late emperor's profound virtue and benevolence.... For the poor, he opened the state granaries for relief; he dispatched Advisory Counselors and Erudites to tour all under Heaven, inspect local customs, recommend the virtuous, redress unjust judgments, with officials flocking to roads and crossings; he reduced various expenditures, relaxed taxes, opened up mountains, lakes, and ponds, prohibited the private feeding of horses, selling wines, and hoarding goods... I cannot list all of these, but I respectfully submit a record of twenty-three such edicts. I prudently examine the kingly criterions, which base the economy on agriculture, emphasize accumulation, measure revenues against expenditures to prepare for disasters, and consider a failure to store for six years as an emergency. In the second year of the Yuanding period, the regions of Pingyuan, Bohai, Taishan, and Dongjun suffered from catastrophes, and people starved to death on the roads... Thanks to the wise decree to provide assistance, they were revived. Now, in a year of poor harvest, grain prices have skyrocketed.... I am deeply concerned and believe it is crucial to plan for contingencies early.
> 臣聞明主在上，賢輔在下，則君安虞而民和睦。……竊伏觀先帝聖德仁恩之厚……為民貧窮發倉廩，賑乏餧；遣諫大夫博士巡行天下，察風俗，舉賢良，平冤獄，冠蓋交道；省諸用，寬租賦，弛山澤波池，禁秣馬酤酒貯積……臣相不能悉陳，昧死奏故事詔書凡二十三事。臣謹案王法必本於農而務積聚，量入制用以備凶災，亡六年之畜，尚謂之急。元鼎二年，平原、勃海、太山、東郡溥被災害，民餓死於道路。……賴明詔振捄，乃得蒙更生。今歲不登，穀暴騰踊，……臣竊寒心，宜蚤圖其備。[103]

[103] *Hanshu* 74.3137–3138.

Wei starts this memorial with a typical reference to a distant past, yet astutely omits any mention of the term *gu*. Rather than dwelling extensively on the idealized past, he promptly shifts attention to the benevolent edicts of the preceding emperors. At first glance, the "late emperor" appears unmistakably to be Emperor Wu, given that he was the first Han emperor who dispatched Erudites to tour all under Heaven. In his 117 BCE edict, Emperor Wu articulated that the primary objective of these Erudites was to identify and support those unable to sustain themselves, recognize and enlist virtuous individuals, and inquire into cases of wrongful accusations or severe maltreatment.[104] Furthermore, the edict promulgated in the second year of the Yuanding era by Emperor Wu is lauded by Wei as a paradigmatic effort in aiding famine refugees. Nonetheless, subtle references to other Han emperors are also discernible. For example, initiatives such as "opening up mountains, lakes, and ponds" and "opening the state granaries to aid the people" first emerge in Emperor Wen's 158 BCE edict, while the "prohibition of selling wines" traces back to a policy declared by Emperor Jing in 147 BCE.[105] Wei's intent to synthesize a cohesive tradition from potentially discordant precedents becomes evident. Even though Emperor Wu is not predominantly recognized for his benevolence, Wei judiciously cherry-picks his edicts geared towards alleviating the plights of the impoverished, amalgamating them with the benevolent acts of other emperors. Consequently, the unique personas of individual emperors fade, and all previous Han sovereigns are collectively referenced as "the late emperors," their actions serving as practical, replicable templates.

[104] Ibid. 6.180.
[105] Ibid. 4.131, 5.147.

Beyond Wei Xiang, several eminent officials during Emperor Xuan's reign staunchly upheld the principles of precedents, including Zhang Anshi 張安世 (?–62 BCE), Su Wu 蘇武 (140–60 BCE), Du Yannian 杜延年 (?–52 BCE), and Bing Ji 丙吉 (?–55 BCE). Portraits of each adorned the Qilin Pavilion 麒麟阁 in homage to their distinguished contributions. As early as during Emperor Zhao's reign, Du Yannian had advocated to Huo Guang multiple times the merits of adhering to Emperor Wen's policies (宜修孝文時政).[106] On the eve of Chancellor Bing Ji's demise, he endorsed Du as his prospective successor, lauding him for his intimate knowledge of state precedents (曉國家故事).[107] Zhang Anshi's recommendation of Su Wu also resonated with this sentiment, noting Su's profound comprehension of *gushi* (明習故事).[108] In conjunction with Wei Xiang, these senior officials collectively epitomized a potent faction championing *gushi*. Although extant sources might not provide comprehensive details on how these ministers employed the *gushi*, it is plausible to surmise that their interpretations were not limited solely to Emperor Wu's era but encapsulated the broader spectrum of Han precedents, as shown in the cases of Du and Wei.

Under Emperor Xuan's patronage, the Precedentists emerged as the predominant influence during this era. Nevertheless, a minority persisted in their allegiance to the *gu*, or the distant past. Prominent among these were Gai Kuanrao 蓋寬饒 (?–61 BCE), Wang Ji 王吉 (?–48 BCE) and Gong Yu 貢禹 (124–44 BCE), with the latter two being close friends. Gai was forced to commit suicide after his memorial deeply infuriated Emperor Xuan, and Wang was slighted by Emperor

[106] Ibid. 60.2664.
[107] Ibid. 74.3148.
[108] Ibid. 54.2468.

Xuan, who criticized his suggestions as being "high-sounding yet impractical" (*yukuo* 迂闊).[109] Gong, by virtue of outliving Emperor Xuan, received appreciation from the subsequent emperor. Therefore, he will be subject to deeper analysis in the next section.

The *Hanshu* has preserved merely two brief excerpts from Gai Kuanrao's memorial that tragically precipitated his demise. In it, Gai lamented, "Nowadays, the sacred ways are increasingly neglected, and Confucian disciplines are not practiced. Individuals subjected to penalties are esteemed as the likes of Duke Zhou and Shao, and legal codes are equated with the *Shi* and *Shu* classics" (方今聖道浸廢，儒術不行，以刑餘為周召，以法律為詩書). Furthermore, Gai invoked the instance of abdication among the Five Emperors, subtly insinuating that the mantle of leadership ought to be transferred to those truly deserving.[110] The subject of abdication was a deeply sensitive matter and Gai was not the first scholar to face dire consequences for raising it.[111] Beyond broaching this taboo, Gai's recourse to ancient times as a means to vehemently critique contemporary governance was also disdained by Emperor Xuan. Despite being overlooked for promotions over the years, Gai continued to present unpleasant memorials, leading a sympathizer to counsel him against persisting in this approach. The sympathizer opined, "Now you are not merely content with fulfilling your duties. Instead, you wish to use the matters of the distant past to advise and correct the emperor. You repeatedly present unadopted and jarring words to remonstrate those around him. This neither augments your esteem nor bodes well for your longevity" (今君不務循職而已，乃欲以太古久遠之事匡拂天子，數進不用難聽之語以摩切左

[109] Ibid. 72.3065.
[110] Ibid. 77.3247.
[111] For example, Sui Hong 眭弘, during the reign of Emperor Zhao, had already asserted that: "The Han family serves as the descendants of Yao, so it is destined to pass on the state" (漢家堯後，有傳國之運). This proclamation led to his execution by Huo Guang. See *Hanshu* 75.3154.

右，非所以揚令名全壽命者也).[112] Apparently, Emperor Xuan held a certain aversion towards those who lauded the remote past, particularly when the practices heralded from such times appeared impractical in contemporary context. In contrast to Wei Xiang, who consistently centered on tangible issues and offered applicable precedents, Gai's broad critiques of the overall political principles found little resonance with the emperor.

Similarly, Wang Ji also frequently invoked *gu* to bolster his argument. In a memorial presented to Liu He 劉賀 (?–59 BCE), Wang explicitly posited that a wise ruler should "reflect upon the eras from Yao and Shun to the zenith of the Shang and Zhou" (上論唐虞之際，下及殷周之盛).[113] As shown in the previous section, this chronological span precisely demarcates the realm of *gu*. Upon Emperor Xuan's accession, he challenged the emulation of Emperor Wu's *gushi* and blamed ministers for "failing to elevate the sage ruler to the prominence of those from the Three Dynasties" (然未有……舉明主於三代之隆者也). He then enumerated several current problems: common people marrying prematurely and overspending on wedding ceremonies, and sons obtaining the Gentleman post owing to their fathers' official positions despite inadequate administrative knowledge. He further suggested the emperor to be thrifty and reduce the musical bureau and imperial workshops.[114] While most of Wang's suggestions appear more pragmatic than Gai's, and his fundamental philosophy does not markedly deviate from Wei Xiang's opinions, Emperor Xuan did not embrace Wang's recommendations. For one thing, Wang's proposition to curtail the musical bureau and imperial workshops defied Emperor Xuan's aspirations to emulate Emperor Wu, and for another, Wang exhibited a total disregard for Han *gushi*. There is no single

[112] *Hanshu* 77.3246.
[113] Ibid. 72.3060.
[114] Ibid. 74.3062–3065.

allusion to the Han precedents in his memorials, but he twice cited *guzhe*,[115] resonating those arguments expressed in the *Yantielun* by the Literati and Worthies.[116] Both Wei Xiang and Wang Ji advocated governing the people with benevolence, emphasizing the rectification of official conduct, and allowing the people to recuperate. The distinct responses they elicited from the emperor were shaped not just by their propositions, but also by their methods of articulation. Thus, in this context, the manner of expression appears to be as consequential as the content itself.

In a word, traditional distinctions such as "Modernists" versus "Reformists" or "Legalists" versus "Confucians" seem insufficient to adequately describe the political dynamics of this period. Both Wei and Wang, for instance, underwent classical education and were recommended by local officials. In contrast, figures like Zhang Anshi and Du Yannian, who were descendants of cruel officials and began their careers by virtue of their fathers' positions, appear to be more influenced by the tradition of clerks rather than Ru scholars. Interestingly, Wei's political affiliations align more closely with Zhang and Du than with Wang. Adding complexity to this political landscape are the two eunuchs, Hong and Shi, in the inner court. These figures cannot easily fit into any of the aforementioned categories, yet their influence in the court's political milieu is undeniable. The predominant factor distinguishing those in Emperor Xuan's favor from those

[115] The two *guzhe* can be seen in this passage: "In ancient times, clothing, carriages, and horses had distinctions, in order to demonstrate the virtuous and differentiate between the noble and the common. Nowadays, distinctions have become blurred; everyone decides on their own, leading to greed for wealth and recklessness even in the face of death…. In ancient times, craftsmen did not create things with engraved pattern, and merchants did not exchange luxuries, not because they were uniquely virtuous, but because of the governance and teachings of the time. When the populace sees frugality, they will return to the foundation, and when the foundation is established, all else will follow" (古者衣服車馬貴賤有章，以褒有德而別尊卑，今上下僭差，人人自制，是以貪財誅利，不畏死亡。……古者工不造琱瑑，商不通侈靡，非工商之獨賢，政教使之然也。民見儉則歸本，本立而末成). See *Hanshu* 74.3064–3065.

[116] See the Literati's words: "Markets and merchants do not exchange useless things, craftsmen do not make useless tools" (市、商不通無用之物，工不作無用之器) in *Yantielun* 1.3. Also, the Worthies provided detailed accounts of a well-regulated past in *Yantielun* 29.349–351, depicting an era where social norms were more orderly and structured.

outside it seems not to be familial lineage, education, political ideology, or personality. Instead, the pivotal distinction lies in their approach to the past. The contention is not necessarily between the Zhou ideal and the Qin model, but more precisely between reverence for the distant past (*gu*) and adherence to Han historical precedents (*wang*). Therefore, the label "Precedentists" aptly encapsulates the shared tenets of this influential group.

It is commonly assumed that post-Emperor Xuan era marked the ascendancy of the "Reformists" who venerated the remote past. However, such an assumption oversimplifies the complexities of the era. Indeed, there was certainly a surge in influence of Ru scholars employing *gu*-oriented rhetoric to advise the emperors. Additionally, the subsequent emperors, who were well-versed in classical education and held Ru scholars in high regard, contributed to this trend. Yet, the situation was far from monolithic. Not all "Reformists" were of one mind, and later Han emperors did not entirely forsake the authority of *gushi*. The intricate details of the "Reformist" movement will be delved into in the following section. For now, the emphasis is on the persistent efforts of these later emperors to maintain and uphold the significance of *gushi*.

In the reign of Emperor Yuan, real power was entrenched within the inner court, dominated by the two eunuchs, Hong Gong and Shi Xian, who "often adhere solely to *gushi* when discussing issues" (論議常獨持故事).[117] Leading "Reformists" of the time, such as Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成 (d. 41 BCE) and Kuang Heng 匡衡 (Chancellor 36–30/29 BCE), found themselves having to either concur with Hong and Shi's perspectives or adopt a cautious silence for their own safety. Despite the preservation of numerous "Reformist" memorials in the *Hanshu*, it is plausible that practical governance during this era was predominantly shaped by Precedentists rather than "Reformists."

[117] *Hanshu* 78.3284.

Emperor Cheng's reign, spanning from 33 to 7 BCE, presents a more intricate scenario. Previous scholarship has largely overlooked the evident policy shifts during his tenure. Upon his accession to the throne, Shi Xian was dismissed, while members of his mother's clan, the Wang family, enjoyed substantial promotions. Initially, Emperor Cheng endorsed Kuang Heng's radical reform of the ancestral temple system and the Heaven and Earth sacrifices. However, after Kuang was dismissed in 30 BCE, Emperor Cheng encountered increasing opposition, leading him to question the merits of the reform. While he did not overtly retract his support, he evidently began to regret about its implementation.[118] In other words, his endorsement of the reform only lasted three years. A pivotal moment in the transitional phase appears to be the demise of Wang Feng 王鳳 (granted Marquis in 42 BCE) in 22 BCE. Elevated to the General-in-Chief with the title of Marshal of State 大司馬大將軍 at the onset of Emperor Cheng's reign, he held de facto power until his death.[119] Although the prestigious role of General-in-Chief continued to be held by members of the Wang clan, Emperor Cheng's satisfaction with them waned soon after. In response, he turned to the *gushi*, particularly those associated with Emperor Wu, as a means to bolster his own authority.[120] Contrasting with Emperor Xuan, Emperor Cheng's adoption of the *gushi* is frequently perceived not as a mark of his exemplary leadership but as indicative of his compromised moral integrity and propensity for hedonistic excesses. First, let us examine the manifestations of *gushi* in the Imperial Harem.

[118] Ibid. 25B.1258–1259.
[119] For example, the *Hanshu* recounts a notable incident involving Emperor Cheng's attempt to appoint Liu Xin as the Regular Palace Attendant 中常侍. Despite the emperor's wishes, his attendants refused to proceed with the appointment until Wang was informed. Ibid. 98.4018–4019.
[120] *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 (Comprehensive Meaning of Customs and Mores) notes that Emperor Cheng was "particularly adept at the standards and *gushi* of the Han dynasty" (尤善漢家法度故事). See Wang Liqi, *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu* 風俗通義校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 93.

> Since the Hongjia era [20–17 BCE], the emperor began to indulge more into the Imperial Harem. Ban Jieyu (lady of handsome fairness)[121] presented a lady-in-waiting named Li Ping to the emperor, who gained the emperor's affection and was promoted to the position of Jieyu. The emperor said, "In the past, Empress Wei also rose from a humble position." He then granted Li Ping the surname Wei, hence she came to be known as Wei Jieyu.
> 自鴻嘉後，上稍隆於內寵。婕妤進侍者李平，平得幸，立為婕妤。上曰：「始衛皇后亦從微起。」乃賜平姓曰衛，所謂衛婕妤也。[122]
>
> Later on, the emperor went on incognito excursions. He often traveled with Zhang Fang, the Marquis of Fuping, and would introduce themselves as servants of the Marquis of Fuping. They once visited Heyang Princess to enjoy some entertainment. There, the emperor encountered a dancer named Zhao Feiyan and favored her.... Subsequently, she was established as the empress.
> 其後帝為微行出遊，常與富平侯張放俱稱富平侯家人，過河陽主作樂，見舞者趙飛燕而幸之……後遂立為皇后。[123]

From 20 BCE (the first year of the Hongjia reign), only two years after Wang Feng's death, Emperor Cheng started to travel outside the palace incognito.[124] Within the records of the Han dynasty, only Emperor Wu was previously documented to have undertaken such ventures.[125] Concurrently, from 20 BCE onwards, Emperor Cheng began to bestow favor upon women from more modest backgrounds, likely an effort to counterbalance the prevailing influence of the Wang clan.[126] In doing so, he explicitly invoked the precedent of Emperor Wu elevating Empress Wei. For instance, with Li Jieyu, he altered Li's surname to mirror the case of Empress Wei (i.e., Wei

---

[121] For the translation of the title Jieyu 婕妤, see Olivia Milburn, "Palace Women in the Former Han Dynasty (202 BCE–CE 23): Gender and Administrational History in the Early Imperial Era," *NAN NÜ* 18, 2 (2016): 203–204.
[122] *Hanshu* 97B.3984.
[123] Ibid. 27B-a.1395.
[124] Ibid. 10.316.
[125] Ibid. 65.2847.
[126] The *Hanshu* describes how Emperor Cheng's actions caused concern within the Wang clan, particularly in relation to the rise of new consort clans. It notes, "Emperor Cheng ... having no heir for a long time, often went incognito, frequently favoring minor attendants. Ladys Zhao and Li, rising from humble origins to exclusive favoritism, were all a constant worry to the Empress Dowager and her brothers day and night" (成帝……久無繼嗣，數為微行，多近幸小臣，趙、李從微賤專寵，皆皇太后與諸舅夙夜所常憂). This passage illustrates the Wang clan's anxiety, not just about Emperor Cheng's safety or his successor, but also about their own positions being threatened by these emerging consort clans. Ibid. 85.3465.

Zifu 衛子夫 [d. 91 BCE], Emperor Wu's empress). Had Zhao Feiyan not subsequently emerged, Li might have ascended to the role of empress. The circumstances under which Zhao was encountered bear striking resemblance to Emperor Wu's introduction to Empress Wei: the emperor, upon visiting his sister, was immediately smitten by a dancer, who ultimately achieved the status of empress. While this could be a mere coincidence, it seems plausible that Emperor Cheng was strategically utilizing the authority of *gushi* to legitimize the potential elevation of a woman of humble origins to the position of empress.

In addition to promoting several new consort clans within the Imperial Harem, Emperor Cheng also elevated trusted followers in the inner court, with Zhang Fang emerging as one of the most intimate ones.

> During the Hongjia era, the emperor wanted to follow Emperor Wu's *gushi*. He frolicked and banqueted with his close subordinates. Zhang Fang was favored because he was the son of a princess, being well-informed and sharp-witted…. Fang slept and rose with the emperor. He was exceptionally favored by the emperor and often accompanied him on incognito journeys… this went on for several years. At that time, the emperor's maternal uncles grew jealous of Fang's favor and reported it to the Empress Dowager.
> 鴻嘉中，上欲遵武帝故事，與近臣游宴，放以公主子開敏得幸……與上臥起，寵愛殊絕，常從為微行出游……積數年。是時上諸舅皆害其寵，白太后。[127]

Clearly, through the emulation of the *gushi*, Emperor Cheng aimed to cultivate a close-knit circle of trusted subordinates to counterbalance the influence of the Wang clan.[128] Consequently, his maternal uncles, who were probably the most sensitive to Zhang's ascent, leaned on their main power base, the Empress Dowager, to resist and ultimately expel Zhang. While earlier scholarly interpretations often framed Emperor Cheng's promotion of female and male favorites in terms

[127] Ibid. 59.2654–2655.
[128] Emperor Cheng notably referenced a *gushi* to caution the Wang clan. He cited the *gushi* of Emperor Wen, who executed Empress Dowager Bo's brother, Bo Zhao 薄昭 (d. 170 BCE), as a warning. Ibid. 98.4025.

of hedonistic indulgences, it is more insightful to recognize the deeper political motivations underlying these seemingly excessive actions.

Beyond these maneuvers in the private domain, Emperor Cheng's ambitions to revive Emperor Wu's *gushi* found a more public expression in the realm of sacrificial ceremonies. In 16 BCE, he announced the reestablishment of sacrifices at Ganquan and Hedong, signifying a complete departure from his earlier endorsement of Kuang Heng's reforms. Not only did he personally embark on grand ceremonial visits to Ganquan and Hedong, but he also entrusted many sacrificial duties to men of methods, mirroring the practices of Emperor Wu.[129] Additionally, he reinstated Empress Dowager Lü's edict that forbade officials from making unauthorized comments about the ancestral temples of former emperors.[130] As a result, his reign did not witness fervent debates, like those during Emperor Yuan's rule, about discontinuing sacrifices to certain ancestral temples. Until his passing, neither the systems of the ancestral temples nor the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth were changed again. In summary, the reforms introduced during Emperor Yuan's reign, championed by the "Reformists," were effectively reversed in the latter half of Emperor Cheng's tenure.

Finally, we need to scrutinize the ministers who ascended to prominence during Emperor Cheng's reign. Wang Feng, who wielded considerable power during the earlier part of Emperor Cheng's reign, was described as someone who "could not establish his own rules and regulations, but merely adhered to the *gushi*" (鳳不能自立法度，循故事而已).[131] Xue Xuan 薛宣, who rose

[129] Ibid. 87A, 25B.1260.
[130] Ibid. 73.3125. Loewe acknowledges the frequent alterations in state cults since Emperor Cheng, interpreting these actions as mere expedients driven by the emperor's desire to secure an heir. However, I posit that the emperor's quest for an heir was just one among several factors influencing the emperor's contradictory attitudes. There could have a more complex set of motivations behind his decisions. See Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China*, 176–78.
[131] *Hanshu* 60.2670.

to the position of Chancellor between 20 BCE and 15 BCE, initially served as a scribal clerk to the Superintendent of Trials 廷尉書佐 and possessed a limited grasp of the Classics.[132] Similarly, Zhai Fangjin 翟方進 (d. 7 BCE), a close associate and Xue's successor, began his career as a minor clerk. The *Hanshu* portrays him as someone "proficient in the duties of legal clerks, using his Confucian education to embellish the laws and regulations…. Internally, he deciphered subtle intentions from the monarch to secure his position" (兼通文法吏事，以儒雅緣飭法律……內求人主微指以固其位).[133] This characterization evokes parallels with Emperor Wu's Chancellor, Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 (200–121 BCE), who "well-studied the affairs of legal clerks and adorned them with Confucian methods" (習文法吏事，緣飾以儒術).[134] It is evident that Emperor Cheng exhibited a preference not for the "Reformists," but for individuals who could employ the Classics to embellish the tradition of legal clerks. From 20 BCE until Emperor Cheng's demise, the position of Chancellor was predominantly held by such figures, effectively challenging the widely accepted narrative of a "victory of Confucianism" or the dominance of "Reformists" during this period.

Emperor Ai, from the very beginning, also sought to emulate Emperor Wu's *gushi*, rather than solely heeding the advice from "Reformists." In 5 BCE, he adopted a new reign title Taichu yuanjiang 太初元将, which immediately evoked one of Emperor Wu's reign titles, Taichu 太初.[135] In 4 BCE, he not only restored the sacrifices at Ganquan and Hedong (which had been

[132] Ibid. 83.3385.
[133] Ibid. 84.3421.
[134] Ibid. 58.2618.
[135] Loewe also notes that the change in reign title and the appointment of Zhu Bo 朱博 in this era are linked to the "Modernists," but he does not connect these two events to other actions of Emperor Ai, considering them instead as isolated and transient incidents without clear indications of Emperor Ai's intentions. See Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China*, 280–85.

discontinued after Emperor Cheng's passing by the Empress Dowager), but also summoned men of methods and revived all the preceding sacrificial sites, numbering over seven hundred.[136] In 3 BCE, he promoted his male favorite, the 22-year-old Dong Xian 董賢 (23–1 BCE), to be the General-in-Chief. Emperor Ai was known for his swift dismissals and executions of subordinates who failed to satisfy him. At times, the Chancellorship changed hands amongst three different individuals within a single year. Ban Gu assessed Emperor Ai as one that "aimed to strengthen the monarch's authority, following the examples of Emperors Wu and Xuan" (欲彊主威，以則武、宣).[137] Notably, two of his Chancellors, Kong Guang 孔光 (65–5 BCE) and Zhu Bo 朱博 (?–5 BCE), demonstrated a clear inclination towards the *gushi*.

> [Kong Guang] studied *gushi* and standards. Over several years, he became well-versed in Han regulations, laws and orders.… He oversaw key state affairs for over a decade, adhering to regulations and maintaining *gushi*.
> （孔光）觀故事品式，數歲明習漢制及法令。……凡典樞機十餘年，守法度，修故事。[138]
> Zhu Bo served as the Grand Minister of Works and presented a memorial saying, "The way of emperors does not necessarily have to follow; each should adapt to the needs of the times. Emperor Gaozu… instituted the position of the Censor-in-chief…. Now, changing it to the Grand Minister of Works and having it at the same rank as the Chancellor have not brought auspicious benefits. According to *gushi*, top-performing governors and chief ministers of provinces and states are selected as officials of full 2000 bushels in the central government, from whom the Censor-in-chief is chosen, and those who excel in their duties become the Chancellor. The hierarchy is established…"
> 朱博為大司空，奏言「帝王之道不必相襲，各繇時務。高皇帝……置御史大夫……今更為大司空，與丞相同位，未獲嘉祐。故事，選郡國守相高第為中二千石，選中二千石為御史大夫，任職者為丞相，位次有序……」[139]

Kong's adherence to the *gushi* was emphasized twice in his biography, and Zhu explicitly invoked the *gushi* to advocate for the discontinuation of the title of the Grand Minister of Works

[136] *Hanshu* 25B.1254.
[137] Ibid. 11.345.
[138] Ibid. 81.3353.
[139] Ibid. 83.3405.

and the reinstatement of the Censor-in-chief. Though Kong was a quintessential Ru scholar and Zhu emerged from a military clerk background—each with distinct personalities—their perspectives towards the *gushi* were congruent. Both Kong and Zhu can be classified as the Precedentists, individuals who regarded the Han edicts and administrative antecedents, rather than distant historical events, as their guiding standards. [140]

In synthesizing our insights from the reigns of Emperors Xuan to Ai concerning the emperors' conduct and favored subordinates, we can come to the conclusion that the so-called "Reformists" never truly gained dominance in the mid to late Western Han. A notable portion of the influential figures during this era were staunch adherents to Han precedents. Given their multifaceted backgrounds, it is also untenable to assert a definitive victory of Confucianism. Even under Emperor Yuan, wherein "Reformists" received significant reverence, they faced impediments in wielding control over administrations and largely confined their efforts to proposing reforms in temple and sacrificial systems. These reformative endeavors later met with disapproval from Emperors Cheng and Ai and witnessed multiple revocations.

To sum up, the differences in *gushi* appropriation by emperors and ministers are discernable. Emperors exhibited a predilection for precedents linked to Emperor Wu, while ministers normally exhibited a broader spectrum, encompassing all Han antecedents. While "adherence to the precedents" is often perceived as a hallmark of the clerical tradition, it is evident that, from Emperor Xuan's reign onwards, the demarcations between Ru scholars and legal clerks began to fade. A legal clerk could be proficient in classics, just as a Ru scholar might exhibit mastery over legal stipulations.[141] Consequently, the delineation between "Ru scholar" and "Legal clerk"

[140] Notably, in the *Hanshu*, none of the memorials by Kong or Zhu mention the term *gu*.
[141] This phenomenon has long been recognized scholars, though interpretations vary. For example, Chen Qiyun 陳啟雲 views this as a transformation of legal officials into Confucian scholars, whereas Yu Yingshi 余英時 perceives it as the reverse. For an exploration of these differing perspectives, see Chen Qiyun

became increasingly tenuous in the discourse surrounding the political dynamics of this era. The overarching theme that emerged at this time was the compulsion felt by proponents of the remote past to respond to challenges posed by powerful Precedentists. In the next section, I will probe into the strategies of the so-called "Reformists" and elucidate their varied approaches to rekindling the essence of *gu*.

1.4 Past as Ritual Classics or Historical Examples: The Decline and Transformation of the *gu* Faction

As illustrated in the analysis of the *Yantielun*, the concepts of *wang* and *gu* delineate two distinct types of the past. Since the mid-Western Han period, *wang* has been increasingly emphasized. The pronounced inclinations of Emperors Xuan, Cheng, and Ai towards *gushi* surfaced as a formidable challenge to the longstanding veneration of the distant past. Consequently, scholars traditionally reliant on this distant past found themselves necessitated to recalibrate their positions and strategies. In the reign of Emperor Xuan, Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 (ca. 114–46 BCE) epitomized the perspectives of the Worthies and the Literati, who championed an idealized past. At the same time, Xiao also adeptly attuned his arguments to align with the emperor's predilections, integrating Han precedents and regulations, though he did not hold them in high esteem. Consequently, he found disfavor with Emperor Xuan and stood out as the singular Imperial Counselor in this reign who, rather than being elevated to the role of Chancellor, faced demotion. Under

---

陳啟雲, *Ruxue yu Handai lishi wenhua: Chen Qiyun wenji 2* 儒學與漢代歷史文化：陳啟雲文集 2 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2007), 24. Also, Cai Liang, when examining the mechanism of recruiting officials in the Han, identifies four general categories of candidates for clerk positions, one of which includes experts in the classics or individuals recognized for their moral conduct. This suggests that the boundary between Ru scholars and legal clerks was not strictly delineated. See Cai, *Witchcraft and the Rise of the First Confucian Empire* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 192–193.

Emperor Yuan, there was a rise of classicist scholars. Gong Yu and Yi Feng 翼奉 (fl. 48–45 BCE) emerged prominently during the early years of his reign. Gong, probably the most representative "Reformist," persistently accentuated the need for rejuvenating *gu*. However, his affiliations with influential eunuchs seemingly nudged him towards adopting the rhetoric of *gushi*, too. In contrast, Yi, although mentioned *gu* sometimes, exhibited a keener inclination toward concrete historical exemplars rather than the abstract principles of *gu*. Subsequently, the advocates of an idealized remote past splintered into two primary intellectual trajectories: the Ritualists and the Paradigmists. The former, exemplified by figures Wei Xuancheng and Kuang Heng in the reign of Emperor Yuan, posited *li* 禮 (ritual) as the paramount authoritative source. To them, *gu* was invaluable perennial principles only when it was supported by ritual classics. Conversely, the latter school, represented by Liu Xiang and Gu Yong 谷永 (70–10 BCE) under Emperor Cheng, rejected this approach. They embraced *gushi*, underlining the value of historical instances, particularly those from the Han dynasty. To them, *gu* only became convincing when it was supported by robust precedents. Finally, Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE–23 CE) synthesized these two traditions of ritual classics and historical precedents to establish his authority. The boundary between different pasts was intentionally blurred.

In this section, I will delve into the memorials authored by the so-called "Reformists" as documented in the *Hanshu*. Unlike literary compositions, memorials typically offer limited insight into the author's innermost thoughts and feelings, primarily due to the formal constraints and conventions associated with official documentation. Nonetheless, it is precisely within these works that one can discern the clear articulation of their political inclinations and rhetorical strategies. While the extant materials are not exhaustive and are arguably curated based on Ban Gu's preferences, they still, to a certain extent, mirror the authors' perspectives on the past. Among

these individuals, Liu Xiang has bequeathed a more extensive body of compilations beyond his memorials, which also manifest a discernible inclination towards *gushi*. A more in-depth exploration of his additional contributions will be reserved for the subsequent chapter.

The preceding analysis underscores that Xiao Wangzhi was not the sole proponent of venerating the remote past during Emperor Xuan's reign. However, he stands out as the only figure elevated to official prominence. What differentiates Xiao's propositions from those of his fellows? Emperor Xuan's attitude towards Xiao shifted from approval to dissatisfaction. Initially, the ascendancy of Xiao's official career started from his proposal of curbing the influence of the Huo clan.[142] At that time, Emperor Xuan was ardently cultivating loyal subordinates surrounding him, positioning Xiao as a perfect fit for this agenda. Therefore, many suggestions by Xiao were accepted in this period. In 61 BCE, the Western Qiang tribe rebelled, and the emperor sent troops to quell the uprising. Zhang Chang proposed that the common people in the northwest, due to their logistical involvement in the military campaign, had forsaken agricultural activities. This would inevitably precipitate a food crisis in the ensuing spring. He thus suggested that those who have committed crimes (barring those with unpardonable offenses) in these eight counties should be allowed to redeem their offenses by supplying grain. Xiao, in alliance with another official, the Superintendent of the Lesser Treasury 少府, tabled a memorial challenging Zhang's proposal.

> … Given the human nature, if the father or the elder brother of a poor family is imprisoned and their son and younger brother hear that money can save them, they would disregard the danger of death… to save their relatives. One might be saved, but ten might be lost…. In ancient times, the state stored the wealth among the people. During times of deficit, it requisitioned resources from the people; conversely, in periods of abundance, it distributed excess back to the people.… Now, with the military campaigns in the west, people are missing out on farming. Even if taxes were collected per household and per capita to alleviate their difficulties, it is a universal principle from ancient times and would not be deemed unfair by the masses. However, using death to save lives seems questionable.

[142] *Hanshu* 78.3273.

……人情，貧窮，父兄囚執，聞出財得以生活，為人子弟者將不顧死亡之患，……求救親戚。一人得生，十人以喪，……古者臧於民，不足則取，有餘則予。……今有西邊之役，民失作業，雖戶賦口歛以贍其困乏，古之通義，百姓莫以為非。以死救生，恐未可也。[143]

Xiao tries to legitimize the imposition of taxes by advocating that this approach aligns with the "universal principle from ancient times." His argument of *guzhe* finds parallels with the tenets presented by the Literati in the *Yantielun*, which postulates, "The king does not hoard or accumulate; he stores wealth among the people, eschews exploitative profit-making, and emphasizes the righteousness of the people" (王者不畜聚，下藏於民，遠浮利，務民之義).[144] However, Xiao diverges from the Literati's focus. Instead of highlighting the principle of "kings storing the wealth among people," he underscores the notion that "during times of deficit, it requisitioned resources from the people." Therefore, Xiao's reference to *gu* appears to be a deliberately chosen facet of one account of the *gu*.

However, Zhang promptly counters Xiao's stance by employing *wang*, reminiscent of the manner in which the Literati's position was rebutted by the Counselor. First, Zhang challenges the purportedly "universal principle" of increasing taxation when necessary. He cites Emperor Wu as a testament, arguing that even amidst prolonged warfare, the emperor refrained from levying additional taxes. Given this precedent, Zhang posits, how could one justify extra taxation over a minor rebellion? Furthermore, he refutes the presumption that using grain to absolve crimes would precipitate unrest. Drawing on his two-decade-long career, Zhang contends that such a policy has never incited disturbances. In the face of these critiques, Xiao, in collaboration with his peer, presents an updated memorial that seeks to counter Zhang's assertions by harnessing *gushi*.

[143] Ibid. 78.3275–3276.
[144] *Yantielun* 5.68.

> The late emperor was sagacious, and the officials were wise and virtuous. They established canons and set down laws, serving as timeless guidelines. The emperor was always concerned about the insufficiency at the borders. Hence, the "Ordinance on Finance, A" states, "Border regions often suffer from invasions, leading to starvation, cold, untimely deaths, and families being torn apart. The entire state is commanded to support their costs." …. I have heard that in the fourth year of the Tianhan era [97 BCE], there was once a practice allowing those with capital offenses to reduce their sentences by a grade if they paid 500,000 coins.... As a result, evil people were rampant, and large groups of bandits emerged…. A wise imperial decree sent officials with embroidered robes to raise armies and suppress them, executing more than half of the bandits before the unrest subsided. We believe that this was the fault of allowing those with capital offenses to commute their sentences through payment. Thus, it is not advisable.
> 先帝聖德，賢良在位，作憲垂法，為無窮之規，永惟邊竟之不贍，故金布令甲曰「邊郡數被兵，離飢寒，夭絕天年，父子相失，令天下共給其費」……聞天漢四年，常使死罪人入五十萬錢減死罪一等，……其後姦邪橫暴，群盜並起……明詔遣繡衣使以興兵擊之，誅者過半，然後衰止。愚以為此使死罪贖之敗也，故曰不便。[145]

In this memorial, Xiao abstains from referencing ancient paradigms or canonical texts. Predominantly, he anchors his argument on Han laws and Emperor Wu's *gushi*. The change in his strategy is evident: when *gu* was assailed by the Precedentists, Xiao swiftly incorporated the *gushi* of the late emperor as a countermeasure. Notably, even though Xiao epitomizes the Ru scholar, he displays profound knowledge of legal statutes and regulations. Due to the insights gleaned from unearthed Qin and Han bamboo slips, we know that "Ordinance on Finance" had its origins in the Qin dynasty and underwent modifications at the outset of the Han era.[146] The particular Ordinance on Finance, A referenced here is likely an augmentation instituted by Emperor Wu, illustrating that levying taxes from the people to bolster frontier efforts was an established convention. Moreover, Xiao invokes the edicts that permitted individuals to redeem their crimes during the Tianhan era, underscoring the traumatic consequences. When juxtaposed with the Literati's

[145] *Hanshu* 78.3278.
[146] For a detailed introduction of the excavated "Ordinance on Finance," see Cheng Weirong 程維榮, "Youguan Qin Han 'Jinbulü' de ruogan wenti" 有關秦漢《金布律》的若干問題, *Lanzhou daxue xuebao (shehui keixue ban)* 2010.4: 67–73, and Zhou Haifeng 周海鋒, "Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian 'Jinbulü' yanjiu" 嶽麓書院藏秦簡《金布律》研究, *Jianbo yanjiu* 2017.1:176–195.

recounting of identical circumstances in the *Yantielun*, Xiao's memorial stands out for its meticulous citation of specific mandates and temporal precision.[147] This suggests that Xiao was not an unwavering advocate of a distant past, akin to figures like Gai Kuanrao or Wang Ji. On the contrary, he exhibited a finesse in harnessing the *gushi*, especially those pertinent to Emperor Wu. Nevertheless, unlike Precedentists who venerated Han *gushi* as archetypes, Xiao's stance towards them was nuanced. For instance, in the aforementioned memorial, the edicts from the Tianhan era were unequivocally invoked as negative examples.

Xiao's various proposals were largely adopted by Emperor Xuan, until he opposed the establishment of Constant Balance Granaries 常平倉 and other economic initiatives introduced by Geng Shouchang. Since then, Emperor Xuan's attitude towards Xiao discernibly soured. In the memorial against Geng's suggestions, including tripling the sea tax, Xiao claimed that:

> The former subordinate of the Imperial Counselor, Xu Gong, was from Donglai. He reported that in previous years when there was an increase in the sea tax, fish ceased to appear. The elders all recounted that during Emperor Wu's reign, local officials once tried to monopolize fishing, resulting in fish disappearing from the sea. It was only after the rights were returned to the people that fish began to emerge again…. Now, Shouchang wishes to purchase grain from within the central administrative region, construct granaries, and manage ships, an endeavor that would cost more than 20 million, involving vast manpower. I fear this might induce a force of drought, causing suffering for the populace.
> 故御史屬徐宮家在東萊，言往年加海租，魚不出。長老皆言武帝時縣官嘗自漁，海魚不出，後復予民，魚乃出。……今壽昌欲近糴漕關內之穀，築倉治船，費直二萬萬餘，有動眾之功，恐生旱氣，民被其災。[148]

The allegorical account of mysterious fish relayed by Xiao, whether factual or fabricated, stands as a protest against Emperor Wu's policies. Clearly, fish do not possess the intelligence to time

[147] The Literati's depiction of the same phenomenon is less detailed. For example, they describe it as: "At that time... deceit and treachery took root, bandits and thieves rose up, local governors and magistrates were unable to prohibit them, and cities and towns could not halt them. Then, officials of high rank were dispatched, clad in embroidered garments, to lead a campaign against them" (當此之時……姦偽萌生，盜賊並起，守尉不能禁，城邑不能止。然後遣上大夫衣繡衣以興擊之). See *Yantielun* 46.501.
[148] *Hanshu* 24A.1141.

their appearances or disappearances strategically. When figures like "the elders," Xu Gong, and Xiao reported such phenomenon, they apparently utilized the fish as a veil to censure the escalation in sea taxation and the state monopoly. Analogously, as the Worthies praised the *wangzhe* by borrowing words from the elders, Xiao's account of the "previous years" did not draw from codified regulations or formal documents, but rather from local tales, thereby challenging the official narratives. If narratives of *wang* can be constructed at will by anyone, it risks undermining the court's control over *gushi*. Understandably, Emperor Xuan's displeasure with Xiao's unconventional construction of the past led to a shift in his attitudes towards Xiao. Later, Xiao was demoted to the position of Senior Tutor to the Heir Apparent 太子太傅 and felt compelled to commit suicide shortly after Emperor Yuan's accession to the throne.

In the reign of Emperor Yuan, Gong Yu and Yi Feng were the two earliest "Reformists" who received the emperor's approbation. Gong Yu was a close friend of Wang Ji, and he also exhibited a palpable inclination towards an idealized past. Among all his memorials preserved in the *Hanshu*—approximately 2000 words in total length—the term *gu* recurs a notable 12 times, significantly outpacing his contemporaries in its usage. Emperor Yuan, exhibiting a keener interest in such discourse than his predecessor, ultimately elevated Gong to the esteemed rank of Imperial Counselor. Within Gong's memorials, one discerns an unprecedentedly vehement critique of the Precedentists.

> During Emperor Wu's time, he took thousands of beautiful women to fill the imperial harem. When he passed away, Emperor Zhao was young and weak. Huo Guang monopolized power and, not knowing the proper rites, rashly hoarded and buried large amounts of gold, money, and valuables, along with birds, beasts, fish, turtles, cattle, horses, tigers, leopards, and other living creatures, altogether 190 items, as grave goods.…. By Emperor Xuan's time, the emperor did not say anything, and ministers continued these *gushi*. How lamentable it is! … When commoners buried their dead, they would deplete their assets to enrich the tombs underground. The fault began from above, all due to the officials following *gushi*.

> 武帝時，又多取好女至數千人，以填後宮。及棄天下，昭帝幼弱，霍光專事，不知禮正，妄多臧金錢財物，鳥獸魚鱉牛馬虎豹生禽，凡百九十物，盡瘞臧之……至孝宣皇帝時，陛下惡有所言，群臣亦隨故事，甚可痛也！……及眾庶葬埋，皆虛地上以實地下。其過自上生，皆在大臣循故事之辠也。[149]

The criticism Gong levied against *gushi* represents perhaps the strongest rebuke found in the extant records. Both Emperor Wu and Emperor Xuan found themselves subject to Gong's scrutiny: the former for his evident misdeeds and the latter for his tacit acquiescence. While many officials utilized the term *gushi* to refer to all the Han precedents, Gong's reference seemed to particularly target those associated with Emperor Wu. In this memorial, Gong condemned Emperor Wu for his indulgent lifestyle and the superfluity of his imperial harem. In other memorials, he censured Emperor Wu's policies, such as the unbearable collection of poll taxes, allowing criminals to buy their redemption, and enabling merchants to buy official titles. Gong even advanced the radical proposition that coinage should be abandoned, advocating for a prohibition on trade. The majority of his arguments resonate with the Worthies and the Literati's proposals in the *Yantielun*. Interestingly, in a memorial repeatedly addressing the concept of *gu*, Gong also remarked, "It is difficult to fully emulate the remote past; it is appropriate to moderately follow the past to discipline oneself" (盡如太古難，宜少放古以自節焉).[150] When advocating for a "moderate" adherence to the past, Gong was actually alluding to the *wang*, the paragon set by Emperor Wen. Emperor Wen was lauded by Gong as the paradigmatic monarch, with his reign portrayed as rivaling the golden era of legend. This evokes the Worthies' attitudes towards the past: they revered the distant past and the reign of Emperor Wen equally as epitomes of perfection. In fact, in all his remaining memorials, Gong's references to historical precedents are exclusively from the Han dynasty. This suggests that, in Gong's view, although *gu* represents overarching moral principles, it

[149] Ibid. 72.3070–3071.
[150] Ibid. 72.3070.

is *wang* that offers tangible models for emulation. This foundational belief aligns closely with the convictions of Wei Xiang and fellow Precedentists. Thus, it can be inferred that Gong, to a degree, also championed the Han *gushi*, albeit with a focus on those surrounding Emperor Wen.

One might question why Gong, a steadfast proponent of *gu*, concurrently adopted the reasoning inherent to *gushi.* The explanation possibly lies in his political affiliations, particularly his alliance with the influential eunuch, Shi Xian. As previously outlined, Shi Xian wielded substantial power during Emperor Yuan's rule and was mainly responsible for plotting Xiao Wangzhi's demise. Anticipating criticism from the scholarly community, Shi Xian strategically sought to cultivate an alliance with Gong Yu, a distinguished Ru scholar. Shi Xian's endorsements ensured Gong's ascension within the official hierarchy.[151] Given Shi Xian's expertise in *gushi*, it is plausible that he significantly impacted Gong's rhetorical strategies. While Gong, much like Wang Ji, venerated the ancient past, he recognized that the ideals of *gu* were not only out of favor with his contemporaries but also impossible to reinstate. This acknowledgment might have led him to judiciously incorporate select elements of Han *gushi* into his discourse.

Yi Feng, who received his education in the *Shijing* under the same mentor, Hou Cang, as Xiao Wangzhi and Kuang Heng, diverged from his peers by displaying a profound inclination towards esoteric interpretations of the Classics. Demonstrating proficiency in musical pitch, the calendrical system, and the divination associated with Yin and Yang, he held the *Shijing*, *Yijing* 易經 (The Book of Changes), and *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals) in high regard.[152] Within the *Hanshu*, both Liu Xiang and Gu Yong, set for further discussion, are aligned with Yi

[151] Ibid. 93.3729.
[152] While Yi listed all the six classics, he only emphasized on the importance of *Yijing*, *Shijing* and *Chunqiu*. See *Hanshu* 75.3172. It is noteworthy that scholars in the Han dynasty who explored the connections between Yin and Yang and various omens and anomalies typically had an academic foundation in the *Shangshu*, the *Yijing*, or the *Chunqiu*.

Feng, being recognized as leading figures of the faction dedicated to explicating these omens and anomalies.[153] Given this backdrop, it is logical to find overlapping rhetorical elements between Yi's works and the memorials penned by Liu and Gu.

While Yi did reference *gu* sporadically, his understanding of the past mainly encompassed tangible historical precedents that were deemed replicable rather than moral principles from the remote past. For instance, in his memorial where he advised Emperor Yuan on the relocation of the capital, he invoked the historical instances of Pangeng and King Cheng of Zhou to bolster his argument.

> I wish Your Majesty could relocate the capital to Chengzhou…. Your Majesty only need to restrain yourself with solemn respect and do nothing else. You dwell according to Chengzhou and also embrace the virtues of Pangeng, thereafter, for eternity, you shall be revered as a high ancestor. The rituals and ceremonies of the Han Dynasty's suburban sacrifices and ancestral temples often do not conform to the practices of the ancient. I find it is indeed difficult to stay in the current capital and propose reform. Therefore, I wish for Your Majesty to relocate the capital and rectify the foundation…. Therefore, I wish that Your Majesty would relocate the capital in response to the changes of Heaven, which is what is meant by starting anew with all-under-Heaven.
> 臣願陛下徙都於成周，……陛下共己亡為，按成周之居，兼盤庚之德，萬歲之後，長為高宗。漢家郊兆寢廟祭祀之禮多不應古，臣奉誠難亶居而改作，故願陛下遷都正本。……故臣願陛下因天變而徙都，所謂與天下更始者也。[154]

Yi stands out as the first Han official to contend that the imperial sacrificial systems were misaligned with the principles of *gu*. Subsequent reform proposals by figures such as Gong Yu, Wei Xuancheng, and Kuang Heng took root in this assertion. It is essential, however, to discern that in Yi's proposal, the modification of the ritual system was merely a subsidiary concern. The primary focus was the proposition to relocate the capital. His rationale for the relocation bore significant symbolic weight. He posited that the cyclic nature of Heaven necessitates a return to

[153] *Hanshu* 75.3195.
[154] Ibid. 75.3176–3177.

origins and rejuvenation during periods of decline. Given the myriad issues that emerged since Emperor Wu's reign, Yi was convinced that only a fresh start could effect meaningful rectification. His blueprint for renewal drew inspiration from Pangeng, and the choice of the new capital's site was informed by King Cheng's precedent. While some may perceive this meticulous emulation of the past as slavish and anachronistic, it is pivotal to acknowledge that this probably represents one of the earliest instances where Han scholars offered a detailed and actionable roadmap to follow the remote past. Previously, *gu* was predominantly invoked as abstract ethical guidelines. While Ru scholars frequently lamented the divergence between contemporary realities and historical ideals, they seldom articulated a tangible strategy for reverting to past practices.[155] Yi, in contrast, put forth precise historical episodes as instructive templates. Yi believed that by meticulously replicating the actions of esteemed past rulers, contemporary monarchs could also replicate their successes. This emphasis on particular historical precedents is also palpable in the memorials of both Liu and Gu.

Gong Yu passed away in 44 BCE, and the last memorial from Yi, as recorded in the *Hanshu*, was delivered in 46 BCE. In 43 BCE, Emperor Yuan removed the Chancellor Yu Dingguo 于定國 (?–40 BCE) and the Commander-in-Chief Shi Gao 史高 (?–42 BCE) from their posts. Since then, all the senior officials whom Emperor Xuan had designated to guide his successor were replaced. Emperor Yuan began to elevate those Ru scholars he favored to prominence. Wei Xuancheng and Kuang Heng, both of whom successively held the Chancellor position for over a decade, emerged as two of the most pivotal figures during this era.

[155] For example, when asked by Emperor Wu to devise a feasible plan for the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, the Ru scholars failed to provide a viable schema. Simultaneously, they criticized Emperor Wu's sacrificial appliances for not conforming to ancient standard. This incident symbolizes the Ru scholars' commitment to the *gu* but their inability to establish a replicable *gu* in contemporary settings. See *Shiji* 28.1397.

While Wei and Kuang are frequently classified as representative "Reformists," known for their zeal to revert to the practices of the distant past, a closer examination indicates that their interests in the *gu* had shifted to *li*, the rituals. Kuang, in particular, explicitly asserted that the regulations of the prior emperors should not be rashly altered without concrete reasons. He did not elevate the distant past as the authoritative foundation for his reforms. Instead, he esteemed the ritual classics, many of which were amassed and systematized by their contemporaries. As such, it would be more apt to label them as "Ritualists" rather than "Reformists."

The study of rituals in the pre-Qin era lacked a systematic theory of political systems, and the records of rites were not canonized. Most of the ritual materials passed down from this period primarily comprised ceremonial accounts or instructions on the aristocratic etiquette.[156] Prior to Emperor Xuan, the only official ritual texts that Han people could access were the seventeen chapters of "Shi li" 士禮 (Rites of the *Shi*), which offered no directives on the emperor's sacrificial ceremonies. Moreover, during the early Han, ritual studies predominantly focused on the performance of ceremonies, not the construction of rituals.[157] However, this landscape shifted when Hou Cang consolidated existing resources, possibly incorporating ancient scripts discovered during Emperor Wu's reign, to devise an expansive system delineating rituals in tens of thousands of words (說禮數萬言).[158] These revitalized texts endowed scholars with renewed sources, empowering those intent on advocating changes to the current circumstances. Wei and

[156] Gan Huaizhen 甘懷真, *Huangquan, liyi yu jingdian quanshi: zhongguo gudai zhengzhishi yanjiu* 皇權、禮儀與經典詮釋：中國古代政治史研究 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2008), 56.
[157] See Wang, *Xi Han jingxue yuanliu*, 110 and Watanabe Shin'ichirou 渡辺信一郎, *Zhongguo gudai de wangquan yu tianxia zhixu: cong rizhong bijiaoshi de jiaodu chufa* 中國古代的王權與天下秩序——從日中比較史的角度出發, trans. Xu Chong 徐沖 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 84.
[158] *Hanshu* 88.3615.

Kuang leaned heavily on these newly emerged ritual texts when proposing the reforms of ancestral temples and suburban sacrifices.

In 40 BCE, Emperor Yuan initiated discussions amongst his subordinates regarding the discontinuation of ancestral temples within the local prefectures and feudal states. This proposal garnered significant support from Ru scholars. Wei, accompanied by seventy other scholars, submitted a memorial endorsing the idea. In their memorial, they made implicit references to the *Liji* twice and to the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (Classic of Filial Piety) once, prefacing their citations with the phrase "we heard that" (臣聞).[159] They also explicitly quoted the *Shijing* and *Chunqiu*. This suggests that while the *Shijing* and *Chunqiu* were already well-established classics, those ritual texts had not yet achieved the same level of recognition and were perceived more as important materials passed down from teachers. Perhaps encouraged by the overwhelming support from his subordinates, a mere month after initiating the discourse on the abolition of local ancestral temples, Emperor Yuan sought advice regarding the appropriate number of ancestral temples to retain. However, this time, the responses from his officials were diverse, with four distinct opinions emerging. Wei, along with forty-four others, advocated for the permanent preservation of only the temple of Gaozu. They recommended the removal of all other temples once they no longer ranked among the four most recent, in relation to the reigning emperor.

> In the rites, when a sovereign first receives the Mandate of Heaven, or when a feudal lord first gets his enfeoffment, they are revered as the Great Ancestors. After them, there are five temples removed in sequence. The spirit tablets of the discontinued temples were then kept in the Great Ancestor's temple…. The father is honored as "Zhao," the son as "Mu," and the grandson again as "Zhao." This is the proper rite of antiquity. The "Meaning of Sacrifices" says, "The sovereign greatly sacrifices the origin of his ancestors, together with his ancestor, and established four temples." This means when first receiving the Mandate and being enthroned, the sovereign offers sacrifices to Heaven together with his [remote] ancestor, but does not establish a temple for him, because the intimacy is exhausted. Four temples for

[159] *Hanshu* 73.3117.

> direct ancestors are established to reveal the principle of being close to one's kinship…. The reason the Zhou Dynasty had seven temples is that Hou Ji was first enfeoffed, and then both King Wen and King Wu received the Mandate, leading to three temples that were not removed. Added to the four direct lineage temples, there are seven in total…. Although King Cheng carried on the achievements of the two sagacious kings and established rites and music with significant merit, his temple did not continue. He was only posthumously named based on his deeds. According to the rites, temples are located within the main gate, signifying not daring to distance one's ancestors. In my humble opinion, since Emperor Gaozu received the Mandate and settled all-under-Heaven, his temple should be established as the Great Ancestor, perpetually undemolished, and subsequent generations should be removed once their intimacy are exhausted.
> 禮，王者始受命，諸侯始封之君，皆為太祖。以下，五廟而迭毀，毀廟之主臧乎太祖，……父為昭，子為穆，孫復為昭，古之正禮也。祭義曰：「王者禘其祖自出，以其祖配之，而立四廟。」言始受命而王，祭天以其祖配，而不為立廟，親盡也。立親廟四，親親也。……周之所以七廟者，以后稷始封，文王、武王受命而王，是以三廟不毀，與親廟四而七。……成王成二聖之業，制禮作樂，功德茂盛，廟猶不世，以行為諡而已。禮，廟在大門之內，不敢遠親也。臣愚以為高帝受命定天下，宜為帝者太祖之廟，世世不毀，承後屬盡者宜毀。[160]

In this memorial, the term *li* is repeatedly emphasized. However, for two of the references to *li*, there are no corresponding texts within the extant classics. It is plausible that these were ritualistic texts not included in the official versions, known as *yili* 逸禮. One passage from the *Liji*, titled "Meaning of Sacrifices" (*jiyi* 祭義), is explicitly cited, suggesting its elevated status akin to that of the Classics, especially since an explanatory note follows this reference. Wei's primary contention is that aside from the temple of the Great Ancestor and the four temples dedicated to direct predecessors, all other temples ought to be dismantled. Evidently, Wei's main targets were the temples of Gaozu's father, Emperor Wen, and Emperor Wu. Both Emperor Wen and Emperor Wu were posthumously awarded the temple name *zong* 宗 (denoting ancestors of significant achievement), implying that their temples should be perpetually preserved.[161] In Wei's

[160] *Hanshu* 73.3118.

[161] Loewe also notes this, arguing that the conferral of special honors, such as *zong* 宗 on certain emperors, implies that they were entitled to receive offerings permanently. See Loewe, *Problems of Han Administration: Ancestral Rites, Weights and Measures, and the Means of Protest* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 11. For

assessment, all three of these temples should be removed ultimately. He bolstered his argument by referencing a line from "Meaning of Sacrifices" and citing the examples of the Zhou dynasty. However, it is noteworthy that there is an inherent contradiction between these two sources. While the *Liji* text cites a system of five temples, the Zhou dynasty is traditionally believed to have upheld a structure of seven temples.[162] When faced with discrepancies between *gu* and *li*, Wei decidedly aligned with *li* over *gu*. He endeavored, albeit tenuously, to interpret the seven temples of the Zhou dynasty as a variant of the five-temple system, arguing that three rulers held the position of the Great Ancestor. A more widely accepted explanation of the seven temples in the Zhou is that they contain one temple for the Great Ancestor and six temples for direct ancestors, which is also recorded in the *Liji*.[163] Furthermore, Wei took King Cheng as an example, highlighting that even a ruler of such repute was not venerated with the temple name *zong*, and consequently, his temple was not preserved in perpetuity. By this logic, the temples dedicated to Emperors Wen and Wu should also be relinquished once they lose direct relevance to the reigning emperor. However, such a claim is anachronistic, as throughout the Zhou dynasty, there were no designated temple names. As a Ru scholar with profound knowledge of the ritual texts and Zhou history, Wei undoubtedly would have been aware of the conventional interpretation of the seven temples and the reasons for King Cheng not receiving a temple name. Yet, he intentionally overlooked these aspects, fixating on a single line from the ritual classics. In a word, Wei's stance is less about venerating the *gu* and more about adhering to the selected *li*.

---

discussions on the late Western Han debates regarding ancestral temples (referred to as "shrines" by Loewe), see Loewe, *Problems of Han Administration*, 46–56.

[162] The seven-temple system in the ancient times are frequently mentioned in the pre-Han texts, including ritual texts (*Liji*), historical texts (*Chunqiu guliangzhuan*), and Qin court discussions (in the *Shiji*) See *Liji zhengyi*, 448, *Chunqiu guliangzhuan zhushu* 春秋穀梁傳註疏, Ruan Yuan ed., *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue shubanshe, 2000), 153, and *Shiji* 6.266.

[163] See *Liji zhengyi*, 448.

Other officials voiced diverse viewpoints. Some contended that the temple of Emperor Wen should be perpetually maintained, while others advocated for the permanent preservation of Emperor Wu's temple. Another faction argued for the removal of Emperor Xuan's father's temple. Yet, they universally accepted Wei's foundational model of five temples, as opposed to the seven-temple system. This preference might be attributed to the fact that there were only seven universally recognized emperors preceding Emperor Yuan. Adopting a seven-temple framework would imply that there would currently be no necessity to eliminate any of the temples. In this chaotic debate, it becomes evident that the selection and interpretation of ritual texts remained highly subjective. The scholarly community had yet to reach a consensus on the authority of these ritual texts. Nevertheless, the discourse marked a significant improvement from the pre-Emperor Xuan era when scholars essentially lacked ritualistic texts pertaining to imperial matters to consult.

Similarly, Kuang's faith in the reforms was anchored more in the *li* than *gu*. When Emperor Yuan expressed his wishes to reinstate the local ancestral temples, he strongly resisted and wrote two memorials justifying the abolition of local ancestral temples and the maintenance of a select number of ancestral temples. Kuang consistently emphasized the term *li*. For example, he contended, "Although the emperor wishes to restore the ancestral rites, Heng and others unanimously believe that it does not align with the precepts of *li*." (皇帝願復修承祀，臣衡等咸以為禮不得). He further posited, "Should it truly deviate from the tenets of *li* and righteousness, and go against the wishes of the ancestors, the responsibility would rest entirely on Heng." (如誠非禮義之中，違祖宗之心，咎盡在臣衡).[164] Kuang was fully aware that the system of five temples had never been actualized historically. Hence, he refrained from invoking *gu* as his

[164] *Hanshu* 73.3121.

theoretical foundation, opting instead to adhere to "the classics of ancient sages" (古聖之經), with a particular emphasis on ritual classics in this context.

Upon Emperor Cheng's ascension to the throne, Kuang further suggested revising the suburban sacrifice.[165] He posited that rather than carrying out the sacrifices of Heaven and Earth at Ganquan and Hedong, they should take place in the southern and northern suburbs of Chang'an, respectively.

> Sacrifices to Heaven are conducted at the southern suburb, leaning towards Yang. Earth is honored by burying items at the northern suburb, gravitating towards Yin. Heaven, in relation to the emperor, receives offerings based on the emperor's residence. In the past, Emperor Wu resided at the Ganquan Palace. He therefore established the Taiyi altar at Yunyang and conducted sacrifices to the south of the palace. Now, the emperor often stays in Chang'an. The ritual for the Heaven is strangely conducted at north, the Greater Yin, and the ceremony for the Earth is unexpectedly conducted at east, the Lesser Yang, deviating from ancient practices.... The Taiyi altar at Ganquan and the shrine for the Earth in Hedong should be relocated to Chang'an, aligning with the practices of ancient emperors.
> 祭天於南郊，就陽之義也；瘞地於北郊，即陰之象也。天之於天子也，因其所都而各饗焉。往者，孝武皇帝居甘泉宮，即於雲陽立泰畤，祭於宮南。今行常幸長安，郊見皇天反北之泰陰，祠后土反東之少陽，事與古制殊。……甘泉泰畤、河東后土之祠宜可徙置長安，合於古帝王。[166]

Despite the term *gu* being mentioned twice, Kuang did not advocate for a reinstatement of the authentic Zhou sacrificial system. Instead, it was a new invention based on ritual classics and

[165] Extensive scholarship exists on the sacrificial reforms at the end of the Western Han. Notable works include Zhang Rongming 張榮明, *Zhongguo de guojiao: cong shanggu dao Dong Han* 中國的國教——從上古到東漢 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe, 2001), Chen Shuguo 陳戍國, *Zhongguo lizhi shi: Qin Han juan* 中國禮制史・秦漢卷 (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), Wang Baizhong 王柏中, *Shenling shijie: zhixu de goujian yu yishi de xiangzheng* 神靈世界：秩序的構建與儀式的象征 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2005), Gan, *Huangquan, liyi yu jingdian quanshi*, 26–58, Kojima Tsuyoshi 小島毅, "Koushi seido no hensen" 郊祀制度の変遷, *Touyou bunka kenkyuuzyo kiyou* 東洋文化研究所紀要 108 (1989): 123–219, and Kaneko Shuuichi 金子修一, "Kandai niokeru koushi, soubyou seido no keisei to sono un'you" 漢代における郊祀・宗廟制度の形成とその運用，in *Chuugoku kodai koutei saishi no kenkyuu* 中国古代皇帝祭祀の研究 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2006), 141–214.

[166] *Hanshu* 25B.1254.

Han *gushi*.[167] There is a lack of substantial evidence suggesting that Zhou kings performed the sacrifices of Heaven and Earth in the southern and northern suburbs. The principal sacrificial ceremony in the Zhou was directed towards Heaven in the suburbs (*jiaoji* 郊祭),[168] yet there was no comparable ritual for Earth. While sacrifices to the god of soil (*sheji* 社祭) existed, their exact location remains unspecified.[169] Moreover, *sheji* was not exclusive to the King but also widespread locally.[170] It was not until 113-114 BCE that Emperor Wu, for the first time, instituted the Heaven-Earth sacrifice system. Rather than critiquing Emperor Wu for his innovation, Kuang sought to legitimize the chosen location of the altar, which was situated near the emperor's residence. Given that the current emperor did not reside at the Ganquan Palace, Kuang contended

[167] Gu Yixin notices a similar trend in late-Western Han literary production, where scholars invented their ideal model not merely in the name of *gu* per se, but also through the revisionary appropriations of a set of ideas and utterances drawn from their old contexts and circumstances. See Gu Yixin, "The Enchantment of Erudition," 87.

[168] The earliest mention of suburban sacrificial practices can be traced to the "Announcement of Duke Shao" 召誥 in the *Shangshu*: "[The Duke] used sacrificial animals in the suburbs" (用牲于郊). See *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義, Ruan Yuan ed., *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue shubanshe, 2000), 462.

[169] Since the Zhou dynasty, the representation of territorial sovereignty *she* 社 (altars to the god of the soil) and the representation of the Earth *di* 地 (sacrifices to the Earth) have been distinct in their worship. See Zhan Yinxin 詹鄞鑫, *Shenling yu jisi: Zhongguo chuantong zongjiaozonglun* 神靈與祭祀：中國傳統宗教綜論 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1992), 316. The complex relationship between the sacrifice to *she* and the sacrifice to Houtu, a topic of long-standing debate, is summarized by Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 in *Zhouli zhengyi* 周禮正義 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 1418–1419. Recent discoveries from Chu bamboo slips of the Warring States period reveal significant differences in the sacrificial hierarchy between *she* and Houtu. This distinction continued into the Western Han, with *she* sacrifices being restored early in the dynasty, as recorded in the "Treatise on Suburban Sacrifices," and Houtu sacrifices not instituted until Emperor Wu's reign. Wei Jianzhen 魏建震 provides an in-depth analysis of these practices, see Wei, *Xian Qin shesi yanjiu* 先秦社祀研究 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008),142–159.

[170] The *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書 (Lost Book of Zhou) contains a record that feudal lords established the grand *she* in their states upon receiving a mandate from the Zhou. See Huang Huaixin 黃懷信, *Yi Zhoushu jiaobu zhuyi* 逸周書校補注譯 (Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 2006), 237.

that the location should be altered accordingly. In other words, Kuang largely endorsed Emperor Wu's system, only advocating for a different location.[171]

To support his argument, Kuang implicitly quoted two lines from the "The Standard of Sacrifices" (*jifa* 祭法) chapter in the *Liji*: "by burning piles of wood on the Grand altar, they sacrificed to Heaven; by burying (the victim) in the Grand mound, they sacrificed to the Earth." (燔柴於太壇，祭天也；瘞薶於大折，祭地也). While the chapter's opening and concluding segments originated from *Guoyu* 國語 (Discourses of the States), the section quoted by Kuang does not correspond with any other classical texts and certainly does not depict the Zhou ritual system. Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869-1936) has argued that the rituals recorded in this segment likely derived from the Chu state during the Warring States period.[172] Kuang was esteemed by his contemporaries as "peerless in the study of the classics" (*jingxue juelun* 經學絕倫), indicating his awareness that the lines he cited lacked corroboration in other classical texts. However, he chose to adhere to this particular text, since the foundation for the legitimacy of his proposal was anchored in *li*, rather than *gu*.[173] Evidently, Kuang's intention was not to reinstate the "Zhou model" but rather to adopt the existing Han model with subtle modifications.

Scholars displayed varied opinions regarding Kuang's proposal. Of the fifty-eight individuals who weighed in on the discussion, fifty endorsed Kuang's perspective. Their support was anchored in Kuang's citation from the *Liji*, and they were persuaded that the proposal was firmly

---

[171] Tian Tian 田天 highlights that the Reformist faction, represented by Kuang Heng, did not propose any new specific rites for sacrifices but replicated the existing Tai Yi-Hou Tu sacrifices, simply relocating the original site. See Tian, *Qin Han guojia jisi shigao* 秦漢國家祭祀史稿 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2015), 233.

[172] For Zhang's argument, see Ren Mingshan 任銘善, Liji *mulu houan* 禮記目錄後按 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1982), 57.

[173] The concept of sacrificing to the Earth in the Northern Suburbs is absent in the pre-Qin classics, with the earliest evidence found in Kuang's memorial.

rooted in classical teachings. Conversely, eight scholars resisted Kuang's recommendations, asserting that the existing practices, steeped in long-standing tradition, should be preserved. Kuang rebuked these dissenters, stating they "did not reference the Classics" (不案經藝).[174] However, the opponents apparently had different opinions on what constituted the "Classics." For example, Liu Xiang launched a sharp critique against Kuang's reforms, contending that "the classics do not provide explicit text" (經無明文).[175] While many attributed Liu's opposition to personal tensions with Kuang,[176] it is important to consider the literal implications of his statement. Kuang's proposals were largely undergirded by a solitary sentence from the *Liji*. *Liji* was an amalgamation of various ritual materials, and its compilation was somewhat eclectic. Dai De 戴德, Dai Sheng 戴聖, and Liu Xiang each crafted their versions of *Liji*, with the current *Liji* being a compilation by Dai Sheng.[177] Interestingly, in the *Hanshu*'s "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志 (Treatise on Classics and Literature), drew from the bibliographical catalogs of Liu Xiang and his son, only Liu's version of *Liji* is mentioned. This suggests that Liu may have been skeptical of the authority of the two Dai's ritual classics. Therefore, he, along with other scholars who echoed similar sentiments, was unlikely to champion Kuang's reforms that leaned on these texts.

[174] *Hanshu* 25B.1255.
[175] Ibid. 25B.1258.
[176] For example, Tian Tian suggests that "this clash of views between Liu Xiang and Kuang Heng played itself out against the background of Kuang's close alliance with the eunuch Shi Xian. Moreover, Liu Xiang had sharply disagreed with Kuang Heng and his allies over the right policy to use with the Xiongnu. Thus Liu Xiang's objections to Kuang Heng's reforms may well have stemmed from a combination of political rivalry, theoretical disagreements, and personal animus." Xu Xingwu 徐興無 interprets the conflict between Liu and Kuang as emblematic of the broader clash between imperial attendants and Ru scholars, particularly those being promoted from the Erudite of classics. See Tian, "The Suburban Sacrifice Reforms and the Evolution of the Imperial Sacrifices," in *Chang'an 26 BCE*, 276, and Xu, *Liu Xiang pingzhuan (fu Liu Xin)* 劉向評傳（附劉歆） (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2005), 142–145.
[177] For a discussion of the three *Liji* versions, see Wang, *Xi Han jingxue yuanliu*, 266–271.

Intriguingly, when Emperor Yuan displayed a marked fondness for Ru scholars and undertook a series of reversals of Emperor Xuan's policies, Kuang expressed disdain for those who countered the regulations of the previous emperor, rather than applauding Emperor Yuan for his reforms.

> Your Majesty's virtue envelops the people akin to the embrace of Heaven, and your benevolence towards the realm mirrors the care bestowed upon one's own progeny. However, the balance of Yin and Yang is not yet harmonized, and treacherous evils have not been fully eradicated. The main reason might be that the public discourse has not adequately praised the previous emperor's magnificent achievements. Some argue that the existing systems are no longer applicable, and they are eager to reform them. Some of their reforms are not feasible, so they are reverted back. As a result, subordinates are caught in a cycle of disputes, and the people are unsure of what to believe. I deeply lament that the state abandons its enterprise of established norms, instead becoming embroiled in such unnecessary chaos.
> 陛下聖德天覆，子愛海內，然陰陽未和，姦邪未禁者，殆論議者未丕揚先帝之盛功，爭言制度不可用也，務變更之，所更或不可行，而復復之，是以群下更相是非，吏民無所信。臣竊恨國家釋樂成之業，而虛為此紛紛也。[178]

The "magnificent achievements" of the previous emperors evidently encompassed innovations introduced by Emperor Wu. Hence, we can understand that Kuang, in his proposals, refrained from using *gu* as a tool to critique former emperors. Kuang did not appear to be a radical advocate for reform. Instead, his suggestions seemed geared towards minor modifications to the existing system. Thus, labeling him a "Reformist" may be a mischaracterization. Paradoxically, the fate of Kuang's proposals mirrored the very phenomenon he had critiqued. Within three decades after his suburban sacrifice plans, the ritual locations underwent five shifts, severely undermining the prestige and influence of state ceremonies.

After Kuang's dismissal, both Liu Xiang and Gu Yong became active in the reign of Emperor Cheng.[179] Their memorials are prominently preserved in the *Hanshu*, with each amassing

[178] *Hanshu* 81.3338–3339.
[179] Liu Xiang's court career began during Emperor Xuan's reign, but he did not hold significant positions initially. His influence was further limited under Emperor Yuan, largely due to the dominance of powerful

approximately 8,000 words. Despite their differing political perspectives,[180] their attitudes towards the past were strikingly similar. In contrast to the Ritualists, who sought to build a new ritual system to guide the emperor, both Liu and Gu recognized the potency of *gushi* and maximized the power of historical precedents.

As noted previously, Liu vehemently opposed Wei and Kuang's suggestions, which heavily leaned on recently established ritual classics. However, this should not be misconstrued as Liu devaluing the significance of *li*. On the contrary, Liu, on one occasion, exhorted Emperor Cheng to adopt a ritual system to shape social customs. Yet, Liu's conception of ritual was less about intricate instructions for the emperor and more about fostering benevolent education for the common people.[181] Notably, historical examples, rather than the classics, served as the primary foundation in his memorials to persuade the emperor.

> When powerful ministers grasp authority and control the state's affairs, there have always caused harm. In the past, there were six ministers in the Jin state, the clans of Tian and Cui in Qi, Sun and Ning in Wei, Ji and Meng in Lu. They all controlled the state matters and held significant power for generations. Eventually, the Tian clan took control of the Qi, and the six ministers divided the Jin…. The maternal uncle of King Zhao of Qin, the Marquis of Rang, along with the Lords of Jingyang and Yeyang, seized power and ruled the state…. Thanks to the advice of Fan Sui, Qin was preserved. The second emperor of Qin entrusted Zhao Gao, who abused the authority and deceived the major ministers. This eventually led to the disaster at the Wangyi Palace conducted by Yan Le, and Qin fell because of that…. When the Han dynasty was established, the Lü family acted without righteousness, arbitrarily assuming the roles of Chancellor and King. It was thanks to loyal and upright ministers like the Marquis of Jiang and the Marquis of Zhuxu that they were eliminated, and then did the Liu family regain stability. Now, the Wang family, a single clan, has had 23 of its members ride in decorated chariots adorned with red wheels…. The General-in-Chief holds the power, and the five marquises live extravagantly and arrogantly. From ancient times until Qin and Han, no other consort clan has been as influential as the Wang family, surpassing even clans like Huangfu in the Zhou, Marquis of Rang in the Qin, and the Marquis of Wu'an, Lü, Huo, and Shangguan clans in the Han.

---

eunuchs. It was only in Emperor Cheng's reign that Liu Xiang gained prominence and became a key figure in political debates.

[180] Gu closely served the Wang clan, while Liu fiercely attacked it.

[181] Liu juxtaposed *li* and punishments, believing that "ritual has the nurturing of people as its foundation" (禮以養人為本), see *Hanshu* 22.1033–1034.

> When things flourish, signs of extraordinary anomalies are revealed first, serving as subtle indicators of the people. During the reign of Emperor Zhao, there was a self-established stone on Mount Tai, and a collapsed willow rose at Shanglin Park, then Emperor Xuan ascended the throne. Now in Jinan, at the ancestral tombs of the Wang family, cypress pillars have remarkably sprouted new branches that extend beyond the house, their roots firmly anchored in the ground. Even the self-established stone and the risen willow could not be more apparent than this…. It is advisable to issue a clear decree and speak virtuous words to elevate the Liu clan, fostering close relations and trust in them, while dismissing the consort clan and withholding power from them. Send them all back home, following the example set by the late emperor…. Failure to enact these measures may well result in a recurrence of the Tian clan's dominance or the rise of the six ministers in the Han, thereby posing a concern for future generations.
> 夫大臣操權柄，持國政，未有不為害者也。昔晉有六卿，齊有田、崔，衛有孫、甯，魯有季、孟，常掌國事，世執朝柄。終後田氏取齊，六卿分晉……秦昭王舅穰侯及涇陽、葉陽君專國擅勢，……賴寤范雎之言，而秦復存。二世委任趙高，專權自恣，壅蔽大臣，終有閭樂望夷之禍，秦遂以亡。……漢興，諸呂無道，擅相尊王。……賴忠正大臣絳侯、朱虛侯等竭誠盡節以誅滅之，然後劉氏復安。今王氏一姓乘朱輪華轂者二十三人……大將軍秉事用權，五侯驕奢僭盛，……歷上古至秦漢，外戚僭貴未有如王氏者也。雖周皇甫、秦穰侯、漢武安、呂、霍、上官之屬，皆不及也。
> 物盛必有非常之變先見，為其人微象。孝昭帝時，冠石立於泰山，仆柳起於上林，而孝宣帝即位。今王氏先祖墳墓在濟南者，其梓柱生枝葉，扶疏上出屋，根垂地中，雖立石起柳，無以過此之明也。……宜發明詔，吐德音，援近宗室，親而納信，黜遠外戚，毋授以政，皆罷令就弟，以則效先帝之所行……如不行此策，田氏復見於今，六卿必起於漢，為後嗣憂。[182]

Using historical examples to buttress an argument is not a new rhetorical strategy. Nevertheless, the exhaustive manner in which Liu employed this tactic is rare in prior records. Previously, using historical examples was typically supplementary, not the core of arguments. The examples chosen were seldom comprehensive concerning the topic, and they were not necessarily listed in chronological order. The primary emphasis was on the lessons derived from these accounts rather than on the stories themselves. However, Liu's approach diverged significantly from this norm. He foregrounded historical examples in the first part of the memorial. In his recounting of powerful subordinates who potentially imperiled the status of rulers, Liu dedicated nearly 60% of this particular memorial (around seven hundred words) to detailing historical precedents. This section

[182] *Hanshu* 36.1958–1962.

almost reads like a historical treatise on influential ministers, with a specific emphasis on consort clans. Both the spatial and temporal breadth of Liu's examples are remarkable. He not only drew from a vast chronological span, from ancient eras to the Qin and Han periods, but also cited four distinct states from the Spring and Autumn period that had experienced similar challenges. This intent to encompass examples as comprehensive as possible is evident in Liu's other memorials as well. For instance, when advising Emperor Cheng against constructing opulent tombs, Liu detailed the previous burial practices of rulers, spanning from the Yellow Emperor to Emperor Wen, dedicating over eight hundred words, which constituted half of that memorial. Parallel to the Precedentists, Liu revered the Han *gushi*. In almost all his memorials, commendable actions of Han rulers and officials were lauded as fervently as those of ancient, legendary figures documented in the classics. Occasionally, Liu's memorials exclusively focused on the Han *gushi*, leaving ancient accounts aside.[183] As a member of the imperial family, Liu's strong interest in Han's own stories is understandable. Notably, in his writings, no Han emperors were criticized, and he did not posit any dichotomy between Emperors Wen and Wu.[184] Mirroring Wei Xiang, Liu's references to the "late emperor" encompass all previous Han emperors, portraying the *gushi* as an elaborately constructed aggregation of exemplary governance.

The latter portion of Liu's memorial pivots to another foundational element of his arguments: the interpretation of anomalous events. As a quintessential Han scholar specialized in the

[183] Liu Xiang argued that even previously punished subordinates could effectively serve the state, citing all four officials in the Han as examples, see *Hanshu* 36.1930–1931. Also, when Liu Xiang opposed Kuang Heng's modifications to the Han imperial ancestral temple rites, he based his argument entirely on Han precedents. He asserted that: "The rites of the Han ancestral temple must not be arbitrarily debated, as they were jointly established by the previous emperors and worthy ministers" (漢宗廟之禮，不得擅議，皆祖宗之君與賢臣所共定). He further emphasized that "ancient and contemporary institutions differ" (古今異制), rejecting Kuang Heng's invocation of *gu* as insufficient justification.

[184] According to the *Fengsu tongyi*, Emperor Cheng sought Liu Xiang's opinion on Emperor Wen. Liu's response did not place Emperor Wen above Emperor Xuan. See *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu*, 98.

study of catastrophes and abnormalities, Liu composed a comprehensive commentary on the Five Elements in the "Hongfan" 洪範 (Great Plan) chapter of the *Shangshu*. According to *Hanshu*'s record, Liu believed that the Wang clan bore the culpability for the prevailing calamities. Consequently, he "amassed historical accounts of propitious and inauspicious omens from ancient times, spanning the Spring and Autumn period, the era of the six states, and culminating with the Qin and Han dynasties" (集合上古以來歷春秋六國至秦漢符瑞災異之記) to caution the emperor.[185] The underlying rationale of Liu's commentary aligns seamlessly with the memorial's core premise: Historical examples are valuable because history always repeats itself and Heaven reveals a constant pattern in response to human affairs. By aggregating a multitude of past anomalies and clarifying their references, one can discern the causes for contemporary abnormalities and subsequently address them. Hence, the sheer volume of examples Liu curated served to fortify the legitimacy of his deduced patterns. This methodology, while grounded in historical analysis due to its reliance on a plethora of historical narratives for validation, simultaneously exudes an ahistorical essence. The crux of the argument hinges on a singular, overarching paradigm extracted from myriad instances, a constant paradigm that resurfaces consistently across diverse eras without deviation.[186] Contrastingly, while Precedentists typically cherry-picked specific historical events and figures for emulation, Liu's expansive incorporation of historical narratives effectively downplayed the significance of individual precedents. Only when a confluence of antecedents converged to unveil a consistent pattern did that pattern gain merit as a guiding principle.

---

[185] *Hanshu* 36.1950.

[186] Poo Mu-chou highlights a similar paradox in the discussion of the value of *gu*. Since ancient events are often discussed for their timeless principles, the notion that the values of antiquity transcend time reflects a blend of historical and ahistorical perspectives. This duality is particularly evident in Liu Xiang's analyses of abnormalities. See Poo, "Xian Qin liang Han de zungu siwei yu zhengzhi quanwei," 4.

Similarly, Gu Yong seldom invoked the concepts of *li* or *gu*,[187] focusing instead on the historical precedents and interpretations of the anomalies. Although his enumeration of historical tales might not be as exhaustive as Liu's, the tendency to draw from both the ancient precedents and Han *gushi* is still very evident.

> In the past, the Zhou scribe Chang Hong wished to bolster the authority of King Ling through supernatural methods, summoning feudal lords to Zhou. However, the Zhou dynasty increasingly declined, and the feudal lords became increasingly defiant. King Huai of Chu conducted grand sacrificial rites and worshiped deities, seeking their blessings to repel the Qin army. Yet, his military power waned, and his territory shrank. He faced humiliation and the peril of his state. When the First Emperor of Qin initially unified the realm, he eagerly pursued the way of immortals and sent Xu Fu, Han Zhong, and others with youths to the sea to seek out deities and elixirs. They took a chance to escape and did not return, which incurred resentment all-under-Heaven. During the Han dynasty, individuals such as Xinyuan Ping, Shaoweng from Qi, Gong Sunqing, and Luan Da, … all were rewarded with over thousands of golds. Luan Da was especially honored and even married a princess. His rank of nobility piled up, shocking the realm. During the Yuanding and Yuanfeng eras, tens of thousands of men of methods in the Yan and Qi regions were wide-eyed and wringed their hands, claiming to have the methods to bring good fortune through the worship of immortals and spirits. Later, Ping and others were executed because their methods were exhausted and deceptions were unveiled. In the middle of the Chuyuan era, fraudulent activities resurged, such as the Tianyuan Jade Maiden, the divine beings of Julu, and Zhang Zong, the teacher of Marquis of Liaoyang. At the end of the Zhou and Qin dynasties, and during the zenith of Three Monarchs and Five Emperors, rulers exhausted resources, bestowed high titles and rewards, concentrated their minds and mobilized all-under-Heaven in pursuit of these spiritual practices, but for many years, there was not a shred of evidence to verify their claims. These are enough to extrapolate the current situation…. I advise Your Majesty to completely distance yourself from these practices and prevent deceitful individuals from infiltrating the court.
> 昔周史萇弘欲以鬼神之術輔尊靈王會朝諸侯，而周室愈微，諸侯愈叛。楚懷王隆祭祀，事鬼神，欲以獲福助，卻秦師，而兵挫地削，身辱國危。秦始皇初并天下，甘心於神僊之道，遣徐福、韓終之屬多齎童男童女入海求神采藥，因逃不還，天下怨恨。漢興，新垣平、齊人少翁、公孫卿、欒大等，……賞賜累千金。大尤尊盛，至妻公主，爵位重紱，震動海內。元鼎、元封之際，燕齊之間方士瞋目扼擊，言有神僊祭祀致福之術者以萬數。其後，平等皆以術窮詐得，誅夷伏辜。至初元中，有天淵玉女、鉅鹿神人、轑陽侯師張宗之姦，紛紛復起。夫周秦之末，三五之隆，已嘗專意散財，

[187] Gu's references to the *Liji* are implicit, unlike his clear citations of other classics. This suggests that, like Liu Xiang, Gu may not highly value the ritual classics, as he never explicitly mentions the title of the *Liji* or any of its chapters.

> 厚爵祿，竦精神，舉天下以求之矣。曠日經年，靡有毫氂之驗，足以揆今。……唯陛下距絕此類，毋令姦人有以窺朝者。[188]

In this 550-word memorial presented to Emperor Cheng, Gu dedicates over 300 words, which is more than half of the text, to the history of rulers' reliance on men of methods. Chang Hong stands as the earliest such individual documented in the *Shiji*,[189] and the reign name Chuyuan was used by Emperor Yuan. This denotes Gu's endeavor to create a comprehensive historical account that spans from the earliest available accounts to the contemporary period. Analogous to Liu's practice, Gu places significant focus on the Han *gushi* over more ancient histories, integrating all the previous Han emperors into one laudable model without criticizing any of them.[190] At the same time, Gu's argumentation strongly invokes the interpretation of anomalies. He posits that "the emergence of disasters and unusual omens are reflective of [the emperor's] mistakes and are communicated to people through their respective categories" (凡災異之發，各象過失，以類告人).[191] This perspective suggests that identical natural phenomena are indicative of similar forms of ruler misconduct, merging distinct historical periods into a unified account. For example, Gu's observation of a comet's appearance led him to anticipate internal uprisings akin to those initiated by Zhenshu 徵舒 (d. 598 BCE) and Cui Zhu 崔杼 (d. 546 BCE), as well as external revolts by the likes of Fan Bing 樊並 (d. 14 BCE), Su Ling 蘇令 (d. 14 BCE), Chen Sheng 陳勝 (d. 208 BCE), and Xiang Liang 項梁 (d. 208 BCE). The rebellions by Fan Bing and Su Ling occurred under Emperor Cheng's reign, whereas Chen Sheng and Xiang Liang rose against the Qin towards its end, and Zhengshu and Chui Zhu became infamous for regicide during the

[188] *Hanshu* 25B.1260–1261.
[189] *Shiji* 28.1364.
[190] *Hanshu* 85.3463.
[191] Ibid. 85.3444.

Spring and Autumn period. Despite the chronological disparities, Gu integrates these events equally in his interpretation of the comet. Echoing Liu's methodology, Gu's focus is not on individual historical incidents, but rather the recurring paradigm distilled from a multitude of historical precedents. Therefore, I propose the designation "Paradigmist" to characterize scholars such as Gu and Liu, who prioritize the extraction of enduring patterns over any single precedent.

The synthesis of the Ritualist and Paradigmist approaches is epitomized in Wang Mang's rise to power. On the one hand, many of Wang's reforms, including the establishment of ritual, taxation, and official systems, were grounded in the *Liji* and *Zhouli* 周禮 (Rites of Zhou, originally titled "Officers of Zhou" 周官).[192] As Timothy Baker has noted, almost all the references to the *Zhouli* occur during Wang's period and are related to him and his circle,[193] therefore *Zhouli* was probably also a newly produced ritual classic, just like the *Liji* produced by Kuang's teacher and contemporaries.[194] Echoing the practices of the Ritualists, who refrained from invoking the

[192] Ibid. 24B.1180, 25B.1265, 69B.4136. Michael Puett argues that the *Zhouli* offers a means of organizing the world through the ruler's ordering actions. This functionality of the *Zhouli* is what led to its employment by Wang Mang. See Puett, "Centering the Realm: Wang Mang, the *Zhouli*, and Early Chinese Statecraft," in *Statecraft and Classical Learning*, eds. Benjamin Elman and Martin Kern (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 151–154. Prior to Wang Mang, both Wei and Kuang had been seeking such ritual texts to provide guidance to rulers.

[193] Timothy Baker, "The Imperial Ancestral Temple in China's Western Han Dynasty: Institutional Tradition and Personal Belief" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2006), 163.

[194] Although many early Chinese texts can be understood through an accumulative mode, the *Zhouli* stands apart. It is a work of profound conception and meticulous organization, far from being a random accumulation of official positions. The text demonstrates internal coherence within chapters and recurring patterns across them, suggesting that the author of the *Zhouli* was not merely an editor compiling disparate materials but rather someone who employed various literary techniques to create a cohesive, self-contained text. This structure, I contend, could only have been conceived by a single author or a closely connected group at a specific time. The *Zhouli* is perhaps the first Chinese text to successfully develop a structure that qualifies as a real "book," where not only are the chapters organized in a specific way, but sections within chapters are also carefully arranged to prevent the insertion or deletion of text and to ensure their sequences and significance are correctly perceived by readers. Such structural rigor is absent in works like the *Lüshi Chunqiu* or the *Huainanzi*, suggesting that this level of textual design only emerged once a mature writing culture had developed. The proliferation of written texts and calls for reform of the official system from the reign of Emperor Yuan, particularly during the reign of Emperor Cheng, would be well-suited for the creation of such a text. Thus, I argue that the main body of the *Zhouli*, i.e., its overall structure, was produced during the mid-to-late Western Han period. For discussions on the date and

concept of *gu*, the *Zhouli* likewise conspicuously eschews this term and any reference to the past. On the other hand, Wang also harnessed the legacy and authority of *gushi*,[195] notably expanding its domain to encompass antiquity, reaching as far back as Shun and the Duke of Zhou. He was probably the earliest figure in the Han context to do so, thereby merging the exemplary virtues of ancient sage-rulers with the immediacy of Han *gushi*.

> I shall nurture and raise the young noble to maturity both day and night, striving to align his virtue with that of King Cheng of Zhou…. Upon the young noble's capping ceremony, I will return the power to him, emulating the *gushi* of the Duke of Zhou.
> 臣莽夙夜養育隆就孺子，令與周之成王比德……孺子加元服，復子明辟，如周公故事。

---

authorship of the *Zhouli* in English scholarship, see William Boltz, "*Chou-li*," in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), 24–29; Bernhard Karlgren, "The Early History of the *Chou li* and *Tso chuan* Texts," in *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 1931.3: 1–59; and David Schaberg, "The *Zhouli* as Constitutional Text," in *Statecraft and Classical Learning*, 36–39. Schaberg reviews several theories on the dating of the *Zhouli*, including a) by the Duke of Zhou, b) by Liu Xin and Wang Mang, c) during the Warring States period, and d) during the Qin dynasty, but omits others, such as theories dating it to the Western Zhou, the Spring and Autumn period, or the early Han. For a thorough introduction, see Yang Tianyu 楊天宇, "Lüeshu *Zhouli* de chengshu shidai yu zhenwei" 略述《周禮》的成書時代與真偽, *Zhengzhou daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 2000.4: 71–77. For the Western Zhou theory, see Hayashi Taisuke 林泰輔, "*Shūkan* seisaku jidai kō" 周官制作時代考, in *Shūkō to sono jidai* 周公と其時代 (Tōkyō: Ōkuraya Shoten, 1915), 784–824 and Meng Wentong 蒙文通, "Cong shehui zhidu ji zhengzhi zhidu lun *Zhouguan* chengshu niandai" 從社會制度及政治制度論周官成書年代, in *Meng Wentong quanji* 蒙文通全集 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2015), vol. 3, 360–368. For the Spring and Autumn period theory, see Liu Qiyu 劉起釪, "*Zhouli* zhenwei zhizheng ji qishu xiecheng de zhenshi yiju" 《周禮》真偽之爭及其書寫成的真實依據, in *Gushi xubian* 古史續辨 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991), 619–653, For the Warring States period theory, the most influential one, see Qian Mu 錢穆, "*Zhouguan* zhuzuo shidai kao" 《周官》著作時代考 (Beijing: Yanjing daxue chubanshe, 1932); Guo Moruo 郭沫若, "*Zhouguan* zhiyi" 《周官》質疑, in *Jinwen congkao* 金文叢考 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1954); Yang Xiangkui 楊向奎, "*Zhouli* de neirongfenxi jiqi zhuzuo shidai" 《周禮》的內容分析及其著作時代, in *Ershi shiji Zhonggguo lixue lunji* 二十世紀中國禮學論集 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe,1998), 173–198; Qian Xuan 錢玄, *Sanli tonglun* 三禮通論 (Nanjing: Nanjing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1996); and Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, " 'Zhougong zhili' de chuanshuo he *Zhouguan* yishu de chuxian" "周公制禮"的傳說和《周官》一書的出現, in *Wenshi* 文史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), vol. 6. For the theory dating it to the early Han, see Peng Lin 彭林, Zhouli *zhuti sixiang yu chengshu niandai yanjiu*《周禮》主體思想與成書年代研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991).

[195] In a notable incident recorded in the *Hanshu*, the Great Empress Dowager justified transferring power from Dong Xian to Wang by specifically citing Wang's proficiency in *gushi*. See *Hanshu* 93.3739.

> Should there be any who dare to defy the sacred well-field system and lead people astray without laws, let them be banished to the remote borders to fend off evil spirits, as was done according to the *gushi* set by Shun, my imperial ancestor.
> 敢有非井田聖制，無法惑眾者，投諸四裔，以禦魑魅，如皇始祖考虞帝故事。[196]

Prior to Wang, the usage of *gushi* was conventionally restricted to the Han precedents. Even as Paradigmists expanded the application of *gushi*'s principles to encompass earlier historical episodes, they did not categorize these events under the term *gushi*. Wang's innovation was to significantly broaden the scope of *gushi* to include the remote past, thus blurring the demarcation between *wang* and *gu*. Hence, previously multiple and disparate pasts were merged into one unified past. This fusion effectively enabled a more coherent construction of history, one that Wang Mang could leverage to validate his rule.

In the analysis of the memorials of the group identified as "Reformists," it becomes apparent that their propositions were not rooted in a simplistic longing for a return to an idyllic and distant past. It is crucial to acknowledge the nuances within their approaches. In the reign of Emperor Xuan, when the Precedentists were at the pinnacle of their influence, Xiao Wangzhi exhibited a profound grasp of Han *gushi*, though his stance was not always commendatory. He also adeptly used local narratives to forge a personalized version of *gushi*, setting up a counter-narrative to the official one. At the beginning of Emperor Yuan's reign, Gong Yu presented perhaps the strongest criticism towards the *gushi*. However, he acknowledged the futility of reviving the remote past, so he advocated for a "moderate" adherence to the more recent past, the *wang* established by Emperor Wen. Yi Feng, distinguishing himself from those who saw *gu* as merely abstract moral precepts, pinpointed specific historical instances as instructive exemplars, aligning with the usage of history by the Precedentists. Later, Wei Xuancheng and Kuang Heng were

[196] *Hanshu* 99A.4094, 99B.4111.

successively promoted to the Chancellor. Both of them, when confronted with conflicts between *gu* and *li*, favored the newly emerged ritual classics, which formed the foundation of their reforms. Their goal was not to reinstate the Zhou model but to adopt the existing Han model with subtle modifications. In contrast, Liu Xiang and Gu Yong during the reign of Emperor Cheng recognized the potency of *gushi* and amplified the influence of historical precedents. At the same time, their belief in the established interpretations of abnormalities downplayed the significance of any individual precedents, underscoring instead the overarching paradigm extracted from numerous antecedents. Finally, Wang Mang incorporated both the tradition of Ritualists and Paradigmists, merging the previously divergent pasts into a unified whole. In a word, these so-called "Reformists" developed varied strategies to cope with the dominant influence of the Precedentists, and their proposals should not be oversimplified as a mere call for a return to the past. Instead, we should always keep these questions in mind: To which past were they alluding? How did they manipulate the past to their advantage? What specific arguments were they endeavoring to challenge when invoking particular facets of the past?

- CHAPTER 2 -

New Master Writings:

Liu Xiang's Newly Arranged Anecdotes and Huan Tan's Newly Created Stories

2.1 Liu Xiang's *Xinxu* 新序 (Newly Arranged [Events])[197] and *Xinyuan* 新苑 (New Garden, i.e., *Shuoyuan* 說苑)[198]

2.1.1 *Xin* 新 (new): A Distinctive Designation in Western-Han Master Writings

Scholars have observed a prevalent trend among Western Han dynasty literati to prefix their works with "new," as evidenced by notable examples such as Lu Jia's *Xinyu* 新語, Jia Yi's *Xinshu* 新書, Liu Xiang's *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan*, and Huan Tan's *Xinlun* 新論 (New Treatises).[199] This naming convention is often highlighted as a characteristic feature of Western Han master writings.[200] Nonetheless, the authenticity of these titles as originally given by the authors

---

[197] Shi Guangying 石光瑛 argues (though unattested) in his annotation to *Xinxu* that this book was originally named *Xinshi* 新事 (New Events), and the title was changed to *Xinxu* when it was presented to the throne. See Shi., *Xinxu jiaoshi* 新序校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 3.

[198] Liu Xiang named this book *Xinyuan* in the preface, and the name *Shuoyuan* first appears in Ban Gu's bibliographic treatise, so it was probably renamed by Liu Xin or Ban Gu. See Yao Juan 姚娟, "*Xinxu Shuoyuan* wenxian yanjiu" 《新序》《說苑》文獻研究 (Ph. D. Diss., Central China Normal University, 2009), 14.

[199] This trend has well extended to the Eastern Han and the Three Kingdoms Period. For example, there are *Xinyi* 新議 by Liu Xin 劉歆, *Xinyan* 新言 by Gu Tan 顧譚, *Xinlun* 新論 by Zhou Zhao 周昭, and four different *Xinshu* 新書 by Wang Ji 王基, Yao Xin 姚信, Pei Xuan 裴玄, and Du Shu 杜恕.

[200] Two of the most influential articles which articulate this phenomenon are: "Shuo xin: jianlun nianhao zhi qiyuan" 說新：兼論年號之起源 by Liu Pak-yuen 廖伯源, and "Xi Han zhuzi de 'shangxin' chuantong yu 'xinxue' yuanyuan" 西漢諸子的"尚新" 傳統與"新學"淵源 by Sun Shaohua 孫少華. The former called attention to the books titled new and that many reign titles adopted by Western Han emperors indicating newness during this period. Liu related this upsurge of newness with the theory of revolution within the framework of "interaction between Heaven and mankind." The author of the second article called these Han Masters' works "the new study/ the study of newness" (新學). These two articles are largely confined to mere description of the phenomenon, and their explanations of the phenomenon were debatable. See Liu, "Shuo xin: jianlun nianhao zhi qiyuan," in *Qin Han shi luncong* 秦漢史論叢, ed. Liu

themselves is a matter of ongoing debate. The title of Lu Jia's work was probably assigned by its readership,[201] while Huan Tan explicitly stated in his preface that his *Xinlun* was inspired by the "new" writings of Lu and Liu.[202] The origins of the titles for Jia Yi and Liu Xiang's works are more ambiguous. A significant number of scholars believe these works were titled "new" following Liu Xiang's editorial efforts, which signified a revised edition of an existing text.[203] Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 (1848–1908) is one of the most influential advocates for this argument:

> *New Book* [i.e., *New Writings*] is probably a title given by Liu Xiang when presenting these writings [to the throne]. In general, manuscripts that had not yet been collated were referred to as old books, while those that had been revised and were deemed ready for copying were called new books. Yang Liang's commentary on the *Xunzi* does not include the old contents, but before Liu Xiang's preface [to the *Xunzi*], there is a title "*Xun Qing's New Book*[204] with twelve volumes and thirty-two chapters." Yin Jingshun's *Explanation of the Liezi* also mentions an old title, "Contents of *Liezi's New Book*," and quotes Liu Xiang's memorial on the *Guanzi* to the throne under the title "Contents of *Guanzi's New Book*." These instances affirm that the old titles of master writings in early versions were generally as such…. The term "new book" was probably not an exclusive title for the works of Jia Yi.
> 《新書》者，蓋劉向奏書時所題，凡未校者為故書，已校定可繕寫者為新書。楊倞注《荀子》未載舊本目錄，劉向《敘錄》前題「《荀卿新書》十二卷三十二篇」；殷敬順《列子釋文》亦載舊題云「《列子新書》目錄」；又引劉向上《管子》奏稱「《管子新書》目錄」，足證諸子古本舊題大氐如是。……蓋新書本非賈書之專名。[205]

Pak-yuen (Taipei: Wunan tushu chuban gongsi, 2003), 1–30, and Sun, "Xi Han zhuzi de 'shangxin' chuantong yu 'xinxue' yuanyuan," *Wenxue pinglun* 2012.2: 156–65.

[201] See the record in the biography of Lu Jia in the *Shiji*: "With each submission of a chapter [by Lu], Emperor Gaozu always praised it as good, and those around him would shout 'Long live [the emperor]!' and called these writings 'New Discourses'" (每奏一篇，高帝未嘗不稱善，左右呼萬歲，號其書曰「新語」). See *Shiji* 97.2699.

[202] See Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之, *Xinjiben Huan Tan Xinlun* 新輯本桓譚新論 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 1.

[203] Wang Zhong 汪中 (1745–1794) and Yu Jiaxi also argue that the word *xinshu* 新書 (new book) was added by Liu Xiang to all the books that he has collated. Like Sun, they take the *xinshu* in the prefaces of *Xunzi* and *Liezi* as evidence. See Tian Hanyun 田漢雲, *Xinbian Wang Zhong ji* 新編汪中集 (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2005), 422 and Yu, *Muluxue fawei* 目錄學發微 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2004), 260–61.

[204] In the context of the pre-Qin and Western Han periods, the term *shu* is appropriately translated as "writings." However, in this instance, given Sun's interpretation of *shu* as "books," I have adopted Sun's understanding for this translation.

[205] *Xinshu jiaozhu*, 250.

Sun suggests that the designation *xinshu* was likely applied by Liu Xiang to denote all the works that had been edited and were deemed suitable for reproduction, as opposed to those still in their original, unedited form, indicating that this terminology was a general practice for Liu's naming. Subsequently, if the designation *xinshu* indeed implies a revised version of an existing book, it follows logically that Liu's *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan* are derivatives of two earlier books.[206] Some scholars have gone further, claiming that *Xinyuan* might be an abbreviation for "New *Shuoyuan*" or "*Shuoyuan xinshu*," implying that *Xinyuan* was derived from an original work titled *Shuoyuan*.[207] However, I argue that it is unlikely for Liu to uniformly label all edited versions as *xinshu*. The application of *xin* in the titles of his two works reflects a conscious effort, indicating a level of engagement and creativity surpassing mere editorial revision.

Sun Yirang supports his arguments by referencing three instances where works were referred to as *xinshu* in Liu's prefaces, specifically mentioning the *Xunzi*, *Liezi*, and *Guanzi*. In the case of the *Xunzi*, the term *xinshu* is found in the title "*Xun Qing's New Book* with twelve volumes and thirty-two chapters," positioned before the content list and the main preface. Given that Liu Xiang never uses the term *juan* 卷 (volume) as the basic textual unit to organize master

[206] This argument is very popular among scholars. For example, Shen Qinhan 沈欽韓 argues that these two books have earlier editions, and were edited, not created, by Liu. See Shen, *Hanshu shuzheng* 漢書疏證 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), 762. Similar arguments can be seen in Luo Genze 羅根澤, "*Xinxu Shuoyuan Lienü zhuan* bu shizuoyu Liu Xiang kao" 《新序》《說苑》《列女傳》不始作於劉向考 in *Gushi bian* 古史辨 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), vol. 4, 228; Yu Jiaxi, *Siku tiyao bianzheng* 四庫提要辨證 (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 2004), 468; and Zhao Shanyi 趙善诒, *Xinxu shuzheng* 新序疏證 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1989).

[207] For example, Yao Zhenzong 姚振宗 (1842–1906) argues that the title *Xinyuan* might be the abbreviation of *Xin Shuoyuan*. Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯 also argues that there was originally a book called *Shuoyuan*, and Liu Xiang named his new edition *Shuoyuan xinshu*. See Yao, *Qilüe Bielu yiwen* 七略別錄佚文 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 567; and Xiang, *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 說苑校正 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 1.

writings,[208] this particular mention of *xinshu* likely originates from a later editor rather than Liu Xiang himself. Furthermore, the current preface to the *Guanzi* lacks any mention of *xinshu*, and the phrase "*Guanzi xinshu*" appears exclusively in a Tang dynasty commentary on the presumed Liu's preface to *Liezi*. Considering this commentary's intent to validate the authenticity of *Liezi*, a detailed scrutiny of its preface is essential for assessing the credibility of Sun's assertion regarding the term *xinshu*.

> Above are the eight chapters established in the new book. The Commissioner of the Eastern [Metropolitan Area] Conservancy and Imperial Counselor First Class, your servant [Liu] Xiang speaking: There are five chapters of *Liezi* inside the palace that he collated. In collaboration with your servant [Du] Can, the Commandant of Changshe, they carefully collated three chapters from the Chamberlain for Ceremonials, four from the office of the Grand Clerks, six from servant Xiang's collection, and two from servant Can's collection, totaling twenty chapters from both inside and outside the palace. In collating them, he has eliminated 12 duplicate chapters, resulting in a standard text of eight chapters, with more materials sourced from within the palace than outside. Sections were scattered in the chapters. Sometimes the characters were wrongly written, such as the misuse of *jin* 盡 (to exhaust) for *jin* 進 (to advance), and *xian* 賢 (virtuous) for *xing* 形 (form). Such errors were numerous. And they are noted in the new book. The revisions prioritize the writings from within the palace, and all are complete, with the bamboo slips ready for copying.... Followers of Dao hold to the essentials and adhere to the fundamental, embracing the concept of being clear, empty, and non-action. In self-cultivation and interpersonal relations, they promote and strive for non-competition, in accordance with the Six Classics. The chapters of "King Mu" and "Tang asks" are convoluted, extravagant, and bizarre, not befitting the words of a gentleman…
> 右新書定著八篇，護左都水使者、光祿大夫臣向言：所校中書《列子》五篇，臣向謹與長社尉臣參校讎太常書三篇，太史書四篇，臣向書六篇，臣參書二篇，內外書凡二十篇，以校除復重十二篇，定著八篇，中書多，外書少。章亂布在諸篇中，或字誤，以「盡」為「進」，以「賢」為「形」，如此者眾。及在新書有棧[209]。校讎從中書，已

[208] In the *Hanshu* "Yiwen zhi," the whole *zhuzi* 諸子 (master writings) section only contains one text marked by volume, that is *Baijia* 百家 (Hundreds of Lineages) placed at the end of this category, all other texts are marked by the number of their chapters. See *Hanshu* 78.1724–746. According to Liu's preface, he seems to put all the trivial and scattered texts together to form the *Baijia*, this is probably the reason that these materials were not further categorized into different chapters.

[209] Yin Jingshun 殷敬順 annotates the character *zhan* 棧 as the state of bamboo slips being rotted by bookworms. See Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 278. However, if we consult a similar expression in the preface of *Yanzi chunqiu*, this character probably refers to *jian* 箋 (to note). The translation below follows this understanding.

定皆以殺青，書可繕寫。……道家者，秉要執本，清虛無為，及其治身接物，務崇不競，合於六經，而《穆王》《汤问》二篇，迂诞恢诡，非君子之言也。……[210]

Among all the rather reliable prefaces by Liu, this is the only one that mentions the phrase *xinshu* in the content.[211] The authenticity of both the *Liezi* and its preface has been a subject of skepticism among scholars since the Tang dynasty,[212] with numerous factual inaccuracies identified within this preface.[213] Despite this, the examination of the preface from the standpoint of text collation and organization has been relatively unexplored.[214] Cheng Shuijin 程水金 and Feng Yiming 馮一鳴 stand out as pioneers in scrutinizing the preface as a potential later fabrication by identifying errors that suggest a lack of familiarity with Liu Xiang's editorial principles. They highlight several critical discrepancies: a) The misuse of the formula "以 X 為 Y" in this preface, which traditionally positions X as correct and Y as incorrect, a convention not adhered to in the preface of *Liezi*; b) The misplacement of discussions on scattered sections and wrongly-written characters, which logically should precede the finalization of the eight chapters, thus violating chronological order; c) The incorrect treatment of phonetic loan characters *jin* 進 and *jin* 盡 as

[210] Zhang Shunhui 張舜徽, *Wenxianxue lunzhu jiyao* 文獻學論著輯要 (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1985), 9.

[211] The rather reliable prefaces written by Liu are those of *Zhanguo ce*, *Guanzi*, *Xunzi*, *Yanzi chunqiu*, *Han Feizi*, and *Xinyuan*. The prefaces of *Zi Huazi* 子華子, *Deng Xi* 鄧析, and *Guanyin zi* 關尹子 have long been treated as later fabrications.

[212] The representative viewpoint of those who consider the current *Liezi* to be largely fabricated can be found in the appendix "Bianwei wenji jilüe" 辨偽文字輯略 in Yang Bojun's *Liezi jishi*. The representative viewpoint of those who argue for the authenticity of the *Liezi* can be seen in Yan Lingfeng's 嚴靈峰, *Liezi bianwu ji qi zhongxin sixiang* 列子辯誣及其中心思想 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1994) and Ma Da 馬達, *Liezi zhenwei kaobian* 列子真偽考辨 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2000).

[213] For example, Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819) points out that whoever wrote the prefaces has made a mistake on the era of Master Lie. Since Liu was very knowledgeable, he was unlikely to be the author of this preface. See *Liezi jishi*, 287.

[214] Those who argue for the fabrication of the preface mainly focus on three points in the introduction part: the author, the content of the book, and transmitting history, which are not included in the excerpt above. For the discussions of the three points, see Cheng Shuijin 程水金 and Feng Yiming 馮一鳴, "*Liezi* kaobian shuping yu *Liezi* weishu xinzheng" 《列子》考辨述評與《列子》偽書新證, *Zhongguo zhexue shi* 2007.2: 41–42.

errors, despite their widely-accepted use in textual variants.[215] While Cheng and Feng's analysis offers stimulating insights into *Liezi*'s preface, they overlook its striking resemblance to *Yanzi*'s preface. Comparing the two prefaces highlights a mimetic relationship that could potentially explain the peculiarities identified by Cheng and Feng.

> Above are the eight chapters of *Yanzi* [coming from] both inside and outside the palace, in total 215 sections. The Commissioner of the Eastern [Metropolitan Area] Conservancy and Imperial Counselor First Class, your servant [Liu] Xiang speaking: There are eleven chapters of *Yanzi* inside the palace that he collated. In collaboration with your servant [Du] Can, the Commandant of Changshe, they carefully collated five chapters from the office of the Grand Clerks, one from servant Xiang's collection, and thirteen from servant Can's collection, totaling thirty chapters and 838 sections both inside and outside the palace. He has eliminated 22 duplicate chapters and 638 sections, establishing a standard text comprising eight chapters and 215 sections. The materials from outside the palace were found to lack 36 sections, while those from within the palace were missing 71 sections [in the final version]. The text is settled by collating sources from both inside and outside the palace. In the writings inside the palace, the character *yao* 夭 was wrongly written as *fang* 芳, *you* 又 as *bei* 備, *xian* 先 as *niu* 牛, and *zhang* 章 as *chang* 長, and many such instances were found. These errors were meticulously marked. The text was finalized and ready for copying.... All the six chapters of his writings offer loyal advice to his ruler. The writings are admirable, the principles are worthy of emulation, and they align with the virtues espoused by the Six Classics.... Moreover, there are parts that do not conform to the canonical teachings, likely not the words of Master Yan…
> 右《晏子》凡內外八篇，總二百十五章。護左都水使者、光祿大夫臣向言，所校中書《晏子》十一篇，臣向謹與長社尉臣參校讎太史書五篇，臣向書一篇，參書十三篇，凡中外書三十篇，為八百三十八章。除復重二十二篇，六百三十八章，定著八篇二百一十五章，外書無有三十六章，中書無有七十一章，中外皆有以相定。中書以「夭」為「芳」，「又」為「備」，「先」為「牛」，「章」為「長」，如此類者多。謹頗略椠，皆已定以殺青，書可繕寫。……其書六篇，皆忠諫其君，文章可觀，義理可法，皆合六經之義……又有頗不合经术，似非晏子言……[216]

[215] Other flaws mentioned by them include a) the standard format in other prefaces is putting the character *fan* 凡 (altogether) before "writings inside and outside the palace," while *fan* is put after it in *Liezi*'s preface; b) the phrase *neiwai* 內外 (inside and outside) never appears in other prefaces, and the writings inside the palace are always called *zhongshu* 中書, not *neishu* 內書. See Cheng and Feng, "*Liezi* kaobian shuping," 43–48. For a point-by-point rebuttal, see Zhang Hongxing 張洪興, "*Liezi* zhenwei kaolun" 《列子》真偽考論, *Zhuzi xuekan* 2022.1: 83–88. However, Zhang's refutation does not well explain why the author of *Liezi*'s preface seems to be unfamiliar with Liu's editorial principles.
[216] *Wenxianxue lunzhu jiyao*, 7.

The comparison between the prefaces of *Liezi* and *Yanzi* reveals a striking similarity in structure: both editors initially mention the total number of chapters in the final compilation, detail the various sources used, and remove certain texts to establish a standard version with a specific chapter count. The contribution of sources from inside and outside the palace varies, and both prefaces acknowledge the presence of wrongly written characters in the materials. Despite this apparent alignment, a closer examination reveals some critical divergences that suggest the author of *Liezi*'s preface only superficially mimicked *Yanzi*'s preface, lacking a genuine understanding of Liu Xiang's editorial methodology.

First, *Liezi*'s preface abruptly transitions to discussing the variance in the volume of materials sourced from within and outside the palace after detailing the total chapters of the final version. This raises the question about the basic textual unit used to assess the contributions of these disparate materials. Given that the preface predominantly mentions chapters, if the author's intention was to suggest that the final version comprises a greater number of chapters sourced from within the palace than from external sources, it presents a misunderstanding of Liu's editorial practices. Liu's approach was not to merely eliminate duplicate chapters; rather, he amalgamated "repetitive but different" sections from the omitted chapters into the final composition, thus transforming the original compositions of chapters.[217] Identifying the origins of specific chapters in the finished compilation thus becomes an impractical endeavor. On the other hand, if the author implies a predominance of sections sourced internally, the argument also falls short due to the preface's earlier omission of any mention of sections during the editorial process. This oversight becomes apparent only when contrasted with the preface of *Yanzi*, where the significance of

[217] See Meihui Liu, "Examining the Repetitions Within and Between Chapters in the *Xunzi*: Traces of Liu Xiang's Editorial Work," *T'oung Pao* 110, 3-4 (2024): 333–339.

sections is acknowledged from the outset. In *Yanzi*'s preface, sections are considered the primary unit of compilation, often maintained in their original form throughout the editing process. This approach allows for a viable and meaningful comparison based on the number of sections in the final version.

Second, both prefaces address the issue of wrongly written characters within the texts, but in different places. *Yanzi*'s preface explicitly states that errors were within inside-palace-sourced texts, and they were identified and corrected, ensuring the final version was free from these inaccuracies. In contrast, *Liezi*'s preface suggests inaccuracies were marked in the final text, implying the errors had to be present in the final version to be annotated. This interpretation contradicts Liu's meticulous editing approach, which aimed for a definitive, error-free text.

Third, *Liezi*'s preface notably asserts a prioritization of texts sourced from within the palace when collating all the available texts, a statement that stands in stark opposition to the approach delineated in the preface of *Yanzi*, which underscores the equitable evaluation of both internal and external sources. Although Liu's main focus for collation targeted the inside-palace materials, this focus should not be misconstrued as an assumption that he regarded those materials as inherently more reliable or possessing superior value for textual criticism. Liu, celebrated for his judicious and informed philological expertise, would unlikely favor any particular source on the basis of its origin. His editorial practice, as historically recognized, involved a balanced assessment of texts with thorough comparison and analysis. These discrepancies in the preface of *Liezi*, along with the three points pointed by Cheng and Feng above, suggest that its author lacked substantial editorial experience, casting doubt on the text's attribution to Liu Xiang.

The doubts cast upon the authenticity of the sole preface featuring the term *xinshu* significantly challenge the argument that Liu Xiang uniformly referred to all his revised works as "new

books." A careful examination of the titles in Liu's prefaces consistently reveals the format "the bibliographical records of [book title], edited by servant Xiang,"[218] without the prefix "new" to denote revised versions. Furthermore, if Liu Xiang had truly referred to all collated texts as *xinshu* and if his catalog, *Bielu* 別錄 (Separate Listings), included only these edited versions,[219] then every title in his bibliography should have contained the character *xin*. Although Liu Xiang's original bibliography is no longer extant, the "Yiwen zhi" which was based on his catalog, lists only one book with the prefix *xin*: *Xin Guoyu* 新國語 (New Discourses of the States), which appears immediately after *Guoyu*. These two texts contain different numbers of chapters and are evidently not different versions of the same work.[220] This leaves us with two mutually exclusive hypotheses: a) Liu Xiang did not universally apply the designation *xinshu* to all revised editions, but only conferred the title *new* upon a select few texts; or b) Liu Xiang did originally label all collated texts as *xinshu*, but Ban Gu, for some reason, removed these designations from the *Hanshu*, preserving *xin* only in the title *Xin Guoyu*. If the second hypothesis were correct, Liu Xiang's original catalog would have needed to differentiate this genuinely new *Xin Guoyu* from

[218] For example, the last lines of the prefaces of *Zhanguo ce* and *Xunzi* are: "'The Records of *Zhanguo ce*,' edited by the Commissioner of the Eastern [Metropolitan Area] Conservancy and Imperial Counselor First Class, your servant Xiang" (護左都水使者光祿大夫臣向所校《戰國策書錄》) and "'The Records of *Sunqing*'s writings' in the imperial collections, edited by the Commissioner of the Eastern [Metropolitan Area] Conservancy and Imperial Counselor First Class, your servant Xiang" (護左都水使者光祿大夫臣向言所校讎中《孫卿書錄》). See *Wenxianxue lunzhu jiyao*, 3, 15.

[219] Liu's revisions aimed to produce the most complete and authoritative versions, superseding and rendering all the original, incomplete versions obsolete. See Sato Masayuki's 佐藤將之 discussion of the formation of the *Xunzi* in *Canyu tiandi zhi zhi: Xunzi lizhi zhengzhi sixiang de qiyuan yu gouzao* 參於天地之治：荀子禮治政治思想的起源與構造 (Taibei: Guoli Taiwan daxue chuban zhongxin, 2016), 34. Hence, Liu's bibliography probably only contains those edited texts. Xu Jianwei also suggests that the *Bielu*, *Qilüe* and "Yinwen zhi" should be the catalogues of all the "new books" collated by Liu, not old books. See Xu, *Wenben geming: Liu Xiang* Hanshu *"Yiwen zhi" yu zaoqi wenben yanjiu* 文本革命：劉向《漢書藝文志》與早期文本研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2017), 7.

[220] For the analysis of the relationship of these two texts, see Wu Ge 吳戈, "*Guoyu*, *Xin Guoyu* yu gushilei shishu" 《國語》、《新國語》與"故事類史書," *Nanjing shifan daxue wenxueyuan xuebao* 2016.1: 180–183.

the *Xin Guoyu* that was merely a revised version of an earlier text. This would have necessitated a title such as *Xin Xin Guoyu*, which is patently absurd. In summary, the assumption that Liu Xiang labeled all his revisions as "new books" faces considerable conceptual and practical challenges.[221] It is more plausible to assume that Liu reserved the "new" designation for specific instances that warranted such distinction, such as *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan*.

What, then, underpins the use of *xin* in the titles of *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan*? Liu explicitly mentions one reason in his preface to *Xinyuan*, where he acknowledges not only the incorporation of received materials but also the addition of newly created content (更以造新事).[222] Indeed, the narratives of the Han dynasty, lacking prior references, were likely compiled by Liu himself. Consequently, some scholars argue that *xin* denotes the contemporary epoch of the Western Han, distinguishing it from all the preceding periods.[223] However, this interpretation is challenged by the presence of anecdotes from the Qin dynasty, a predominant proportion of which also lack preceding sources.[224] Should these narratives be Liu's creations, the term *xin* would then more broadly indicate an era characterized by the absence of documented and disseminated stories, rather than exclusively referring to the Western Han dynasty. Liu's efforts to perpetuate and enrich

[221] Yin Yushan 尹玉珊 also argues that Liu Xiang does not title all the finalized versions as "new books," and she further claims that any newly written, newly prefaced, or newly compiled master writings during the Han dynasty that did not have a specific title, or whose specific title had not yet become widely known, could be referred to as "new books." Such an understanding does not recognize the unique significance of using this term in Liu's two books. See Yin, "Han Wei zishu fancheng 'xinshu' zhi yuanqi ji qi shidai yiyi" 漢魏子書泛稱"新書"之緣起及其時代意義, *Xueshu luntan* 學術論壇 no.7 (2011): 86–89.
[222] *Shuoyuan jiaozheng*, 1.
[223] See Xu Jianwei, *Shuoyuan yanjiu*, 84. Xu's analysis is inspired by Liu Pak-yuen's observation that Western Han people frequently named things in their era "new."
[224] In the current *Xinyuan*, the total characters of Han anecdotes are around 4000, while that of the Qin anecdotes are around 2000. Given the extremely short length of the Qin dynasty (15 years compared to 150 years from Emperor Gaozu to Emperor Xuan that has been spanned in the *Xinyuan*), Liu seems to have paid much attention on the Qin period.

the tradition of historical anecdotes, particularly through the addition of new stories, are one reason for the application of *xin* in the naming of his works.

Moreover, the designation *xin* encompasses an essential element related to the innovative arrangement and presentation of existing materials. Scholars have observed that numerous pre-Qin anecdotes in Liu's compilations can be traced to earlier transmitted texts, including *Han Shi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳, *Lüshi chunqiu*, *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋, *Guoyu*, and *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策.[225] Additionally, parallels to these works are found in excavated early Han texts, such as the Dingxian bamboo slips[226] and Fuyang manuscripts.[227] Clearly, aside from introductory comments

[225] I do not include *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語 (The School Sayings of Confucius) in my analysis, although there are also many parallel texts between it and Liu's two book. A closer examination of the relationship between the excavated counterpart, *Xinyuan*, and *Kongzi jiayu* shows that there often exists a sequence of structural evolution from unearthed documents to *Xinyuan* and then to *Jiayu*. *Jiayu* seems to be the last stage in this sequence, formed through the accumulation and layering of content from the previous stages. For the analysis of their relationship, see Ning Zhenjiang 寧鎮疆, "*Jiayu* de 'cenglei' xingcheng kaolun: Fuyang shuanggudui yihao mudu suojian zhangti yu jinben Jiayu zhi bijiao" 《家語》的"層累"形成考論：阜陽雙古堆一號木牘所見章題與今本《家語》之比較, *Qilu xuekan* 2007.3: 9–17. For a detailed analysis of the parallel texts across Liu's two books and other texts, see Yao, "*Xinxu Shuoyuan* wenxian yanjiu" and Du Jiaqi 杜家祁, "Liu Xiang bianxie *Xinxu*, *Shuoyuan* yanjiu" 劉向編寫新序說苑研究 (Ph.D. Diss., Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1999).

[226] The Dingxian 定縣 bamboo slips were excavated from a Western Han tomb (no. 40) in the village of Bajiaolang 八角廊, Hebei Province, in 1973. The tomb owner, Liu Xiu 劉修, died in 55 BCE. A great part of the bamboo slips was burnt and barely readable. Among them, there is a text named by researchers, "Rujiazhe yan" 儒家者言 (Words of the Ru), consists of 27 chapters, of which 20 chapters can be seen in the current *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan*. For an introduction of this text, see "'Rujiazhe yan' shiwen"《儒家者言》釋文, *Wenwu* 1981.8: 13–19 and He Zhigang 何直剛, "'Rujiazhe yan' lüeshuo"《儒家者言》略說, *Wenwu* 1981.8: 20–22.

[227] The Fuyang 阜陽 excavated texts were found in the tomb of the Marquis of Ruyin 汝陰, Xiahou Zao 夏侯灶, who died in 165 BCE. The tomb was excavated in 1977 in the village near Fuyang, Anhui Province. There are two wooden tablets, which contain chapter titles that can be largely found in Liu's two books. There are also some broken bamboo slips which contain some anecdotes that can be found in the *Xinyuan*. Researchers named these slips "Shuolei zashi" 說類雜事 (miscellaneous affairs in the category of *shuo*), imitating Liu's designation of the materials later developed into *Xinyuan*. Hu Pingsheng 胡平生 asserts that these slips belong to the same category of the texts on the two tablets, and "Shuolei zashi" is the one mentioned in Liu's preface to *Xinyuan*. See Hu, "Fuyang shuangudui Hanjian yu *Kongzi jiayu*" 阜陽雙谷堆漢簡與《孔子家語》, in *Guoxue yanjiu* 國學研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), vol. 7, 523. However, Han Ziqiang 韓自強 believes that one of the tablets should be named "Rujiazhe yan" 儒家者言, since part of its content are similar to that of the Dingxian slips. The other tablets,

at the beginning of chapters and slight modifications to concluding remarks within the anecdotes, the core content of Liu's two books, comprising pre-Qin records of events and sayings, originates from pre-existing materials, not penned by Liu himself. Yet, it would be misleading to suggest that such compilations already existed in their entirety before Liu's efforts, reducing his contribution to mere editing akin to his treatment of other texts in the Palace library.[228] Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 illuminates this misconception by noting that Liu confronted not pre-arranged collections but a disarray of stories without defined thematic boundaries or coherence.[229] Liu's editorial brilliance was thus not only in generating new content but also in weaving these fragmented narratives into cohesive, thematic collections, thereby bestowing upon them a renewed significance and structure. This reorganization effort, which imbued scattered tales with unity and narrative clarity, is precisely what the *xin* in the titles of his works signifies: marking a renewal not just of text but of context, offering readers a reimagined historical panorama through meticulous editorial craft.

---

together with the bamboo slips, should be called "Chunqiu shiyu" 春秋事語 (The affairs and discourses in the Chunqiu period), named after a silk manuscript named by Zhang Zhenglang 張政烺 found in the Mawangdui tomb. Han believes that "Rujiazhe yan" and "Chunqiu shiyu" are two different types of materials. For Han's discussion, see *Fuyang Hanjian* Zhouyi *yanjiu (fu "Rujiazhe yan" zhangti, "Chunqiu shiyu" zhangti ji xiangguan zhujian* 阜陽漢簡《周易》研究（附：《儒家者言》章題）、《春秋事語》章題及相關竹簡 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004). A similar categorization of these tablets and slips can be seen in Fukuda Tetsuyuki 福田哲之, *Zhongguo chutu guwenxian yu Zhanguo wenzi zhi yanjiu* 中國出土古文獻與戰國文字之研究 (Taipei: Wanjuanlou tushu gufen youxian gongsi, 2005): 113–115.

[228] It is a popular belief that there was a book called *Shuoyuan* before Liu revised it into the current *Xinyuan*. See Shen, *Hanshu shuzheng*, 762; Luo, "*Xinxu Shuoyuan Lienü zhuan* bu shizuoyu Liu Xiang kao," 227–29; Yu, *Siku tiyao bianzheng*, 552; Xiang, *Shuoyuan jiaozheng*, 1; and Yan Lingfeng 嚴靈峰, "Liu Xiang 'Shuoyuan xulu' yanjiu" 劉向《說苑敘錄》研究, in *Wuqiubeizhai xueshu xinshu* 無求備齋學術新著 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1987), 364.

[229] See Xu, *Liang Han sixiangshi*, vol. 3, 40; and Zuo Songchao 左松超, "Lun Liu Xiang bianzhuan *Shuoyuan*" 論劉向編撰說苑, *Xiangguang jinhui xueyuan xuebao* 13 (1986): 55.

2.1.2 *Xu* 序 (to organize): A Crucial Step from Passages to Books

Scholars have extensively debated Liu Xiang's involvement in the compilation of the *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan*. A prevalent perspective among some scholars posits that these works were pre-existing entities with distinct boundaries that Liu merely reorganized. This viewpoint is partly based on a reference from the "Yiwen zhi" chapter of the *Hanshu*, which credits Liu Xiang with the arrangement (*xu* 序) of 67 chapters. This includes works such as the *Xinxu*, *Xinyuan*, *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 (Biographies of Exemplary Women), and *Shishuo* 世說 (Tales of the World), as annotated by Ban Gu.[230] Many interpret the term *xu* as merely sequencing,[231] a task perceived as lesser than that of an actual author, leading to the conclusion that Liu Xiang was an editor rather than the author of these texts.[232] This interpretation, however, may significantly misrepresent the term *xu*.

A closer examination of the term's usage in the "Yiwen zhi" reveals a profound respect for the act of arrangement, a sentiment likely shared by not only Ban Gu, but also Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, given the "Yiwen zhi"'s heavy reliance on the Liu's "Qilüe" 七略 (Seven Summaries).[233]

---

[230] A detailed analysis of the number of chapters of these works can be seen in Chen Guoqing 陳國慶, *Hanshu Yiwen zhi zhushi huibian* 漢書藝文志注釋彙編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 114.

[231] Upon examining some examples of using this term, such as in the *Shiji*, *Suishu*'s 隋書 (Book of Sui) "Jingji zhi" 經籍志 (Treatise on Classics), and other later texts, some scholars conclude that the term *xu* carries the meanings of "narration" and "composition" besides the meaning of "sequence." For example, see Wang Sufeng 王蘇鳳, "Liu Xiang *Xinxu* zhuzuo xingzhi kaobian" 劉向《新序》著作性質考辨, *Hebei shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexueban)* 2000.3: 97–98. However, what they are missing is the examination of the usage of this term in the "Yiwen zhi."

[232] For those scholars' arguments and Xu's refutation, see Xu Fuguan, *Liang Han sixiangshi*, 39. However, although Xu firmly proposes that Liu should be regarded as the author of these books, not the editor, his understanding of the term *xu* is still confined in the sense of "sequencing," and regards the amount of authorial input marked by *xu* less than that of *zhu* 著 (to compose). He claims that in Liu's biography in the *Hanshu*, both *Xinyuan* and *Xinxu* are said to be "composed" (*zhu*) by Liu, while only the *Lienü zhuan* is said to be "arranged" (*xu*) by Liu, thus *Xinyuan* and *Xinxu* involve more authorial work than the *Lienü zhuan*. Given the much more organized form of *Lienü zhuan*, Xu's argument can hardly stand.

[233] The relationship between the "Yiwen zhi" and its predecessors, the *Bielu* and *Qilüe*, remains a subject of scholarly debate. "Yiwen zhi" seems to significantly condense the content of its antecedents, yet it preserves the categorization method and nearly all the entries found in the *Qilüe*, despite some of these entries having been lost by the time of Ban Gu. Additionally, Ban introduced several new entries not found

The specific application of *xu* in reference to Liu Xiang's work serves as a critical indicator of his contribution, albeit one that may diverge from modern conceptions of authorship.

In the "Yiwen zhi," there are only two instances where texts are specifically mentioned as being "arranged" (*xu*) by individuals, standing out against the backdrop of 596 entries: the 67 chapters by Liu Xiang and the 38 chapters by Yang Xiong.[234] According to Ban's annotation, Yang Xiong's writings were added to the treatise by him, not originally included in earlier compilations like the *Bielu* or *Qilüe*, likely due to Yang's contemporaneity with Liu Xin. The selective emphasis on Liu Xiang and Yang Xiong by Ban, using *xu* to describe their contributions while attributing other texts directly to their authors, raises questions about the distinctiveness of their works.

The differentiation of Yang's and Liu's works from others within the "Yiwen zhi" probably lies in the assembly of multiple well-defined *books* under a single authorship. This contrasts notably with other entries, which either reference a single book or a mere collection of disparate passages. For instance, while Huan Kuan's *Yantielun* is acknowledged for its concrete authorship, Ban Gu does not apply the term *xu* to it, implying that a single book does not merit such a designation. Similarly, the inclusion of 123 chapters attributed to Dong Zhongshu in the "Yiwen zhi", likely encompassing the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals) among others, illustrates this point.[235] These chapters, some of which possibly

---

in the *Qilüe*, marked by the term *ru* 入 (addition). Given the loss of both the *Bielu* and *Qilüe* and considering their apparent close relationship with the "Yiwen zhi," it is reasonable to infer that many textual characteristics of the "Yiwen zhi" likely mirror those found in the bibliographical works of Liu Xiang and Liu Xin. For a detailed analysis of the relationship of these three books, see Zhong Zhaopeng 鍾肇鵬, "*Qilüe Bielu* kao"《七略》《別錄》考, *Wenxian* 1985.3: 59–73; and Sun Xianbin 孫顯斌, "*Qilüe Bielu* bianzhuan kao" 《七略》《別錄》編撰考, *Tushuguan zazhi* 30(2011): 88–91.

[234] *Hanshu* 30.1727.

[235] Although some scholars believe that *Chunqiu fanlu* is not included in these 123 chapters, such a theory seems improbable. If this were the case, it would imply that the *Chunqiu fanlu* was omitted from the

penned by Dong, lack a cohesive connection and were likely circulated independently prior to Liu's aggregation of them. Consequently, Ban Gu would not categorize Dong's collection as *xu* either.

Considering Ban Gu likely views *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan* as independent and authorial books, akin to *Fayan* and *Taixuan*, we must examine what distinguishes a collection of disparate chapters from a cohesive book. The distinction lies in a meticulously crafted structure, where chapters and sections are strategically positioned. Thus, it emerges that the organization attributed to Liu and Yang pertains not to the order of their books, as suggested by Xu Fuguan,[236] but rather to the arrangement of chapters within those books. In both *Fayan* and *Taixuan*, the deliberate articulation of each chapter's theme and their fixed sequence is evident.[237] Although such explicitness is absent in Liu's two texts, the structured pattern of the twenty chapters in *Xinyuan* suggests that Liu, too, purposefully organized the material into a systematic whole.[238] *Xu* entails more than simple compilation; it involves a strategic organizational effort aimed at creating a coherent and unified work.

The practice of establishing or discerning a thematic pattern across the chapters of a single book has a deep-rooted history. Notably, among the ancient classics, the traditions associated with the *Yijing* and *Shangshu* have exhibited a pronounced inclination towards organizing

---

"Yiwen zhi," a scenario that appears unlikely given the historical and literary significance of the work. For different proposals on this topic, see Chen, *Hanshu Yiwen zhi zhushi huibian*, 111.

[236] Xu Fuguan, *Liang Han sixiangshi*, 39. Xu claims that the use of the term *xu* in the "Yiwen zhi" signifies the act of Liu Xiang and Yang Xiong arranging several of their works in a sequence, an interpretation that lacks support from extant texts. Furthermore, this assertion is considered to have little merit since, typically, each book was circulated independently, rendering the author's decision on book sequence unnecessary.

[237] See the preface to *Fayan* in Wang Rongbao 汪榮寶, *Fayan yishu* 法言義疏 (Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 1987), 565–574; and two chapters, "Xuan chong" 玄衝 and "Xuan cuo" 玄錯, in Sima Guang 司馬光, *Taixuan jizhu* 太玄集註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 178–184.

[238] For one interpretation of the structure of *Xinyuan*'s chapters, see Xu Xingwu, *Liu Xiang pingzhuan*, 411.

different chapters in a deliberate sequence.[239] In the "Yiwen zhi," this methodical approach to structuring texts is credited to Confucius.

> The *Yijing* says, "Fu Xi…began to create the eight trigrams…." By the time of the Yin and Zhou dynasties, ... King Wen … expanded the trigrams into hexagrams, forming the upper and lower chapters. Confucius wrote ten chapters, including the "Tuan" (Judgment), "Xiang" (Overall Image), "Xici" (Appended Phrases), "Wenyan" (Words), and "Xu Gua" (the Sequence of the Hexagrams), among others. Therefore, it is said that the way of the *Yijing* is profound; it has been enriched by three sages over the ages of three ancient periods.
> 《易》曰：「宓戲氏……始作八卦……」至於殷、周之際，……文王……重易六爻，作上下篇。孔氏為之彖、象、繫辭、文言、序卦之屬十篇。故曰易道深矣，人更三聖，世曆三古。
>
> The *Yijing* says, "The Yellow River brought forth the Diagram, and the Luo River brought forth the Writing. The sages followed them." Thus, the origins of the *Shangshu* are profoundly ancient. When Confucius compiled these texts, he traced back to the time of Yao and extended down to the Qin dynasty, comprising a total of a hundred chapters. He wrote prefaces for them, explaining the purpose of compilation.
> 《易》曰：「河出圖，雒出書，聖人則之。」故書之所起遠矣，至孔子篹焉，上斷於堯，下訖于秦，凡百篇，而為之序，言其作意。[240]

In his summaries of the *Yijing* and *Shangshu* categories, Ban Gu—likely drawing from Liu Xin—highlights the critical role of *xu* in the classical canon formation process. Despite the "Xu Gua" and the prefaces of the *Shangshu* possibly being compositions from a later period rather than direct works of Confucius,[241] their attribution to him significantly elevates the act of explicating or creating a sequence within a text to a prestigious level, arguably as crucial as the original composition itself. In the *Shangshu*, *xu* is even considered an integral part of the

[239] *Shijing* also has a similar tradition, represented by the small prefaces in front of each poem and some explanatory texts like "Kongzi shilun" 孔子詩論 (Confucius Poetry Edification). However, in the discussion below, I mainly focus on prose rather than the poetry tradition.
[240] *Hanshu* 30.1706.
[241] For the lengthy discussion of whether Confucius has written the prefaces to *Shangshu* and the "Xu Gua," see He Fasu 何發甦, "Cong yinxu zhilu dao huaiyi zhitu: Han zhi Ming xuezhe guanyu Kongzi yu *Shangshu* guanxi zhi lunshu" 從因循之路到懷疑之途：漢至明學者關於孔子與《尚書》關係之論述, *Kongzi yanjiu* 2016.1: 110–119; and He Zeheng 何澤恆, "Kongzi yu 'Yizhun' xiangguan wenti fuyi" 孔子與《易傳》相關問題覆議, *Zhouyi yanjiu* 2001.1: 32–48.

composition. This perspective echoes the situation with Liu's works: although the contents of *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan* are of ancient origin, it was Liu Xiang who organized them, determined the number of chapters for the final versions, and thus became the "author" of these new compilations.

Historically, the majority of pre-Qin texts circulated as individual chapters rather than complete books.[242] It was not until the compilation of *Lüshi Chunqiu* that a deliberate design for an entire book became evident. In the *ji* 紀 (Almanacs) sections, for instance, the progression from the first month through the twelfth and the sequence of seasons are almost inherently logical. Subsequently, in works like *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Master Huainan) and *Shiji*, we observe an organizational approach that, while not strictly adhering to a natural order, is significantly shaped by the authors' creative structuring. Despite relying on existing materials, these texts represent new compilations by their authors. However, even during the Western Han, the prevailing format for scholarly compositions remained focused on individual chapters rather than entire books. For example, in the writings of Jia Yi and Dong Zhongshu, there is little evidence of any overarching structure that transcends the confines of individual chapters.

A pivotal moment in this context was the collation of imperial texts by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin. Prior to Liu Xiang's efforts, there existed collections of chapters attributed to single authors that were frequently circulated together, yet these collections lacked internal order or fixed boundary. Rather than being recognized as "books," these pre-Liu collections more closely resembled overlapping anthologies without a steady selection. The sequence of chapters within

[242] See Yu Jiaxi, *Gushu tongli* 古書通例 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 93–96. This argument has also been confirmed by excavated texts. For example, "Baofu" 保傅 is a chapter of Jia Yi's *Xinshu*, and it is also incorporated into *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記. In the Dingxian bamboo slips, we find "Bao fu" circulated on its own. See He Zhigang and Liu Shishu 劉世樞, "Dingxian 40 hao Hanmu chutu zhujian jianjie" 定縣 40 號漢墓出土竹簡簡介, *Wenwu* 1981.8: 11–13.

these collections was particularly unstable. For example, the excavated *Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法 (Master Sun's Military Method) shows a chapter arrangement vastly different from the version familiar to us today.[243] Similarly, many master writings read by Sima Qian likely followed a different sequence or chapters than the versions organized by Liu.[244] When ancient texts were primarily circulated by individual chapters, the order of these chapters was of little concern to readers, who did not expect to find a meaningful or consistent thread linking various chapters. However, Liu Xiang faced a unique challenge when tasked with determining the definitive version of a "book." He needed to first define the scope of materials eligible for inclusion in the book and then devise a method to organize these materials coherently. This approach is especially evident in his handling of less structured texts, such as the *Yanzi chunqiu*, where even chapters were not yet stable units and sections retained considerable independence.[245] Liu Xiang assumed the critical role of transforming these sections into chapters, thereby shaping the materials into a structured book.

[243] There are eight chapters listed on the excavated tablet, which are in a different sequence from those in the current version. Moreover, there are five more chapters in the Yinqueshan texts that are not included in the current version. For a detailed introduction, see *Sunzi bingfa* in *Yinqueshan Hanmu zhujian* 銀雀山漢墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1975), vol. 1. Also, Boltz notes that the order of Guodian 郭店 *Laozi* 老子 passages is entirely different from the chapter order found in the received texts. See William G. Boltz, "The Fourth-Century B. C. Guodiann Manuscripts from Chuu and the Composition of the Laotzyy," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 119 (1999): 592.

[244] For example, in the biography of Mengzi, Sima said that when he reads the writings of Menzi and comes to the part where King Hui of Liang asks, "What can benefit my state?", he cannot help but put the book aside and sigh. The line mentioned by Sima is in the first line of the first chapter in the current *Mengzi*. If Sima were reading the same *Mengzi* version, such an expression would be quite awkward. Additionally, in the biography of Han Fei, Sima said that Han composed "Gufen" 孤憤, "Wudu" 五蠹, inner and outer "Chu" 內外儲, "Shuolin" 說林, and "Shuinan" 說難. The chapters mentioned are scattered around in the current *Han Feizi* without a clear sequence.

[245] Some chapters in texts like the *Guanzi* and *Xunzi* perhaps have circulated as basic textual units, as inferred from Liu's prefaces to them, which only mention the number of chapters, not sections. However, it is important to recognize that a chapter, as it stands following Liu's editorial efforts, may differ significantly from its original form.

> There are six chapters comprising his writings …which align with the virtues espoused by the Six Classics. There are also repetitive but different words. I dare not to discard them; thus, I listed them as one chapter. Additionally, certain words do not align with the method of classics. They seemed not to be the words of Master Yan but rather the creations of eloquent individuals from a later period. Thus, I also dare not to discard them and listed them as a separate chapter. There are eight chapters in total.
> 其書六篇……皆合六經之義，又有復重文辭頗異，不敢遺失，復列以為一篇，又有頗不合經術，似非晏子言，疑後世辯士所為者，故亦不敢失，復以為一篇，凡八篇。[246]

Upon examining the current *Yanzi Chunqiu*, it is evident that the chapters and sections within have been meticulously sorted. The initial six "inner" chapters include two named "Jian" 諫 (Remonstrations)—upper and lower—encompassing all the sections that conclude with "Master Yan admonished [the ruler]" (*Yanzi jian* 晏子諫) in their titles. Similarly, the two chapters labeled "Wen" 問 (Questions)—again, upper and lower—predominantly feature section titles beginning with "[Someone] asked [Master Yan]." In the seventh and eighth "outer" chapters, there are anecdotes that are "repetitive but different" from those in the inner ones, and also anecdotes with anti-Ru themes.[247] Liu Xiang was presented with various bundles of *Yanzi*-related materials, ranging from a single chapter from his own collection to a thirteen-chapter compilation provided by Du Can. It was Liu who created the book *Yanzi Chunqiu* with a stratified structure of newly arranged chapters, a configuration that had never before existed. In summary, Liu's contribution

[246] Zhang, *Wenxianxue lunzhu jiyao*, 7.

[247] For example, in one of the inner chapters, there is a dialogue between Liangqiu Ju 梁丘据 and Yanzi, where Liangqiu inquiries about Yanzi's ability to serve three different lords who had differing intentions, yet Yanzi was able to comply with all of them harmoniously. In contrast, the seventh chapter, classified as an outer chapter, features a narrative with a similar thematic essence but introduces different characters, substituting Liangqiu Ju with Gaozi 高子. Subsequently, the eighth chapter presents two sections that parallel the earlier narratives, where Confucius explicitly refuses to meet Yanzi and doubts Yanzi's integrity, mirroring the structure of the preceding anecdotes but with an anti-Ru theme. These instances exemplify Liu's methodical approach to organizing varied materials across different chapters. See *Yanzi Chunqiu* 4.29; 7.19; 8.3; and 8.4.

was pivotal in transforming disarrayed chapters into structured books, particularly within the genre of master writings,[248] thereby playing a key role in the textual formation of early China.[249]

Liu Xiang and Xin's contributions extend beyond compiling materials into individual books; they also organized a significant number of books into a systematic bibliographical list. In the preface to the "Six Classics" in the "Yiwen zhi," the author explicitly mentions "arranging the texts of Six Classics into nine categories" (序六藝為九種),[250] indicating a deliberate structuring from what was deemed most important to least in the author's perspective. Before this reorganization, the Six Classics were traditionally listed starting with the *Shijing* and *Shangshu*, concluding with the *Chunqiu*.[251] However, Liu Xin, in his *Qilüe*, elevated the Yijing to the foremost

[248] Those texts in the category of Classics (six arts 六藝) seems to be better-developed and more stable than the master writings. Therefore, when Liu collates the Classics, he seems to focus more on the editorial work on the level of words, not arranging chapters. See Ban's articulation of Liu's revisions to the Classics in the prefaces to the *Yijing* and *Shanghu* categories in the "Yiwen zhi" in *Hanshu* 30.1704, 1706.
[249] For previous scholarship addressing Liu Xiang's editorship, see Goldin, *The Art of Chinese Philosophy: Eight Classical Texts and How to Read Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 5–12; Xu, Shuoyuan *yanjiu*, 1–25; and Olivia Milburn, *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Yan* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 3–22. Although these studies have discussed Liu Xiang's editorial reports, most have not elaborated on the creation of new chapters and new structures.
[250] *Hanshu* 30.1723. Also, there are similar expression in the "Yiwen zhi" that the compiler "arranges the military writings" (序次兵書), "arranges the texts of numbers and methods into six categories" (序数术为六种), and "arranges the texts of recipes and techniques into four categories" (序方技为四种).
[251] The most popular sequence is probably *Shijing*, *Shangshu*, *Li*, *Yue*, *Yijing*, and *Chunqiu* (詩書禮樂易春秋), which can be seen in the *Zhuangzi*, *Xunzi*, *Huainanzi* and *Shiji*.

position, considering it the source of all other classics.[252] This reordering was not merely bibliographical but carried significant academic and political implications.[253]

The use of the term *xu* in broader cosmological contexts within the "Yiwen zhi" further illustrates this point: "Astronomers *xu* the twenty-eight lunar mansions" (天文者，序二十八宿); and "Chronologists *xu* the positions of the four seasons" (曆譜者，序四時之位).[254] While the stars and seasons inherently exist in nature, independent of human manipulation, the arrangement of their textual representations is subject to control. Consequently, the power to structure the textual realm is believed to be able to translate into an influence over the perceived world. In other words, the action of arranging texts becomes a method of molding the world one perceives.[255]

Hence, we can gain a more profound insight into why Liu Xiang named his compilation *Xinxu*. While it is true that most of the sections comprised pre-existing materials widely

[252] The reason behind this new arrangement is debatable. Zhou Yutong 周予同 argues that this sequence reflects the order of the formation of these classics, and he attributes this arrangement to the Ancient Script scholars. See Zhu Weizheng 朱維錚, *Zhou Yutong jingxue shilun* 周予同經學史論 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chunbanshe, 2010), 3–5. Additionally, some scholars attempt to understand this new sequence from the perspective of Liu Xiang and Xin's personal academic backgrounds, while others argue that the other five classics except for the *Yijing* are arranged in a way mimicking the Five Phases. For the analysis of different explanations of the various sequences, see Zhang Peilin 張沛林, "Xian Tang liujing cidi kao" 先唐六經次第考, *Jingxue wenxian yanjiu jiyan* 2017.1: 76–95.

[253] A similar intention can be seen in the listing of ten lineages of the master writings. The significance of them decreases from the first (Ru) to the last (Little Sayings), which clearly different from Sima Tan's arrangement.

[254] *Hanshu* 30.1767.

[255] Mark Edward Lewis reminds us to notice the ideological agenda in the "Yiwen zhi" and argues that it presents "all forms of writing…within an intellectual universe established by the state canon that was understood as the textual form of the Han empire." See Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 226. Furthermore, Michael Hunter points out that "Yiwen zhi" should be understood in the context of the ten treatises which probably modeled "Hongfan" for the systematic presentation of all worthy knowledge contributed to the imperial "Great Plan." See Hunter, "The 'Yiwen zhi' 藝文志 (Treatise on Arts and Letters) Bibliography in Its Own Context," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 138 (2018): 763–780. Even within the "Yiwen zhi" itself, we can already see such a "Great Plan."

disseminated before Liu's time,[256] what truly establishes his authorship is not the ownership of any specific sections, but rather the overarching structure he created, where each section is meticulously positioned. This organizational principle mirrors the ideal societal structure in Liu's mind, where the ruler, the worthies, and the common people all exhibit appropriate behavior and occupy their rightful places.[257]

Liu Xiang's approach to compiling anecdotes and discourses (*yu* 語) marks a significant innovation within the long-standing tradition of assembling such materials.[258] Li Ling 李零, in his classification of ancient historical texts, identified four categories: genealogical records, annals, archives, and anecdotal materials. Based on the currently available excavated texts, it seems that the last type was the most abundant and dynamic form of ancient historical documentation.[259]

---

[256] In Xu Jianwei's analysis, they are categorized as "public materials", see Xu, "Zhanguo Qin Han jian de gonggong sucai yu Zhou Qin Han wenxueshi xushi" 戰國秦漢間的"公共素材"與周秦漢文學史敘事, *Zhoushan daxue xuebao (shehui kexueban)* 2012.6: 1–9.

[257] Liu's two books are often interpreted as "remonstrations to the emperor." For example, see Wang Qimin 王啟敏, *Liu Xiang* Xinxu Shuoyuan *yanjiu* 劉向《新序》《說苑》研究 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2011), 38; and Yao, "*Xinxu Shuoyuan* wenxian yanjiu," 1. However, an equally significant number of chapters within these texts concentrate not solely on the emperor's virtues but also on those of the subordinates. Thus, it is more accurate to perceive these books as proposing an ideal blueprint for society at large, rather than targeting the emperor exclusively.

[258] In his two books, historical anecdotes and discourses emerge as two predominate categories, which may overlap each other, given the common practice of simultaneously documenting events and the utterances of characters involved. As Liu elucidates in his preface to the *Zhanguo ce*, one notable classification for such content is "shiyu" 事語 (affairs and discourses), therefore in the discussion below, I do not differentiate between these two types. Nonetheless, it is observable that the *Xinxu* leans more towards anecdotes, while the *Xinyuan* is more discourse oriented. This is evidenced by the *Xinyuan* featuring three chapters specifically titled *shuo* 說 (explanations), *yan* 言 (statements), and *tan* 談 (discussions), alongside numerous instances of standalone sayings devoid of any contextual narrative, a characteristic less prevalent in the *Xinxu*.

[259] Within Li's classification, anecdotal materials encompass both the historical anecdotes and discourses. See Li Ling, *Jianbo gushu yu xueshu yuanliu* 簡帛古書與學術源流 (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 2004), 267–73. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of these excavated texts, which are confined in scope, geographical distribution, and chronological range. Consequently, caution must be exercised when drawing conclusions from these sources.

Thus, it becomes essential to explore how these materials were utilized and disseminated prior to Liu's reorganization.

Pre-Liu texts employed two primary methods to organize these pieces. The first method focused on the historical information conveyed by the anecdotes, arranging them chronologically, geographically, or without any discernible connection.[260] References to Liu's preface for *Zhanguo ce* and excavated texts, such as "Xi nian" 繫年 (Annalistic History) from the Tsinghua corpus and "Chunqiu shiyu" from Mawangdui, illustrate that many anecdotal collections were either disorganized, fragmentary, or both. This incompleteness has led some scholars to draw parallels between these unearthed collections and the types of historical excerpts (*wei* 微) recorded in the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*.[261] Given the absence of extant texts identified as *wei*, the characteristics of this type of text remain largely speculative. While it is possible that the excavated texts we have now are excerpts from a more comprehensive and coherent compilation, it is also likely the process of textual formation was the opposite: the well-arranged, extensive texts we are familiar with, such as *Zuozhuan* and *Guoyu*, might have been developed from these

[260] For example, the "Xi nian" in the Tsinghua corpus largely lists events in the chronological order, while one version of pre-*Zhanguo ce* that Liu collated separates anecdotes into different states. In contrast, stories on the silk manuscript "Chunqiu shiyu" found in the Mawangdui tomb are not arranged neither in the chronological nor the geographical order. See Li Xueqin 李學勤 ed., *Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian (er)* 清華大學藏戰國竹簡（貳）(Beijing: Zhongxi shuju, 2011); the preface of "Zhanguo ce" in the *Wenxianxue lunzhu jiyao*, 1; and Zhang Zhenglang 張政烺, " 'Chunqiu shiyu' jieti"《春秋事語》解題, *Wenwu* 1977.1: 36.

[261] For "Xi nian," many scholars argue that it is similar to *Duoshi wei* 鐸氏微 (Excerpts by Duo). See Chen Wei 陳偉, "Bujin xiangqi *Duoshi wei*: du Qinghuajian 'Xi nian' suixiang" 不禁想起《鐸氏微》：讀清華簡《繫年》隨想, Bamboo and Silk Manuscripts, accessed December 19, 2011, http://www.bsm.org.cn/?chujian/5783.html; and Feng Shi 馮時, "'Zhengzi jiasang' yu *Duoshi wei*" 《鄭子家喪》與《鐸氏微》*Kaogu* 2012.2: 76–83. For "Chunqiu shiyu," Zhang Zhenglang considers the nature of the silk texts from Mawangdui to be consistent with *Duoshi wei*, viewing them as documents for teaching purposes, either selected excerpts or abridged versions. Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 also agrees that it is of the same type as *Duoshi wei* or are extracts from it. See Zhang, "Boshu 'Chunqiu shiyu' jieti" and Qiu, "Boshu 'Chunqiu shiyu' jiaodu" 帛書《春秋事語》校讀 in *Qiu Xigui xueshu wenji* 裘錫圭學術文集 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2015), vol. 2, 402.

fragmented smaller texts. Regardless of which scenario is more historically accurate, one thing remains clear: while these anecdotal collections may impart moral or political lessons, they are not systematically organized by such principles.[262] In contrast, the primary objective in Liu Xiang's compilations is to articulate the author's intent, highlighting a distinct departure from a focus on presenting historical information.

Another approach to compiling anecdotes and discourses involves using them to elucidate canons or bolster one's argument. This method is evident in the "Chushuo" 儲說 (Stories in Stock) chapters, both inner and outer, in the *Han Feizi*,[263] as well as in the *Han Shi waizhuan*, the "Dao ying" 道應 (Responses of the Way) chapter of the *Huainanzi*, and the "Lan" 覽 (Examinations) and "Lun" 論 (Discourses) sections of the *Lüshi Chunqiu*. Liu Xiang's two books at times directly incorporate content from these texts, with *Han Shi waizhuan* being a particularly common source.[264] However, Liu's methodology diverges significantly from these precedents because he liberates anecdotes from their subservient role as mere illustrative tools or supplementary examples within canonical or philosophical discussions. Instead, he promotes them to the core of his work, transforming what were previously considered expendable and interchangeable

[262] The only assumed pre-Liu text that has a very similar structure to Liu's two book, is *Yushi Chunqiu* 虞氏春秋 (Yu's Spring and Autumn Annals), which is said in the *Shiji* that this book draws from the *Chunqiu* and observes the contemporary world, containing chapters such as "Jieyi" 節義 (Integrity and Righteousness), "Chenghao" 稱號 (Titles), "Chuaimo" 揣摩 (Speculations), and "Zhengmou" 政謀 (Political Plans), in a total of eight chapters. See *Shiji* 76.2375. Unfortunately, this work has been lost, and no documents closely resembling it have been found among the materials excavated to date.

[263] Xu Jianwei emphasizes the influence of the tradition of *shuo* 說 to Liu's works. He argues that *shuo* should be considered as materials produced for the purpose of explaining classics and ideas. The subjects of these explanations are *zhuan* 傳 (commentaries) or the thoughts of philosophers. See Xu Jianwei, *Shuoyuan yanjiu*, 83.

[264] Xu Fuguan speculates that if the thirty volumes of *Xinxu* were not lost, almost all of *Han Shi waizhuan* would have been absorbed by these two books. Thus, he asserts that the creation of *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan* was based on the legacy of *Han Shi waizhuan*. See Xu Fuguan, *Liang Han sixiangshi*, 47.

elements into fundamental components. In other words, the stories stand on their own merit, without serving as accessories to superior texts.[265]

2.1.3 Reintegrating Anecdotes into the Contexts of *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan*

2.1.3.1 The Structure Across Chapters

As mentioned above, among Liu Xiang's most significant achievements in reorganizing long-standing anecdotes was his development of a novel structural context, positioning these selected narratives within a freshly conceived framework. Unfortunately, many contemporary scholars, while recognizing Liu's efforts in categorization, overlook the critical role of this context in the analysis of individual anecdotes within the structure. They isolate a specific anecdote from *Xinxu* or *Xinyuan*, compare it with versions in other transmitted or unearthed texts, and assess differences as reflections of Liu's intentions, as if the anecdotes' meanings were self-contained and unambiguous.[266] Furthermore, discussions on Liu's authorial purpose often focus exclusively on segments he directly authored, such as chapter prefaces and concluding remarks, mistakenly treating these as the sole indicators of Liu's distinctiveness from an anonymous compilation.[267]

---

[265] Although Christian Schwermann argues that the anecdotal materials in the *Xinyuan* serve to exemplify *jing* 經 (propositions), I contend that Liu's two books diverge fundamentally from earlier expository texts. The elements Schwermann identifies as *jing* within the *Xinyuan* function more as thematic summaries rather than authoritative propositions. See Schwermann, "Anecdote Collections as Argumentative Texts: The Composition of the *Shuoyuan*," in *Between History and Philosophy: Anecdotes in Early China*, eds. Paul van Els and Sarah A. Queen (Albany: SUNY Press, 2017), 148. A similar attitude towards historical stories can be seen in Liu's presentations to the throne, see the section 1.4 in the first chapter.

[266] For example, see Yao Juan's comparison of the anecdotes from Liu's two books with almost all other texts with parallel texts. Yao, "*Xinxu Shuoyuan* wenxian yanjiu."

[267] For example, Wang Qimin argues that Liu's direct involvement in the two works as an author is primarily manifested in three ways: inserting evaluations, explanations, and discussions of the original materials. See Wang Qimin, *Liu Xiang* Xinxu Shuoyuan *yanjiu*, 132. Although Schwermann also refuses to take Liu as a mere compilator or commentator but as an author, his sense of the "author" is based on Bonaventura's (1221–1274) authorial mode of the "auctor," i.e., of "someone who combines received textual materials and self-composed texts, while treating the received material as secondary." However, I contest the notion that Liu would ever consider the received material as secondary. Contrary to Schwermann's interpretation, the received texts constitute the core of Liu's two books. This perspective emphasizes Liu's

This perspective, heavily influenced by modern notions of authorship, may ignore what Liu Xiang, Liu Xin, and Ban Gu considered the essential contribution of these two works: the power of *xu*. In other words, understanding the authorial intent demands a consideration of the overall context, not merely isolated excerpts. This section will employ examples from *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan* to illustrate how the deliberate arrangement influences the interpretation of individual sections, underscoring the importance of contextual analysis in appreciating these texts.

Before delving into the structure of *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan*, it is crucial to ascertain whether our current versions of them remain largely true to Liu's original composition. Regrettably, both works have suffered extensive damage and partial loss through their transmission history, prompting recovery and editing efforts made by Zeng Gong 曾鞏 (1019–1083). According to the *Hanshu* and Liu's preface to *Xinyuan*, the *Xinxu* originally comprised thirty chapters, while the *Xinyuan* had twenty.[268] By the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), however, Zeng managed to recover only ten chapters of *Xinxu*, and even these chapters are likely incomplete, given that the current sixth and tenth chapters are considerably shorter than the others. This indicates that over two-thirds of the original *Xinxu* has been lost, and it remains uncertain whether the current chapter division in it (e.g., the five chapters titled "Zashi" 雜事 [Miscellaneous Affairs]) aligns with Liu's original arrangement. In contrast, *Xinyuan* has been better preserved, and the existing version more or less retains the original structure.[269] Therefore, in discussing the overarching framework and chapter interrelations, the focus will primarily be on the *Xinyuan*.

---

reverence for and reliance on existing sources, positioning them not as supplementary but as central to his literary and philosophical endeavors. See Schwermann, "Anecdote Collections as Argumentative Texts," 170 note 8.

[268] The biography of Liu mentions in total fifty chapters of *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan*, and the preface to *Xinyuan* mentions twenty chapters. See *Hanshu* 36.1958.

[269] For the textual history of *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan*, see Xu Fuguan, *Liang Han sixiangshi*, 42; and Xu Jianwei, *Shuoyuan yanjiu*, 45. Both scholars agree that the current *Xinyuan* keeps the main body of the original version.

The structural composition of *Xinyuan*, as delineated by the thematic and sequential organization of its chapter titles, has been widely recognized by scholars.[270] Yet, detailed discussions on the principles guiding this organization are scarce. Xu Xingwu 徐興無 provides a compelling categorization of the text's twenty chapters into nine thematic groups:

> ①Ch.1 君道 "The Way of a Ruler," Ch.2 臣術 "The Craft of an Officer";
> ②Ch.3 建本 "Building the Root," Ch.4 立節 "Establishing Integrity";
> ③Ch.5 貴德 "Prizing Virtue," Ch.6 復恩 "Repaying Favors";
> ④Ch.7 政理 "Principles of Government," Ch.8 尊賢 "Honoring the Worthy";
> ⑤Ch.9 正諫 "Upright Remonstrance," Ch.10 敬慎 "Diligent Care";
> ⑥Ch.11 善說 "Skill in Argument," Ch.12 奉使 "The Performance of Missions";
> ⑦Ch.13 權謀 "Judgment and Strategy," Ch.14 至公 "Impartiality," Ch.15 指武 "Military Affairs";
> ⑧Ch.16 談叢 "Aphorisms," Ch.17 雜言 "Miscellaneous Discourses";
> ⑨Ch.18 辨物 "Discrimination," Ch.19 修文 "The Cultivation of Civil Order," Ch.20 反質 "Returning to the Essence."[271]

Certain pairs, like the initial chapters on the ruler's Way and the ministers' crafts, the collection of sayings and discussions in chapters 16 and 17, and the concluding chapters on the interplay between refinement and essence, showcase an intuitive correlation. Nevertheless, some groupings lack apparent internal coherence, and Xu's criteria for categorization remain unspecified. Questions arise, such as the rationale behind positioning a chapter on impartiality amidst discussions on strategy and military affairs, or the connection between discerning myriad things and the subsequent discussions on refinement and essence. To understand the structural intricacy of these twenty chapters, an examination of the initial chapters is essential. These opening segments not

[270] For example, Xu Fuguan argues that *Xinyuan*'s arrangement of chapters reflecting an ideological system, though he does not provide clear explanation of the "ideological system." See Xu Fuguan, *Liang Han sixiangshi*, 41.
[271] Translation of *Xinyuan* revised from Eric Henry trans, *Garden of Eloquence/ Shuoyuan 說苑* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021). For the categorization, see Xu Xingwu, *Liu Xiang pingzhuan*, 411.

only encapsulate themes elaborated upon in subsequent chapters but also set the stage for the overarching narrative.

The initial two chapters focusing on the ruler and the subordinate undeniably set the thematic foundation for the subsequent discussions. Yet, the significance of the third chapter, "Jianben" 建本, should not be overlooked as it elucidates the intricate relationship between the subjects of the first two chapters. The chapter opens with a reference to Confucius's teachings on the importance of establishing a strong foundation, positing that the ruler is the foundation of a state, since a state led by a righteous ruler is secure from peril (有正君者無危國). It further delves into Confucius's notion of the "six roots" (*liuben* 六本), which are essential for the moral development of subordinates. The author then concludes by underscoring the reciprocal relationship between the ruler, ministers, and the people as a continuous cycle without a beginning or end (夫君臣之與百姓，轉相為本，如循環無端). This mutual dependency is succinctly expressed as, "The ruler considers the ministers as the foundation, and the ministers regard the ruler as the foundation" (君以臣為本，臣以君為本).[272] This chapter not only bridges the themes of the preceding two chapters but also highlights the critical role of mutual support and contribution within the governance structure. Without this pivotal chapter, the core principles outlined in the book would remain incomplete, suggesting that this chapter, along with the first two, should be viewed as a whole that provides the comprehensive framework for the entire text.

A parallel structure is observed towards the book's conclusion. Following two chapters of miscellaneous materials (chapters 16 and 17), a trio of chapters appears again, presenting "Bianwu" 辨物 in a manner seemingly disconnected from the final two chapters on *wen* 文

[272] *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 3.59.

(refinement) and *zhi* 質 (essence). However, the opening discussion in chapter 19, "Xiuwen" 脩文, ingeniously links these two themes to the broader cosmic principles of Heaven and Earth, thereby reflecting the text's intricate design.

> *Shang* is equated with *chang* (constancy), where *chang* signifies *zhi* (simplicity), corresponding to Heaven; *Xia* is associated with *da* (greatness), where *da* is connected to *wen* (culture), corresponding to Earth.
> 商者，常也，常者質，質主天；夏者，大也，大者，文也，文主地。[273]

Also at the beginning of the previous chapter, "Bianwu," there is a line on how human should interact with Heaven and Earth, emulating the sages' approach.

> *Yijing* says, "Look up to observe the pattern of Heaven, and bow down to examine the pattern of Earth, thereby understanding the principles of darkness and light." Storing the function of celestial phenomena, geographical features, and human emotions in the heart, and following the repository of sage wisdom.
> 《易》曰：「仰以觀於天文，俯以察於地理，是故知幽明之故。」夫天文地理、人情之效存於心，則聖智之府。[274]

This perspective on humans' position among Heaven and Earth echoes another important concept in the *Yijing*, *sancai* 三才 (three elements). One commentary on the hexagrams suggests that the six lines of a single diagram collectively represent the entirety of heaven, earth, and man.[275]

---

[273] Ibid. 19.476. Connecting *wen* and *zhi* with Heaven and Earth seems to be a popular practice at Liu's time, though their corresponding relationship might be different. For example, Yang Xiong claims that "Heaven's nature is *wen* and Earth's nature is *zhi*, their positions cannot be exchanged" (天文地質，不易厥位), see *Taixuan jizhu*, 205. The direct source of this line might be Dong Zhongshu's statement in the *Chunqiu fanlu* that "the king's system consists of Shang and Xia, *zhi* and *wen*. Shang's *zhi* corresponds to Heaven, Xia's *wen* corresponds to Earth, and the *Chunqiu* corresponds to humanity" (王者之制，一商一夏，一質一文。商質者主天，夏文者主地，春秋主人), which explicitly reveals the three fundamental elements in their construction. See Dong, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 204.

[274] *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 18.442.

[275] For example, in the "Shuo Gua" 說卦, an explanation goes, "The way of Heaven is established as Yin and Yang; the way of Earth is established as softness and hardness; the way of Human is established as benevolence and righteousness. Integrating the three elements and doubling them, thus the *Yijing* is composed of six lines to form hexagrams" (立天之道曰陰與陽，立地之道曰柔與剛，立人之道曰仁與義。兼三才而兩之，故《易》六畫而成卦). See *Zhouji zhengyi* 周易正義, Ruan Yuan ed., *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue shubanshe, 2000), 383–84.

By the Western Han period, this tripartite structure had become a foundational lens through which the world was interpreted.[276] Liu Xiang, renowned for his scholarship on the *Yijing*,[277] was well-versed in this theory. His organizational strategy for his work, whether deliberate or instinctive, mirrors this cosmic framework, employing sets of three chapters to both open and conclude his text: the ruler and the concept of *zhi* align with Heaven; the ministers and the *wen* align with Earth; and finally, an intermediary element bridges these domains, symbolizing humans' mediating role. Thus, the concluding triad of chapters in *Xinyuan* should be viewed as a cohesive unit that encapsulates the interconnectedness of these themes, mirroring the structure established by the initial trio of chapters.

The relationships between the chapters situated in the first half of the *Xinyuan* are intricately linked to the themes established in the initial three chapters, which collectively serve as the outline for the entire work. Upon examining the anecdotes and discussions within these outline chapters, it becomes evident that they explore key themes such as the integrity of ministers, the value of virtue, the elevation of the worthy, the significance of remonstration by ministers, and the importance of being respectful and prudent. Notably, these themes predominantly feature within the first ten chapters, ending with "Jingshen" 敬慎. The themes in the latter chapters, such as persuasion, strategic manipulation, or military affairs, are absent from the three outline chapters. The statement found close to the end of "Jingshen," potentially written by Liu himself, may offer insights into the structure of middle chapters:

[276] For example, in the *Chunqiu fanlu*, there is a statement that "Heaven, Earth, and Human are the foundation of all things. Heaven gives birth to them, Earth nurtures them, and Human completes them.... These three support each other like hands and feet, together forming a body, and none can be absent" (天地人，萬物之本也。天生之，地養之，人成之……三者相為手足，合以成禮，不可一無也). See *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 168.
[277] *Hanshu* 36.1967.

A: To govern oneself, one must diligently observe five fundamentals. First, be gentle with benevolence; second, be sincere with trustworthiness; third, though wealthy and noble, never dare to be arrogant towards others; fourth, be respectful with reverence; fifth, be tolerant with tranquility. Reflect on these five, and no calamitous fate shall befall.
B: It is said: "Able to govern with respect and assist the heavenly timing, calamitous fate will not come, nor disaster approach." To respect others is not just about respecting them, but respecting oneself; to value others is not merely valuing them, but valuing oneself.
C1: In the past, I have seen the heaven rain metal, stones, and blood;
C2: I have seen ten suns and four moons appear simultaneously, sliding on the heaven;
C3: I have witnessed the collapse of high mountains, the blockage of deep valleys, the destruction of great cities and palaces, the downfall of powerful states;
C4: I have seen high mountains split, sand in deep abysses run depleted, the nobles dismembered by five carts;
C5: I have observed dense forests running out of trees, flat lands turning into ravines, gentlemen reducing to charioteers;
C6: I have seen rivers dry up into pits, elms and mulberry harvested in deep winter; snow and frost rain in midsummer; lords of thousands of chariots and masters of tens of thousands die unburied.
C7: Therefore, the noble man cultivates his reputation through respect, while the petty man uses respect to avoid punishment. How can one not be cautious about these five fundamentals!
A 凡司其**身**，必慎五本。一曰：柔以**仁**；二曰：誠以**信**；三曰：富而貴，毋敢以驕**人**；四曰：恭以**敬**；五曰：寬以**靜**。思此五者，則無凶**命**。
B 曰：能治敬以助天**時**，凶命不至而禍不**來**。敬人者，非敬人也，自敬也；貴人者，非貴人也，自貴也。
C1 昔者，吾嘗見天雨金石與血；
C2 吾嘗見四月十日並**出**，有與天**滑**；
C3 吾嘗見高山之崩，深谷之窒，大都王宮之破，大國之滅；
C4 吾嘗見高山之為**裂**，深淵之沙**竭**，貴人之車**裂**；
C5 吾嘗見稠林之無**木**，平原為谿**谷**，君子為御**僕**；
C6 吾嘗見江河乾為**坑**，正冬采榆**桑**，仲夏雨雪**霜**，千乘之君、萬乘之主，死而不**葬**。
C7 是故君子敬以成其**名**，小人敬以除其**刑**，奈何無戒而不慎五本哉！[278]

There are several notable points in this paragraph. First, the concept of *ben* 本 (root) is frequently discussed in preceding chapters and within "Jingshen." However, following this discussion, the term *ben* is absent from chapters 11 to 15.[279] This absence aligns with the earlier observation that

[278] *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 10.263.
[279] The sole exception is a reference in chapter 15. This reference employs *ben* 本 to denote "inside China" and contrasts it with *mo* 末, meaning "outside." However, since this mention does not engage in a

themes introduced in the first three chapters persist only through the initial ten chapters. Second, this excerpt uniquely features the first-person pronoun *wu* 吾 outside of direct quotations in the whole *Xinyuan*, suggesting it likely represents Liu's own voice. Third, the paragraph can be dissected into three sections based on rhyming patterns (with rhyme words marked in bold). Part A's rhymes conclude with the sounds [éŋ]/[ən(h)], while Part B's rhymes end in [ə]/[əh]. The rhyming scheme of Part C is more varied, with each subsection adopting different rhymes, except for C1 and C3, which lack rhyming.[280] Moreover, the sentence lengths from C1 to C7 vary, with C4, C5, and C6 being particularly well-structured. Thus, this paragraph, especially Part C, can be regarded as a *fu* 賦 (rhapsody) by Liu employing a first-person narrative to underscore the significance of prudence regarding *ben*, resonating with the main theme of chapter 3.[281] Considering the structure of chapters, this *fu* might be considered Liu's concluding reflection on the first ten pivotal chapters, which I propose to call the "inner chapters" of the *Xinyuan*. Subsequently, while themes in chapters 11 to 15 diverge from those in the outline chapters, they still illuminate crucial aspects of governance and subordinates' abilities, warranting their classification as "outer chapters." Chapters 16 and 17, being diverse compilations, are termed "miscellaneous chapters." Lastly, chapters 18, 19, and 20 serve as the final chapters, mirroring the structure introduced by the first three chapters. In summary, the structure of the *Xinyuan* can be represented as follows in the figure below.

---

substantive discussion of the concept of *ben*, it is not included in the scope of this examination. See *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 15.369.

[280] The reconstruction of Western Han pronunciation is based on Sergei Anatolyevich Starostin's (1953–2005) work. See the "Bigchina" database on the website of "The Tower of Babel," accessed February 11, 2024, https://starlingdb.org/cgi-bin/query.cgi?basename=\data\china\bigchina&root=config&morpho=0.

[281] This phenomenon reminds us of the composition of the final chapter of the *Huainanzi*, which is also demonstrated to be a *fu* 賦. See Kern, "Creating a Book and Performing It: The 'Yao lüe' Chapter of the *Huainanzi* as a Western Han *Fu*," in *The* Huainanzi *and Textual Production in Early China*, eds. Sarah A. Queen and Michael Puett (Boston: Brill, 2014), 124–150.

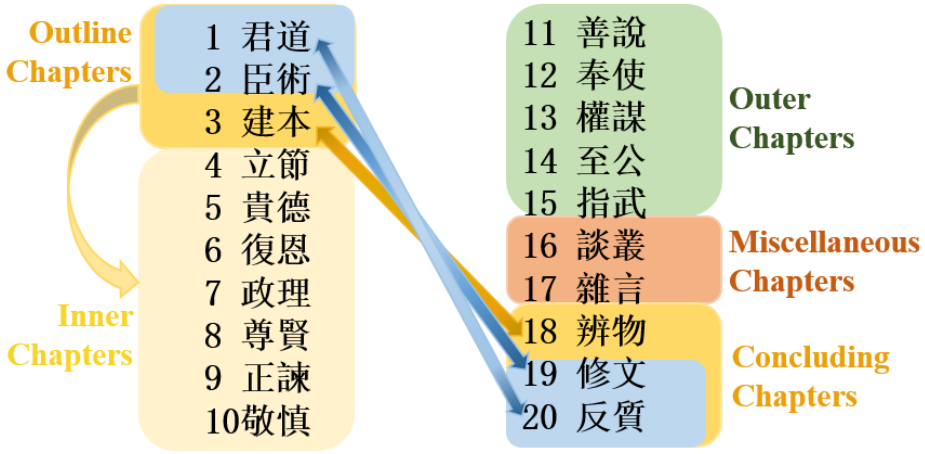

Figure 4. The structure of *Xinyuan*'s chapters

Apparently, the design of this structure is deeply influenced by Liu's editorial project. As demonstrated in the preface to *Yanzi chunqiu*, Liu consciously categorizes available materials into several groups based on their relevance to presumed intentions and arguments of the author, ranging from closely related to less relevant, and finally to disordered materials that defy easy categorization. When establishing the framework of his own book, despite having the option to integrate the scattered materials into various thematic chapters, Liu chooses to adhere to the classification system he applied in organizing the imperial library's texts. Furthermore, Liu introduces two novel sets of chapters at the book's outset and conclusion—triple chapters that likely emulate the triadic harmony of Heaven, Earth, and Human, echoing the cosmological significance of the three essential elements of the universe. This method reflects not only an editorial preference but also a philosophical stance, underscoring the importance of *xu* at a cosmic level, as Ban emphasizes in the "Yiwen zhi." Through this approach, Liu not only categorizes historical anecdotes and discourses from an editor's perspective, but also aligns his work with a broader, natural order, mirroring the cosmic principles that govern the universe.

2.1.3.2 The Context Within One Chapter

Liu Xiang's meticulous design in structuring his two books is evident not only in the overarching framework of chapters but also in the nuanced arrangement of sections within each chapter. In many chapters of *Xinyuan*, Liu purposefully positions negative examples or "miscellaneous cases"[282] towards the end, serving as cautionary tales against the devaluation of virtues highlighted earlier. For example, at the end of chapter 5, "Guide" 貴德, counterexamples showcase individuals prioritizing personal gain or rivalry over virtue, leading to undesirable outcomes. In instances where chapters encompass both negative examples and miscellaneous anecdotes, Liu systematically positions the latter after the former. For example, chapter 9, "Zhengjian" 正諫 emphasizes the importance of subordinates providing skillful and loyal advice to rulers. The concluding sections (9.19–23) depict the dire outcomes for rulers who ignore wise remonstrations, followed by three miscellaneous sections: 9.24 recounts a story of a white dragon transforming into a fish, resembling the "minor sayings" Liu Xiang opted to exclude from *Xinyuan*; 9.25 broadens the concept of heeding advice, suggesting it applies across all social levels; and the final section, 9.26 stresses the importance of the rulers fostering an environment conducive for subordinates to offer guidance.[283] Similarly, the main body of chapter 12, "Fengshi" 奉使 delineates the exemplary achievements of a capable envoy who not only advances personally but also benefits his state. Sections 12.18 and 12.19 serve as cautionary tales of envoys whose incompetence leads to disgrace and calamity. These are followed by two ending sections 12.20 and 12.21, which, while generally praising the envoys for their insight and eloquence, also point out

[282] The phrase refers to some segments within the chapters that diverge from the primary subject matter, encompassing instances that are not entirely aligned with the chapter's main theme (such as in 13.48), incorporate mythical elements (for example, 4.24), or highlight the theme from an alternative perspective not prominently addressed in the main body of the text (as seen in 11.28).
[283] *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 9.237–239.

their slight imperfections.[284] Hence, these two sections serve to complement the two polarized portrayals of envoys in the preceding texts. This pattern within chapters reflects Liu's adherence to a triadic structure of "inner, outer, and miscellaneous" elements, even at the sectional level.

Additionally, the sequencing of sections is also deliberately structured. For example, in the "Jieshi" 節士 chapter of *Xinxu*, the themes of sections 7.12, 7.13, and 7.14: loyalty, trustworthiness, and integrity, mirror the order in which Liu enumerates these core moral virtues in the preface of the "Lijie" 立節 chapter in the *Xinyuan*.[285] This alignment underscores the coherence between Liu's introductory remarks and the thematic progression within his chapters, even across his two books. Furthermore, the arrangement of sections 5.10, 5.11, and 5.12 in the "Guide" chapter of *Xinyuan*, although directly draw from the *Yanzi chunqiu*, are listed in a different sequence.[286] In the *Xinyuan*, Duke Jing's actions unfold in a gradual expansion of benevolence: from returning nestlings to their nest (5.10), to recognizing and addressing the needs of a young beggar upon Yanzi's advice (5.11), and to ultimately directing his officials to support an elderly, hungry man, and further extending care to all vulnerable individuals under his rule, culminating in the declaration that "the elderly and weak are cared for, and the widowed have a family" (老弱有養，鰥寡有室). This progression illustrates a deliberate narrative strategy, highlighting a shift from concern for animals to the welfare of all subjects.

---

[284] Ibid. 12.308–310.

[285] "What a *shi* deems shameful is to not be associated with loyalty when the world values it, to not be associated with trustworthiness when the world cherishes it, and to not be associated with integrity when the world esteems it" (夫士之所恥者，天下舉忠而士不與焉，舉信而士不與焉，舉廉而士不與焉). Ibid. 4.78.

[286] The sequence in the transmitted *Yanzi chunqiu* exchanges 5.10 and 5.12. Though there are several anecdotes probably from a pre-Liu collection of Yanzi-related stories excavated from the Yinqueshan tomb, since the bamboo slips are damaged, it is almost impossible to recover the sequence of sections in it. For a discussion of the excavated *Yanzi chunqiu*, see Pian Yuqian 駢宇騫, *Yinqueshan zhujian* Yanzi chunqiu *jiaoshi* 銀雀山竹簡《晏子春秋》校釋 (Taipei: wanjuanlou tushu youxiangongsi, 2000).

The placement of sections within Liu's works significantly influences their interpretation, representing a significant innovation in the genre of anecdotal collections, which typically consist of unconnected stories. Even in instances where stories are classified thematically, as seen in the "Lan" and "Lun" sections of the *Lüshi chunqiu*, their sequence is generally not considered significant. Contrary to this, Liu's editorial strategy reveals how strategic arrangement of section can profoundly influence their interpretations. This approach will be explored through three scenarios: the juxtaposition of similar sections within a single chapter; the alignment of analogous sections across different chapters or between Liu's two books; and the comparison of similar sections situated in diverse works.

In the *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan*, Liu employs a method of juxtaposing sections with analogous structures to highlight their themes, though these sections are not strictly parallel texts in many cases. This technique is exemplified in the "Jieshi" chapter of *Xinxu*, where two narratives underscore the virtue of integrity over material gain:

> There was a person from Song who acquired a piece of jade and offered it to the Minister of Works, Zihan, but Zihan refused to accept it. The person who offered the jade said, "I showed it to a jade expert, who considered it a treasure, and that is why I dared to offer it to you." Zihan replied, "I treasure my lack of greed, while you treasure the jade. If you give it to me, we would both lose what we treasure. It is better for each person to keep their treasure."
> 宋人有得玉者，獻諸司城子罕，子罕不受。獻玉者曰：「以示玉人，玉人以為寶，故敢獻之。」子罕曰：「我以不貪為寶，爾以為寶，若與我者，皆喪寶也，不若人有其寶。」
>
> In the past, there was someone who offered fish to the Prime Minister of Zheng, but the Prime Minister did not accept it. Someone asked the Prime Minister, "You love fish, so why do you not accept it?" He replied, "It is because I love fish that I do not accept it. If I accept the fish, I will lose my salary, and then I will have no means to buy fish; if I do not accept it, I will keep my salary and can eat fish for the rest of my life."
> 昔者，有餽魚於鄭相者，鄭相不受。或謂鄭相曰：「子嗜魚，何故不受？」對曰：「吾以嗜魚，故不受魚。受魚失祿，無以食魚；不受得祿，終身食魚。」[287]

[287] *Xinxu jiaoshi* 7.15, 917.

Within this chapter containing fewer than 30 sections, the presence of at least six pairs of analogous texts, including the examples mentioned above, highlights a deliberate editorial strategy. Despite varying characters, locales, eras, and dialogues, the consistency of themes across these pairs underscores an editorial intention behind such arrangements. In chapter 1, my analysis of Liu Xiang's memorials to the throne highlights his effort to include as broad a spectrum of historical examples as possible. Liu posited that a principle only becomes worthy of serving as a guideline when a multitude of precedents coalesces to reveal a consistent pattern. This approach, however, was not pioneered by Liu but has its roots in the traditions of the *Chunqiu*. As outlined in the *Liji*, the essence of *Chunqiu* teaching involves the ability to "group phrases and compare texts" (*zhuci bishi* 屬辭比事[288]),[289] a method that classifies and scrutinizes records by grouping similar occurrences together. This technique, aimed at uncovering the nuanced implications of praise and criticism, is a hallmark of the three commentaries on the *Chunqiu*, especially those by Gongyang and Guliang, two traditions that Liu Xiang revered.[290] In the *Chunqiu fanlu*, Dong Zhongshu further elucidates this method:

> Therefore, in discussing the *Chunqiu*, one should integrate and comprehend it thoroughly, pursue it through connections, quintuple its comparisons, pair its examples, overview its sequences, eliminate its redundancies, thus the way of human is thoroughly permeated, and the law of kings is established.

---

[288] Paul Fahr notes that by the time of the Western Han, the word *shi* 事 had come to convey a rather abstract notion of "text." In this case, what scholars are comparing are not the events themselves, but rather the written records of these events. Consequently, I have chosen to translate *shi* as "texts" rather than "affairs." See Fahr, "On the Meaning of *shi* 事 in Han Historiography," *T'oung Pao* 107 (2021): 196.
[289] *Liji zhengyi*, 1597.
[290] Xu Fuguan examines Liu's learning of different traditions of *Chunqiu* and finds that all texts referred to by the name *Chunqiu* in Liu's books belong to either the Gongyang or Guliang commentaries, extending even to Dong Zhongshu's *Chunqiu fanlu*. In the *Xinxu*, the use of Guliang Commentary exceeds that of Gongyang, while in the *Xinyuan*, the use of Gongyang Commentary far surpasses that of Guliang Commentary. See Xu Fuguan, *Liang Han sixiangshi*, 53.

是故論《春秋》者，合而通之，緣而求之，五其比，偶其類，覽其緒，屠其贅，是以人道浹而王法立。[291]

In many places of the *Chunqiu fanlu*, Dong Zhongshu's extraction of stylistic and normative principles from the *Chunqiu* clearly employs this method.[292] The instruction to "pair its examples" underscores the methodological importance of juxtaposing similar instances, facilitating the extraction and establishment of general rules.

As an esteemed scholar of *Chunqiu* who frequently referenced it throughout his two books, Liu must have been well-versed in this analytical approach. It is likely that he deliberately applied this exegetical principle in the organization of his sections, thereby relieving readers of the need to pair analogous texts themselves; Liu had already juxtaposed them to underscore the principles he aimed to convey. As demonstrated in the analysis of Liu's memorials, the employment of paired anecdotes significantly amplifies the strength of his arguments: the authority of historical precedents becomes pronounced when history consistently validates a particular pattern.

The presence of analogous sections across different chapters within a single book or between *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan* is also a notable feature, despite Liu's claim in the preface to *Xinyuan* that he had removed repetitive content already included in the *Xinxu*. Criticism has arisen from scholars like Huang Zhen 黃震 (1213–1280), who have identified parallel anecdotes both within and across Liu's compilations, which led to their dissatisfaction with the lack of discernment.[293] Some scholars justify Liu's approach by comparing it to the *Han Feizi*, where variations of a text are often prefaced with the phrase "one says" (*yiyue* 一曰), indicating that maintaining different

[291] *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 32–33.
[292] See Zhao Youlin 趙友林, Chunqiu *sanzhuan shufa yili yanjiu*《春秋》三傳書法義例研究 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2010), 24.
[293] See Huang Zhen 黃震, *Huangshi richao* 黃氏日抄, annot. Wang Tingqia 王廷洽 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2019), 67–68.

versions of the same story was a common practice.[294] However, I argue that Liu's approach significantly diverges from that found in the *Han Feizi*. The use of *yiyue* in the *Han Feizi* is mostly limited to the inner and outer "Chushuo" chapters, where anecdotes serve purely as tools for expounding philosophical classics, and slightly different versions of a story do not alter their illustrative function or interpretation within the text's framework. In contrast, the sections that appear similar in Liu's two books have distinct implications due to their respective contexts. For example, two sections that may seem identical in isolation, one in the "Zhengli" 政理 chapter and another in the "Zhengjian" chapter of *Xinyuan*, actually emphasize different aspects when considered within their specific contexts.

> Gongshu Wenzi served as the Chancellor for the state of Chu. Within three years, the people dared not enter the court. Gongshu zi met him and said, "This is stern." Wenzi replied, "The strictness of the court, could it indeed hinder the governance of the state?" Gongshu zi responded, "When strictness leads to silence below, silence below leads to deafness above. If the deaf and the mute cannot communicate, how can there be governance of the state..."
> 公叔文子為楚令尹，三年，民無敢入朝。公叔子見曰：「嚴矣。」文子曰：「朝廷之嚴也，寧云妨國家之治哉？」公叔子曰：「嚴則下喑，下喑則上聾，聾、喑不能相通，何國之治也？……」[295]

> Yanzi replied to Duke Jing, "While [you are] in the court, are you too stern?" The Duke said, "Being stern in the court, then how could this harm the governance of the state?" Yanzi responded, "If [you are] stern in the court, then those below will not speak; if those below do not speak, then those above will not hear. Not speaking from below is called muteness, not hearing from above is called deafness. If there is muteness and deafness, then how is it not harmful to the governance of the state..."
> 晏子復於景公曰：「朝居嚴乎？」公曰：「朝居嚴，則曷害於治國家哉？」晏子對曰：「朝居嚴則下無言，下無言則上無聞矣。下無言則謂之喑，上無聞則謂之聾。聾喑，則非害治國家如何也！……」[296]

[294] Quoted from Zuo Songchao 左松超, *Shuoyuan jizheng* 說苑集證 (Taipei: Guoli bianyiguan, 2001), 1413.
[295] *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 7.145.
[296] Ibid. 9.239.

Upon closer examination, the two anecdotes above, while sharing an almost identical theme and structure about the pitfalls of rulers' sternness in court, occupy unique positions within their respective texts that significantly influence their interpretation. The first anecdote is situated between discussions on the consequences of harsh laws provoking public unrest (令苛則民亂) and a narrative of Confucius advising a ruler on the reciprocal nature of love (愛人者則人愛之). This placement suggests that the anecdote serves to underscore the broader theme of eschewing severity for a more compassionate governance approach. Conversely, the second anecdote is located at the conclusion of a chapter that underscores the value of remonstration, shifting the emphasis from benevolence to creating an environment where advisors feel empowered to speak freely. This distinction in thematic focus illustrates the critical role of context in interpreting these anecdotes. It highlights a fundamental departure in Liu's compilation technique from earlier anecdotal collections: Liu's strategic placement within a carefully constructed framework imbues the anecdotes with specific, non-interchangeable meanings. Thus, these stories transform from isolated narratives into integral components of Liu's textual universe, where their specific locations are pivotal.

The shared anecdotes between *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan* further exemplify this principle. Although contemporary scholars might label them as "repetitive," Liu's deliberate contextualization endows each instance with unique interpretative possibilities. As such, when these anecdotes are recontextualized, their potential meanings are honed to convey distinct messages, underscoring Liu's innovative approach to textual arrangement. For example, the two anecdotes below are excerpts from the "Zunxian" 尊賢 chapter of *Xinyuan* and the first "Zashi" chapter of *Xinxu*.

Xinyuan	*Xinxu*

Zhao Jianzi was enjoying a boat ride on the West River and sighed, "If only I could have wise men to stay with." 趙簡子游於西河而樂之，歎曰：「安得賢士而與處焉？」	Duke Ping of Jin was floating on the West River when he sighed and said in midstream, "Alas! If only I could have wise men to share this joy with." 晉平公浮西河，中流而歎曰：「嗟乎！安得賢士與共此樂者。」
The boatman, Gu Sang, knelt and replied, "… Now, if men with feet do not come, is it because my lord does not cherish them?" 舟人古桑跪而對曰：「……今士有足而不來者，此是吾君不好之乎？」	The boatman, Gu Sang, responded, "… If you truly cherish wise men, then wise men will come to you!" 船人固桑進對曰：「……今君苟好士，則賢士至矣！」
Zhao Jianzi said, "I have thousand guests to the left and right at my door. If they do not have enough breakfast, [I will] collect market taxes [for them] in the evening; if they do not have enough dinner, [I will] collect market taxes in the [next] morning. Can I still be said to not cherish wise men?" 趙簡子曰：「吾門左右客千人，朝食不足，暮收市征；暮食不足，朝收市征。吾尚可謂不好士乎？」	Duke Ping said, "Gu Sang, come here! I have more than three thousand guests at my door. If they do not have enough breakfast, [I will] collect market taxes [for them] in the evening; if they do not have enough dinner, [I will] collect market taxes in the [next] morning. Can I still be said to not cherish wise men?" 平公曰：「固桑來！吾門下食客者三千餘人，朝食不足，暮收市租；暮食不足，朝收市租，吾尚可謂不好士乎？」
The boatman, Gu Sang, replied, "The great swan flies high and far, relying on its six feathers [on the wings]. The feathers on its back and the down under its belly, without fixed numbers, if taken away by the handful, would not make its flight any lower; if added by the handful, would not make its flight any higher. I wonder if the thousand guests at your door also serve the function of the six feathers, or are they just fine feathers." 舟人古桑對曰：「鴻鵠高飛遠翔，其所恃者六翮也。背上之毛，腹下之毳，無尺寸之數，去之滿把，飛不能為之益卑，益之滿把，飛不能為之益高。不知門下左右客千人者，亦有六翮之用乎？將盡毛毳也。」[297]	Gu Sang replied, "Now, the great swan flies high and pierces the sky, mainly relying on its six feathers [on the wings]. The fur beneath its belly and the feathers on its back, if even a handful were added or removed, would not affect its ability to fly high or low. I wonder whether the more than three thousand guests at your door are six feathers or just the fur on the belly and back?" Duke Ping remained silent and did not respond. 固桑對曰：「今夫鴻鵠高飛沖天，然其所恃者六翮耳，夫腹下之毳，背上之毛，增去一把，飛不為高下。不知君之食客三千餘人六翮邪？將腹背之毳也？」平公默然而不應焉。[298]

Table 2. Two similar anecdotes in the *Xinyu* and *Xinyuan*

Again, despite featuring different characters, Zhao Jianzi and Duke Ping of Jin, the two anecdotes share nearly identical structures and many parallel lines. However, their implications must be discerned within their unique contexts. Following the narrative in the *Xinyuan*, a dialogue

[297] Ibid. 8.189–190.
[298] *Xinxu jiaoshi* 1.15, 120–26.

involving Chunyu Kun 淳于髡 (fl. late fourth century BCE) criticizes the current ruler for his failure to appreciate wise individuals, a stance the ruler counters by claiming a lack of distinguished men in the state. Chunyu then underscores the ruler's failure to actively seek out wise men among the people, opting instead for passively waiting for sage-like figures. This stance, Chunyu suggests, would lead to a mutual lack of appreciation between the rulers and potential sages if they indeed exist. These two stories of Chunyu and Zhao Jianzi highlight contrasting approaches to treating wise men. The story of Zhao Jianzi exemplifies a failure to discern the true wise men from many, mistaking quantity for quality. In contrast, the ruler in Chunyu's story passively expects the emergence of the ideal wise men. This dichotomy underscores the nuanced theme in Zhao Jianzi's story: the importance of a balanced approach to identifying wise individuals. Meanwhile, in the *Xinxu*, the narrative is followed by Song Yu's 宋玉 comments on the challenge of appreciating sophisticated wisdom, pointing out that the difficulty lies in the ruler's limited capacity to recognize profound insights and deeds. Thus, Duke Ping's story reflects the issue of failing to acknowledge genuine wisdom. The analysis presented above is made possible through the method of "pair its examples," a technique prominently featured in Liu's editorial approach.

Finally, extending the analysis to similar sections across Liu's compilations and other works reveals the limitations of viewing anecdotes as self-contained narratives. Variations in the tale of Yang Zhen 羊斟 across the *Xinyuan*, *Zuozhuan*, and *Lüshi Chunqiu* challenge the notion of anecdotes with straightforward, unambiguous meanings, advocating for a contextual approach to understanding Liu's texts.

Xinyuan	*Zuozhuan*	*Lüshi Chunqiu*
When Zheng attacked Song, the people of Song were	Before the battle, Hua Yuan slaughtered sheep to	Prince Guisheng of Zheng led troops to attack Song. Hua Yuan commanded the

preparing for battle. Hua Yuan was slaughtering sheep to feed the soldiers, but his charioteer, Yang Zhen, did not partake in the meal. During the battle, Yang Zhen said, "For the mutton soup of the past, you were in charge. For today's matter, I am in charge." Together with Hua Yuan, he charged into the Zheng army, leading to the defeat of the Song forces. 鄭伐宋，宋人將與戰。華元殺羊食士，其御羊斟不與焉。及戰，曰：「疇昔之羊羹，子為政，今日之事，我為政。」與華元馳入鄭師，宋人敗績。[299]	feed his soldiers, but his charioteer, Yang Zhen, was not involved. During the battle, Yang Zhen said, "For the mutton of the past, you were in charge. For today's matter, I am in charge." He charged into the Zheng army with [Hua], resulting in a defeat. 將戰，華元殺羊食士，其御羊斟不與，及戰，曰：「疇昔之羊，子為政，今日之事，我為政。」與入鄭師，故敗。	Song troops to meet them at Daji, with Yang Zhen as his charioteer. On the day before the battle, Hua Yuan slaughtered sheep to feed his soldiers, but Yang Zhen was not involved. On the next day of the battle, Yang Zhen said to Hua Yuan, "For yesterday's matter, you were in charge; for today's matter, I am in charge." He then drove the chariot straight into the Zheng troops. The Song army was defeated, and Hua Yuan was captured. 鄭公子歸生率師伐宋。宋華元率師應之大棘，羊斟御。明日將戰，華元殺羊饗士，羊斟不與焉。明日戰，恕謂華元曰：「昨日之事，子為制；今日之事，我為制。」遂驅入於鄭師。宋師敗績，華元虜。
	The gentlemen said that Yang Zhen was inhumane because due to his personal grievance, he caused the defeat of his state and the decimation of its people. 君子謂羊斟非人也，以其私憾，敗國殄民。[300]	...Therefore, in all battles, one must thoroughly prepare and be well-informed, knowing both the enemy and oneself, before one can be assured of victory. ……故凡戰必悉熟偏備，知彼知己，然後可也。[301]

Table 3. The tale of Yang Zhen in the *Xinyuan*, *Zuozhuan*, and *Lüshi Chunqiu*

The version in the *Xinyuan* stands without an accompanying commentary, directing readers to discern the author's intent through its context. The preceding narrative highlights Confucius's commendation of a fisherman who shares surplus fish, illustrating that the act of wisely distributing wealth is characteristic of sage-like behavior. The subsequent story further elaborates on this theme, portraying a gentleman who feeds others without expecting labor in return, thereby

[299] *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 5.107–108.
[300] *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義, Ruan Yuan ed., *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue shubanshe, 2000), 681.
[301] Xu Weiyu 許維遹, *Lüshi Chunqiu jishi* 呂氏春秋集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 420–21.

earning the affection of both his kin and the broader community. Positioned between these narratives, the section in the *Xinyuan* underscores the virtue of generously sharing wealth. In contrast, commentary in the *Zuozhuan* severely attacked Yang's behavior, while the *Lüshi Chunqiu* prioritizes the necessity of martial preparedness. This illustrates that interpretations of identical tales can diverge significantly. Whereas previous collections might depend on explicit commentaries or thematic introductions to convey the compiler's perspective, narratives in Liu's two books rely on a more subtle, context-driven approach. This method, which leverages narrative grouping and comparison, allows Liu's editorial voice to emerge through the careful arrangement and juxtaposition of stories.

In this section, I initially clarify that Liu Xiang's use of *xin* in the titles of his two compilations is not merely a conventional choice for naming his edited works. The term *xin* signifies not just the inclusion of new materials but, more critically, points to the reimagined significance Liu imparts to traditional narratives. This recontextualization breathes new life into old stories, reconstructing their meanings. Further exploration into the concept of *xu* in the "Yiwen zhi" suggests a departure from contemporary notions of authorship. For Liu Xiang, Liu Xin, and Ban Gu, the act of arranging texts was itself a form of authorial expression, esteemed for its creative labor. By organizing disparate anecdotes into cohesive structures, Liu achieves more than merely compiling; he redefines the anecdotal genre, moving beyond scattered historical instructions or canonical annotation. Finally, Liu's accomplishment of forming the structure across chapters in the *Xinyuan*, as well as the sequence of sections within one chapter, is demonstrated. These intentional arrangements imbue the stories with meanings discernible only through their considered placement and juxtaposition. Thus, viewing Liu's two books as mere encyclopedias (*leishu* 類書) would be to overlook the depth of his editorial vision and the transformative impact of his

work.[302] Liu's role as the "author" of *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan* is cemented by his meticulous crafting of a textual web that reflects his philosophical and moral insights into the world's workings. Through this process, the once generic and floating anecdotes are endowed with distinct and fixed identities shaped by Liu.

2.2 *Xinlun*: The Herald of New Master Writings

2.2.1 What is New in the *Xinlun*

Huan Tan has historically received limited scholarly attention,[303] overshadowed by his contemporaries Yang Xiong and the later Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 97 CE), whose intellectual contributions have been more widely recognized. Additionally, the scarcity of comprehensive records on his life and works has further complicated discussions surrounding him. The ambiguity surrounding his death year, with theories spanning nearly three decades, exemplifies these challenges.[304] Despite Huan Tan's prolific output across various genres, including literary

---

[302] For the opinion of regarding Liu's two books as encyclopedias, see Zhang Baiheng 張白珩, "Shilun Liu Xiang *Xinxu* chengshu zhi tili" 試論劉向《新序》成書之體例, *Sichuan shiyuan xuebao (shehui kexueban)* 1980.3: 19. Xu Fuguan also challenges the view that these texts are merely encyclopedias, but his critique stems from a different perspective. Xu contends that encyclopedias primarily involve the act of copying without significant intellectual engagement, whereas Liu's works are designed to actively disseminate ideas in reality. Specifically, they aim to enhance their persuasive power with respect to rulers. As I have articulated above, regarding Liu's books as mere remonstrations to the rulers neglects the holistic structure of them. See Xu Fuguan, *Liang Han sixiangshi*, 4.

[303] The only monograph on Huan in English is Pokora's translation. For scholarships in Chinese and Japanese, see Sun Shaohua, *Wenben zhixu: Huan Tan yu liang Han zhiji chanshi sixiang de dingxing* 文本秩序：桓譚與兩漢之際闡釋思想的定性 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019), 6.

[304] Among the numerous theories regarding the years of Huan's birth and death, several notable ones include: a) Timoteus Pokora, who posits that Huan was born in 43 BCE and passed away in 28 CE; b) Ōkubo Takao 大久保隆郎, who suggests a birth year of 40 BCE and a death year of 31 CE; c) Sun Shaohua, who argues for a birth in 36 BCE and death in 35 CE; d) Jiang Liangfu 姜亮夫, who proposes birth in 31 BCE and death in 47 CE; e) Su Chengjian 蘇誠鑒, who claims Huan was born in 23 BCE and died in 56 CE. These theories highlight a significant disparity, with a 28-year difference in the estimated death year between the theories of Pokora and Su Chengjian. See Timoteus Pokora, "The Dates of Huan T'an," *Archív Orientální* 27, no. 4 (1959): 670; Ōkubo Takao, "Kantan sei sotsu nenkō" 桓譚生卒年考, *Fukushima daigaku kyōiku gakubu ronshū* 福島大學教育學部論集 20-2 (1968): 13–26; Sun Shaohua, "Huan

compositions (*fu* 賦), eulogies, memorials, letters, and most notably, discourses,[305] most of his works have not survived.[306] The current *Xinlun* is an incomplete compilation of scattered quotations,[307] posing significant challenges for scholars attempting to reconstruct Huan's perspectives from this text.[308]

Tan shengzunian xinkao" 桓譚生卒年新考, *Huaibei shifan daxue xuebao: zhexue shehui kexue ban*, 32 (2011):14–17; Jiang Liangfu and Tao Qiuying 陶秋英, "Huan Tan yinian de taolun" 桓譚疑年的討論, *Hangzhou daxue xuebao: renwen kexue ban* 1962.1:46–55; Su Chengjian, *Huan Tan* 桓譚 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1986), 117–151. A persuasive argument can be made that Huan's lifespan extended from the late 40s to the early 30s BCE for his birth, and concluded in the late 20s to early 30s CE for his death. This timeline establishes Huan as a younger contemporary of notable figures such as Yang Xiong, Liu Xin, and Wang Mang, with the distinction of having outlived them.

[305] Fan Ye 范曄, *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, annot. Li Xian 李賢 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 28A.961.

[306] Other than *Xinlun*, only one *fu* composition, two memorials, and some fragments survive. See Timoteus Pokora, *Hsin-lun (New Treatise) and Other Writings by Huan T'an (43 B.C.–28 A.D.)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 231–267.

[307] Since the Song dynasty, *Xinlun* has almost disappeared from bibliographical records. For the transmitting history of the *Xinlun*, see Pokora, *Hsin-lun*, xxx-xxxiv. During the Qing dynasty, scholars dedicated efforts to collate the dispersed quotations from *Xinlun*, leading to the creation of three notable compilations. These were assembled by Sun Pingyi 孫馮翼 (fl. 1799), Qian Xizuo 錢熙祚 (?–1844), and Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843), with Yan's compilation emerging as the most comprehensive among them. Modern scholarship has further expanded on these collections, primarily drawing from Yan's version, reconstructed by Wu Zeyu 吳則虞, Bai Zhaolin 白兆麟, and Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之. Wu's version reorganizes the *Xinlun* into new categories, departing from its original chapter structure. Bai's work, while valuable, lacks citations for its sources, rendering it less useful for scholarly reference. Zhu's compilation stands out for its comprehensiveness, meticulous selection of entries, and precise, informative annotations. Importantly, it preserves the original structure of *Xinlun*, making it an optimal choice for academic discussion. Therefore, Zhu Qianzhi's version is selected as the foundational text for my analysis. For a detailed introduction and comparison between the three Qing collections, see Dong Junyan 董俊彥, *Huanzi Xinlun yanjiu* 桓子新論研究 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1989), 103–108. For a detailed analysis of the advantage of Zhu's version, see Yin Yushan, "Han Wei zishu yanjiu" 漢魏子書研究 (Ph.D. Diss., Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2010), 164–168.

[308] The endeavor to compile and interpret materials from *Xinlun* is fraught with challenges that stem from three main sources: the collection process, the practice of quoting, and the inherent limitations of working with incomplete texts. Firstly, for collectors, the primary risk lies in the potential to overlook relevant *Xinlun* materials or to mistakenly attribute unrelated texts to it, exacerbated by the existence of numerous works sharing the same title. Secondly, from the perspective of those quoting the texts, the selected passages are often edited or even fabricated to suit the citers' purposes. This process can distort the original meaning or intent of the text, introducing biases or misinterpretations that deviate from the author's original ideas. Lastly, the nature of reconstructing texts presents its own set of challenges. Although Li Xian's 李賢 (655–684) commentaries on the *Hou Hanshu* provide us with the titles of sixteen chapters of *Xinlun*, most quotations do not specify their chapter origins. Without access to the complete text, interpreting Huan's intended chapter arrangement, or the broader context of individual quotations becomes

Scholarly discussions of Huan Tan often center on two of his arguments. First, Huan analogizes the spirit's dependence on body to the light emitted by a candle, which ceases once the candle burns out, thereby critiquing the quest for immortality prevalent in his era. Second, his vocal opposition to the apocryphal texts (*chenwei* 讖緯)[309] incurred the wrath of Emperor Guangwu, leading many to label him a "materialist."[310] However, this praise reflects an anachronistic projection of modern notions of "materialism versus idealism" onto Huan's era, celebrating his perceived "progressiveness" without recognizing that such ideas were neither novel nor exclusive to him, as evidenced by earlier works like *Xunzi*[311] and contemporaneous critiques of apocryphal texts.[312]

What truly distinguishes Huan Tan is his innovative engagement with master writings, characterized by a focus on more personal and contemporary history. This approach also broadened the scope of what was deemed worthy of the textual tradition. Despite the *Xinlun*'s claim to serve as administrative guidance, its inclusion of segments that appear to lack explicit political or

---

speculative. The risk of misinterpretation is heightened when dealing with quotations that are mere snippets, not full textual units, as they may convey misleading impressions absent their original context.

[309] For an introduction to apocryphal texts and Emperor Guangwu's attitude towards these texts, see Gu Jiegang, *Qin Han de fangshi yu rusheng* 秦漢的方士與儒生 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), 90–101.

[310] For example, see Hou Wailu 侯外廬, *Zhongguo sixiang tongshi* 中國思想通史 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1957), vol. 2, 257–61; and Ren Jiyu 任繼愈, *Zhongguo zhexue shi* 中國哲學史 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1966), vol. 2, 106–112. Since these two scholars, regarding Huan as a materialist became a common view in the field.

[311] For example, in chapter 17, "Tianlun" 天論 (Discourse on Heaven), there is a line saying that "the body is set and then the spirit arises" (形具而神生). See Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 309.

[312] During the reign of Emperor Cheng, an individual named Gan Zhongke 甘忠可 presented an apocryphal text titled "Scriptures of the Great Peace Embracing the Origin" 包元太平經. Notable scholars of the time, Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, critiqued this text for its lack of conformity with the Five Classics, deeming it unreliable. This skepticism towards apocryphal texts was not isolated. The *Hou Hanshu* records that contemporaries of Huan, specifically Zheng Xing 鄭興 (fl. 23–33) and Yin Min 尹敏 (fl. 26–68), also expressed public reservations about the authenticity and reliability of such texts. See *Hanshu* 75.3191; and *Hou Hanshu* 36.1223, 79A.2558.

moral instruction suggest a novel intention, audience, and function for the text: The writer crafts his work not exclusively for the emperors but also for his scholarly peers, signifying a shift in the intended readership. Correspondingly, readers are able to engage with the text not just for pragmatic advice on governance or ethical conduct but also for intellectual enjoyment. This development heralds the rise of a distinctive type of masters literature, which saw significant growth in the subsequent centuries.

2.2.2 A New and Different *Chunqiu*: From History to Discourses

Huan Tan, like many Han-era writers, aspired to elevate his work to a status akin to that of ancient sages, harboring a deep desire to join their esteemed lineage.

> Ru scholars, upon seeing the text of the *Chunqiu*, which records the successes and failures in governance, believe that if a sage were to rise again, they should likewise create another *Chunqiu*. Even comprehensive intellectuals like the Grand Historian agree with this view. However, I disagree. Why? Because the sages of the past and future do not necessarily follow each other's footsteps. What the sages and worthies have presented all gain from the Way, virtues, benevolence, and righteousness, making extraordinary arguments and unusual writings, which are all commendable, similar to how people eat fish, meat, vegetables, and eggplants, which, whether raw or cooked, different or coordinated, but are all delicious in their own right.
> 諸儒睹《春秋》之文，錄政治之得失，以為聖人復起，當復作《春秋》也。自通士若太史公，亦以為然。余謂之否。何則？前聖後聖，未必相襲也。夫聖賢所陳，皆同取道德仁義，以為奇論異文，而俱善可觀者，猶人食皆用魚肉菜茄，以為生熟異和而復俱美者也。[313]
>
> I have composed the *Xinlun*, which narrated and examined the past and the present, also with the aim of promoting good governance. How does this differ from the praise and blame in the *Chunqiu*? If now there are people who doubt this, [that will be the same as] someone saying that clam is different from oysters, and two times five is not ten. I, Tan, observed Liu Xiang's *Xinxu* and Lu Jia's *Xinyu*, and then wrote the *Xinlun*.
> 余為《新論》，術辨古今，亦欲興治也，何異《春秋》褒貶邪！今有疑者，所謂蚌異蛤、二五為非十也。譚見劉向《新序》、陸賈《新語》，乃為《新論》。[314]

[313] *Xinlun*, 40.
[314] Ibid., 1.

Huan asserts that his work, while embodying the essence of the *Chunqiu*, does not mimic its form. The *Xinlun* stands as both a *Chunqiu* and a non-*Chunqiu*. Although Sima Qian also claims to continue the legacy of the *Chunqiu* while modestly refusing to label his work as such,[315] Huan cites a distinct rationale for considering his work a non-*Chunqiu*. Sima Qian humbly describes his work as a transmission (*shu* 述) rather than a creation (*zuo* 作), echoing Confucius's own declaration (*shu er buzuo* 述而不作).[316] Michael Puett notes that in the Western Han period, writing one's arguments was often seen as a potential claim to sagehood,[317] a claim Sima Qian felt compelled to deny, at least ostensibly. By contrast, Huan audaciously acknowledges his ambition: to author a classic that could elevate him to sage status. Hence, he implores his readers to recognize the *Xinlun* as akin to the *Chunqiu*. Yet, Huan also contends in the first excerpt that a future sage need not produce work identical to the *Chunqiu*, likely because the *Chunqiu* referenced there pertains to the genre of historical writing. Sima Qian, recognized here as an advocate of "writing another *Chunqiu*," through his *Shiji*, is lauded by Huan as a paragon of comprehensive talent (*tongcai* 通才), the pinnacle of Huan's evaluative criteria among all Han writers.[318] However, despite the existence of precedents like the *Chunqiu* and *Shiji*, Huan opts for a different path. He chooses not to write history but to engage in discourse.

---

[315] *Shiji* 130.3296–98.
[316] *Lunyu* 7.1.
[317] See Michael Puett, "The Temptations of Sagehood, or: The Rise and Decline of Sagely Writings in Early China," in *Books in Numbers: Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Harvard-Yenching Library Conference Papers*, ed. Wilt L. Idema (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Yenching Library, 2007), 25. While Puett's general assessment of the period under discussion may hold validity, the assertion that Sima Qian harbored a "competitive notion of sagehood," characterized by an ambition to surpass his predecessors, warrants a cautious approach. Considering the author's subjectivity, it appears Sima Qian may not have possessed the level of confidence attributed to him, especially when compared to later writers like Huan Tan.
[318] *Xinlun*, 41.

Nevertheless, prior to Huan, the discourse genre was not highly esteemed, often considered a derivative of masters literature. In the *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons), the chapter on discourses follows directly after the one on "Various Masters" 諸子, with Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465–?) classifying the works of notable Han scholars such as Lu Jia, Jia Yi, Yang Xiong, and Liu Xiang within this domain.[319] Yet, towards the end of the Western Han, masters literature faced considerable disdain, with many scholars deeming the study of classics alone sufficient. This disdain was manifest when General-in-chief Wang Feng 王鳳 (?–22 BCE) refused to provide the King of Dongping, Liu Yu 劉宇 (?–20 BCE), with master texts, justifying his decision by asserting that "master writings sometimes go against the learning of classics and oppose the sages." (諸子書或反經術，非聖人)[320] Even Yang Xiong, whose *Fayan* was later categorized as masters literature by Liu Xie, explicitly expressed his aversion to master writings, reinforcing the era's prevailing skepticism towards this genre.

> No one can abandon the Five Classics and still achieve the Way. How can one who discards the usual delicacies and craves unusual foods be trusted in their taste? And how can one who forsakes the great sages for the masters be trusted in their understanding of the Way? 舍五經而濟乎道者，末矣。棄常珍而嗜乎異饌者，惡睹其識味也？委大聖而好乎諸子者，惡睹其識道也？[321]

Yang Xiong esteems the classics and disparaged masters literature, a stance that may have prompted Huan's defense of discourse writing in response to Yang's critique of "unusual foods." While Yang undervalues these "unusual foods," Huan claims that all dishes, whether fish, meat,

[319] Zhou Zhenfu 周振甫, *Wenxin diaolong zhushi* 文心雕龍注釋 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981), 189–190.
[320] *Hanshu* 80.3324–25.
[321] *Fayan yishu*, 67.

vegetables, or eggplants, are equally delectable (*ju mei* 俱美), despite their seemingly different appearances.

Huan's preference for masters literature over historical narratives in creating his own version of the *Chunqiu* likely stems from his admiration for "extraordinary arguments and unusual writings" (奇論異文) by sages and worthies. The extant fragments of the *Xinlun* reveal Huan's propensity for engaging in discourse rather than recounting historical events, showcasing his preference for debate and analysis. This inclination made masters literature an ideal medium for Huan's expressive style. While Huan does not aim to continue Han historical writing, he does introduce a new perspective of writing history, emphasizing a personal viewpoint.

2.2.3 A New History: From the History of Dynasties to the History of Oneself

2.2.3.1 Recent Political History: More Contemporary than Xinyu *and* Xinxu

Huan Tan's *Xinlun*, as he asserts, was composed under the inspiration drawn from Lu Jia's *Xinyu* and Liu Xiang's *Xinxu*, both of which leverage historical narratives for the purpose of political guidance. Despite this shared characteristic, the structural approaches of Lu Jia and Liu Xiang diverge significantly. *Xinyu* parallels the *Xinlun* in its argumentative nature, employing historical tales to reinforce the author's arguments, while *Xinxu* (and similarly, *Xinyuan*) presents as a collection of anecdotes, with the author's scarce commentaries affiliated at the end of these narratives. Huan's integration of these two divergent styles into the *Xinlun* contributes to the tradition of using history for political and moral reflection, and I will begin with the inspiration from *Xinxu*.

Huan's adaptation of *Xinxu* involves selecting and condensing stories, notably with fewer "ancient" (pre-Qin) examples in Huan's work, possibly due to his greater interest in

contemporary rather than ancient history.[322] Even when drawing from ancient history, Huan tends to streamline the source material to prioritize discussion on contemporary issues. This preference suggests a focus on recent events over historical precedence, which is evident in the comparison of how the same story is presented in the *Xinxu* and *Xinlun*.

> *Xinxu*: In the past, Duke Huan of Qi went out and traveled on the field. He saw the ruins of the old town in a perished state belonging to the Guo family. He asked a farmer in the field, "What are those ruins?" The farmer replied, "Those are the ruins of the Guo family." Duke Huan asked, "Why did the Guo family come to ruins?" The farmer said, "The Guo family favored the good and despised the evil." Duke Huan said, "Favoring the good and despising the evil are the proper conducts of people. Why then did it lead to ruins?" The farmer said, "They favored the good but could not practice them. They despised the evil but could not abandon them; thus, they came to ruins." Duke Huan returned and recounted this to Guan Zhong, who asked, "Who was that person [who talked to you]?" Duke Huan said, "I do not know." Guan Zhong said, "My lord, you are also a Mr. Guo." Thus, Duke Huan summoned that farmer and rewarded him.
> 《新序》：昔者，齊桓公出遊於野，見亡國故城郭氏之墟。問於野人曰：「是為何墟？”野人曰：「是為郭氏之墟。」桓公曰：「郭氏者曷為墟？」野人曰：「郭氏者善善而惡惡。」桓公曰：「善善而惡惡，人之善行也，其所以為墟者，何也？」野人曰：“善善而不能行，惡惡而不能去，是以為墟也。」桓公歸，以語管仲，管仲曰：「其人為誰？」桓公曰：「不知也。」管仲曰：「君亦一郭氏也。」於是桓公招野人而賞焉。[323]
>
> *Xinlun*: a) In the past, Duke Huan of Qi went out and saw the old ruins. He asked about it and someone replied, "Those are the ruins of the Guo family." He asked further, "Why did the Guo family come to ruins?" Someone said, "They favored the good and despised the evil." Duke Huan said, "To favor the good and despise the evil should be the way to thrive, yet it led to ruin, why is that?" Someone said, "They favored the good but could not employ them, and despised the evil but did not expel them."
> b) The good people, knowing that the Guo family honored them but did not use them, grew resentful towards the Guo family. The evil people, seeing themselves despised but not

[322] The hypothesis that the original *Xinlun* might have contained numerous such ancient anecdotes that have not been frequently cited, and thus are underrepresented in the current reconstructed version, merits consideration. However, the inclination against this possibility stems from an analysis of Huan's writing and thematic preferences. Observations indicate that when Huan does draw upon examples from ancient history, he tends to abbreviate these accounts, prioritizing space for his analysis of contemporary issues. This pattern suggests a deliberate choice to focus more on the discussion of his own times, particularly the Han and Xin dynasties.
[323] *Xinxu jiaoshi*, 591–93.

shunned, grew hostile. When one incurs resentment from the good and hostility from the evil, how can one avoid ruin?
c) Recently, Wang Mang appreciated all the talented and capable people under Heaven, gathered them but refused to employ them, causing them to harbor slander and resentment; Emperor Gengshi hated those kings and unrighteous individuals who assumed titles without merit, yet he could not expel them, leading them to harbor hatred and enmity…. Both rulers favored the good and despised the evil, hence they could not escape from calamities and great disasters, ultimately leading to the ruin and desolation of the great capital Chang'an. This was indeed a great misstep.

《新論》：a) 昔齊桓公出，[324]見一故墟而問之。或對曰：「郭氏之墟也。」復問：「郭氏曷為墟？」曰：「善善而惡惡焉。」桓公曰：「善善惡惡乃所以為存，而反為墟，何也？」曰：「善善而不能用，惡惡而不能去。」
b) 彼善人知其貴己而不用，則怨之；惡人見其賤己而不好，則仇之。夫與善人為怨，惡人為仇，欲毋亡，得乎？
c) 乃者王翁善天下賢智材能之士，皆徵聚而不肯用，使人懷誹謗而怨之；更始帝惡諸王假號無義之人，而不能去，令各心恨而仇之。……二主皆有善善惡惡之費，故不免於禍難大災，卒使長安大都，壞敗為墟，此大非之行也。[325]

In his *Xinlun*, Huan strategically compresses an anecdote from the *Xinxu*, transitioning from a condensed narrative (part a) to his own commentary (part b), and concluding with a critique of Wang Mang and Emperor Gengshi (part c). This compression entails a significant reduction of background information, including the omission of one character's identity, the consolidation of Duke Huan's inquiries from three to two, and the deletion of Guan Zhong. This alteration not only streamlines the story but also shifts its focus. In the *Xinxu*, Duke Huan emerges as the central figure, with his interaction with the farmer setting the stage for Guan Zhong's enlightening commentary, culminating in a narrative full of irony: Despite learning from the farmer, Duke Huan initially repeats the Guo family's errors until Guan Zhong's intervention leads to a corrective and ultimately positive outcome. Contrastingly, Huan's approach in the *Xinlun* seems less

[324] Zhu Qianzhi adds nine characters drawn from an annotation of the *Wenxuan* here. Without clear evidence to support their precise placement in the reconstructed version, I do not include them. See *Xinlun*, 20.
[325] Ibid., 20.

concerned with the narrative completeness, choosing instead to employ one scene from the story as a vehicle to introduce the aphorism of favoring the good and despising the evil. This serves as a prelude to his examination of contemporary political failures, indicating a pivot from historical recounting to present-day analysis. Thus, the ancient anecdote serves not as an end in itself but as a means to underscore a contemporary lesson derived from Huan's observation. This method of engagement with historical anecdotes marks a departure from Liu Xiang's reverence for such tales as central to his compilation. Huan prioritizes the immediate applicability and relevance of the moral lessons over the anecdotal content, showcasing a thoughtful integration of past and present.

The *Xinlun* also shares notable similarities with Lu Jia's *Xinyu*. First, both are argumentative texts engaging in political discourses. Second, *Xinlun* appears to deliberately mirror some of *Xinyu*'s chapter titles. For example, *Xinyu* features chapters titled "Assisting in Government" 輔政, "Discerning Delusion" 辯惑, "Attention to the Subtle" 慎微, and "Acting on the Basis" 本行, whereas *Xinlun* contains "Searching for Assistant" 求輔, "Discerning Delusion" 辯惑, "Observing the Subtle" 見微[326], and "The Basis of Creation" 本造, respectively. Third, *Xinlun* inherits some key concepts from the *Xinyu*. For example, both texts underscore the importance of the present. Huan's intention behind writing *Xinlun* is to narrate and examine both historical and contemporary events (余為《新論》，術辨古今), reflecting Lu's view that a person who is good at talking about the past should also examine the present (善言古者合之於今). Huan emphasizes the necessity for rulers to adapt to unforeseen circumstances through expedient

[326] Based on Li Xian's commentary, the title of the fifth chapter of *Xinlun* is identified as "Observing Evidence" 見徵. However, Zhu Qianzhi, through his examination of additional citations, posits that the character *zheng* 徵 (evidence) may have been erroneously transcribed, arguing instead that the original term was *wei* 微 (subtle). I adopt Zhu's speculative revision here.

measures (遭變而用權), mirroring Lu's belief in the flexibility of rule according to the times (因世而權行). Additionally, both authors exhibit a pessimistic view towards the ruling authorities of their times.[327]

In their use of historical examples, both draw upon recent history: Lu references the Qin dynasty, while Huan focuses on the Xin dynasty. However, Huan shows a greater interest in contemporary figures, particularly discussing Wang Mang more extensively than Lu's discussions on the Qin dynasty. Even as Huan delves into the history of the Western Han, his analysis consistently gravitates towards Wang Mang, underscoring Wang's conduct and policies as the crux of his political critique.[328] For example, Huan's analysis of the northern barbarians, the Xiongnu (匈奴), when compared with Yang Xiong's views, underscores this focus.

	Xinlun	Yang Xiong's memorial
The beginning	The ancestors of the Northern Barbarians existed alongside the Central State for countless years. Even a benevolent ruler cannot attract them by virtue, and even a powerful ruler cannot annex them by force…. It is difficult to bend their might or make peace with them. Therefore, sage kings conciliated them but did not autocratically control them. 北蠻之先，與中國並，歷年茲多，不可記也。仁者不能以德來，強者不能以力並也……其強難屈而和難得，是以聖王羈縻而不專制也。	[Xiongnu] was originally the Di Barbarians in the north. Five Emperors could not let them submit and Three Kings could not control them. It is very clear that one should not let Xiongnu have any grudges against [the Han]. （匈奴）本北地之狄，五帝所不能臣，三王所不能制，其不可使隙甚明。
Zhou dynasty	In the past, when the Zhou dynasty declined, barbarians from different directions attacked the Zhou…. Thus, when	

[327] For example, "Rulers in the world do not understand" (世主既不通), *Xinlun*, 24; and "Now there is no illuminated king and sagacious rulers above" (今上無明王聖主), see Wang Liqi 王利器, *Xinyu jiaozhu* 新語校註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 84.

[328] Dong Junyan argues that most political proposals in the *Xinlun* are aimed at Wang's policies. See Dong, *Huanzi Xinlun yanjiu*, 164.

	King Xuan restored the state, he could only recover the territories that had been taken. 昔周室衰微，夷狄交侵……於是宣王中興，僅得復其侵地。	
Qin dynasty	**With the might of the First Emperor of Qin, who commanded four hundred thousand armored soldiers, he still did not dare to peep into the west of the Yellow River. Therefore, he built the Great Wall to separate the two regions.** **夫以秦始皇之強，帶甲四十萬，不敢窺河西，乃築長城以分之。**	I dare not talk about something distant, so please let me take Qin as an example to illustrate this. **With the might of the First Emperor of Qin** and the power of Meng Tian, **who commanded more than four hundred thousand armored soldiers, they still did not dare to peep into the west of the Yellow River. Therefore, they built the Great Wall to separate the two regions.** 臣不敢遠稱，請引秦以來明之：**以秦始皇之彊，**蒙恬之威，**帶甲四十餘萬，然不敢窺西河，乃築長城以界之。**
Gaozu	**When Han arose, Gaozu was surrounded at Pingcheng.** **漢興，高祖見圍于平城。**	**When the Han just arose, with the might and prestige of Gaozu, three hundred thousand soldiers were surrounded at Pingcheng.** Some soldiers were not able to eat for seven days…. No one could tell the reason that [Gaozu] finally escaped. **會漢初興，以高祖之威靈，三十萬眾困於平城**，士或七日不食。……卒其所以脫者，世莫得而言也。
Empress Lü	**At the time of Empress Lü, [the leader of Xiongnu] made deviant comments.** **呂後時為不軌之言。**	Moreover, **Empress Gao once was offended by Xiongnu.** Officials discussed it at court…. Therefore, ministers wrote the credential out of expediency and sent it to [Xiongnu]. Then the knot with Xiongnu was untied and the suffering of the central state subsided. 又**高皇后嘗忿匈奴**，群臣庭議……於是大臣權書遺之，然後匈奴之結解，中國之憂平。
Emperor Wen	**At the time of Emperor Wen, Xiongnu greatly invaded. Signal fires and mounted scouts even reached the Ganquan Palace at Yong.**	**At the time of Emperor Wen, Xiongnu invaded and ruined the northern border, mounted scouts even reached the Ganquan Palace at Yong.** People in the capital were

	文帝時匈奴大入，烽火候騎，至雍甘泉。	greatly frightened. [Emperor Wen] sent three generals to station at Xiliu, Jimen, and Bashang to guard against the Xiongnu. It was not until several months later that the army returned. **及孝文時，匈奴侵暴北邊，候騎至雍甘泉，**京師大駭，發三將軍屯細柳、棘門、霸上以備之，數月乃罷。
Emperor Jing and Wu	At the time of Emperor Jing and Wu, **armies were sent out but were in danger several times, and finally could not catch or control them. Then the Han made peace with them through marriages.** Then the borders were peaceful, and the central state was tranquil. 景、武之間，**兵出數困，卒不能禽制。即與之結和親**，然後邊甬得安，中國以寧。	When Emperor Wu ascended to the throne, he made a plan at Mayi and tried to entice Xiongnu, …**but he wasted money and tired the troops in vain.** He could not see even one barbarian, not to mention the head of the Xiongnu. Then, he deeply contemplated the strategies for the welfare of the state, planned policies for the prosperity of ten thousand years, and greatly dispatched troops of several hundred thousand soldiers. He let Wei Qing and Huo Qubing lead the troops for decades.... Since then, Xiongnu was shocked and frightened. **They requested marriages with the Han more**, but they were not willing to call themselves subjects. 孝武即位，設馬邑之權，欲誘匈奴，**……徒費財勞師，一虜不可得見**，況單于之面乎！其後深惟社稷之計，規恢萬載之策，乃大興師數十萬，使衛青、霍去病操兵，前後十餘年。……自是之後，匈奴震怖，**益求和親**，然而未肯稱臣也。
Emperor Xuan	**Later, Xiongnu had internal strife and was divided into five groups led by five Chanyu.** **其後匈奴內亂，分為五單于。**	Till the beginning of the era of Benshi [73–70 BCE], Xiongnu had a brutal mind.… Therefore, the Northern Barbarians were not obedient, and the central state had not yet slept peacefully without anxiety. When it came to the eras of Yuankang [65–61 BCE] and Shenjue [60–58 BCE], great instructions were sagacious and brilliant. Great benevolence was extensive and broad. **Xiongnu had internal strife**

		and five Chanyu rivaled to be established. Rizhu and Huhanye brought their people and submitted to the Han. They prostrated and called themselves subjects. However, [the Han] conciliated Xiongnu and did not plan to autocratically control them. 至本始之初，匈奴有桀心……故北狄不服，中國未得高枕安寢也。逮至元康、神爵之間，大化神明，鴻恩溥洽，而**匈奴內亂，五單于爭立**，日逐、呼韓邪攜國歸死[329]，扶伏稱臣，然尚羈縻之，計不顓制。
Emperor Yuan	Gan Yanshou was able to take the advantage of their weakness, and showed profound virtue to the Chanyu, Huhanye. Therefore, Huhanye was willing to offer tribute and called himself a subject. He came to the court and saw the House of Han. The House of Han could spread the eminence of its broad virtue, and show its might to the four seas. There was no one who did not submit and for generations, there was no invader. 甘延壽得承其弊，以深德呼韓耶單于，故肯委質稱臣，來入朝見漢家。漢家得以宣德廣之隆，而威示四海，莫不率服，曆世無寇。	
Wang Mang	When it was not clear whether there would be peace or peril, [Wang Mang] suddenly invaded Xiongnu again…. Therefore, [Xiongnu] greatly raged, being engaged in attacking and resisting. Wang Mang did not regret or blame himself. Instead, he kept being unyielding and unreasonable. He appointed many generals and sent out soldiers and horses…. All under heaven was grief, hatred, anger, and suffering, so there were great disturbances. In the end, not a single barbarian was defeated or injured. It was	

[329] The character *si* 死 (to die) might have been incorrectly transcribed and the original character was likely *hua* 化 (to transform). See *Hanshu* 94B.3814.

	merely self-exhaustion and self-depletion. 安危尚未可知，而猥復侵刻匈奴……是以恨恚大怒，事相攻拒。王翁不自非悔，及[330]遂持屈強無理，多拜將率，調發兵馬，……天下愁恨怨苦，因大擾亂，竟不能挫傷一胡虜，徒自窮極竭盡而已。	
The conclusion	The *Shangshu* said, "Calamities from Heaven can be avoided, but one cannot survive from calamities created by oneself." This is what is meant. 書曰：「天孽可避，自作孽不可活。」其斯之謂矣。[331]	Since then, [the Han] does not refuse those barbarians who wish to present at court and does not force those who do not want to come. Why is this so? …. It is difficult to bend their might or make peace with them. 自此之後，欲朝者不距，不欲者不彊。何者？ ……其彊難詘，其和難得。[332]

Table 4. Huan and Yang's arguments on the Sino-Xiongnu relationship[333]

In 3 BCE, amidst tensions surrounding the head of Xiongnu, Chanyu's potential visit to the Han court during Emperor Ai's reign—a proposal met with opposition from some ministers—Yang Xiong submitted this memorial advocating for a diplomatic approach, suggesting that Xiongnu's willingness to submit offered an opportune moment for peace. When Yang narrated the Sino-Xiongnu relationship since the Qin dynasty, he highlighted the policies of Emperors Wu and Xuan, praising the former's military expansion as "the policy for the prosperity of ten thousand years" (萬載之策) but critiquing its effectiveness since the Xiongnu remained defiant. Yang favored Emperor Xuan's more conciliatory stance, that is "conciliating them, not autocratically controlling them" (羈縻之，不顓制), emphasizing negotiation over dominance. Huan's

[330] The character *ji* 及 (when) might have been incorrectly transcribed and the original character was likely *fan* 反 (on the contrary) or *nai* 乃 (then). See *Xinlun*, 21.
[331] Ibid., 20–21.
[332] *Hanshu* 94B.3812–14.
[333] The bold lines are loose parallels shared by the two excerpts.

perspective aligns with Yang's but with a more critical stance on Emperor Wu and Xuan's achievements, which he purposefully understates. In his narrative, Emperor Wu, alongside his father, Emperor Jing, fails to subjugate the Xiongnu despite numerous military campaigns, leading to the necessity of diplomatic peace through marriage. This portrayal starkly contrasts with historical accounts that credit Emperor Wu with significant victories against the Xiongnu. Similarly, Huan disregards Emperor Xuan's contributions, focusing instead on the influence of Gan Yanshou 甘延壽 (?–25 B.C.E) on Huhanye Chanyu's decision to submit to the Han. This portrayal of Gan as a virtuous subordinate diverges from other historical accounts emphasizing Gan's military prowess. This narrative also neglects Huhanye's prior submission to Han twenty years ago before Gan's military operation. Since Emperor Xuan also sent troops to help Wusun 烏孫 resist the Xiongnu in the era of Benshi, Huan's deliberate underrepresentation of Emperor Wu and Xuan likely stems from his argument against the military engagement with the Xiongnu, positioning it as fundamentally flawed. This critique is particularly aimed at undermining the legitimacy of Wang Mang's aggressive policies towards the Xiongnu, suggesting that peace, symbolized through marital alliances and the demonstration of virtue, is preferable. Interestingly, Huan portrays Wang as an unjust aggressor and the Xiongnu's resistance as justified. This stance inverts the conventional narrative that painted the Xiongnu as the aggressors and the Han as just defenders, ultimately framing Wang Mang's military actions as disastrous. Huan's manipulation of historical facts, therefore, appears to deliberately overlook certain historical achievements and policies that align with Wang Mang's approach, reflecting a strategic use of history to critique contemporary policies. This method of selective historical record aligns with the spirit of the *Chunqiu* as interpreted by Han scholars, where the divergence between recorded events and their carefully structured narration opens a space for profound interpretative insights.

Huan's critique, while primarily directed at Wang's policies towards the Xiongnu, can be extended to Emperor Guangwu's foreign policies as well. The unsuccessful military campaign led by Wu Han 吳漢 (?–44) against the Xiongnu in 33 CE, which not only failed to curb their power but seemingly emboldened their invasions, reinforces Huan's viewpoint that military aggression does not secure peace but rather exacerbates chaos. The turning point came in 48 CE, likely after Huan's death, when the Southern Xiongnu's leader submitted to the Han, marking a decrease in the northern threats. Witnessing those aggressive campaigns against the Xiongnu only escalated unrest, akin to the outcomes of Wang's strategies, Huan expresses a strong denunciation of such military pursuits, and deliberately downplays the actions of previous Han emperors who engaged in similar military efforts against the Xiongnu.

Similarly, in another context, Huan critiques the policy of criminalizing dissenting political speech, targeting Wang Mang directly while also subtly implicating Emperor Guangwu.

> To bring about the destruction of a person's clan over minor issues in speech is truly a matter worthy of grief and lamentation…. At times of speaking, errors, discrepancies, fumbling, and mistakes may occur, which are not deserving of punishment by death. As for matters of "slander and deceit," nothing can escape from being considered guilty. The *Book of Changes* said, "The great men change like the tiger and the gentlemen change like the leopard." If this is used to admonish a ruler, could he rightly say, "Why do you compare me with beasts?" If someone praises his rulers' sageness as the same as Yao and Shun, some rulers might be angry and say, "Why do you compare me with the dead?" Rulers in this world do not understand this, and their assistants again follow and obey them, complying with and facilitating the rulers' minds. Are they not adding the ignorance of their rulers?
> 至以言語小故，陷致人於族滅，事誠可悼痛焉。……夫言語之時，過差失誤，乃不足被以刑誅，及詆欺事，可無於不至罪。易言：「大人虎變，君子豹變。」即以是論諭人主，寧可謂曰：「何為比我禽獸乎？」如稱君之聖明與堯、舜同，或可怒曰：「何故比我於死人乎？」世主既不通，而輔佐執事者，復隨而聽之，順成之，不亦重為朦朦乎？[334]

[334] *Xinlun*, 23–24.

Huan laments the fate of those scholars and ministers penalized and executed for what was deemed "inappropriate words." He argues that the pursuit of so-called slanders in someone's speech by rulers and their enforcers is often successful, regardless of the speaker's intentions, which can always be maliciously misinterpreted. Huan illustrates his point with two absurd examples, highlighting the ease with which well-meaning comments can be construed as defamation. The accusation of "inappropriate speech" (非所宜言) has historical precedent in the Qin and Han dynasties, targeting those who voiced dissent either publicly or privately against prevailing policies or the conduct of emperors. The earliest detailed record of such an accusation might be the case of Yang Yun 楊惲 (?–54 BCE), where six instances of his alleged impropriety were documented.[335] If these accounts were accurate, Emperor Xuan had justifiable reasons to be offended, given Yang's comparisons of the emperor with notorious rulers Jie 桀 and Zhou 紂, and his ominous predictions regarding the emperor's death. Despite these inappropriate words, Emperor Xuan refrained from executing Yang for these words alone, though Yang ultimately met his end due to his unrepentant writings.

From Emperor Cheng's reign onwards, the frequency of accusations for such crimes increased, with those charged not always expressing explicit dissatisfaction with the emperor. Instead, they simply shared their viewpoints and faced allegations of uttering "inappropriate words." Mei Fu 梅福 (fl. the late first century BCE), in a memorial to Emperor Cheng, observed that "since the era of Yangshuo 陽朔 (24–21 BCE), people all under Heaven have avoided speaking, partly because even well-received memorials by the emperor could be deemed offensive and a grave insult to the throne by ministers of Law Enforcement."[336] This broad and

[335] *Hanshu* 66.2891–92.
[336] Ibid. 67.2921–22.

flexible charge was exploited by various political factions, with Wang Mang showing particular favor towards it upon ascending to the throne. Ironically, the charge of "inappropriate speech" can at times reflect more on the ruler's insecurities and hypersensitivity than on any genuine malfeasance by the speaker.

> The Commandery Governor of Suye, Han Bo, reported [to Wang Mang] that: "There is an unusual man. He is over two meters tall, and his waistline is over one meter. He came to my office, claiming he wishes to vigorously attack the Xiongnu. He calls himself Juwu Ba…. That very day I used a great cart with four horses and tiger banners to carry Ba visiting the palace…. This is what great Heaven uses to support the House of Xin…." Bo intended to remonstrate Mang. Mang heard his words and detested it. He kept Ba in Xinfeng, and changed his surname to Jumu [literary meaning: Great Mother], saying that this was the omen of becoming a hegemon and king relying on Empress Dowager Wen [Wang's aunt]. [Mang] then summoned Bo, imprisoned him for speaking inappropriately, and executed him in the marketplace.
> 夙夜連率韓博上言：「有奇士，長丈，大十圍，來至臣府，曰欲奮擊胡虜。自謂巨毋霸，……即日以大車四馬，建虎旗，載霸詣闕。……此皇天所以輔新室也。」……博意欲以風莽。莽聞惡之，留霸在所新豐，更其姓曰巨母氏，謂因文母太后而霸王符也。徵博下獄，以非所宜言，棄市。[337]

The enigmatic case of Han Bo's recommendation of Juwu Ba to Wang Mang, as narrated by Ban Gu, presents an intriguing episode where historical facts and interpretative nuances intertwine. According to Ban Gu, Han Bo utilized this figure to subtly critique Wang Mang, yet Han Bo himself might not have harbored such an intention. The interpretative layer added by later scholars suggests Juwu Ba's name could imply a critique of Wang's rule, hinting that Wang, known as Jujun 巨君, should not aspire to hegemony.[338] Wang Mang's reaction, refusing to meet Juwu Ba and altering his name, indicates this interpretation aligned with his view, although Han Bo reported that Juwu Ba, a real individual not an allegorical character, chose his own name. Han

[337] Ibid. 99C.4157.
[338] See Jin Zhuo's 晉灼 comment on this paragraph. Ibid. 99C.4157.

Bo's report of transporting this giant to the capital underlines his credibility, since any fabrication would be quickly uncovered. The subsequent appearance of this giant in a confrontation with Emperor Guangwu, consistent with Han's description, lends further authenticity to Han's account.[339] This suggests Han's genuine intent in presenting Juwu Ba to Wang Mang was to offer assistance amidst the frequent rebellions of the time. However, Wang Mang's sensitivity to omens and words led to a tragic misunderstanding of Han's loyalty, resulting in Han's execution. This incident highlights the severe consequences of a ruler's inability to discern the true intentions of their subjects (*butong* 不通).

Huan's observations of such tragedies during the late Western Han and Wang Mang's reign resonate with a deep sense of mourning for those who perished due to the dangerous misunderstandings of words. Emperor Guangwu was no more lenient toward his subordinates on this issue than his predecessors. Despite his proclaimed adherence to the "way of gentleness" and his mild disposition towards the people, Emperor Guangwu's interactions with his ministers tell a different story. He often treated his ministers harshly, either disregarding their advice or punishing them harshly for their admonitions.[340]

> [Han Xin] was fond of speaking frankly, without holding back, which the emperor often could not bear…. Eventually, Xin and his son Ying committed suicide. Xin always had a great reputation, and his death was not due to any fault of his own. Many people were not satisfied with it.
> （韓歆）好直言，無隱諱，帝每不能容。……歆及子嬰竟自殺。歆素有重名，死非其罪，眾多不厭。[341]

[339] *Hou Hanshu* 1A.5.
[340] See Chen Dengyuan 陳登原 and Wei Guanglai's 衛廣來 discussions in Chen Dengyuan 陳登原, *Guoshi jiuwen* 國史舊聞 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1958), vol. 1, 381; and Wei Guanglai 衛廣來, *Han Wei Jin huangquan shandai* 漢魏晉皇權嬗代 (Taiyuan: Shuhai chubanshe, 2002), 14.
[341] *Hou Hanshu* 26.902.

> At that time, many official positions inside and outside the court were selected and appointed by the emperor himself. Moreover, laws and principles were rigorously investigated. Official duties were excessively demanding. Even close ministers like the Imperial Secretary were beaten and dragged in front of [the emperor], causing none of the ministers to dare to speak frankly. Shentu Gang often remonstrated extremely…. The emperor refused to take advice at all. [Shentu] did not accord with the emperor's will because he earnestly remonstrated many times.
> 時內外群官，多帝自選舉，加以法理嚴察，職事過苦，尚書近臣，至乃捶撲牽曳於前，群臣莫敢正言。（申屠）剛每輒極諫，……帝並不納。以數切諫失旨。[342]

The silence imposed on ministers during Emperor Guangwu's reign, described as a time when none dared to speak frankly, mirrors the atmosphere Mei depicted in his memorial to Emperor Cheng, where he lamented a universal reticence to voice opinions. Emperor Guangwu's aversion to direct advice led to a climate of fear and suppression, with Huan Tan falling victim to this environment. Huan's expulsion and eventual death for "inappropriate words" reflect his firsthand experience with the peril of speaking out, likely leading him to critique Emperor Guangwu alongside others for their failure to appreciate honest counsel. Meanwhile, Emperor Guangwu's interest in apocryphal texts, shared with Wang Mang, might have heightened his sensitivity to language, making him prone to overinterpreting the intentions behind his subjects' words. In criticizing Wang Mang for absurdly interpreting his subjects' expressions, it is possible that Huan implicitly targets Emperor Guangwu as well. In this sense, *Xinlun* shares a foundational approach with the *Xinyu* and *Xinxu*, employing historical examples as cautionary tales for contemporary rulers. However, *Xinlun* distinguishes itself by favoring more recent incidents over ancient stories. When historical accuracy does not align perfectly with his argument, Huan selectively curates or even modifies the information to serve his narrative, prioritizing the conveyance of his judgment over strict adherence to factuality. This approach reflects the view of Confucius'

[342] Ibid. 29.1017.

Chunqiu during the Han era, not as a mere record of events but as a vehicle for moral and political critique. Yet, this does not imply that Huan disregards history; rather, he engages deeply with historical narratives, skillfully weaving the selected episodes into his discourses to express nuanced viewpoints. By blending historical recounting with argumentation, Huan effectively blurs the lines between historical documentation and discursive practices. This approach allows him to "penetrate" (*tong* 通) across genres, fulfilling his vision for the ideal role of writers.

2.2.3.2 Personal History: Historicizing his Discourses and Friends

Huan devotes considerable attention to political discourse, a tradition followed by many Han masters, yet he distinctively incorporates a personal dimension into his work. The frequent use of the first-person pronoun, *yu* 余, in his accounts provides a rare, intimate glimpse into the author's life and perspectives. We learn of his official roles, such as his positions within the Music Bureau under Emperor Cheng and as Grand Master for Instruction and Music during Wang Mang's reign. Huan's skills and interests are also illuminated; his prowess in popular music contrasts with a professed lack of appreciation for jade.[343] Moreover, Huan's viewpoints on wealth, his criticisms of Yang Xiong for his disdain for fortune,[344] and Zhang Heng 張衡 for taking wealth to the grave,[345] alongside mentions of his friends and adversaries, provide a nuanced portrait of his character and values. Should the *Xinlun* have survived in its entirety, it is probable that even more personal insights could be gleaned, positioning the work not just as a political discourse but also as a form of autobiography. This personal narrative, when Huan recounts his own experiences and those of his acquaintances, takes on a significance that arguably surpasses the

[343] *Xinlun*, 31
[344] Ibid., 44
[345] Ibid., 62.

historical anecdotes he selects for discussion. These personal stories, unique and contemporary, greatly enrich Huan's arguments, even if the arguments themselves may not be original.

> If one praises me based on others' words, they will also disparage me based on others' words. Wang Mang sent the Chief Commandant Meng Sun to Mount Tai to make sacrifices. On his way, passing through Xuzhou, the governor of Xuzhou, Song Zhongweng, praised my intelligence and wisdom, comparing me to Chen Ping and Marquis of Liu [i.e., Zhang Liang 張良]. Upon Meng Sun's return, he joyfully said to me, "Zhongweng greatly praised your virtue. You are actually like [what he said]!" I replied, "You have been associated with me for four to five years, and you have never praised me. Now, hearing a word from Zhongweng, you are astonished; if someone were to slander me, you would also believe it, which makes me wary of you."
> 夫以人言善我，亦必以人言惡我。王翁使都尉孟孫往泰山告祠，道過徐州，徐州牧宋仲翁道余才智，陳平、留侯之比也。孟孫還，喜謂余曰：“仲翁盛稱子德，子乃此耶！”余應曰：“與僕遊四五歲，不吾見稱。今聞仲翁一言而奇怪之；若有人毀余，子亦信之，吾畏子也。”[346]

The aphorism mentioned at the outset of the excerpt, far from being an original creation by Huan, traces its roots back to a well-known saying from the Warring States period. This is evidenced by an anecdote found in the *Han Feizi*.

> Lu Dan persuaded the ruler of Zhongshan three times but was not accepted. Therefore, Lu used fifty pieces of gold to serve the ruler's attendants. When he met the ruler again, he did not talk, and the ruler ate together with him. Lu Dan went out, did not return to his house, and then left Zhongshan. His charioteer asked, "When we met [the ruler] again, he started to treat us well. Why did we leave Zhoushan?" Lu Dan said, "If one praises me based on others' words, they will also disparage me based on others' words."
> 魯丹三說中山之君而不受也，因散五十金事其左右，復見，未語，而君與之食。魯丹出，而不反舍，遂去中山。其御曰：「反見，乃始善我，何故去之？」魯丹曰：「夫以人言善我，必以人言罪我。」[347]

[346] Ibid., 61.
[347] *Han Feizi jijie*, 182.

Huan's engagement with the *Han Feizi* is evident through many citations within the *Xinlun*,[348] suggesting a deep familiarity with this text. Despite this, Huan chooses not to cite this ancient anecdote directly from it, opting instead to apply the aphorisms within the context of his own stories. This method diverges from the traditional emphasis on antiquity as a source of authoritative wisdom. In contrast, Huan prioritizes contemporary relevance over historical remoteness, emphasizing recent events and personal experiences over ancient examples. This approach signifies a departure from the conventional criteria for argumentation, asserting that persuasiveness stems not from historical precedent but from personal verification and direct experience. By centering his narrative universe around himself, Huan redefines the role of the writer as not just a conveyor of information but as an integral part of the textual reality, thereby imbuing his work with a distinct personal signature.

Huan's methodology disrupts both traditional historical and master writings. Historical accounts typically adopted an impersonal tone, with the author's perspective surfacing subtly, if at all. Huan, however, consistently integrates his presence throughout the *Xinlun*, embodying both the historian and the subject of his narratives. This dual role is a novel contribution to Chinese historiography.[349] Similarly, in the realm of master writings, where arguments often unfolded in the abstract, Huan's work is distinguished by its reliance on tangible, recent events and personal experiences as the foundation of his discourse. Unlike earlier works where anecdotes served

[348] For example, there is an argument that Huan directly borrows from the "Gu fen" 孤憤 (Solitary Indignation) chapter of the *Han Feizi*. See *Xinlun*, 10–11.

[349] Sima Qian's approach to historiography in the *Shiji* is characterized by a notable restraint regarding personal involvement in the narratives he presents. Despite including a chapter on his family and himself, he generally maintains an objective distance, even in instances where he was personally involved. This methodological choice is highlighted by the absence of his efforts to plead on behalf of Li Ling within the *Shiji* itself. Our awareness of his attempt comes instead from the letter to Ren An, the authenticity of which has been a subject of debate among scholars. This approach underscores Sima Qian's dedication to the separation of personal experiences from the historical record. See *Hanshu* 62.2729–731.

merely to support arguments, Huan's detailed and unique narratives are pivotal to his exposition. Furthermore, while the essence of Huan's writings remains argumentative, he contextualizes these arguments within a deeply personal historical framework, blending and transcending the two genres of narration and arguments through his own experiential lens.

> Once I visited Du Fang from my commandery, a former Director of Chen prefecture. I saw him light a fire and sit at night. He burned charcoal to dry the wall and read Laozi's writings. He said, "Laozi maintained his nature through tranquility and moderation, living to a few hundred years old; by following his way, could we possibly extend our lives and avoid aging?" … I saw a hemp candle next to him, with the ash hanging down about one foot. Therefore, I took it as an example and said, "The spirit inhabits the body just as the fire lights the candle…." Later, Liu Boshi and I lit a fire in oil. We sat and talked at night. The oil in the lamp was almost exhausted. The wick was scorched, bald, and about to extinguish, and I used this to enlighten Boshou, saying that human decline and aging are like that stubbed lamp. I also recounted the incident of the hemp candle.
> 余嘗過故陳令同郡杜房，見其舉火夜坐，燃炭乾墻，讀老子書，言：「老子用恬淡養性，致壽數百歲；今行其道，寧能延年卻老乎？」 ……余見其旁有麻燭，而灺垂一尺所，則因以喻事。言：「精神居形體，猶火之然燭矣。……」余後與劉伯師夜爇脂火坐語，鐙中脂索，而炷燋禿，將滅息，則以示曉伯師，言人衰老，亦如彼禿燈矣。又為言前爇麻燭事。[350]
>
> Liu Zijun believed in the empty words of men of recipes, thinking that immortality could be learned. He once asked people, saying, "If one truly can suppress desires, close off the senses, is it possible to never weaken or deteriorate? ..." I saw a large elm tree in his courtyard, long aged and peeling. Pointing to it, I said, "That tree has no desires to endure, no ears or eyes to close, yet still it withers, rots, and is eaten by worms; even though one may wish to care for and preserve [his body], how can one prevent its decline?"
> 劉子駿信方士虛言，謂神仙可學。嘗問人言：「人誠能抑嗜慾，閼耳目，可不衰竭乎？……」余見其庭下有大榆樹，久老剝折，指謂曰：「彼樹無情欲可忍，無耳目可閼，然猶枯槁朽蠹；人雖欲愛養，何能使之不衰？」[351]

The first analogy stands out as one of Huan's most well-known arguments, challenging the prevalent belief of his time in the possibility of learning to extend one's life or even achieve

[350] *Xinlun*, 31–34.
[351] Ibid., 37.

immortality. His vivid comparison of the spirit to a flame and the body to a candle soon becomes prevalent among scholars who discuss the relationship between spirit and body.[352] Notably, Huan's analogy was not born of mere contemplation but was inspired by an actual scenario with the candle present. Similarly, the elm mentioned in another conversation was also present, underscoring Huan's practice of grounding his philosophical arguments in real-life observations rather than fabricating hypothetical circumstances. These accounts, framing arguments within anecdotes rather than the reverse, share a closer affinity with the later "minor discourses" (*xiaoshuo* 小說) found in works like the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (A New Account of the Tales of the World), diverging from earlier master writings. The contextual details, such as names of interlocutors, timing, setting, actions of the speakers, and preceding dialogue, provide essential layers to Huan's arguments, making them not just philosophical discourses but rich historical narratives. Contrary to earlier Han masters who often employed fictional characters to articulate their ideas, Huan anchors his dialogues in reality, with tangible individuals and specific circumstances. This method of documenting background information gives his arguments a historical dimension, rendering them both time-specific and personal. Considering these discourses solely as abstract philosophical arguments overlooks their true value; they are, in essence, historical accounts of Huan's interactions with his contemporaries.

In addition to referencing his companions within narratives of himself, Huan also dedicates an entire chapter to recording the history of his circle. The biographies of his peers below stand as testament to the depth and breadth of his engagements.

> Master Yangcheng's surname is Zhang and his first name is Heng. He is from Shu Commandery. At the time of Wang Mang, we were both Directors of Music. When he was

[352] See Ren, *Zhongguo zhexue shi*, vol. 2, 266.

bedridden with illness, he bought a coffin in advance and placed many silks and brocades in it. His tomb was immediately robbed.
陽城子姓張名衡，蜀郡人，王翁與吾俱為講學[353]祭酒。及寢疾，豫買棺槨，多下錦繡，立被發塚。[354]

Among musicians at the Palace Gate who play the zither, there are Ren Zhenqing and Yu Changqian who can transmit the measures and numbers. The sounds of their wonderful songs linger.
黃門工鼓琴者，有任真卿，虞長倩，能傳其度數，妙曲遺聲。[355]

Guan Bing, whose style name is Ziyang, has unimpeded talent and wisdom.
關並，字子陽，材智通達。[356]
Zhang Rong, whose style name is Zhonggong, is familiar with the affairs of irrigation.
張戎，字仲功，習溉灌事。[357]
Han Mu, whose style name is Zitai, is skillful in matters related to water.
韓牧，字子台，善水事。[358]

Gao Junmeng knows the statutes and ordinances well. He always prostrated himself to write texts. The Office of Gentlemen for Writings pitied his old age and wanted to replace him. He refused and said, “Writing it myself is equal to reading it ten times.”
高君孟頗知律令，嘗自伏寫書，著作郎署哀其老，欲代之，不肯，云：「我躬自寫，乃當十遍讀。」[359]
Liang Zichu and Yang Zilin were Assistant Court Gentlemen at the same time with me. They are eager to learn. They wrote ten thousand scrolls until their hair turned white. They once sent me some hundred items that they could not understand. I observed their questions and roughly comprehend them.
余同時佐郎官有梁子初、揚子林，好學，所寫萬卷，至於白首。常有所不曉百許寄余，余觀其事，皆略可見。[360]

[353] In all surviving versions, the character is recorded as *xue* 學 (learning), yet Wang Mang’s biography in the *Hanshu* indicates the absence of a Director of Learning 講學祭酒 during his reign, identifying only a Director of Music 講樂祭酒 instead. See *Hanshu* 99B.4127. Since Master Yangcheng was also known for his classic of Music, it is reasonable to change the character *xue* to *yue* 樂 (music) here.
[354] *Xinlun*, 62.
[355] Ibid., 70.
[356] Ibid., 62.
[357] Ibid., 62.
[358] Ibid., 63.
[359] Ibid., 63.
[360] Ibid., 63–64.

The extant sections of Huan's *Xinlun* offer only glimpses into his relationships with his friends, yet the chapter titled "Minyou" 閔友 (Mourning for Friends) suggests the original work contained a richer exploration of these bonds. Huan's friends came from diverse backgrounds, including court gentlemen, musicians, and technicians, reflecting his varied career from a Court Gentleman of Imperial Carriages (*Fengche langzhong* 奉車郎中)[361] at seventeen to roles such as the Director of the Music Bureau under Emperor Cheng and a Clerk in the Minister of Works during Wang Mang's reign.[362] Notably, Huan's circle extended beyond the traditional scholarly elite to encompass zither players, law clerks, copyists, and water project experts, individuals often overlooked by mainstream Han scholars and historical records.[363] Nevertheless, Huan valued them as equals and was keen on documenting their lives through biographies, adhering to the traditional format of noting each person's name and hometown. Although much of the subsequent content has been lost, it is plausible to assume that these biographies contained a wealth of anecdotes. Although these people are Huan's friends, not all of the anecdotes cast their subjects in a commendatory light. For example, he criticizes Master Yangcheng for his extravagant burial practices and Yang Xiong for the excessive expenses incurred in burying his son in his hometown. However, such criticisms stemmed from a place of sincerity and companionship, indicating Huan's commitment to truthfully portraying his friends' lives, complete with their

[361] Ibid., 49.
[362] Due to the Yellow River's frequent flooding towards the end of Western Han dynasty, Wang Mang convened numerous experts in river management to the capital. Their diverse proposals were documented in the *Hanshu*'s "Treatise on Rivers and Canals" 溝洫志. Among the participants, Guan Bing, Zhang Rong, and Han Mu emerged as key figures in this discourse. Huan oversaw these discussions. See *Hanshu* 29.1696–97.
[363] Sima Qian does dedicate an entire treatise to river regulation in his work, but most of his characters are officials in charge, not specialists in the field. Although he also includes a chapter on music (which has unfortunately been lost), the whole *Shiji* records only one Han musician, Li Yannian 李延年, who is classified under "Male Favorites" 佞幸 rather than as musicians. See *Shiji* 125.3195.

virtues and flaws. Huan's approach is not to judge his friends by moral or political standards, but to capture the essence of daily life and individuality, thereby presenting them as vivid, multidimensional characters beyond simplistic societal labels. His determination to record the stories of these ordinary yet remarkable individuals, who otherwise might have remained voiceless, mirrors Sima Qian's historical endeavors.[364] Both Huan and Sima recognized the difficulty for common people to achieve posthumous fame and sought to use their writings as a means to combat the erasure of these individuals from history. Unlike Sima, however, Huan focused on those within his immediate circle, offering a more intimate portrayal of the lives and times he shared with them.[365] The title "Mourning for Friends" suggests these biographies serve not just as historical records but as emotional tributes to those Huan lost, especially as he reflects on his life and friendships in his later years. Living well into his seventies, Huan witnesses the demise of many companions amid the tumult following the fall of the Western Han Dynasty, including the loss of Yang Xiong and Liu Xin. In documenting the lives of these friends, Huan not only pays tribute to their memories but also chronicles the significant moments of his own life, effectively intertwining his existence with theirs. Ultimately, Huan's work emerges as a heartfelt history of both his life and those within his circle, embodying the essence of an emotional memoir rather than a mere collection of biographies.

---

[364] *Shiji* 61.2127.

[365] In discussing the practice of documenting information about one's social circle, Wang Chong references a notable incident involving Yang Xiong. A wealthy individual from Yang's hometown offered him tens of millions of coins to secure a mention in Yang's *Fayan*, but Yang refused to do so. This anecdote, assuming its authenticity, highlights two key aspects of master writings towards the end of the Western Han Dynasty. Firstly, including references to one's acquaintances within one's writings was not an uncommon practice. This is evidenced by Yang Xiong's own mentions of his son and his fellow townsman, Li Zhongyuan 李仲元, in the *Fayan*. Secondly, it was relatively unusual for an author to record tales of acquaintances unless these narratives were directly tied to themes of moral integrity or exceptional wisdom. See Huang Hui 黃暉, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 869.

2.2.4 New Masters Literature: From Political Remonstrations to Comprehensive Literary World

2.2.4.1 Comprehensive Talent

Although Huan regards his book as following in the tradition of political discourse, its wide-ranging coverage likely captivated readers, including Emperor Guangwu, for reasons beyond its political content.[366] The variety of subjects Huan addresses paints his work as a comprehensive examination of life and knowledge, transcending mere political argumentation. From the fragments available, Huan delves into at least the following aspects:

> Literature: The "Speaking on the *Fu*" chapter
> 文學：《道賦》篇
>
> Music: The "Way of the Zither" chapter
> 音樂：《琴道》篇
>
> Astronomy: The comprehensive man, Yang Ziyun [i.e., Yang Xiong] followed the way that common Ru scholars talked about Heaven, and believed that Heaven rotated like a cover constantly turning towards the left…. I used this to demonstrate [my theory] to Ziyun, saying, "…. Is not this phenomenon, on the contrary, in accord with the theory of sphere-Heaven?" Ziyun immediately destroyed his work.
> 天文：通人揚子雲, 因眾儒之說天，以天為如蓋轉，常左旋……因以示子雲曰：「……無乃是反應渾天家法焉。」子雲立壞其所作。[367]
>
> Calendar: I penetrated the methods of calculation used by different schools of calendars. [Their records] start with Heaven's start in the remote past, till the eleventh month, when the first day of the sixty-day cycle at midnight met the first day of the new moon at the winter solstice. [At that time,] the sun and the moon were like two juxtaposed round pieces of jade.

---

[366] According to *Hou Hanshu*, Emperor Guangwu enjoyed reading the *Xinlun*, see *Hou Hanshu* 28A.961. Moreover, according to *Dongguan Hanji* 東觀漢記 (Records of Han in the Eastern Lodge), Emperor Guangwu found every volume of *Xinlun* too long (therefore hard to hold while reading), so he ordered each volume to be divided into upper and lower parts. See Wu Shuping 吳樹平, *Dongguan Hanji jiaozhu* 東觀漢記校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 548. Emperor Guangwu was the earliest recorded figure in early China to expressly advocate for altering the physical form of texts to facilitate easier reading, with the *Xinlun* being the first documented text to undergo such modification in response to reader demand. The likelihood that Emperor Guangwu's interest in the *Xinlun* stemmed from its political content seems minimal, given that Huan submitted at least three memorials to the emperor, none of which received his approval. See *Hou Hanshu* 28A.956-61.

[367] *Xinlun*, 29–30.

曆法：通曆數家算法推考其紀，從上古天元以來，訖十一月甲子夜半朔冬至，日月若連璧。[368]

Geography: Bin Commune at Fufeng, was originally where the Great King of Zhou lived. There was a night market.
地理：扶風邠亭，本太王所居，有夜市。[369]

Custom: People in the Taiyuan Commandery did not light the fire to cook for five days in midwinter. Even if someone had diseases or urgent affairs, they did not dare to break the rule. This is because of Jie Zitui.
民俗：太原郡民以隆冬不火食五日，雖有疾病緩急猶不敢犯，為介子推故也。[370]

Water conservancy: Among the sources of four rivers, the source of the Yellow River is the highest and the river is the longest. The water pours down from a height, and the current is swift. Therefore, its flow is rapid.
水利：四瀆之源，河最高而長，從高注下，水流激峻，故其流急。[371]

Official System: At the time of Wang Mang, he established the Xihai Commandery and let all the officials in this commandery with the rank of one hundred bushels deal with government affairs in person. (According to another source, it is the rank of four hundred bushels). These officials would be transferred to fill vacant posts in two years.
職官：王莽時置西海郡，令其吏皆百石親事（一曰為四百石），二歲而遷補。[372]

Law: Duke Wen of Wei took Li Kui as his advisor, who wrote the *Canon of Law*. Li believed that nothing in the king's administration was more urgent than the problem of thieves and bandits, so his law began with the chapter "On Thieves and Bandits."
法律：魏文侯師李悝，著《法經》。以為王者之政，莫急於盜賊，故其律始於《盜賊》。[373]

Tax: Since Emperor Xuan in the Han, the tax income from people in a year was more than four billion. The salary of officials cost half of it, and the two billion left was stored in the capital as the emperor's money.
賦稅：漢宣以來，百姓賦斂一歲為四十餘萬萬。吏俸用其半，餘二十萬萬藏於都內為禁錢。[374]

---

[368] Ibid., 46.
[369] Ibid., 51.
[370] Ibid., 56.
[371] Ibid., 47.
[372] Ibid., 49.
[373] Ibid., 5. Pokora expresses skepticism regarding the authenticity of quotations related to the *Canon of Law*, suggesting they might be fabricated. However, in the absence of compelling evidence to substantiate his doubts, these quotations are still referenced here as part of Huan's writings. See Pokora, *Hsin-lun*, xxxiv.
[374] *Xinlun*, 49.

Onomastics: Kings build a round pond like a round piece of jade [*bi*], and fill water in it. It is encircled by a dam [*yong*], so it is called *piyong*.
名物：王者作圓池如璧形，實水其中，以環壅之，故曰辟雍。[375]

Animal: Domestic animals are inferior, but there are also extraordinary ones, which can be seen in records. Therefore, people commend Hualiu, Ji, and Lu [the names of famous horses] among horses; praise Guojiao and Dingli [the names of famous oxen] among oxen; and compliment Lu from the state of Han and Cu from the state of Song among dogs.
動物：夫畜生賤也，然有尤善者，皆見記識。故馬稱驊騮騹驥，牛譽郭椒丁櫟。故犬道韓廬宋促。[376]

Epigraphy: It is said that there are inscribed stones on Mount Tai. There are one thousand and eight hundred of them in total, and seventy-two of them could be recognized and understood.
碑刻：言太山之上有刻石，凡千八百餘處，而可識知者，七十有二。[377]

Bibliography: The ancient-script *Shangshu* used to have forty-five scrolls and eighteen chapters. The lost ancient-script *Liji* had fifty-six scrolls. The ancient-script *Lunyu* has twenty-one scrolls, and more than four hundred characters having different pronunciations from the Qi and Lu versions. The ancient-script *Xiaojing* has one scroll, twenty chapters, and one thousand eight hundred and seventy-two characters. It differs from the current version in more than four hundred characters.
書目：古文《尚書》舊有四十五卷，為十八篇。古帙《禮記》有五十六卷。古《論語》二十一卷，與齊、魯文異音四百餘字。古《孝經》一卷二十章，千八百七十二字，今異者四百餘字。[378]

Historiography: The "Table of the Genealogy in the Three Dynasties" by the Grand Historian is arranged in a horizontal table, and it imitates the "Genealogy of Zhou."
史學：太史《三代世表》，旁行邪上，並效《周譜》。[379]

Entertainment/ Military: In the world, there is the game of Go, and some say it is akin to the art of war.
娛樂、军事：世有圍棋之戲，或言是兵法之類也。[380]

[375] Ibid., 47.
[376] Ibid., 27.
[377] Ibid., 47.
[378] Ibid., 38.
[379] Ibid., 40.
[380] Ibid., 58.

The range of topics covered in the existing fragments underscores Huan's expansive intellectual pursuits, many of which diverge significantly from the traditional foci of earlier scholars. Areas like law, taxation, and water conservancy, typically relegated to the realm of professional clerks, along with interests in music (particularly popular music) and the game of Go, often dismissed as common or vulgar, highlight Huan's unique scholarly breadth. Furthermore, his unprecedent engagement with the theory of literary composition and criticism, as well as the study of historiography, including the nuanced examination of relationships between historical works and their successors, distinguishes him as an exceptionally "comprehensive man." This breadth of interest, particularly at a time when the intellectual trend was moving towards a more expansive view yet remained largely anchored in the first three categories in the *Qilüe* (classics, master writings, and literary compositions) underscores Huan's unique position. While many of his contemporaries and friends like Yang Xiong, Liu Xin, and Liu Xiang embraced this broader intellectual horizon,[381] none demonstrated the same level of comprehensive engagement across as wide a range of subjects as Huan did. This comprehensive approach to scholarship was shared by only a few during the Western Han, most notably by Sima Qian. It is this shared breadth of interest that likely inspired Huan's high praise for Sima Qian's broad and extensive writings, which reflects not only a recognition of Sima's achievements but also a definition of sagehood. By Huan's standards, a sage is someone with comprehensive talent who creates broad and vast texts, a criterion he undoubtedly met. His vision of sagehood influenced subsequent generations, gradually reshaping the intellectual landscape. For example, the literati's growing appreciation for music and Go,[382] along with a pride in wide-ranging erudition, can be traced back to the trail Huan

[381] See Gu Yixin, "The Enchantment of Erudition," 76.
[382] See Yu Yingshi, "Han Jin zhiji shi zhi xin zijue yu xin sichao" 漢晉之際士之新自覺與新思潮, in *Shi yu Zhongguo wenhua* 士與中國文化 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), 341–346.

blazed, marking him as a pivotal figure in the evolution of scholarly pursuits and the conception of intellectual breadth in literary and academic traditions.

Some aspects of Huan's wide-ranging knowledge, while not directly related to governance or instructions, play a crucial role in shaping the cultural identity of the literati. Huan's various writings appeal to and foster a community of scholars increasingly disillusioned with the stale learning of classics. This inclination towards a broader intellectual curiosity signifies a shift beginning in the Eastern Han, where the literati increasingly distance themselves from the political core, seeking validation not through imperial recognition but through the cultivation of their extensive inner worlds. The value of scholarship became less about its utility for imperial administration and more about its contribution to personal growth and cultural enrichment. Huan's work not only broadens the scope of what is considered valuable knowledge but also heralds the emergence of a literati culture that treasures intellectual development over traditional political engagement.

2.2.4.2 "Trivial" Anecdotes

Evaluating the *Xinlun* requires a nuanced approach. Defining master writings strictly as political discourses and assessing *Xinlun* from this narrow perspective might lead one to undervalue its significance, as it includes few political discussions that are innovative.[383] This view aligns with Lü Simian's 呂思勉 (1884–1957) opinion, which posits that the pinnacle of master writings occurred during the Eastern Zhou, suggesting that even the finest works of the Western Han were largely derivative of pre-Qin texts, not to mention those of the Eastern Han.[384] Other scholars

[383] For example, Xiao Gongquan 蕭公權 claims that the majority of the political ideas of Eastern Han scholars are unoriginal, including Huan's writings. See Xiao Gongquan, *Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiangshi* 中國政治思想史 (Beijing: Xinxing chubanshe, 2010), 213.
[384] Lü Simian 呂思勉, *Xian Qin xueshu gailun* 先秦學術概論 (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 2008), 158.

recognize that *Xinlun* incorporating not only political argumentation but also diverse content, straying from traditional themes of morality and politics. For example, Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 (1869–1936) criticizes the *Xinlun* for its focus on what he considered trivial matters, likening its records to minor sayings and notes (*xiaoshuo zhaji* 小說札記) prevalent in the Song dynasty.[385] Similarly, Liu Xianxin 劉咸炘 (1896–1932) regards the *Xinlun* as the first predecessor of the genre of miscellaneous notes,[386] a genre traditionally ranked low within the literary hierarchy. Their evaluations hold merit to some extent, particularly when considering the segments in the *Xinlun* that align closely with the genres of "records of people" 志人 and "tales of the strange" 志怪 seen post-Eastern Han, which appear to lack political or moral instruction.

> I was the Grand Master of Music in the past, and a bird cried in the tree of the courtyard. Everyone in the bureau and hangers-on were worried and frightened. Later, I had a dispute with another Grand Master, Xie Hou, and as a result, we were both dismissed from our positions.
> 余前為典樂大夫，有鳥鳴於庭樹上，而府中門下皆為憂懼。後余與典樂謝侯爭鬬，俱坐免去。[387]

> On my journey back to Pei from Chang'an, I fell ill. I covered myself with a silk quilt and a long robe of red wool. I rode a post horse and stayed overnight at Eastern Commune. The chief of that commune suspected us of being bandits, so he sent soldiers during the night. I instructed my attendants not to fight, and after questioning, they left. This was a case of being serenity and self-preserved.
> 余自長安歸沛，道疾，蒙絮被絳罽襜褕，乘驛馬，宿東亭，亭長疑是賊，發卒夜來。余令吏勿鬬，乃相問而去。此安靜自持也。[388]

[385] See the quotation in Liu Xianxin 劉咸炘, "Jiushu bielu" 舊書別錄, in *Liu Xianxin xueshu lunji: zixue bian* 劉咸炘學術論集・子學編, ed. Huang Shuhui 黃曙輝 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2007), 439.
[386] Liu Xianxin, "Jiaochou shulin" 校讎述林, in *Liu Xianxin xueshu lunji: jiaochouxue bian* 劉咸炘學術論集・校讎學編, ed. Huang Shuhui 黃曙輝 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), 127.
[387] *Xinlun*, 17.
[388] Ibid., 17–18.

The integrity of the two examples mentioned here remains uncertain, leaving open the possibility that they were part of a broader moral or political discourse in their original context. However, based on the available text, these stories do not seem to convey any profound messages. The first story juxtaposes two seemingly unrelated events, birds crying and a human conflict, reflecting Huan's known skepticism towards omens. This juxtaposition might aim to critique those who seek omens in everyday occurrences, though if refutation was Huan's goal, he could have opted for more impactful historical instances, as seen in Wang Chong's approach. Instead, Huan selects a minor personal episode, focusing on the tale rather than constructing a strong argument. Similarly, the second anecdote, another minor incident from Huan's life, prioritizes engaging storytelling, such as the description of colorful clothing, over delivering a direct message. This narrative choice, coupled with a humorously exaggerated conclusion, starkly differs from the treatment of themes like "serenity" (*anjing* 安靜) in other texts, where the concept is treated with depth and seriousness. For example, in the *Xinyuan*, it is asserted, "There is nothing like serenity that is the proper way of a sage" (聖人之正，莫如安靜),[389] underscoring the significance and solemnity associated with "serenity." This disparity suggests that if Huan intended to truly appreciate such a concept, he could have opted for more illustrative examples than the anecdote of an individual donning vibrant clothes and stopping a possible conflict. These two stories, among others in the *Xinlun*, prioritize engaging narratives over didactic messages. Such stories, often considered trivial, do not fit neatly into the mold of traditional biography, since they do not necessarily showcase the protagonist's unique traits nor impart clear lessons. These narratives diverge from the more instructive nature of earlier master writings. Instead, they hold significance primarily for those familiar with or curious about Huan, appealing to readers with similar

[389] *Shuoyuan jiaozheng*, 394.

backgrounds or educations, possibly acquainting them with the stories' subjects or even undisclosed details. This approach suggests that the value of these anecdotes lies less in their profound message and more in the sense of closeness they foster. They resemble amusing accounts one might find in a friend's memoir, aimed not at instructing but at deepening understanding among Huan's contemporaries. As such, when his friends engage with these tales, it is not just the stories that resonate but the shared experiences and memories they rekindle, inviting a broader literary community into a more intimate sphere of shared understanding and connection.

The inclusion of "tales of the strange" similarly offers intriguing narratives without explicit judgments, focusing instead on the stories' inherent interest.

> Cheng Wei, a Gentleman of the Yellow Gate of the Han, was fond of the methods of gold and silver. He married a woman from a family versed in such arts…. Wei tried to make gold using the *Zhenzhong Hongbao* [a text of methods and recipes], but failed. His wife went to see him. At that moment, Wei was fanning the coals to heat a tube, which contained mercury. His wife said, "I would like to have a try." She then took a small amount of medicine from her pouch and threw it in. Shortly after, they opened the tube and the mercury turned into silver, astonishing Wei. He exclaimed, "The Way was here with you all along, and yet you did not tell me earlier, why?" His wife replied, "Only the one who has such a destiny could get it." Wei then tried day and night to coax it out of her, even selling fields and houses to provide luxurious food and clothing, but she refused to tell him. Wei then conspired with others to beat and intimidate her into submission. The wife, immediately foreseeing this, told Wei, "The Way must be transmitted to the right person. If the right person were found, even if we met on the road, I would always teach him. If he were not the right person, if his words were proper but his heart was not, even if I were to be cut into pieces and my limbs torn away, the Way would not be presented." Wei still forced her and did not stop. Thus, his wife went mad, ran away naked, smeared herself with mud, and eventually died.
> 漢黃門郎程偉，好黃白術。娶妻得知方家女。……偉按《枕中鴻寶》作金，不成，妻乃往視偉，偉方扇炭燒筩，筩中有水銀，妻曰：「吾欲試相視一事。」乃出其囊中藥，少少投之。食頃發之，已成銀。偉大驚曰：「道近在汝處，而不早告我，何也？」妻曰：「得之須有命者。」於是偉日夜說誘之，賣田宅以供美食衣服，猶不肯告偉。偉乃與伴謀撾笞伏之，妻輒知之，告偉言：「道必當傳其人。得其人，道路相遇，輒教之；如非其人，口是而心非者，雖寸斷支解，而道猶不出也。」偉逼之不止，妻乃發狂，裸而走，以泥自塗，遂卒。[390]

[390] *Xinlun*, 57–58.

> A maid in the household of Lü Zhongzi died, leaving behind a daughter aged four. She came several times to wash the girl's head, clothes, and body. A master of methods said, "It was the black dog in this family who did this. Kill it, and it will stop." Yang Zhongwen also said that he knew a family where an old woman died. She suddenly rose, drank, and ate. After getting drunk, she sat on the bed for sacrifices. This happened three or four times, increasingly vexing the family. Later, when she got drunk and walked on a ruined wall, [the family] found an old dog and beat it to death. Upon inquiry, it turned out to be a dog from a local merchant family.
> 呂仲子婢死，有女年四歲，數來為沐頭浣濯，道士云：「其家青狗為之，殺之則止。」楊仲文亦言：所知家嫗死，忽起飲食，醉後而坐祭床上。如是三四，家益厭苦。其後醉行壞垣，得老狗，便打殺之。推問乃里頭沽家狗。[391]

The protagonists of these tales are often contemporaries or acquaintances of Huan, such as Yang Zhongwen and Lü Zhongzi in the second tale, indicating that Huan sources these anecdotes from his social circle. His method of recording them appears relatively objective, leaving his personal judgments or beliefs about these unusual tales unexpressed. Consequently, it remains uncertain whether Huan accepts these stories as real or presents them merely for entertainment. The intended message or any specific commentary Huan might have offered at each story's conclusion is lost to us, inviting only speculation based on the remaining texts. Among the two examples given, one story delves into the realm of alchemy, revealing a belief in the potential to transmute base metals into gold or silver, considered a skill of immortals or exceptionally learned men of methods and recipes (*fangshi* 方士, or *daoshi* 道士 before the end of Eastern Han).[392] This belief held sway among aristocrats and scholars throughout much of the Western Han, especially from the time of Emperor Wu. However, due to the scant records left by these practitioners, our understanding of their theories and methods is limited. While some orthodox Ru scholars dismiss alchemy as fraudulent, others, including notable scholars like Liu Xiang, endorsed its possibilities.

[391] Ibid., 56.
[392] Ibid., 53.

> Emperor Xuan again encouraged the affairs of immortals, methods, and recipes. King of Huainan had writings of *Zhenzhong Hongbao* and *Yuanmi*, which described techniques for immortals using spirits to make gold. There were also recipes by Zou Yan valuing the Way and elongating life. Common people could not see them, but Xiang's father, De, got these writings when he tried the case of King of Huainan during the reign of Emperor Wu. Xiang had read and recited these writings since he was young, and he found them extraordinary, so he presented them to the throne, claiming that gold could be made. Emperor Xuan ordered the Imperial Manufactories to cast and make it, which incurred great expense, but the recipe did not work.
> 上復興神僊方術之事，而淮南有枕中鴻寶苑秘書。書言神僊使鬼物為金之術，及鄒衍重道延命方，世人莫見，而更生父德武帝時治淮南獄得其書。更生幼而讀誦，以為奇，獻之，言黃金可成。上令典尚方鑄作事，費甚多，方不驗。[393]

This discredited alchemical recipe stirred considerable debate among scholars of the time regarding the emperor's reliance on such recipes.[394] As an acquaintance of the Liu family, Huan would undoubtedly have been aware of this notable incident. Despite the exclusive access the Liu family had to these esoteric texts, as mentioned in the *Hanshu*, Huan's account of Cheng Wei implies that knowledge of these practices persisted after Liu Xiang's case. Huan, known for his skepticism towards alchemical methods and his approval of Emperor Guangwu's dismissal of recipe practitioners,[395] narrates Cheng's failure in alchemy without a definitive stance against the practice itself. Instead, the story suggests failure is not due to the inherent impossibility of transmutation but rather Cheng's unsuitability for the task, which is illustrated by the contrast to his wife's success. It is likely that Huan might have also perceived Liu Xiang, much like Cheng, as unsuited for alchemical success. Yet, the tale also notes Cheng's wife's tragic end despite her alchemical skill, leaving Huan's judgment, if any, unclear. Is the critique aimed at Cheng's overreach or at his wife's failure to save herself? Huan's narrative remains deliberately ambiguous, possibly reflecting his intent not to moralize but to faithfully document an intriguing story among

[393] *Hanshu* 36.1928–29.
[394] See the memorial of Zhang Chang 張敞 (d. 48 BCE) on this affair. *Hanshu* 25B.1250–51.
[395] *Hou Hanshu* 28A.960.

many in his collection. For Huan, the merit of including such stories in the *Xinlun* lies in their inherent interest and the conversations they might inspire among his readers, much like the debates recorded between him and his friends. Similarly, the second narrative also maintains a neutral stance, not offering judgments on the credibility of stories about mythical dogs. Huan neither endorses nor dismisses these tales, choosing instead to include them in his *Xinlun* without explicit evaluation. This story intertwines the motif of resurrection, a theme with roots stretching back to the Warring States period,[396] and the unusual phenomena, like a dog exerting control over a human body, a motif typically classified under omens in earlier literature. Works like Liu Xiang and Liu Xin's "Discussions of the Commentary on the 'Hongfan'" 洪範五行傳論 serve as exemplars in this genre, categorizing various unusual events as omens tied to the ruler's misconduct, where the phenomena's significance lies in their political implications rather than the events themselves. Contrastingly, the peculiar dogs in Huan's accounts stand out for their intrinsic interest, detached from any broader symbolic meaning. This approach, focusing on the marvels themselves, diverges from the norm in the Western Han, aligning more closely with the narrative styles of later compilers and enthusiasts of strange tales from the Wei and Jin dynasties onward. Thus, Zhang Binglin's observation that Huan's writings resonate with Song people's notes, which "draw attention back to the diversity and particularity of actual phenomena and experience" [397] without necessarily imparting moral or political lessons, captures the essence of Huan's literary endeavors.

---

[396] For transmitted texts, see Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 696. For excavated texts, see Li Xueqin 李學勤, "Fangmatan jian zhong de zhiguai gushi" 放馬灘簡中的志怪故事, *Wenwu* 1990.4: 43–47; Li Ling, "Beida Qindu 'Taiyuan you sizhe' jianjie" 北大秦牘《泰原有死者》簡介, *Wenwu* 2012.6: 81–84.

[397] Peter Bol, "A Literati Miscellany and Sung Intellectual History: The Case of Chang Lei's 'Ming-tao tsa-chih,'" *Journal of Song-Yuan studies* 25 (1995): 150.

However, Huan's anecdotes are far from trivial. On the contrary, his focus on them marks the *Xinlun* as a forerunner of the emergence of a new scholarly class, akin to the Song dynasty's *biji* 筆記 (pen-notes texts), which is "one important form of cultivation for this new class, especially in developing their specific cultural sensitivities and forming their specific knowledge corpus."[398] The widely recognized notion of "self-consciousness" among intellectuals, noticeable from the mid-Eastern Han through the Jin dynasty, found an early advocate in Huan. His wide-ranging interest within the *Xinlun* reflects a quest for comprehensive knowledge that is integral to this emerging sense of self-awareness.[399] Simultaneously, his departure from the constraints of political and moral discourse, focusing instead on personal experiences and community-derived information, signifies the rise of both a new type of writings and a new group of intellectuals. This shift is reflected in numerous post-Eastern Han works, whether in the form of master writings,[400] "tales of the strange," or accounts of historical figures, all resonating with the attitude of viewing literature as a reflection of the author's own experiences and thoughts. For example, Ying Shao's 應劭 (ca. 153–196) *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 (Comprehensive Meaning of Customs and Mores), written a century later, mirrors the *Xinlun* in several key aspects: it targets a literati readership, spans a wide array of topics, weaves in personal and communal anecdotes, and captivates with the intrinsic appeal of its stories.[401] Both works defy easy categorization within

[398] Fu Daiwie, "The Flourishing of *Biji* or Pen-Notes Texts and its Relations to History of Knowledge in Song China (960–1279)," *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* (2007): 107.
[399] For the key role of the concept of comprehensiveness in the formation of "self-consciousness" from the Eastern Han through the Jin dynasty, see Yu Yingshi, "Han Jin zhiji shi zhi xin zijue yu xin sichao," 351–63.
[400] Masters literature in early Medieval China was largely regarded as a comprehensive history of the self. Therefore, a master text is claimed to be "a discourse that is entirely one's own." See Xiaofei Tian, "The Twilight of the Masters: Masters Literature (*Zishu*) in Early Medieval China," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126 (2006): 471.
[401] Many anecdotes in the *Fengsu tongyi* are later incorporated in collections of tales, such as *Soushenji* 搜神記 (In Search of the Sacred), *Bowuzhi* 博物志 (Records of Diverse Matters), and *Shishuo xinyu*. See Liu Mingyi 劉明怡, "*Fengsu tongyi* de wenti tedian jiqi wenxue yiyi" 《風俗通義》的文體特點及其文

traditional literary classifications, straddling the domains of history (*shi* 史) and master writings (*zi* 子),[402] embodying the author's worldview and recording both personal and collective experiences. Long before the third century, Huan emerges as a pioneer of this kind of masters literature that would flourish in the Wei and Jin dynasties, marking a significant shift from public discourse to introspective exploration.[403] Therefore, it is inappropriate to evaluate such works by the criteria applied to pre-Qin master writings. Zhang's critique of the *Xinlun* as trivial overlooks the innovation and contributions within these non-political narratives. The *Xinlun* and its successors cater to a new type of reader, one who values anecdotes not as mere rhetorical devices but for their inherent interest, though they remain open to exploring deeper interpretations. This transformation in reader identity and interests opened the door for authors to forge a new type of masters literature, designed for exchange among peers rather than for the edification of rulers. This is the dusk of imperial literature, but the dawn of self-conscious literati literature.

2.3 Summary

In this chapter, we delve into the transformative editorial practices of Liu Xiang and the innovative literary contributions of Huan Tan, juxtaposing their unique yet complementary influences on masters literature. On one hand, Liu Xiang's editorial expertise in his compilations, *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan,* imbues traditional narratives with reimagined significance and a refreshed context. His strategic use of the term *xin* highlights not merely the inclusion of new material but a profound recontextualization that redefines the implications of historical anecdotes within a meticulously crafted textual web. This approach elevates the anecdotal genre beyond simple historical

學意義, *Wenxue yichan* 2009.2: 20–29; Cao Daoheng 曹道衡, "*Fengsu tongyi* he Wei Jin Liuchao xiaoshuo" 《風俗通義》和魏晉六朝小說, *Wenxue yichan* 1988.3: 10–17.

[402] *Fengsu tongyi* is categorized under master writings in the *Suishu*'s "Jingji zhi," but it is also widely regarded as a historical work. See Liu Mingyi, "*Fengsu tongyi* de wenti tedian jiqi wenxue yiyi," 20.

[403] Yin Yushan, "Han Wei zishu yanjiu," 69.

instruction or canonical annotation. It is precisely through the process of granting those formerly generic anecdotes distinct interpretations that Liu's role as an author becomes evident.

On the other hand, Huan Tan's *Xinlun* represents a crucial shift in the masters literature genre, bridging the legacy of the pre-Qin and Han traditions with the emergence of new masterly writings after the Eastern Han. Huan Tan inherits the tradition of political discourse from earlier texts such as *Xinyu* and *Xinxu*, yet he broadens the narrative scope to redefine sagehood beyond mere political authority, emphasizing the significance of all-encompassing writings. Moreover, *Xinlun*'s integration of personal history with a wide array of knowledge, including what might seem like trivial anecdotes, diverges from the traditional moral and political narratives. This approach signals the advent of a new genre tailored not for rulers but for peers, enhancing close connections among the literati through shared personal experiences and perspectives.

The works of Liu and Huan exhibit numerous similarities: both aim to guide governance, yet their scope extends far beyond mere political directives. The intended audience for their texts includes not just rulers but also their peer literati. Both authors draw upon ancient as well as contemporary stories. They inherit the tradition of the *Chunqiu*, either explicitly or implicitly. Moreover, they penetrate the boundaries of historical narrative and master discourses. Simultaneously, there is a discernible transition from Liu to Huan, where minimal authorial intervention is replaced by a prevalent first-person narrative and perspective. Furthermore, the stories deemed "shallow and lacking in principles" by Liu and thus excluded from his compilations are valued by Huan and meticulously preserved in his work. This contrast underscores a unique appreciation for what merits inclusion in the textual world. While both Liu and Huan denote their works with the term *xin*, their explorations of "newness" significantly diverge, illustrating the varied paths through which masters literature has evolved. Collectively, their works underscore an ongoing

dialogue between tradition and innovation, challenging readers to reconsider the limits and possibilities of master writings during the Han era.

- CHAPTER 3 -

New Classic:

Yang Xiong's Ever-Evolving Model in the *Fayan* 法言 (Exemplary Sayings)[404]

3.1 Yang Xiong's "Love of Antiquity"? Love of New Classics

Yang Xiong has often been perceived as one of the least innovative writers of the Western Han period.[405] This view is heavily influenced by Ban Gu, who suggests that Yang's oeuvre imitated existing classical works.[406] Ban further extolled Yang's "love of antiquity" (*haogu* 好古),[407] casting him as an outlier among his peers—an influential depiction that continues to resonate with many modern scholars. Michael Nylan, for instance, describes Yang and his contemporaries, primarily Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, as "the first generation to truly 'love antiquity' in the quite specific sense of wanting to restore a distant past."[408] Nonetheless, the extent to which Ban Gu's assessments align with Yang's self-perception and his actual sentiments towards the past remains

---

[404] Nylan translates this title as "Exemplary Figures," which downplays the emphasis on the oral elements of Yang's writings. Consequently, I opt for "Exemplary Sayings" as a more accurate translation. A thorough analysis of Yang's deliberate focus on *yan* 言 (spoken language) is provided in the following section.

[405] For example, the Southern Song scholar Chao Gongwu 晁公武 (1101–1180) criticized Yang's scholarship for lacking personal insight, noting that Yang merely emulated the sages, adhering as closely as a shadow to its form. This view found many adherents in later periods. Late Qing scholar Tang Yan 唐晏 (1857–1920) also disparaged Yang's work as merely imitative, asserting that nothing he did was original. See Chao, *Junzhai dushu zhi* 郡齋讀書志 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), 434, and Tang, *Liang Han Sanguo xue'an* 兩漢三國學案 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 553.

[406] Ban commented that Yang aimed for his writings to achieve enduring fame among future generations. He elaborated that Yang held the *Yijing* as the ultimate classic, inspiring his *Taixuan*; the *Lunyu* as the premier commentary, leading to his *Fayan*; the *Cang Jie* 倉頡 as the superior wordbook, prompting his *Xunzuan* 訓纂; the "Yu zhen" 虞箴 as the best admonition, resulting in his "Zhou zhen" 州箴; the "Li Sao" 離騷 as the deepest *fu*, which he expanded upon; and the literary works of Sima Xiangru as the most elegant, inspiring him to write four *fu*. In all these endeavors, he meticulously compared himself to the originals, striving to emulate their style in his own works. See *Hanshu* 87B.3583.

[407] In the *Hanshu*, Ban also praised Duke Wen of Wei, Liu Xiang, Liu Xin, King Xian of Hejian (Liu De 劉德), and Du Lin 杜林, bestowing upon them the accolade of *haogu*.

[408] Nylan, "Manuscript Culture in Late Western Han," 165.

questionable. This calls for a reevaluation of several aspects: Yang's actual affection for *gu* 古, the specific nature of the past he loves, and whether he himself viewed his literary productions as mere "imitations" of ancient texts.

Indeed, Yang's autobiography, which includes some of his *fu*, often alludes to the Three Dynasties and ancient sages. However, the term *gu* appears solely in the compound *taigu* 太古 (remote past), not to contrast with the Han era but as a historical backdrop to the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices.[409] More prevalent is the term *xi* 昔, which appears ten times in the biography. As discussed earlier in the first chapter, *xi* encompasses a wide temporal range: from the distant past to the very recent. Yang adheres to this usage, spanning his references from the first sage, Fu Xi 伏羲, to the Qin dynasty.[410] Additionally, the word *wang* 往 is used twice to denote events from the Warring States period and Emperor Wu's reign, representing an immediate past. Similarly, in the whole *Fayan*, only four instances of *gu* are cited as exemplary;[411] three other references (two within the compound *taigu*) are critiqued.[412] In contrast, *xi* is used twenty times, covering a period from Yao to Emperor Wu, with fourteen instances viewed positively. Despite some Han

[409] At the end of a *fu* on hunting, Yang remarked, "In ancient times (*taigu* 太古), sage kings paid homage to the Eastern Mountain and performed the *shan* rites at Liang. Apart from our era, who could compare with them?" (太古之覲東嶽，禪梁基，舍此世也，其誰與哉？) See *Hanshu* 87A.3552.

[410] Although Yang does not explicitly mention Fu Xi, the description that "In the past, there was a person who observed the patterns in the Heaven, examined the measurements on the earth, and studied the principles among people" (昔人有觀象於天，視度於地，察法於人者) aligns closely with narratives associated with Fu Xi. For this reference and another mentioning the Qin leading with the term *xi*, see *Hanshu* 87B.3577, 3559.

[411] These four instances include: "the learning of the ancient times" (古者之學), "May I ask about exemplary figures from ancient times?" (請問古), "even the finest envoys from ancient times" (雖古之膚使), and "In ancient times, people valued those who achieved distinction by starving" (古者高餓顯). See *Fayan yishu*, 7.8.222, 11.19.476, 11.20.482, 11.21.484.

[412] The three instances mentioned are: "In ancient times, Yang Zhu and Mo Di blocked the road" (古者楊墨塞路), "In ancient times, they blocked the people's ears and eyes" (太古塗民耳目), and "In ancient times, virtue was cherished but not the rites" (太古德懷不禮懷). *Fayan yishu* 2.20.81, 4.18.126, 4.20.127.

scholars leveraging *gu* to strengthen their arguments since the *Yantielun*, Yang does not heavily rely on this approach. As an accomplished philologist,[413] Yang must be meticulous in his word choice. He prefers *xi* over *gu*, indicating that his conception of "past" is not limited to the distant past. Instead, he considers all historical precedents, including those from the Han dynasty, as sources. This broad temporal scope necessitated the use of *xi*, which encompasses a wider range of historical periods. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to classify Yang as a "Reformist" fixated on the remote past. Instead, his approach aligns more closely with that of a Paradigmist, who intends to encompass historical examples as comprehensively as possible.

Among all the precedents, Yang Xiong's preference for a more immediate past over a distant one is evident in his evaluative chapters on historical figures, "Chong Li" 重黎 (Chong and Li) and "Yuan Qian" 淵騫 (Yan Hui and Min Ziqian). Within these two chapters, which comprise 53 entries, only six (approximately 11%) discuss individuals from the pre-Warring States period, while the majority focus on figures from the Qin and Han dynasties. This emphasis on more recent history likely stems from Yang's belief that "with the gentleman's speech, obscure points can always be proven by what is clear, and far-reaching points, by what is close …To have no proof at all for one's claims is the definition of 'baselessness'" (君子之言，幽必有驗乎明；遠必有驗乎近，……無驗而言之謂妄).[414] Yang insists that grand statements must be substantiated by "what is clear" and "what is close." Thus, contemporary history serves as a compelling "proof" (*yan* 驗) for various theories, providing clear demonstrations of the teachings of sages.

---

[413] Yang's notable achievements in philology include his works *Xunzuan* and *Fangyan* 方言 (Dialect Expressions). While *Xunzuan* emphasizes the graphical aspects of characters, *Fangyan* concentrates more on their phonetic aspects.

[414] *Fayan yishu* 5.12.159. Translation revised from Nylan trans., *Exemplary Figures/ Fayan* 法言 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 75.

Consequently, Yang's focus on Qin and Han characters resonates with other Paradigmists, who emphasize the importance of historical examples, particularly from the Han, to inform contemporary practices.

A detailed analysis of Yang's assessments of Han figures reveals some nuanced aspects of his evaluations.

Time Period	Positive Figures	Negative Figures	Unclear
Emperor Gaozu	四皓 欒布 朱家 婁敬 陸賈 周昌 滕公 灌嬰 樊噲 酈商 蕭何 曹參 張良 陳平 周勃 所招不至二大臣	叔孫通 酈食其 蒯通 季布 韓信 黥布	陳餘 張耳
Empress Lü	張辟強 王陵		
Emperor Wen	文帝 申屠嘉 直不疑 張釋之 石奮	賈誼	馮唐
Emperor Jing	韓安國	枚乘 爰盎 晁錯	
Emperor Wu	轅固 申公 董仲舒 太史公 卜式 石慶 石建 汲黯 金日磾 衛青 霍去病 張騫 蘇武	公孫弘 桑弘羊 東方朔 竇嬰 灌夫 淮南王 李廣利 楊王孫 司馬相如	
Emperor Zhao	雋不疑		
Emperor Xuan	霍光 韋玄 張安世 丙吉 夏侯勝 尹翁歸	田廣明 韓延壽 趙廣漢	王吉
Emperor Yuan	京房 賈捐之		弘恭 陳湯 貢禹
Emperor Cheng	王尊 鄭子真		
Contemporaries	龔勝 龔舍 莊君平 李仲元 揚烏 王莽		

Table 5. Evaluations of Han people in the *Fayan*[415]

The table above reveals several key insights into Yang Xiong's evaluation of Han characters. First, Emperors Gaozu and Wu are noted for the quantity of characters mentioned during their reigns, though the proportion of positively regarded figures is significantly higher in Gaozu's era

[415] In this table, for ease of calculation, each figure is placed under the reign of one emperor based on the time of their most memorable events or the specific events to which Yang refers, even though some of them may have lived across several reigns.

than in Wu's. Second, among the figures from both the Qin and Han dynasties, Emperor Wen stands out as the sole emperor commended for his virtues, indicating a selective admiration for leadership qualities that align with Confucian ideals of benevolent governance.[416] Third, from the reign of Emperor Yuan, which coincides with Yang's lifetime, there is a conspicuous absence of criticism toward historical figures, including traditionally infamous ones like the eunuch Hong Gong.[417] This absence might indicate Yang's reluctance to openly critique contemporary figures. Fourth, not many positively noted figures are Ru scholars. Instead, non-Ru figures like Yin Wenggui 尹翁歸 (d. 62 BCE) and Wang Zun 王尊 (fl. 46 BCE), who started as legal clerks and governed stringently, are lauded as "celebrated ministers of recent times" (*jinshi mingqing* 近世名卿).[418] Even though some positive figures in the *Fayan* have backgrounds in Confucian education, few are lauded specifically for their Confucian learning. For example, Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝 (fl. 70 BCE) and Jing Fang 京房 (77–37 BCE), experts in the *Shangshu* and *Yijing*, are commended not for their scholastic achievements but for their bold criticisms of rulers.[419] Similarly, Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成 (d. 36 BCE), despite his deep learning in the *Shijing* and participation in the Shiqu ge 石渠閣 (Stone Canal Pavilion) conference in 51 BCE, is praised for modestly

[416] *Fayan yishu* 10.22.389.
[417] When asked, "What if I were to employ you to draft statutes?" Yang responded, "I would not be as good as Hong Gong." (或問曰：「載使子草律。」曰：「吾不如弘恭。」) At first glance, Yang appears to praise Hong for his proficiency in drafting laws. However, his subsequent statement that his higher pursuit is to let no one break laws may be seen as an implicit critique of Hong. This criticism, if intended, is quite subtle. Ibid. 9.21.303.
[418] Ibid. 11.19.476.
[419] Ibid. 11.16.450. In this entry, Xiahou and Jing are juxtaposed with Dong Zhongshu as three representative figures known for studying anomalies. All three were severely punished for their outspoken admonishments to their rulers. Other characters mentioned in the same entries, regardless of their good conduct, persuasive speeches, steadfast rectitude, or staunch principles, all corrected the emperors' mistakes through their speeches or actions. Therefore, it appears that Xiahou, Jing, and Dong Zhongshu are not merely appreciated for their deep knowledge of anomalies, but more so for their courageous application of this knowledge.

declining to inherit his father's title.[420] Although Yang elevates Ru to a supreme status,[421] only Masters Yuangu 轅固 (fl. the reign of Emperor Jing) and Shen Pei 申培 (ca. 219–ca. 135 BCE) are distinctly commended for their Ru identities. Both are noted probably not only as distinguished *Shijing* scholars but also for their criticism of the sycophantic academic climate under Emperor Wu.[422] Post-Emperor Xuan, Yang refrains from mentioning prominent contemporary Ru scholars such as Kuang Heng or Liu Xiang. The scholars he does praise, with the exception of Wang Mang, are generally peripheral in both the academic and political arenas.[423]

Yang's deliberate omission of notable Ru scholars of his time may be attributed to his disapproval of the imperially controlled academic system. Masters Yuangu and Shen Pei epitomize an older scholarly tradition characterized by: (1) oral rather than written transmission of knowledge, (2) a focus on the essential meanings of the classics, (3) absence of a defined *shifa* 師法 (teachers' models)[424] or influential teachers, and (4) a willingness to criticize rulers openly and

---

[420] Ibid. 10.26.399. In this entry, Wei is juxtaposed with Yan Hui, Qian Lou 黔婁, and the Four Graybeards as individuals who could accomplish what others cannot. It seems that the emphasis here is not on Wei's scholarship, which is not described as beyond the capabilities of others, but rather on his exceptional ethical conduct.

[421] For example, Yang asserts that "if one could employ the true Ru scholars, he would have no peer or rival all under Heaven" (如用真儒，無敵於天下). Ibid. 7.16.235.

[422] Yuangu's uprightness is evident in two incidents: He resisted praising the writings of Laozi even under pressure from Empress Dowager Dou, and he cautioned Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 (199–121 BCE) against flattering the ruler. Given Yang's own criticisms of Gongsun, it is likely that Yang commends Yuangu specifically for his readiness to criticize Gongsun. See *Shiji* 121. 3121–22; 3123–24.

[423] Zheng Zizhen 鄭子真, Zhuang Junping 莊君平, and Li Zhongyuan 李仲元 owe much of their historical recognition to Yang's endorsements. Ban's decision to list Zheng and Zhuang alongside the Four Graybeards in the *Hanshu* was likely influenced by Yang's prominent mentions of them in the *Fayan*. See *Hanshu* 72.3056–57.

[424] Liang Cai argues that the concept of *shifa* was a new construction by Confucians during the reigns of Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan. This argument is detailed in Cai, "Excavating the Genealogy of Classical Studies in the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.–8 C.E.)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131.3 (2011): 391. For further discussions on *shifa*, see Wang Mingsheng 王明盛, *Shiqi shi shangque* 十七史商榷 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), 27; Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞, *Jingxue lishi* 經學歷史 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959), 136; and Qian Mu, "Liang Han boshi jiafa kao" 兩漢博士家法考 in *Liang Han jingxue jinguwen pingyi* 兩漢經學今古文平議 (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 2001), 223–30.

confront flattery among scholars. In contrast, many scholars under the patronage of Han emperors, particularly from the time of Emperor Zhao, tended to: (1) produce extensive written commentaries, including *zhangju* 章句 (detailed comments on sections and sentences), (2) align themselves with restrictive pedagogical lineages, (3) rarely challenge authority, and (4) view scholarship as a vehicle for personal gain or social prestige. Yang depicts himself as their exact opposite (and similar to Yuangu and Shen Pei) at the beginning of his autobiography.[425] Yang positions himself in his autobiography as a counterpoint to this newer tradition that had developed over the preceding fifty years, aligning himself with the older, more critical tradition of scholarship that had arisen roughly a century earlier. Thus, Yang's models for Ru scholarship derive not from a distant past but from an immediate past.

Yang not only opposes the official learning of his time but also maintains a distance from two major scholarly trends. On the one hand, while he frequently emphasizes the importance of rituals in the *Fayan*, he did not participate in the most influential debates on imperial rituals during the reigns of Emperors Yuan and Cheng. Yang appears indifferent to some core ideas proposed by Ritualists: his concept of ritual is primarily manifested in the daily life of gentlemen and common people rather than in grand ceremonies related to emperors.[426] Moreover, he seldom references ritual texts, notably the newly emerged *Liji*, which Ritualists adopted as a guideline.[427]

---

[425] In his autobiography, Yang does not mention his teachers at all. He describes himself as someone who "does not engage with the *zhangju* tradition, focusing instead on understanding the fundamental meanings…. He is indifferent to wealth and status, and undisturbed by poverty and lowliness" (不為章句，訓詁通而已，博覽無所不見。……不汲汲於富貴，不戚戚於貧賤). See *Hanshu* 87A.3514.

[426] "When attending the gentleman, one listens to what he says, and when wine is served, one observes the ritual" (侍坐則聽言，有酒則觀禮). *Fayan yishu* 7.10.227.

[427] In the *Fayan*, the term *li* likely refers to a specific text only in the statement from 7.5: "For explicating bodily decorum, there is no finer rhetoric than that of the *Li*" (說體者莫辯乎《禮》). Additionally, 3.16, which states, "The rites have many points of decorum" (《禮》多儀), is sometimes interpreted to refer to the *Yili*. However, the *Fayan* does not clearly mention any of the newly promoted ritual classics.

On the other hand, although he praises three scholars known for their expertise in disasters and prodigies, he also asserts that such knowledge is inferior to moral cultivation.[428] Thus, Yang Xiong stands as an outlier in the late Western Han academic environment. His deviation from mainstream academic norms is not surprising, given that he did not study the classics under renowned teachers and did not demonstrate the ability to provide detailed explanations of specific classics. Consequently, he was largely ignored by contemporary scholars. His *Taixuan* 太玄 (Supreme Mystery) did not achieve wide circulation, and *Fayan* was criticized as evidence of his wishful thinking about becoming a sage.[429]

Yang Xiong's detachment from the prevailing scholarly inclinations that emphasize ritual texts and anomalies as theoretical tools directs us to consider what he views as his foundational resources. Many scholars have noticed Yang's enthusiasm for the "Five Classics" (*wujing* 五經) in the *Fayan*.[430] He not only regards these texts as a cohesive whole for study but also elevates them to a supreme status.[431] This perspective, however, was not unprecedented. Earlier scholars

[428] "As the sages take doing good to be their chief task, anomalies are no more than secondary concerns" (聖人德之為事，異亞之). *Fayan yishu* 13.15.538.

[429] In Ban's comment, he notes that "people of Yang's time all ignored him" (於時人皆習之). Roughly forty years after Yang's death, his work *Taixuan* did not gain popularity. Instead, Yang's works faced significant criticism from many Ru scholars. They argued that Yang's intention of establishing a new classic was comparable to the rulers of Wu and Chu, who usurped the title of king during the Spring and Autumn period, a deed they considered a serious crime deserving of severe punishment. (諸儒或譏以為雄非聖人而作經，猶春秋吳楚之君僭號稱王，蓋誅絕之罪也) See *Hanshu* 87B.3585.

[430] Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅 suggests that the term "Five Classics" was popularized via Yang Xiong's neoclassics**,** the *Fayan* and the *Taixuan*. His detailed exploration of this theory is presented in *Kandai Jukyō no shiteki kenkyū: Jukyō no kangakuka o meguru teisetsu no saikento* 漢代儒教の史的研究：儒教の官学化をめぐる定説の再検討 (Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 2003), 149–52. Similarly, Nylan argues that the specific rubric of the "Five Classics" came into use relatively late, via the writings of Yang Xiong and his contemporaries. See Nylan, "Classics without Canonization, reflections on classical learning and authority in Qin (221–210 BC) and Han (206 BC–AD 220)," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One, Shang through Han (1250 BC–AD 220)*, eds. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 724.

[431] "No one can ever set aside the Five Classics if one intends to cross over to the Way" (舍五經而濟乎道者，末矣). *Fayan yishu* 2.9.67.

like Dong Zhongshu, Chu Da 褚大, and Xiahou Shichang 夏侯始昌, during Emperor Wu's reign, were already renowned for their ability to "penetrate the Five Classics" (*tong wujing* 通五經).[432] Furthermore, in Emperor Yuan's edict, *wujing* was officially endorsed as "the proper methods" (*zhengshu* 正術).[433] This reverence continued to grow, and during the reigns of Emperors Cheng and Ai, various officials from diverse intellectual backgrounds affirmed that the *wujing* should be the ultimate criterion for evaluating all knowledge.[434] Given that the *Fayan* was composed later, during the reigns of Emperor Ping or Wang Mang,[435] Yang's promotion of the "Five Classics" reflects the popular scholarly trends of his time.

What truly distinguishes Yang from his contemporaries, however, is not merely his reverence for the classics, but his interpretations of them.

> Someone asked about the new versus the worn-out. "The new is continued, and the worn-out, added to or subtracted from."

---

[432] *Hanshu* 88.3617, 58.2633, 75.3154. According to Fukui, the designation *wujing* cannot be traced back to the reign of Emperor Wu, and he regards the usage of *wujing boshi* 五經博士 (Erudites of the Five Classics) in the reign of Emperor Wu as later interpolations. See "Shin Kan jidai ni okeru hakase seido no tenkai: Gokei hakase no secchi o meguru gigi sairon" 秦漢時代における博士制度の展開：五經博士の設置をめぐる疑義再論, *Toyoshi kenkyu* 54 (1995): 1–31. Kern also points out that there is no evidence that the erudites of the *wujing*, "and with them the Canons themselves, played any role in the rulership and representation of Emperor Wu." See Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon," 68–69. However, it does not mean that no one took the Five Classics as a whole and studied them altogether before the reign of Emperor Xuan.

[433] *Hanshu* 80.3323.

[434] During the reign of Emperor Cheng, notable figures included Gu Yong and Wang Feng, while under Emperor Ai, there were Li Xun, Liu Xin, and Bao Xuan. Bao Xuan was known for his straightforward remonstrations, Gu Yong and Li Xun were experts in anomalies, Wang Feng belonged to the consort kin, and Liu Xin was an erudite scholar from the imperial family. Despite their diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise, they all held a common belief in the supremacy of the *wujing* as the standard.

[435] Lu Kanru 陸侃如 suggests that the *Fayan* was composed in 1 CE, the second year of Emperor Ping's era, while Wang Yixian 王以憲 proposes that it was written in 9 or 10 CE. For a detailed discussion of these differing timelines, see Xie Lixia 解麗霞, *Yang Xiong yu Handai jingxue* 揚雄與漢代經學 (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2011), 19. I subscribe to the latter theory and consider *Fayan* to be Yang's final work. Further reference can be found in Wang Qing 王青, *Yang Xiong pingzhuan* 揚雄評傳 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2000), 183.

或問「新敝」。曰：「新則襲之，敝則益損之。」[436]

Someone asked, “Can the classics be added to or subtracted from?” “The *Yijing* began with the Eight Trigrams, from which King Wen produced the sixty-four Hexagrams. This is proof that the classics can be added to. As for the *Shi*, *Shu*, *Li*, and *Chunqiu*, in some places they were transmitted writings, and in some cases new compositions. That they were completed by Kongzi is proof that they could be added to. Thus, the Way is not spontaneously created. Rather, it is fashioned in response to the times, which means that it can be added to or subtracted from.”
或曰：「經可損益與？」曰：「《易》始八卦，而文王六十四，其益可知也。《詩》、《書》、《禮》、《春秋》，或因或作而成於仲尼，其益可知也。故夫道非天然，應時而造者，損益可知也。」[437]

Nylan, when translating the second entry, annotates that Yang’s statement about classics “would have struck some as radical, since *jing* 經 is often glossed as *chang* 常 (i.e., unchanging).”[438] By asserting that the Way—and by extension, the classics—should be crafted in response to the times, Yang advocates for a view of the classics as dynamic and evolving, rather than fixed. He points to historical figures such as Fu Xi, King Wen, and Kongzi, illustrating that these sages created teachings that responded to the circumstances of their respective eras. Yang implies that contemporary scholars should similarly generate new classics to remain relevant and useful in their own times.[439] This perspective becomes even more striking when considering Yang’s use of the term *sunyi* 損益 (to add or subtract) in both the first and second entries. This suggests that the classics can also become “worn-out” or outdated, necessitating not just their preservation but also their revision. The juxtaposition of the term *xin* with *bi* 敝 (worn-out) in a philosophical

[436] *Fayan yishu* 4.19.127; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 63.
[437] *Fayan yishu* 5.6.144; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 73.
[438] Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 73, note 19.
[439] Kase Tatsuo 嘉瀬達男 suggests that the title *Fayan* underscores an emphasis on contemporary expressions. He argues that the meaning of *Fayan* not only aligns with the language of rites and regulations established by former kings but also encapsulates the essence of a new classic that adapts to the changing times. See Kase, “*Hougen* no hyougen: kyousho no enyou to mohou” 『法言』の表現: 經書の援用と模倣, *Gakurin* 36/37 (2003): 167–68.

context marks a significant shift in thinking.[440] For the first time, *xin* is not overshadowed by *gu*, liberating the new from being perceived as inferior to the old and instead granting it a favorable position. In other words, Yang not only makes room for the creation of "new classics" by future generations within his theoretical framework but also exhibits a clear preference for them. This radical stance encourages a more active and creative engagement with the classics.

That is to say, Yang's use of the term *jing* extends beyond merely referencing the traditional "Five Classics." He suggests that any writings that resonate with the spirit of the *wujing* should be considered as part of this esteemed category. For example, he asserts that if a piece of writing aligns with the classics (書與經同)[441], it deserves to be studied regardless of its contemporary recognition.[442] This perspective allows him to elevate such writings to the same status as the well-established classics, regardless of their origin or time period. Similarly, the term *sheng* 聖 (sage) is not exclusively tied to Kongzi, despite frequent references to him in the *Fayan*.[443] Yang exhibits a more expansive interpretation of what constitutes a sage. One of the most evident cases is:

---

[440] Previously, the terms *xin* and *bi*, when used together, typically referred to the physical condition of concrete objects like clothes and hats. For example, see *Shiji* 121.3123. Moreover, Sima Qian articulates that each dynasty and its Way could become worn-out (*bi*) by its end, suggesting that the subsequent dynasty should seize the opportunity for change. This notion that the Han dynasty emerged from the worn-out traditions of the Zhou and Qin dynasties (承周秦之弊) gained popularity later. Yang Xiong's usage of *xin* and *bi* is likely influenced by this historical perspective. For Sima's theory, see his concluding remarks in the biography of Gaozu in *Shiji* 8.393–94.

[441] It is unclear which specific writings Yang is referring to here. Nylan suggests that Yang could be alluding to his own works, obscure writings, or those of Mencius. See Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 17.

[442] *Fayan yishu* 1.19.31.

[443] According to Kase Tatsuo's analysis, 138 out of the 338 entries in the Fayan mention historical figures, with two-thirds of these references concerning Confucius, the sage kings, Confucius's disciples, and Mencius. See Kase, "Guanyu *Fayan* de renwu piping" 關於《法言》的人物批評, in *Gudai wenlun yanjiu de huigu yu qianzhan: Fudan daxue 2000 nian guoji xueshu huiyi lunwenji* 古代文論研究的回顧與前瞻：復旦大學 2000 年國際學術會議論文集 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2002), 517. In my analysis, references to Confucius (referred to either as Zhongni or Kong/Kongzi) occur 61 times, while references to sages total 108 times, many of which likely do not specifically refer to Confucius.

> Someone asked, “To apply the models used by past sages to regulate what is yet to come would be like applying glue to the fret before tuning the zither. Is this so?” “It is so.” “Since there are so few sage rulers and so many mediocre rulers, if one were only to keep to the Way of Kongzi, wouldn’t this gum up the system like lacquer?” “The models of the sages were always related to the rise and fall. In the past, when Yao ruled over the world, he established the grand principles and transmitted the Mandate to Shun and then Yu. Xia, Yin, and Zhou assigned the throne to their sons. Those not stuck to precedent excelled indeed! Yao and Shun made the images of the punishments manifest, while the Xia rulers had 3,000 mutilating punishments. Those not stuck to precedent excelled indeed! Yao drew the Nine Clans to him, and he brought peace and harmony to the myriad states. Tang and King Wu displayed their awesome powers in punitive attacks that led to the conquest of all the territories in the four quarters. From this one may conclude that those not stuck to precedent excelled indeed. [In the Western Zhou,] rites and music, as well as punitive campaigns, were all issued by the Son of Heaven. During the Spring and Autumn period, it was the states of Qi and Jin that truly issued these. Those not stuck to precedent excelled indeed!”
> 或曰：「以往聖人之法治將來，譬猶膠柱而調瑟，有諸？」曰:「有之。」
> 曰：「聖君少而庸君多，如獨守仲尼之道，是漆也。」曰：「聖人之法，未嘗不關盛衰焉。昔者，堯有天下，舉大綱，命舜、禹；夏、殷、周屬其子，不膠者卓矣！唐、虞象刑惟明，夏后肉辟三千，不膠者卓矣！堯親九族，協和萬國。湯武桓桓，征伐四克。由是言之，不膠者卓矣。禮樂征伐，自天子所出。春秋之時，齊晉實予[444]，不膠者卓矣！」[445]

In this excerpt, Yang offers two striking comments. First, Yang not only embraces the rhetorical style of the Counselor in the *Yantielun* but also aligns himself with his philosophical stance,[446] explicitly recognizing that the paradigms set by past sages may not be applied to future contexts. Second, he suggests that various sages throughout history have tailored their approaches to suit their specific times, indicating that Kongzi’s Way is just one among many. He illustrates this with four pairs of contrasting models: abdication versus hereditary rule; symbolic versus mutilating

[444] Li Gui 李軌 and Wang Rongbao interpret this particular line as referring to Kongzi’s attitudes towards the rulers of Qi and Jin, as discussed in the *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan*. Michael Nylan concurs with their interpretation and translates the line accordingly, suggesting that “Kongzi in effect acknowledged the merit of Qi and Jin in issuing these.” See *Fayan yishu*, 295, and Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 143. However, I do not perceive an implication of Kongzi’s presence in this line and prefer a more literal translation. This perspective aligns with the views expressed by Tao Hongqing’s 陶鴻慶 comments in *Fayan yishu* 295, and Han Jing’s 韓敬 annotation in *Fayan* 法言 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 240, note 14.
[445] *Fayan yishu* 9.8.292; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 141–43.
[446] “The Counselor said, ‘Stubbornly adhering to ancient texts to address contemporary issues is like… tuning a zither with glued pegs’” (大夫曰：「堅據古文，以應當世，猶……膠柱而調瑟」). See *Yantielun* 20.255.

punishments; harmonious pacification versus punitive conquests; and the rule of a King versus that of a Hegemon. Traditionally, the former in each pair has been viewed as superior and more ancient, leading to a regressive interpretation of history.[447] However, Yang challenges this perspective by valuing both models within each pair equally as "the models of the sages." Yang's equanimity towards these models has unsettled many commentators, leading to attempts to reinterpret the last example by arguing that it refers not to hegemons but to Kongzi. However, such interpretations lack textual support and seem to stem more from discomfort with Yang's broader acceptance of different sages' models. Contextualizing Yang's statements within the debate over sole adherence to Kongzi's Way, it becomes logical to conclude that he is indeed referencing a variety of models beyond just that of Kongzi. Therefore, while Yang frequently extols Confucius, his definition of a sage is not confined to Kongzi alone. Yang posits that anyone who can develop a Way that is relevant and responsive to the needs of their time has the potential to be considered a sage.

Yang Xiong's aspiration to create new classics and position himself as a new sage suggests that he is not content with merely replicating existing works. The only explicit mention of Yang "imitating" previous texts in his autobiography is related to his study of Sima Xiangru's 司馬相如 (ca. 179–118 BCE) *fu*.[448] This singular instance contrasts sharply with Ban Gu's portrayal of Yang as a diligent follower who aimed to replicate many classical texts. Ban depicts Yang's writings as intentional derivations, suggesting that whenever Yang found a text incomparable, he was compelled to compose a similar one.[449] However, this notion of driven mimicry is absent in

[447] For example, see the narrative in the "Treatise on Punishment and Law" 刑法志 from the *Hanshu*. See *Hanshu* 23.1112.
[448] Yang said that he "always used Sima Xiangru as a model and emulated him whenever composing a *fu*" (每作賦，常擬之以為式). Ibid. 87A.3515.
[449] Ibid. 87B.3583.

Yang's own descriptions of his work. He does not describe his *Taixuan* as an "imitation" of *Yijing* but rather juxtaposes them as balanced counterparts.[450] Similarly, his *Fayan* is not an "imitation" of *Lunyu*. It adopts the form of the *Lunyu* and is in perfect accordance with it (象《論語》),[451] much like the Way of Mystery (*xuan* 玄) is described as operating in the same manner as Heaven (象天) in the first line of *Taixuan*.[452] The term *xiang* 象 in these contexts signifies not imitation but a deeper level of resonance. In other words, Yang perceives the *Fayan* not as a subordinate version of the *Lunyu* but as an updated *Lunyu* that shares the same logic, function, and status. This perspective positions the *Fayan* alongside the influential works crafted by sages like King Wen and Kongzi, with Yang aspiring for his contributions to be recognized as new entries into this esteemed lineage.[453] His vision for the *Fayan* is not that of an echo of past works but of a vibrant, contemporary counterpart that carries forward the intellectual legacy.

To summarize, regarding Yang Xiong as merely an admirer of antiquity who seeks to "restore a distant past" would be a misinterpretation of his scholarly intentions. On the contrary, Yang displays a strong preference for fostering new sages and creating new classics, positioning

[450] "Those who study the *Yijing* see its hexagrams and name them; those who study the *Taixuan* count its lines and determine their meaning" (故觀易者，見其卦而名之；觀玄者，數其畫而定之). Ibid. 87B.3575.

[451] Ibid. 87B.3580. Béatrice L'Haridon also points out that *Fayan* does not simply mimic or cite the *Lunyu*, and she calls their relationship "transposition." See L'Haridon, "La recherche du modèle dans les dialogues du Fayan de Yang Xiong (53 av. J.-C. – 18 apr. J.-C.): écriture, éthique et réflexion historique à la fin des Han occidentaux" (Ph.D. Diss., Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, 2006), 102.

[452] "How harmonious is the Way of Mystery! It moves perfectly and endlessly just like Heaven" (馴乎玄，渾行無窮正象天). See Sima Guang, *Taixuan jizhu*, 1.

[453] A comparable statement can be found in Sima Qian's self-explanation of his intention to write the *Shiji*, where he indicates that his *Shiji* is a new *Chunqiu* and he is the new sage after Kongzi. See *Shiji* 130.3296–97. For a deeper analysis of the theme of sages and their creations, particularly in Sima Qian's postface, see Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2001), 177–81.

himself within this progressive trajectory. In the following section, I will use the *Fayan* to highlight some of Yang's significant innovations in crafting this modern classic.[454]

3.2 *Fayan*: Speeches in Written Form

3.2.1 Emphasizing the Orality

The *Fayan*, as its title clearly indicates, is a book about "speeches" (*yan* 言). The majority of the book consists of direct quotations from fabricated dialogues between two anonymous figures: an inquirer and a replier, presumably Yang himself.[455] Despite the book's pronounced oral elements, few scholars have seriously examined them.[456] Instead, many focus on the written aspect, arguing that Yang and his contemporaries were the first generation to elevate the status of writing. For example, Nylan asserts that "Yang was the first writer to theorize the different uses of speech and writing," and that "Yang's stress on the special strengths of writing seems to be without precedent in his own era."[457] These scholars also contend that during Yang's time, recitation gradually gave way to reading, suggesting that Yang anticipated readers, not listeners, as the primary

---

[454] Given that *Fayan* is the last text composed by Yang, as indicated in his autobiography, it serves as a fitting culmination of his intellectual development. Observing the evolution of a self-reflective persona in his autobiography, it is appropriate to use this final composition to illustrate some of the defining features of his writings.

[455] In the *Fayan*, over 60% of its 339 entries, amounting to 212 entries, are dialogues. These dialogues are generally much longer than the non-dialogue portions. Despite this predominance of dialogues, Nylan argues that "substantial parts of *Exemplary Figures* are not in dialogues but are, rather, epigrams, rhymed encomia, and pithy historical judgments." This perspective indicates a focus on the non-oral, written aspects of the text. Reflecting this inclination, Nylan chooses to translate the title not as "Exemplary Sayings," which would suggest an oral dimension, but as "Exemplary Figures," highlighting the text's written features. Her rationale for this translation choice is discussed in the "Introduction" of *Exemplary Figures*, 9.

[456] For an in-depth exploration of the orality present in the *Fayan*, see L'Haridon, "La recherche du modèle dans les dialogues du Fayan de Yang Xiong (53 av. J.-C. – 18 apr. J.-C.)," 102–108. She correctly notes that Yang's work aims to embed the qualities of spoken language within a literary framework. However, she primarily focuses on how the sense of oral discourse is constructed in Yang's writings, and she does not take the orality as *Fayan*'s core feature. I suggest that Yang's attention to orality and sound sometimes even surpasses his focus on written elements.

[457] Nylan, "Introduction," in *Exemplary Figures*, 23.

audience for his works.[458] To support these arguments and underscore Yang's uniqueness, they portray the late Western Han's teaching and composition environment as heavily reliant on oral transmission.[459] While oral instruction and recitation have indeed always been crucial aspects of Chinese learning traditions,[460] this shift towards valuing written works was already prominent before the *Fayan*, not a consequence of it.[461]

The "Rulin" 儒林 (Biographies of Ru scholars) chapter in the *Shiji* suggests that most early Han scholars taught orally, as evidenced by phrases like "talk about X classic" (言某經). The only scholar noted for leaving written commentaries is Master Han 韓生, who "expounded the meanings of the *Shijing*, writing tens of thousands of words in his internal and external commentaries" (推《詩》之意而為內外傳數萬言).[462] However, this oral tradition saw a significant

[458] Nylan acknowledges that the chanting of texts remained common long after the Han period, yet she argues that during Yang's time, solitary reading of his works fostered a distinctly different relationship with texts. See Nylan, "Textual Authority in Pre-Han and Han," *Early China* 25 (2000): 255. Similarly, Kern suggests that by the very end of the Western Han, especially with Yang, the practice of reading a *fu* began to become a regular way of reception. See Kern, "Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63 (2003): 436.

[459] For example, Nylan argues that "almost every type of instruction or exposition was more reliant on oral instruction in late Western Han than it is today." However, even during the Qing dynasty, scholars were more reliant on oral instruction compared to contemporary practices, so the present may not serve as an ideal comparison point. See Nylan, *Yang Xiong and the Pleasures of Reading and Classical Learning in China* (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 2011), 51. Furthermore, Nylan contends that nearly all teaching, even at the highest level, continued to be done orally during the Han period according to Han descriptions. However, her examples predominantly derive from the *Shiji*, which reflects conditions only during the early Han, possibly limiting the applicability of her conclusions to the later periods. See Nylan, "Textual Authority in Pre-Han and Han," 243.

[460] Jean-Pierre Drège suggests that "the domination of the eye over the ear in the practice of individual reading" only began in the Song dynasty. See Drège, "La lecture et l'ecriture en Chine et la xylographie," *Etudes Chinoises* 10.1-2 (1991): 103.

[461] Nylan suggests that written texts gained a new preeminence in the first century CE, citing the development of explicit grammars and dictionaries as a key factor. However, the *Erya* 爾雅 and many Han commentaries on the classics had already outlined some fundamental features of dictionaries, indicating that such a "new preeminence" of written texts could be observed as early as the first century BCE. See Nylan, "Textual Authority in Pre-Han and Han," 252.

[462] *Shiji* 121.3124.

shift in the mid-to-late Western Han period.[463] During the reign of Emperor Xuan, scholars increasingly felt the need to document and polish oral information. Huan Kuan, for instance, augmented and revised the record of a court debate that had occurred more than a decade earlier; Hou Cang 后倉 composed extensive explanations on ritual classics, comprising tens of thousands of characters, which later formed the foundation of the Ritualists' proposals;[464] Xiahou Jian 夏侯建 elaborated on various interpretations related to the *Shangshu* with detailed explanations, inspiring one of his students to expand these into a text comprising millions of characters;[465] Xiahou Sheng, as the tutor of the crown prince, was tasked by the emperor to write commentaries on the *Shangshu* and *Lunyu*.[466] Similarly, in the reign of Emperor Yuan, Zhang Yu 張禹 (d. 5 BCE) composed the *Lunyu zhangju* 論語章句 (Explanations in Sections and Sentences of the *Analects*) for the crown prince, who found it challenging to frequently pose questions about the classic in person.[467] Yang's own teacher in his hometown, Zhuang Junping 莊君平, produced extensive writings, purportedly commentaries on the *Laozi*, comprising several

[463] During the reign of Emperor Jing, Ding Kuan 丁寬 is noted to have written a commentary on the *Yijing* that spanned approximately thirty thousand words. However, similar to the case of Master Han, it is suspected that their works might have been compiled or composed by later disciples, so these two examples are not discussed when examining the development of textual culture during this period. In contrast, the reign of Emperor Wu marked a significant upsurge in the production of written texts. Notable figures such as Dong Zhongshu, Dongfang Shuo, Sima Qian, and the King of Huainan are all reported to have composed texts exceeding hundreds of thousands of words. While these texts may not have been the sole work of a single author, the considerable effort devoted to these written works is nonetheless remarkable. Despite this prolific period of text production, their writings during this time were not as closely tied to the classics as those seen in the mid-to-late Han period.
[464] *Hanshu* 88.3615.
[465] Ibid. 88.3605. The case of Qin Gong 秦恭, who is noted for composing millions of characters, serves as a striking and representative example for his contemporary scholars. Both Huan Tan and Ban Gu reference Qin Gong's prolific writing as indicative of the deterioration of classical learning during their times. See Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞, *Jingxue tonglun* 經學通論 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1954), 71–72.
[466] *Hanshu* 75.3159.
[467] Ibid. 81.3352.

hundreds of thousands of characters.[468] Almost every scholar mentioned here authored texts amounting to tens of thousands of words or more. These large-scale commentaries could not have been sustained by an oral culture alone. This transition to written texts not only facilitated the preservation and dissemination of knowledge[469] but also marked an evolution in the scholarly culture of the Western Han.

The significance of textual tradition in the late Western Han period grew not only due to the increasing volume of written works but also because of their association with "orthodoxy" in many cases. As previously mentioned, some commentaries were commissioned by the emperor. Additionally, with the emphasis on *shifa*, the most accurate way to preserve a teacher's or one's own instructions was to document them in writing. The "Yiwen zhi" of the *Hanshu* illustrates the flourishing of written commentaries bearing scholars' names since the era of Emperor Xuan. Although oral teaching remained crucial, these written texts must have become the predominant criteria for determining adherence to or deviation from *shifa*. Moreover, the entire project of organizing and cataloging the imperial library collection, supervised by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, was only possible due to a well-developed and extensive textual culture. Their meticulous collation work and their ambition to establish the "most correct" version of texts marked a milestone in the evolution of textual accumulation. Hence, it is understandable that Liu Xin fiercely attacked the Erudites for "believing only in their teachers' oral transmissions and deviating from the [ancient] texts that explain the classics" (信口說而背傳記).[470] From Liu Xin's perspective, written texts,

[468] Ibid. 72.3056. In the "Jingji zhi" chapter of the *Suishu*, there is a commentary on *Laozi* attributed to Yan Zun 嚴遵 (i.e., Zhuang Junping), which consists of eleven scrolls. See Wei Zheng 魏徵, *Suishu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 34.1000.
[469] For example, ever since Zhang's *Lunyu zhangju* was written, everyone who learned the *Lunyu* would read (or read aloud) Zhang's text, even if they had not personally studied under Zhang. There was a popular saying among scholars at that time: "Anyone who wishes to study the *Lunyu* needs to read aloud Zhang's writings" (欲为论，念张文). See *Hanshu* 81.3352.
[470] Ibid. 36.1970.

especially those believed to be from ancient times, were superior to oral ones, even though the oral transmissions he criticized had largely been condensed into written form as well.[471] To sum up, Yang Xiong did not encounter an overwhelming oral tradition, nor was he the first to distinguish and elevate writings. On the contrary, Yang faced a burgeoning of written texts, which coincided with the rise of the official learning he disapproved of since the reign of Emperor Xuan. Consequently, Yang did not herald the age of writings but embraced the earlier oral tradition exemplified by Masters Yuan Gu and Shen Pei. This attitude aligns perfectly with Yang's evaluations of Han historical figures, as analyzed in the previous section.

Though some scholars argue that Yang believes writing generally surpasses speech,[472] this might not be the case. One of the strongest pieces of evidence frequently cited to demonstrate Yang's preference for writing is as follows:

> Speech cannot fully express what is in the heart, nor can writing fully express speech. What a difficulty! Only sages apprehend the true meaning of words and achieve the substantial embodiment of standards in their writing…. Nothing is as good as speech for exchanging remarks during face-to-face meetings, expressing the inner-heart's desire or communicating people's pent-up emotions. And nothing compares with writing for fully delineating the affairs of the whole realm, for recording events of the distant past or clarifying the remote, for making manifest what has been obscured by the mists of time, or for transmitting the difficult-to-comprehend over thousands of miles. Therefore, speech is the sound of the mind, and writing is the image of the mind.
> 言不能達其心，書不能達其言，難矣哉！惟聖人得言之解，得書之體。……面相之，辭相適，捈中心之所欲，通諸人之嚍嚍者，莫如言。彌綸天下之事，記久明遠，著古昔之晻晻，傳千里之恣恣者，莫如書。故言、心聲也，書、心畫也。[473]

Here, Yang actually gives equal importance to speech and writing, recognizing each mode's distinct advantages depending on the situation. For instance, Yang suggests that the ideal way to learn from a sage is in person if the sage is contemporaneous. If not, the writings of the sage

[471] A similar observation can be seen in Nylan, "Textual Authority in Pre-Han and Han," 254.
[472] Nylan, *Yang Xiong and the Pleasures of Reading*, 95.
[473] *Fayan yishu* 5.13.159–60; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 77.

serve as a necessary and valuable substitute.[474] This dual approach indicates a preference for imparting knowledge directly through oral teaching where possible, but also acknowledging the constraints of time and distance that necessitate written instruction. Thus, aiming to be an ideal creator of both speech and writing (a role he believes only a sage can fulfill), Yang strives to incorporate oral elements into his written texts. This intention may be one of the main reasons Yang chooses the *Lunyu* as his model: it is a perfect combination of these two aspects, a presumably faithful record of real dialogues.[475] During a period characterized by the proliferation of lengthy writings, the succinct and "oral" nature of the *Lunyu* stands as a potent antidote to what Yang perceives as the excessive and diminishing quality of contemporary written material.

Correspondingly, from the perspective of audiences, the *Fayan* also underscores the significance of integrating both visual and auditory elements in the processes of learning and communication. Although Han literary works rarely distinguish clearly between speaking and writing, Yang does so explicitly.[476] In his framework of understanding various classics and knowledge, phonetic and visual aspects are distinctly separate.

> When Heaven first bestowed life on the people, it caused them to have eyes to see and ears to hear. For this reason, [the ruler] would have them observe rituals and listen to music.
> 天之肇降生民，使其目見耳聞，是以視之禮，聽之樂。[477]
>
> When attending [the gentleman], one listens to what he says, and when wine is served, one observes the ceremonies.

---

[474] *Fayan yishu* 2.21.82.
[475] Interestingly, Michael Hunter and Oliver Weingarten's studies suggest that the current *Lunyu* only gained its prominence, and perhaps even came into existence, during the reign of Emperor Wu. This timing indicates that Yang Xiong, in seeking ideological resources, looked to the early Han period rather than to more distant antiquity. See Hunter, "The *Lunyu* as a Western Han Text," in *Confucius and the Analects Revisited: New Perspectives on Composition, Dating, and Authorship*, eds. Michael Hunter and Martin Kern (Boston: Brill, 2018), 67–91; and Weingarten, "Delinquent Fathers and Philology: *Lunyu* 13.18 and Related Texts," *Early China* 37 (2014): 221–58.
[476] Nylan, "Textual Authority in Pre-Han and Han," 256.
[477] *Fayan yishu* 4.18.126; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 63.

侍坐則聽言，有酒則觀禮。[478]

The gentleman takes care of his speech, his performance of the rites, and his writings.
君子之所慎：言、禮、書。[479]

Here, Yang articulates that *yan* 言 primarily refers to spoken language, perceived through listening, while ritual pertains to actions observed visually. However, *shu* 書 occupies an intermediate position. It is both observable (*guanshu* 觀書), akin to ritual,[480] and accessible through auditory means like recitation (*song* 誦 or *du* 讀).[481] This dual nature of writing enables Yang to integrate speech into written texts. Thus, the *Fayan* is designed not only to be read but also to be listened to. Nylan has pointed out that certain sound features in the *Fayan*, such as reduplications, alliteration, homophonic puns, and rhymes, are intended to appeal to listeners.[482] The presence of these elements suggests that Yang did not consider writing superior to spoken language, nor did he expect the text to be consumed in silence. Instead, he sought to create a literary piece that effectively bridges the gap between speech and writing, harmonizing both the auditory and visual experiences.

Moreover, Yang seems to place more emphasis on oral than on written texts. According to Yang's two methods of approaching the sages mentioned above, it is only due to one inherent disadvantage of *yan*, i.e., its difficulty in being accurately preserved across time and space,[483]

[478] *Fayan yishu* 7.10.227; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 109.
[479] *Fayan yishu* 3.7.90; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 41.
[480] The term *guanshu* appears three times in Yang's *Fayan*. Aside from one example in the *Huainanzi*, the use of the verb *guan* in relation to general writings (rather than specifically referring to the *Shangshu*) in the *Fayan* is unprecedented.
[481] For example, see *Fayan* 3.20 and 13.7.
[482] Nylan, *Yang Xiong and the Pleasures of Reading*, 63.
[483] It is noteworthy that Yang's statement, "listening to the past and observing the present" (聆聽前世，清視在下), suggests a profound appreciation for the auditory experience as a way to connect with history. In this context, sounds are portrayed as transcending the limits of time, allowing later generations to "hear" the past. See *Fayan* 8.22.

that Yang feels the need to turn to writing to transmit *yan*. This preference is quantitatively supported in his texts: A simple calculation reveals 77 mentions of *yan* (as both verb and noun) in the entire book, compared to only 34 mentions of *shu* (with the meaning "writing").[484] Similarly, the *yan* of sages, worthies, and gentlemen is mentioned 17 times, whereas their writings receive only three mentions. Additionally, *yan* is consistently associated with dynamic actions (either *xing* 行 or *dong* 動), emphasizing its interactive nature. Given Yang's clear definition of *yan* as spoken language, his preference for oral over graphical representation of words is evident.

Yang's engagement with sound transcends the dialogues within *Fayan* and is prominently showcased in the *Fangyan* 方言 (Dialect Expressions), likely his most extensive endeavor.[485] *Fangyan* documents valuable examples of the vernacular languages of his era, employing characters predominantly as phonetic symbols.[486] The phrase "*zhuanyu*" 轉語 (phonetic shift) is particularly innovative, as it not only identifies changes in sounds across different dialects but also recognizes their close relationship and possible common origins. Such a profound focus on phonetics is notably absent in the works of his predecessors and contemporaries. Contrasting with

[484] Other terms related to "writings" appear even more infrequently. For example, *wen* 文 occurs only four times with this specific meaning.

[485] According to the preface of *Fengsu tongyi*, a late Eastern Han text, Yang Xiong was deeply involved in compiling the *Fangyan* for nearly thirty years. Although Yang does not mention the *Fangyan* in his autobiography, the authenticity of the correspondence between Liu Xin and Yang, which discusses this book in detail, has been validated by Paul Serruys and David R. Knechtges. Therefore, the *Fangyan* should be regarded as Yang's work. For further details on the discussion of the letters, see Knechtges, "The Liu Hsin/ Yang Hsiung Correspondence on the *Fang yen*," *Monumenta Serica* 33 (1977): 309–25, and Nylan, *Yang Xiong and the Pleasures of Reading*, 20–24. The issue of authorship of the *Fangyan* is further explored in Wang Qing, *Yang Xiong pingzhuan*, 298–99.

[486] Luo Changpei 羅常培 points out that there are three kinds of characters used by Yang: ancient characters, homophones, and characters invented by himself. Among them, only the first type of characters is related to meaning; the others are essentially phonetic symbols. Additionally, Luo notes that some meaningless phrases such as *wuxie* 無寫 and *renxi* 人兮 are purely phonetic symbols. See Luo, "Preface," in Zhou Zumo 周祖謨, *Fangyan jiaojian* 方言校箋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), 2. For a detailed discussion on the use of phonetic symbols in the *Fangyan*, see Jiang Yuhua 姜聿華, *Zhongguo chuantong yuyanxue yaoji shulun* 中國傳統語言學要籍述論 (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1992), 135–37.

the text-centric approach of the two Lius' library project, *Fangyan* underscores Yang's focus on the auditory elements of language. This orientation towards the auditory is consistently reflected in his major works, both of which incorporate *yan* in their titles, demonstrating his dedication to capturing and preserving the spoken word.

3.2.2 Two Oral Traditions: The Disciples Lineage and The *Shijing* Practice

Yang Xiong's preference for orality in the *Fayan* raises questions about how texts that embody spoken language differ from purely written texts, and what the implications of introducing oral elements into writing are. I argue that incorporating these oral elements results in at least two innovations. First, by reintroducing interlocutors into the texts, Yang restores the authority of the master; and by writing down imagined dialogues himself, Yang not only controls the narrative but also ensures the accuracy and reliability of the information conveyed. This method allows him to embody both roles simultaneously: he is the master, imparting wisdom and guiding the conversation, and also the disciple/opponent, engaging with the teachings. The dual role as both speaker and recorder further incorporates advantages of two previous master-disciple traditions. Second, under Yang's theoretical framework where language is an extension of spontaneous mental activity, both poetry and speech are given equal footing, sharing intrinsic features. In constructing his dialogues, Yang draws on qualities typical of the *Shijing*, employing these poetic devices to create *Shi*-like *yan*. This approach not only enriches the expressive power of his writings but also makes it resonate more deeply with the long oral traditions of Chinese literature. These two aspects: reinstating the master-disciple dynamic and equating the expressive qualities of poetry and speech, will be further explored in this section.

In early Chinese historical traditions, the recording of one's spoken words related to non-specific contexts,[487] or *yan*, predominantly relied on the efforts of subsequent generations rather than the original speakers themselves. This practice is evidenced in texts such as the *Zuozhuan*, *Guoyu*, and *Lunyu*, where the words of figures like Scribe Yi 史佚, Zhou Ren 周任, and Zang Wenzhong 臧文仲 are quoted multiple times. Additionally, *yan* from anonymous sources, typically referred to as "the words of ancient people" (古人之言), are commonly found in the early texts.[488] These long-lasting words were considered one of the three forms of immortality, as defined by Shusun Bao 叔孫豹 (d. 537 BCE).[489] However, *yan* that could be explicitly attributed to specific individuals were often preserved only in rare cases and tended to be fragmentary. Generally, only those moral or political exhortations stood a better chance of preservation.

The later development of master-disciple communities, as seen in the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*, marked a shift towards a more systematic approach to recording one's words. In these settings, the words of a master could be more diligently captured by their disciples. Nonetheless, even within these communities, the individual disciples who recorded and transmitted these teachings often remained anonymous and unrecognized. In pre-Qin master writings, the voice is dominated by the masters. Disciples, when they appear, typically serve merely to introduce topics or promote discussion. In many cases, if one were to remove the initial marker "Master X said," the

[487] Here, I do not discuss the tradition of long political speeches in texts like *Shangshu* and *Zuozhuan*, since the reasons for their recording differ from the *yan* I discuss here.
[488] The genre of collections containing largely anonymous aphorisms and proverbs was notably popular in the pre-imperial era, often focusing on moral or political instructions. For an in-depth categorization and analysis of this literary form, see Yu Zhihui 俞志慧, "Yu, yizhong gulao de wenlei: yi yanlei zhiyu weili" 語，一種古老的文類：以言類之語為例, *Wenshizhe* 2007.1: 5–22. Paul Fahr demonstrates that the term *yu* 語 did not refer to a distinct textual genre, but gradually came to mean "text" in a rather abstract sense since the Western Han. However, there is no convincing evidence for such a claim in the pre-imperial period. See Fahr, "On General Terms for Texts in Early China," *T'oung Pao* 108, 5-6 (2022): 559–587.
[489] Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 1088.

remaining text would resemble a monologic essay rather than a dialogue.[490] The *Lunyu* uniquely presents more balanced master-disciple interactions.[491] Nevertheless, even within it, the structure is inherently centered around Kongzi, ensuring that none of the disciples could attain an equivalent level of sagehood.[492] They primarily serve to highlight and reinforce the master's wisdom and authority.[493] Yang is acutely aware of the implications of the portrayal of disciples. He states:

> Kongzi was a sage, yet some thought him inferior to Zigong. Zigong declined the compliment and clarified the matter, thereby making it unequivocally clear [that Kongzi was a sage].
> 仲尼，聖人也，或者劣諸子貢，子貢辭而精之，然後廓如也。[494]

The anecdotes concerning Zigong's refusal to accept praise suggesting he surpassed Kongzi are documented in the *Lunyu* 19.22–25, particularly 19.23. These stories are used by both the compilers of the *Lunyu* and Yang to highlight Zigong's self-awareness and to reinforce the unparalleled stature of Kongzi. However, this model of the master-disciple relationship has inherent limitations that can lead to a gradual decline in the recognition of each subsequent generation within

---

[490] Yao Zhuming argues that in many early Chinese writings, speech representation primarily functions as a narrative device to serve a text's rhetorical aims. The progression of question-and-answer exchanges does not necessarily rely on signaling words like *yue* 曰; in fact, *yue* has no direct impact on turn-taking between questions and answers. Moreover, the question-and-answer format is fundamentally monologic, as it ultimately reflects only the author's viewpoints. See Yao, "The Synthetic Tongue: Speech, Writing, and 'Speech Writings' in Early China," (Ph. D. Diss., Princeton University, 2023), 70–72.

[491] Oliver Weingarten points out the patron-retainer elements within the relationship between Kongzi and his disciples. See Weingarten, "What Did Disciples Do? 'Dizi' 弟子 In Early Chinese Texts," *Harvard journal of Asiatic studies* 75 (2015) 29–75.

[492] In the *Lunyu*, the only instance where it is positively stated that any of Kongzi's disciples are superior to Kongzi comes from his own assessment of Yan Hui. This mention, found in *Lunyu* 5.9, is generally interpreted as reflecting Kongzi's modesty rather than a literal evaluation of Yan Hui's superiority.

[493] Lewis highlights the interconnected nature of the text, the master, and the disciples, noting that the authority of the masters was significantly derived from the presence of disciples who were responsible for producing the texts. See Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 58. Kern, in his review of this book, highlights a structural parallel between ancestral and philosophical lineages, sacrificial worship, and exegetical transmission. Just as ancestors are invented and perpetuated through ritual, a master and his legacy are constructed and sustained in the same manner. See Kern, "Review of *Writing and Authority in Early China*," *China Review International* 7, no. 2 (2000): 342.

[494] *Fayan yishu* 6.9.188; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 91.

the lineage. Over time, disciples in such a model are often seen merely as conduits of their master's teachings rather than as independent contributors to the scholarly tradition. This could result in their names and contributions being lost to history, a phenomenon Yang Xiong is also evidently aware of.

> Someone asked, "Where are the disciples of Yan Hui and Min Ziqian?" "Sunk without a trace." Someone asked, "So why have Yan and Min not been laid to rest?" "Because they climbed up on the dragon scales and clung to the wings of the phoenix. With that gentle wind to lift them up, they soared higher and higher, until no one could reach them at such great heights. So much for being laid to rest! So much for that!"
> 或問：「淵、騫之徒惡乎在？」曰：「寢。」或曰：「淵、騫曷不寢？」曰：「攀龍鱗，附鳳翼，巽以揚之，勃勃乎其不可及也。如其寢！如其寢！」[495]

Yan Hui and Min Ziqian are highlighted as paragons of moral virtue in the *Lunyu*. Their moral integrity positions them as likely heirs to Kongzi's legacy, potentially continuing his lineage of sagehood. However, within the confines of the text, they remain subordinate to their teacher.[496] Their designation as "Kongzi's disciples" inherently limits their ability to attain a level of recognition comparable to that of Kongzi, not to mention their own disciples. Yang does not deny the potential for Yan's and Min's disciples to reach similar heights of moral excellence as their teachers, but being "disciples of Kongzi's disciples" places them further from the core of recognized authority, Kongzi himself. This second-degree removal reduces the likelihood of their contributions being valued or remembered. Consequently, despite any virtues or wisdom they may possess, these later disciples risk being marginalized and forgotten.

---

[495] *Fayan yishu* 11.1.417; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 183.
[496] However, students who successfully establish their own lineages and develop their disciples beyond the context of the *Lunyu* could ascend to the position of a new master. This is illustrated in the case of Zengzi 曾子, one of Kongzi's disciples. In several chapters of the *Liji*, Zengzi is depicted as a master and an authority figure in his own right. This transformation is particularly notable with the presence and acknowledgment of Zengzi's own disciples.

Partly due to these structural limitations, there was a noticeable shift in the structure of philosophical writings by the end of the Warring States period. Scholars like Han Feizi recognized the potential inaccuracies in relying on others to transmit their ideas and began composing their own texts.[497] However, Mark Lewis highlights an unfavorable aspect of this evolution: the absence of disciples from a master's writings could lead to the erosion of that master's status as a foundational textual authority.[498] The authority of authors during this period turned to derive from direct critiques of other philosophical positions, as seen in texts like the "Tianxia" 天下 (All Under Heaven) of the *Zhuangzi* and "Fei shier zi" 非十二子 (Against the Twelve Masters) of the *Xunzi*. This strategy is adopted by Yang, who explicitly states his intention to follow Mengzi's model by clearing those who "blocked the road," identifying and correcting their errors (古者楊墨塞路，孟子辭而辟之，廓如也。後之塞路者有矣，竊自比於孟子).[499] This method allowed Yang to establish his own intellectual authority by positioning himself not only as a transmitter but also as an active participant in discourses, engaging directly with the ideas of his contemporaries and predecessors to define his own teachings.

The resurgence of the master-disciple relationship during the reigns of Emperors Zhao and Xuan, marked by the official Erudites who took on disciples (*boshi dizi* 博士弟子), differed significantly from its pre-Qin origins.[500] On the one hand, although strictly adhering to *shifa* was

[497] For example, see the anecdote of "a letter from Ying and Yan people's misinterpretation" (郢書燕說) in *Han Feizi jijie*, 279.
[498] Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 63, 97.
[499] *Fayan* 2.20.
[500] Although it is widely believed that Emperor Wu was instrumental in promoting official learning, Cai Liang presents a different perspective. She argues that it was actually during the reign of Emperor Zhao that various interpretive schools which produced influential Ru scholars were established, leading to the production of significant scholarly works. This shift marks a crucial period in the development of scholarly lineages and the formalization of educational institutions in ancient China. For a detailed discussion on the establishment and impact of these scholarly lineages, see Cai, "Excavating the Genealogy of Classical Studies," 371–94.

greatly appreciated and frequently mentioned among scholars, the names of their teachers became paradoxically obscure.[501] On the other hand, during the mid-to-late Western Han period, Ru scholars renowned for their classical knowledge increasingly wrote down their interpretations of the classics, circulating commentaries under their own names. Although these commentaries were presumably based on their masters' teachings, the prominence of the masters was diminished, rendering them secondary figures within the texts.

Yang is evidently dissatisfied with the contemporary state of the master-disciple relationship. Recognizing that his teachings are not gaining popularity in his time and that he is unlikely to cultivate influential disciples in the traditional manner,[502] Yang constructs two types of interlocutors in his simulated conversations: first, those modeled after Kongzi's disciples, and second, those modeled after Mengzi's opponents.[503] This approach allows him to leverage the benefits of both types of relationships depicted in pre-Qin writings.

One of Kongzi's disciples most elevated by Yang is Yan Hui, who is repeatedly applauded in the *Fayan*. Yang establishes Kongzi and Yan Hui as ideal archetypes of the supreme teacher

[501] For example, when Yi Feng and Wang Shi presented their interpretations of the classics, they occasionally prefaced their explanations with: "I have heard this from my teacher," yet they never mentioned their teachers by name. See *Hanshu* 75.3167, 3172, 88.3610. A notable example of this phenomenon is found in the biography of Wang Shi in the *Hanshu*. Tang Changbin 唐長賓 and Chu Shaosun 褚少孫, who had studied the classics under Wang Shi, impressed the Erudites with their recitations and explanations during a visit. The Erudites were initially unaware of who their teacher was, and it was only upon inquiry that the connection to Wang Shi was revealed. See *Hanshu* 88.3610.

[502] In his final commentary, Ban noted that "few people visited Yang's house," indicating that Yang Xiong had a limited circle of followers or disciples. Among these, Hou Ba stands out as the only disciple of Yang whose name has been preserved in historical records. Unfortunately, none of Hou's writings have survived. See *Hanshu* 87B.3585.

[503] The recurring depiction of "someone" (*huo* 或) in the *Fayan* has been subject to limited scholarly exploration. Qin Jiming 秦際明 argues that these characters are portrayed as common people who lack an understanding of the sages and the principles underlying the classics and Confucianism. However, as I will demonstrate in the following sections, Qin's interpretation does not fully capture the complexity or the varied roles that these figures play within the text. See Qin, "*Fanyan* 'huo wen' beihou de ren yu si" 《法言》"或問"背後的人與思, *Ruzang luntan* 2017.1: 90–107.

and student, respectively, underscoring the ideal qualities of both roles that Yang seeks to emulate and perpetuate (有教立道，無止仲尼；有學術業，無止顏淵).[504] At the same time, Kongzi is portrayed as the exemplary student of Duke Zhou, further reinforcing the model of continuous learning (孔子習周公者也，顏淵習孔子者也).[505] In this context, Kongzi epitomizes both roles: he is at once the ideal disciple of his predecessor and the perfect master to his followers. This dual representation echoes Yang's self-portrait, where he embodies both the master and the disciple. Thus, Yan Hui and Yang Xiong share a similar position in the lineage following Kongzi, where they appropriate some of Kongzi's authority through a direct connection to this revered figure. Beyond Yan Hui, Yang also presents two contrasting types of disciples from the *Lunyu*: the most astute and the clumsiest.

> Someone asked, "How is a person to find the direct path to follow?" "A road may wind around, but so long as it leads straight to the Xia, it should be followed. And the river may wind around, but so long as it flows to the sea, it should be followed." Someone said, "So even if certain affairs are less than direct, we should follow through with them, so long as they allow unimpeded access to the sages?"
> 或曰：「焉得直道而由諸？」曰：「塗雖曲而通諸夏則由諸，川雖曲而通諸海則由諸。」或曰：「事雖曲而通諸聖，則由諸乎？」[506]

> Someone asked about the gentleman. "In times of good rule, he is like a phoenix. And in times of misrule, he is like a phoenix." The interlocutor does not understand. "You certainly have not yet thought it through! In times of good rule, he reveals himself, and during times of misrule, he hides himself away…"
> 或問「君子」。「在治，曰若鳳，在亂，曰若鳳。」或人不諭。曰：「未之思矣。」曰：「治則見，亂則隱。……」[507]

The first case is unique among all the conversations in the *Fayan* because it ends with "someone's" words rather than the master's. This "someone" echoes Zigong 子貢 and Zixia's 子夏

[504] *Fayan yishu* 1.24.44.
[505] Ibid. 1.7.13.
[506] *Fayan yishu* 4.2.110; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 53.
[507] *Fayan yishu* 6.16.194; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 93. Similar cases can be seen in *Fayan* 5.21 and 13.19.

capability of extrapolating broader lessons from Kongzi's concise teachings, applying them adeptly to other classical texts.[508] In contrast, the interlocutor in the second one reminds us of the unintelligent image of Fan Chi 樊遲, who often fails to grasp the deeper meanings of Kongzi's words. The portrayal of different disciples in the text not only compensates for the absence of real disciples but also serves as a perfect foil for the master's pervasive influence and pedagogical effectiveness.

Although the interlocutor is sometimes depicted as a disciple, in many cases "someone" refutes the master's statement, challenges his authority, and even ridicules him, representing Mengzi's opponents. This may also be influenced by the use of an anonymous "someone" in the *Lunyu*, where, in almost every case, his question or statement is either ill-disposed or strongly opposed by Kongzi.[509] We see a similar depiction in the *Fayan*:

> Someone asked, "If a given piece of writing were to agree with the Classics, but the age did not value it, would it be right to study it?" "It would be right to do so." The interlocutor remarks with a laugh, "But one had better study for the texts to be set in the exams for office!" "For the great man, the Way is the goal of learning, whereas the object for the petty person is profit. Are you for the Way or for profit?" He asked, "Yet to plow but not to harvest, or to hunt but not to feast, will you still plow and hunt?" "A person who plows the Way gets it, and a person who hunts for virtue gets it. That is quite a harvest and a feast…"
> 或曰：「書與經同，而世不尚，治之可乎？」曰：「可。」或人啞爾笑曰：「須以發策決科。」曰：「大人之學也，為道；小人之學也，為利。子為道乎？為利乎？」或曰：「耕不穫，獵不饗，耕獵乎？」曰：「耕道而得道，獵德而得德，是穫饗已……」[510]

In many instances within the *Fayan*, the interlocutor demonstrates a deep knowledge of the classics, utilizing lines from texts such as the *Shijing* and *Lunyu*, to challenge the master.[511] The

[508] For example, see *Lunyu* 1.15 and 3.8.
[509] For example, see *Lunyu* 2.21, 3.15, 3.22, 5.5, 5.11, 9.14, 14.34, and 14.44.
[510] *Fayan yishu* 1.19.31; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 17.
[511] This persona reminds us of the image of the guest (*ke* 客) in two Yang's *fu* of defending himself, "Jie chao" 解嘲 (Dispelling Ridicule) and "Jie nan" 解難 (Dispelling Reproach). This motif is central to the structure of these works, which seem to be influenced by Dongfang Shuo's 東方朔 "Da ke nan" 答客難 (Replying to the Guest's Reproach).

distinction between him and the masters lies not in their knowledge base, but in their attitudes towards various issues. Unlike traditional disciples who are generally seen as inferior in status and are receptive to guidance, this type of opponent is equally proficient in the classics and keen to exploit any perceived weakness in the argument. This dynamic leads to exchanges where the master's authority is reinforced through the skillful refutation of misconceptions and the robust defense of his positions. By employing both the traditional disciple and the challenging opponent modes, Yang successfully reinvigorates the master-disciple interaction, where the potential and expressive power of oral discourses are demonstrated.

The incorporation of oral elements into written texts also shapes Yang's *Fayan* through the influence of the *Shijing* tradition. First, the attribute of spontaneity in both speeches and writings is highlighted, mirroring Mao commentary's interpretation of *yan* as the direct and immediate expression of one's inner heart (情動於中而形於言). Secondly, Yang adopts the strategy of "evocations" or "stimuli" (*xing* 興), which introduces a level of ambiguity into his writings, necessitating further explanation to fully grasp their meaning.

According to the Mao commentary on the *Shijing* and the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters), the term *yan* implies "to speak straightforwardly" (直言為言).[512] This concept of spontaneity seems to influence Yang's choice of the term *yan* in his book title, and this notion further extends from spoken language to written texts in his philosophical framework:

> The sages talk straight [like shooting arrows] and so perfect their speech. They let their brushes fly and so perfect their writings.

[512] Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815), *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 3A.89.

聖人矢口而成言，肆筆而成書。[513]

However, Yang's own writing process was far from "letting the brush fly." As recorded by his friend Huan Tan, Yang expended so much energy on composing that it once caused him significant illness.[514] Nevertheless, by asserting that ideal speech and writing should be as straightforward and natural as shooting an arrow, he purposefully draws on the famous poetic theory from the great preface of the Mao commentary: sounds (including speech and poetry) are spontaneous and inevitable reflections of one's mind and emotions.[515] This leads to a further development of Yang's theory: not only are sounds direct manifestations of one's mind, but writings are as well. Once this theory is established, writings are elevated from being mere secondary records of speech to having the same status as spoken words.[516] Recognizing that future generations would only be able to read his works and not learn from him personally, Yang theoretically clears the path for readers to access his thoughts directly: Although the *Fayan* is a book, it serves as a faithful record of Yang's "instinctive" words and thus his "authentic" mind. The imitation of a conversational environment in his writings bridges the gap, fulfilling Yang's ambition to connect directly with his readers as if speaking to them in person.

Moreover, the influence of the *Shijing* tradition is evident in the implied metaphors in the *Fayan*, where metaphors often present only the vehicle (the image used to convey the idea)

[513] *Fayan yishu* 8.18.267; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 131.
[514] *Xinlun*, 52.
[515] "The Great Preface," in *Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, Ruan Yuan ed., *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), j. 1A, 7.
[516] Nylan also highlights this shift in the perception of writing in Yang's work, contrasting with earlier traditions reflected in the Classics and pre-Qin masterworks. Traditionally, writing was seen as one step further removed from the core ideas and intentions compared to speech, implying a lesser immediacy or authenticity. However, Yang Xiong elevated the status of writing. See Nylan, *Yang Xiong and the Pleasures of Reading*, 78.

without an explicit tenor (the subject to which the vehicle is applied).[517] This technique is also present in the *Lunyu*, where, for instance, Kongzi praises the pine and the cypress for retaining their needles during the cold season.[518] Clearly, Kongzi was not merely commenting on botanical phenomena; rather, he was suggesting that true gentlemen maintain their virtues in times of hardship, though he never explicitly stated this. In the *Fayan*, the metaphors become even more elusive.[519] Consider the following examples:

> Crossing a vast ocean depends on the strength and power of multistoried boats. But when the oarsmen lack oars, how can one possibly cross the sea?
> 灝灝之海，濟，樓航之力也。航人無楫，如航何？[520]

> The Red Bird flutters and soars, returning freely to its resting place. Someone asked, "What should we take away from this example of the Red Bird?" "Come when it is time to come, and go when it is time to go. Do they not all deserve to be called Red Birds who can manage to come and go as they should?"
> 朱鳥翾翾，歸其肆矣。或曰：「奚取於朱鳥哉？」曰：「時來則來，時往則往，能來能往者，朱鳥之謂與？」[521]

The first example could apply to any situation where essential tools are missing, yet Yang's specific intent remains unclear. In the following item, he uses the same metaphor of sailing a boat and clearly mentions the state as the tenor. However, neither the oarsman nor the oar appears in that entry, making it unclear whether these two entries are related. For the metaphor of "oarsman," Yang could be alluding to a scholar navigating the sea of knowledge or a statesman managing state affairs smoothly, but the exact nature of the "oar" remains unspecified. Similarly, in

---

[517] Following the terminology proposed by I. A. Richards in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), the two parts of a metaphor are referred to as the "tenor" and the "vehicle" here. Other terminologies like figure and ground, source and target, metaphier and metaphrand also exist and are used in various theoretical discussions.
[518] *Lunyu* 9.28.
[519] L'Haridon also notice this feature of *Fayan*, and she attributes it to Yang's imitation of *Lunyu*'s *weiyan* 微言 (subtle language). See L'Haridon, "La recherche du modèle dans les dialogues du Fayan de Yang Xiong (53 av. J.-C. – 18 apr. J.-C.)," 110–111.
[520] *Fayan yishu* 7.17.238; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 113.
[521] *Fayan yishu* 6.21.208; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 97.

the second case, initially without further context, the behavior of the Red Bird appears merely descriptive. Only after an inquiry about its implications do we understand it as a metaphor for discerning the right times for action and inaction. These metaphors draw from the tradition of *xing* in the *Shijing*, where references to the natural world are always followed by descriptions of human affairs, though without an explicitly stated connection between them. The relationship between the two can only be speculated through the interpretations provided by commentators. For instance, the Mao commentary on a line from Mao no. 37 illustrates this:

> The kudzu of the backward-sloping hill, how far-stretching are their joints.
> 旄丘之葛兮，何誕之節兮。
> Mao: This is a stimulus… The feudal lords are interconnected through their states, and their concerns and troubles affect one another, like the intertwined and spreading vines of kudzu.
> 【傳】興也。……諸侯以國相連屬，憂患相及，如葛之蔓延相連及也。[522]

Here, the commentary explains the metaphorical significance of the kudzu, suggesting a complex network of interdependencies among feudal lords, though the text itself provides little direct evidence for this interpretation. Similarly, Yang's metaphors in the *Fayan* require active clarification, as demonstrated in the second example, where an explanation follows a "stimulus." Without such an explanation, as in the first example, readers are left to speculate about the potential meanings of the "stimulus."

Another literary style attributed to Yang Xiong, known as *lianzhu* 連珠 (linked pearls), is reminiscent of the composition style described above. Fu Xuan 傅玄 (217–278), the first literary commentator on this genre, characterizes *lianzhu* as a method that "does not directly address matters but uses metaphors to convey its meaning, allowing the wise to grasp the subtle message" (其文體……不指說事情，必假喻以達其旨，而賢者微悟，合於古詩勸興之義). He

[522] "Maoqiu" 旄丘 (The Backward-sloping Hill; Mao no. 37), in *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 2B, 184.

further notes that it shares the exhortative and inspirational qualities of ancient poems.[523] This genre seems to perfectly resonate with the two previously mentioned entries. Like the *Shijing*, these kinds of texts are challenging to understand solely on their own and typically require external guidance for full comprehension. This underscores the importance of Hou Ba 侯芭, a disciple of Yang, who not only learned both the *Fayan* and *Taixuan* directly from him but also authored a commentary on the *Fayan*. This commentary likely includes Yang's instructions on the "correct" way to interpret the subtle implications embedded within the metaphors.[524] In summary, Yang's emphasis on oral elements in the *Fayan* is intricately linked with his interest in reviving the disciple tradition and the *Shijing* tradition. By revitalizing the master-disciple dynamic and reapplying the concept of "stimulus," orality becomes essential not only in the theory of composition but also in the process of reception.

3.3 Establishing New Textual Relationship: Two Modes of Ever Evolving Texts

In the first section, I have illustrated Yang Xiong's ambition to craft new classics and position himself as a modern sage within a progressive historical narrative. This perspective is vividly demonstrated in how Yang constructs a network of texts, showcasing at least two innovative approaches to text arrangement that orient toward the future rather than the past. First, Yang redefines his relationship with existing classics. Instead of directly citing lines from these texts to

[523] Fu Xuan traces the origin of this literary genre to Ban Gu, Jia Kui 賈逵 (30–101), and Fu Yi 傅毅 (?–90). However, Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513) diverges in opinion, crediting Yang Xiong with the creation of this genre. Unfortunately, most of Yang Xiong's *lianzhu* writings have been lost over time, with only four fragmentary lines surviving. These remnants are insufficient to discern the specific features Fu Xuan mentions as characteristic of the genre. For the extant *lianzhu* works, see Zhang Zhenze 張震澤, *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu* 揚雄集校註 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 236–37.

[524] According to the *Suishu*, there was once a six-scroll commentary on the *Fayan* authored by Hou, but this commentary was no longer extant by that time. See *Suishu* 34.998.

bolster his arguments, as was typical of his predecessors, he opts to allude to them subtly, requiring readers with relevant background knowledge to grasp their full meaning. This approach demands that readers possess relevant background knowledge to fully understand the implications. Consequently, the *Fayan* distinguishes itself as probably the first book that necessitates interpretation through the lens of previous texts. Furthermore, unlike traditional commentaries on classics, which tend to be derivative, the *Fayan* is positioned as a new classic in its own right, setting a precedent for future literary works and establishing a forward-looking model. Second, from the perspective of a single author, the *Fayan* explicitly showcases Yang's reflections and even criticisms of his earlier writings. This marks Yang as the first author to create a developmental timeline in his literary career, where his latest work is always his greatest. Consequently, Yang's autobiography is characterized by his evolving understanding and engagement with literary creation, making the reading of his texts from different periods a journey through the stages of his intellectual growth. To fully understand Yang's transitions, one must engage in comparative analysis with his previous works. Therefore, a textual web similar to the first type is woven: the ideal author or sage is depicted not only as the best disciple of traditions but also as the foremost innovator of future possibilities.

In the "Rulin" 儒林 (Biographies of Ru scholars) chapters of both the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, classical learning lineages are depicted as a radial system originating from Kongzi. Generation by generation, disciples diverge further from their own masters, resembling a firework display where future generations become increasingly subordinate and inconsequential. Similarly, the two Lius in their bibliographical catalogues depict a corresponding pattern of texts, where all commentaries are centralized around a core classic, and all master writings are purported to derive from an unverifiable official position (as shown in Figure 5).

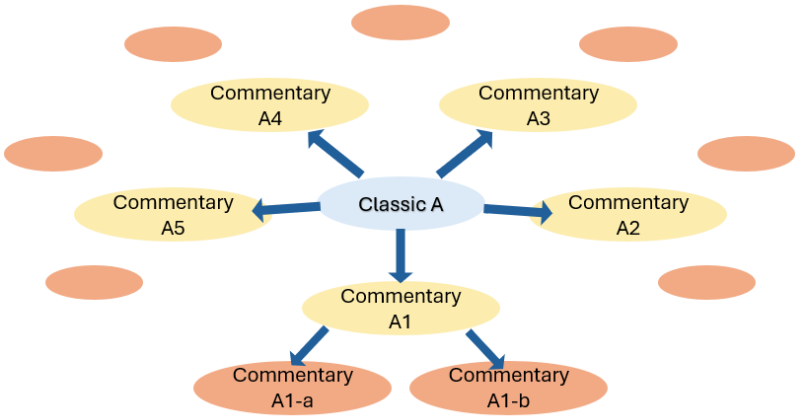

Figure 5. The radial mode of texts

This radial model heavily emphasizes the ancestor and a lost moment of "genesis." Within this framework, there is little scope for the emergence of future classics because the further a text is from the original classics, the less likely it is to achieve the same revered status.

Yang's works, though seemingly derived from the classics, interact with them differently. First, his works are not mere secondary commentaries but are considered on par with the classics themselves. As previously discussed, Yang views the *Fayan* not as a subordinate version of the *Lunyu* but as an updated version of it. Moreover, Yang believes that with changing times, new classics can and should be developed. Second, unlike earlier texts that directly quote lines from the classics, the references in the *Fayan* are far more implicit.[525] For example, in the "Wu zi" 吾子 (My Master) chapter, the interlocutor mentions "the greenfly and the red and purple" (蒼蠅紅紫) without any context.[526] Only those familiar with the *Shijing* and *Lunyu* would recognize

[525] Kase suggests that the *Fayan* employs a distinctive approach to referencing the classics, differing from traditional texts that explicitly cite titles or use phrases such as "as so-and-so said." Instead, the *Fayan* integrates phrases from the classics into the text. This method of embedding classical allusions within the arguments not only enhances the literary quality of the text but also demands a more in-depth understanding of the classics. See Kase, "Hougen no hyougen,"163–65.
[526] *Fayan yishu* 2.3.52.

these as allusions to specific excerpts: in Mao no. 219, the greenfly serves as *xing* referring to slanderers, symbolizing those who confound right and wrong according to Zheng Xuan's commentary (蠅之為蟲，汙白使黑，汙黑使白，喻佞人變亂善惡也);[527] and in *Lunyu* 17.18, Kongzi's disdain for how purple diminishes red, akin to his hatred for those who with their sharp mouths overthrow states and families (惡紫之奪朱也……惡利口之覆邦家者). Similarly, in the "Yuan Qian" chapter, the interlocutor's questions about a series of Han characters follow the sequence of Sima Qian's *Shiji*,[528] indicating that this and other historical assessments in the *Fayan* are intended as commentary on the *Shiji*.[529] Only by reading the *Shiji* alongside or prior to the *Fayan* can readers understand the author's references and different opinions. The *Fayan* thus carries multiple traditions within itself, requiring a deep knowledge of the sources to fully appreciate the connections it draws. This approach leads me to describe it as the confluence model, where the structure of textual relationships is no longer radial, but rather forms a forward-moving line (as shown in Figure 6). Correspondingly, the structure of textual relationships is no longer radial, but a line moving forward. This model continuously opens up space for future texts that embody and renew the tradition, allowing the literary and philosophical lineage to evolve and adapt over time.

[527] "Qingying" 青蠅 (The Greenfly, Mao no. 219), in *Mao shi zhengyi*, j. 14C, 1025.
[528] *Fayan yishu* 11.17.460–461.
[529] For the analysis of Yang's historical evaluations under the comparison of the *Shiji*, see Béatrice L'Haridon, "Le Fayan de Yang Xiong and le questionnement confucéen de l'histoire," *Études chinoises* 24 (2005): 233–48.

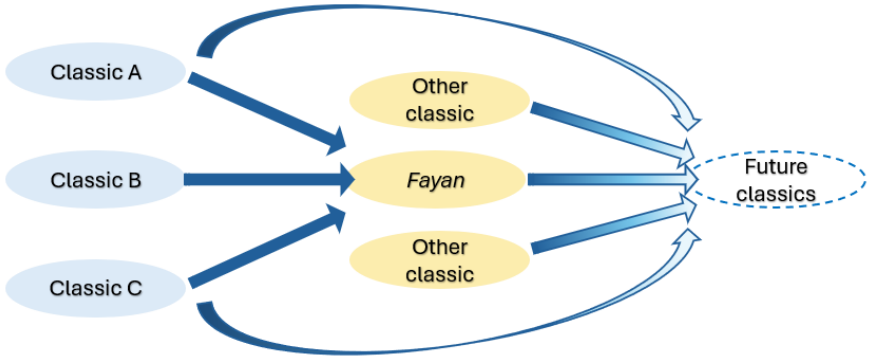

Figure 6. The confluence mode of texts

From the aspect of authorship, Yang is often regarded by scholars as the first fully self-conscious author, but his deep self-reflection, a pivotal element in shaping such consciousness, is frequently overlooked.[530] Yang's most recognized introspective moment involves his explicit rejection of his early writings of *fu*.[531] Yet, his self-examination extends much further. For instance, as reported by Huan Tan, Yang initially supported the Cover-Heaven theory (*gaitian shuo* 蓋天說) but later, influenced by Huan, shifted to the Spherical-Heaven theory (*huntian shuo* 渾天說),[532] a preference he explicitly expresses in the *Fayan* when comparing the two theories.[533] In another case, Yang's intention in composing the *Taixuan* was to "guard his integrity" (*zishou* 自

[530] Both Taniguchi Hiroshi 谷口洋 and Nylan consider Yang Xiong to be the first fully self-conscious author in Chinese history. See Taniguchi, "Fu ni jijo o tsukeru koto: RyōKan no majiwari ni okeru sakusha no mezame" 賦に自序をつけること：両漢の交における作者のめざめ, *Tōhōgaku* 119 (2010): 22–39; and Nylan, "Manuscript Culture in Late Western Han," 163–64.
[531] *Fayan yishu* 2.1.45.
[532] *Xinlun*, 20–30.
[533] *Fayan yishu* 10.3.320. According to the *Suishu* treatise on astronomy, Yang further composed eight questions to "stump" (*nan* 難) the proponents of the Cover-Heaven theory. See *Suishu* 19.506.

守),[534] a concept he highly praises in the "Jie chao."[535] However, in the *Fayan*, this approach is questioned:

> Someone asked, "Since the gentleman is to guard his integrity, why would he engage in social relations at all?" "Through the comingling of heaven and earth the myriad sorts of creatures are born. Through human interactions great achievements may be realized. Why only guard his integrity?"
> 或曰：「君子自守，奚其交？」曰：「天地交，萬物生；人道交，功勛成，奚其守？」[536]

It is significant that the interlocutor in this dialogue adopts Yang's earlier stance, which Yang himself refutes. As discussed earlier, that "someone" often represents an opponent who matches Yang in intelligence and knowledge. Here, that "opponent" even includes a former version of himself. Not only is the initial intention behind writing the *Taixuan* rejected, but also the method of writing some parts of it is critiqued. In the *Fayan*, the author frequently expresses his dissatisfaction with the lengthy commentary tradition. Nevertheless, following the composition of the core text of *Taixuan* (*jing* 經), which consists of approximately five thousand characters, he proceeded to write extensive self-commentaries totaling more than a hundred thousand words.[537] This resulted in a ratio of over twenty explanatory characters for each character of the *jing*, a practice indistinguishable from the popular *zhangju* tradition of his time. Apparently, Yang's

---

[534] "At that time, Yang was composing the *Taixuan*, and he guarded his integrity by doing so" (時揚雄方草《太玄》，有以自守). See *Hanshu* 87B.3565–66.
[535] "Those in the highest positions put their clans in danger, while those who guard their integrity ensure their own safety" (位極者宗危，自守者身全). Ibid. 87B.3571.
[536] *Fayan yishu* 3.8.90; Nylan, *Exemplary Figures*, 41–43.
[537] While some scholars argue that Yang did not write commentary on the *Taixuan*, in Yang's "Jie chao", it is clearly mentioned that Yang composed the *Taixuan* consisting of approximately five thousand characters and then expanded on it with over one hundred thousand words of commentary. Cf. Liu Shangjun 劉韶軍 and Xie Guian 謝貴安, Taixuan Da Dai Li *yanjiu* 《太玄》《大戴禮》研究 (Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1991), 4–5. See *Hanshu* 87B.3566. However, the current *Taixuan* includes only less than ten thousand characters of Yang's commentary, suggesting that a significant portion of his original commentary may have been lost over time. In the *Suishu*, it is noted that Yang's own *zhangju* commentary on the *Taixuan* had been lost by that time. See *Suishu* 34.998.

interest in a more succinct form of explanatory text appears to have developed after composing the *Taixuan* and is fully revealed in the *Fayan*. This indicates that Yang's authorship is founded on continuous self-reflection, and he does not hesitate to critique his former positions when necessary. This approach is described as a retrospective mode, where each text appears to reflect on the previous ones, and it simultaneously sets the stage for the next work to be an improved version (as shown in Figure 7). Thus, like the confluence mode, this pattern provides ample space for the emergence of ever-new texts that become increasingly refined and developed.

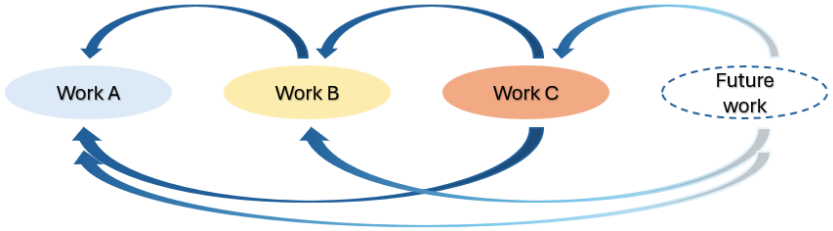

Figure 7. The retrospective mode of texts

To summarize, while Yang Xiong does draw upon historical sources, his model is rooted not in the distant past but in the more recent traditions of the early Han, which are just a century prior. This includes the master-disciple relationship that heavily relied on oral instruction and the detachment from imperial power. As an outlier of the contemporary trends, Yang integrates both the evolving classics and their "proofs" in history to construct his ideal world of learning and texts. Interestingly, Yang's autobiography lacks a formal conclusion; it simply ends with the postface of his final work, *Fayan*.[538] Reflecting the forward-looking nature of the two textual networks Yang established, which project into the future rather than focusing on the past, his

[538] It is plausible that Ban Gu may not have transcribed the full autobiography in his historical records. However, if there was a summary at the end of the original text, it would likely represent the core and most significant aspects of the autobiography. Such a summary would be unlikely to be intentionally omitted by Ban, so I consider that the current ending of the autobiography, as recorded, likely represents the conclusion of Yang's original work.

autobiography remains open-ended, suggesting ongoing development. Our perception of Yang as an enthusiast of antiquity is heavily influenced by Ban Gu's final comments, but Yang himself appears to resist such a narrow characterization. Instead, he emerges as an author who is always looking forward to the next perfecting text and the next evolving sage.

- CHAPTER 4 -

New Mandate:

Transforming Recipients, Audience, and Tokens

This chapter examines the evolution of auspicious signs and mandated tokens as instruments of legitimacy across the Western Han, Wang Mang's Xin dynasty, and the early Eastern Han. It challenges two prevailing interpretations of political legitimacy during this period. The first is the tendency to center legitimacy studies solely on the emperor's actions, either overlooking ministers or reducing them to mere extensions of the ruler's will.[539] The second is the assumption that auspicious omens, as symbols of the ruler's divine mandate, can be analyzed through a transhistorical and uniform framework. However, rather than being dictated exclusively by the emperor, the discourse of imperial legitimacy was a dynamic and often contested arena shaped by negotiation between rulers and their subordinates. Ministers were not simply mouthpieces for an emperor's claims to legitimacy. In many cases, they articulated theories that diverged significantly from the narratives emperors sought to construct. Furthermore, auspicious omens were neither static nor uniform. Instead, they constituted a complex and evolving symbolic repertoire that incorporated new signs and interpretive frameworks over time. This transformation resonated with the intellectual pursuit of novelty discussed in previous chapters: just as Liu Xiang,

[539] For earlier discussions on the construction of legitimacy during Emperor Wu's reign, see Kern, "In Praise of Political Legitimacy," 29–67 and "Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation: The Case of the Han Wudi Period (141-87 B.C.)," *Chûgoku shigaku* 10 (2000): 1–31. Kern primarily focuses on hymns composed at Emperor Wu's request and does not extensively address the interactions between the emperor and his subordinates on this topic. Similarly, Gu Jiegang describes the relationship between emperors and Ru scholars as a mutually beneficial exchange: "The emperor employed Ru scholars to craft a religious framework [to legitimize himself] that served his own interests, while Ru scholars, in turn, leveraged the emperor to promote a religion that benefited them. Whatever the emperor required, the Ru scholars had something to provide." This characterization, however, might not be accurate. See Gu, *Qin Han de fangshi yu rusheng*, 9.

Yang Xiong, and Huan Tan confronted the weight of tradition and sought to reform it, so too did rulers of new dynasties strive to find the new symbols, or redefine symbols of their mandate. Although the Western and Eastern Han are often treated as a unified whole, let alone Wang Mang's short-lived Xin dynasty, which is frequently overlooked, the dramatic shifts between the first century BCE and the first century CE reveal a strong impulse among new dynastic rulers to establish distinct systems of auspicious omens. These new symbols also became increasingly textualized, leaving less room for flexible interpretation. Yet paradoxically, the shift from elusive divine creatures to concrete, declarative statements as evidence of a ruler's heavenly mandate did not diminish enthusiasm for interpreting divine will. On the contrary, it seems that the more emperors sought to substantiate their legitimacy with increasingly explicit proofs, the more ministers distanced themselves from the official discourse. Later historiographical narratives often smoothed over these divergences, retrospectively presenting legitimacy as a singular and harmonious construct.

The idea that the rise of a new dynasty should be accompanied by a corresponding symbolic theory is generally traced back to Zou Yan's 鄒衍 (ca. 305–ca. 240 BCE) doctrine of the cyclical succession of the Five Virtues.[540] Although his original teachings are lost, traces of this theory appear in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, which describes omens corresponding to the Virtue associated with each rising dynasty.[541] Clearly, this theory was oriented toward legitimizing an impending new regime. Scholars continue to debate whether the Qin dynasty adopted Zou Yan's theory to

[540] Since the early 20th century, Gu Jiegang and Chen Pan 陳槃 (1905–1999) pioneered the incorporation of auspicious omens into modern academic studies. For discussion of auspicious signs in the Qin and Han, see Gu, "Wude zhongshishuo xia de zhengzhi yu lishi" 五德終始說下的政治與歷史 in *Gushi bian* 古史辨 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), vol. 5, 492–500 and Chen, "Qin Han jian zhi suowei 'fuying' lunlüe" 秦漢間之所謂"符應"論略, in *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), vol. 16, 1–67.

[541] See the footnote 549 below.

construct its claim to Water Virtue,[542] but there is no doubt that this framework was valued during the Han. It required neither an extensive hereditary lineage nor the exceptional moral character of the founding ruler to justify dynastic legitimacy. Instead, it presented the emergence of a new dynasty as a "natural" process, making it particularly suited to the Western Han. However, precisely because of this, the theory left little room for the ruler's agency. When Emperor Wu, an emperor eager to demonstrate his power as surpassing even that of ancient sage-kings, ascended the throne, the connection between auspicious omens and dynastic Virtue was revised. Instead, omens became directly linked to the emperor's personal achievements.

Yet, this new framework was only useful for legitimizing a ruler who had already ascended the throne; it was ill-suited for a minister attempting to justify usurpation. As a result, Wang Mang had to adopt an entirely new set of strategies and omens to assert his divine mandate when he seized power. In the chaotic decades of regional warlordism that followed, Liu Xiu once again sought out new symbols of Heaven's mandate to bolster his own claims. Throughout this period, signs of Heaven's will were never fixed or immutable signs of legitimacy; rather, they were continuously reinterpreted by different recipients, observers, and interpreters in response to shifting political circumstances.

Thus, the process of legitimizing a new dynasty, whether through Virtue-based omens, the repurposing of existing signs, or fabricated tokens, was itself a site of intellectual and political creativity. Rulers and scholars engaged in a continual reimagining of what it meant for a dynasty, an emperor, or even a political ideology to be "new." Apparently, they were not satisfied with merely borrowing the previous era's practices, but were eager to develop some different signs and interpretive systems. In this way, the discourse on signs and tokens of Mandate was not just

[542] See the discussion in the footnote 550 below.

a reflection of dynastic transition but an actively evolving strategy of political renewal, shaping how imperial legitimacy was constructed and contested.

4.1 *Furui* 符瑞 (auspicious signs): From Symbols of the Five Virtues to Reasons for *fengshan* Sacrifices

Nearly thirty years after the establishment of the Western Han, a scholarly trend emerged that sought to distinguish the Han as a new dynasty, distinct from the preceding Qin.[543] According to the *Shiji*, Jia Yi was the first to propose that the Han implement an entirely new calendrical, official, and ritual system, with changes to the calendar and color scheme being particularly crucial.[544] However, perhaps due to the lack of convincing evidence for the necessity and urgency of such reforms in Jia's proposal, Emperor Wen, newly arrived in the capital and recently ascended to the throne, modestly declined Jia's ambitious suggestion. It was only about a decade later, when Gongsun Chen 公孫臣 (fl. early to mid-second century BCE) submitted a memorial advocating for the virtue of Earth as Han's elemental virtue,[545] that a broader debate about which virtue the Han should embody began. In this debate, the identification of a new virtue served as a justification for establishing a new system.

> Gongsun Chen from Lu submitted a memorial stating: "Originally, the Qin received the virtue of Water. Now, the Han has received the mandate. According to the doctrine of cyclical succession, the Han should be associated with the virtue of Earth. The corresponding omen of the Earth virtue will be the appearance of a yellow dragon. It is appropriate to change the calendar and alter the color of official attire, with yellow becoming the dominant color." At that time, Chancellor Zhang Cang, who had a keen interest in music and calendrical

[543] *Shiji* 26.1260.
[544] Ibid. 84.2492.
[545] Regarding the timing of Gongsun Chen's memorial suggesting the adoption of the virtue of Earth, the accounts in the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu* differ. The *Shiji* places it in Emperor Wen's twelfth year, while the *Han Shu* claims it was the fourteenth year. Based on Zhang Cang's response, it can be pinpointed to the period between the Yellow River breach in Emperor Wen's twelfth year and the appearance of the Yellow Dragon in the fifteenth year.

> systems, argued that the Han was actually at the beginning of the Water virtue. Therefore, the breach of the Yellow River's golden dikes was a sign of this. ... He concluded that Gongsun Chen's claim was incorrect.
> 魯人公孫臣上書曰：「始秦得水德，今漢受之，推終始傳，則漢當土德，土德之應黃龍見。宜改正朔，易服色，色上黃。」是時丞相張蒼好律歷，以為漢乃水德之始，故河決金隄，其符也。……如公孫臣言，非也。[546]

The concept of *fu* 符, meaning "tally" or "symbol," is central to this discussion. When Heaven reveals a sign to humankind, it functions like a tally, legitimizing the dynasty and demonstrating the specific nature of their mandate. Without such signs, Heaven's intent could not be discerned. Disagreement over the Han's elemental virtue stemmed in part from the abundance of potential omens, each of which could be interpreted in support of different virtues. For example, while Gongsun Chen and Zhang Cang 張蒼 (d. 152 BCE) each provided different signs, later scholars such as Liu Xiang and Liu Xin argued at the end of the Western Han that the Han's virtue was Fire, and they cited the story of Liu Bang, allegedly the son of the Red Emperor, killing a mysterious white snake as another example of such a sign.[547] The availability of numerous potential signs raises the question: What kind of objects or phenomena qualify as signs of a dynasty's

---

[546] *Shiji* 28.1381

[547] Although the *Shiji* recounts the story of the Red Emperor's son (i.e., Gaozu) killing the White Emperor's son, Gu Jiegang argued that this legend was fabricated and inserted into the *Shiji* after Liu Xiang and Liu Xin developed the new theory of the Five Virtues' cyclical succession. See Gu, "Wude zhongshishuo xia de zhengzhi yu lishi," 492–500. However, there is strong evidence supporting the Han dynasty's early veneration of the color red. For instance, when Emperor Wen established the system of the five altars in Yong, the ceremonial garments were all red. Qian Mu and Yang Xiangkui 楊向奎 (1910–2000) have both forcefully refuted Gu Jiegang's claim, and Yang points out that the early Han dynasty's reverence for red originated from the concept of the Five Directional or Five Colored Emperors, rather than from the Five Virtue theory. See Qian, "Ping Gu Jiegang wude zhongshishuo xia de xueshu yu zhengzhi" 評顧頡剛五德終始說下的學術與政治, in *Gushi bian* 古史辨 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), vol. 5, 625–629, and Yang, *Xi Han jingxue yu zhengzhi* 西漢經學與政治 (Beijing: Duli chubanshe, 1945), 27–41. Some Japanese scholars have expressed a similar view, as summarized in Kamada Shigeo's 鎌田重雄 work, see Kamada, *Shin Kan seiji seido no kenkyū* 秦漢政治制度の研究 (Tokyo: Nihon Gakujutsu Shinkokai, 1962), 96–98. Yang Quan 楊權 further demonstrates that the Han dynasty's early preference for red had no connection to the Five Virtues theory, and Liu Bang had no knowledge of such theory. Therefore, the early Han had not yet considered or implemented arrangements based on the supposed Virtue.

virtue? The choices of Gongsun Chen and Zhang Cang represented two common approaches: one involving mystical animals and the other relying on natural phenomena, each with earlier precedents.

> Someone said: "The Yellow Emperor attained the virtue of Earth, as evidenced by the appearance of the yellow dragon and earthworms. The Xia dynasty attained the virtue of Wood, marked by an azure dragon resting on the outskirts and the flourishing of vegetation. The Shang dynasty attained the virtue of Metal, signified by silver overflowing from the mountains. The Zhou dynasty attained the virtue of Fire, symbolized by the red crow. Now, the Qin dynasty replaces the Zhou, representing an era of Water virtue. In the past, when Duke Wen of Qin went hunting, he captured a black dragon. This was the auspicious sign of Water virtue."
> 或曰：「黃帝得土德，黃龍地螾見。夏得木德，青龍止於郊，草木暢茂。殷得金德，銀自山溢。周得火德，有赤烏之符。今秦變周，水德之時。昔秦文公出獵，獲黑龍，此其水德之瑞。」[548]

> Whenever an emperor or a king is about to rise, Heaven first reveals auspicious signs to the common people. During the time of the Yellow Emperor, Heaven first revealed giant earthworms and ants. The Yellow Emperor said, "The energy of Earth is dominant." … During Yu's time, Heaven first revealed that plants did not wither in autumn or winter. Yu said, "The energy of Wood is dominant." … During the time of Tang of Shang, Heaven first revealed blades of metal growing out of water. Tang said, "The energy of Metal is dominant." … During the time of King Wen of Zhou, Heaven first revealed fire: a red crow carrying a cinnabar script descended upon the Zhou altar. King Wen said, "The energy of Fire is dominant."
> 凡帝王者之將興也，天必先見祥乎下民。黃帝之時，天先見大螾大螻，黃帝曰「土氣勝」……及禹之時，天先見草木秋冬不殺，禹曰「木氣勝」……及湯之時，天先見金刃生於水，湯曰「金氣勝」……及文王之時，天先見火，赤烏銜丹書集於周社，文王曰「火氣勝」。[549]

In the *Shiji*, the first excerpt is presented as the reason the First Emperor of Qin chose to follow the virtue of Water at the start of his reign. However, since Qin's adherence to Water virtue is more likely a Han reconstruction than a historical reality, this narrative is probably also a Han interpretation.[550] By contrast, the second excerpt from *Lüshi chunqiu* does not link the Qin with

[548] *Shiji* 28.1366.
[549] *Lüshi Chunqiu jishi*, 284.
[550] Although the *Shiji* repeatedly mentions Qin's establishment of the Water Virtue in the "Treatise on *Fengshan*" 封禪書, the "Treatise on the Calendar" 曆書, and the "Annals of the First Emperor of Qin" 秦

Water virtue, probably reflecting an earlier version of Five Virtues theory derived from Zou Yan.[551] These two accounts share identical correspondences between the virtues and dynasties, but they differ in two important ways: First, the *Lüshi Chunqiu*'s version links the acceptance of signs to the founding ruler of each dynasty, whereas the *Shiji* piece tends to associate them more loosely with the dynasties as a whole rather than specific rulers. When the *Shiji* mentions specific figures, such as Duke Wen of Qin, these individuals are not necessarily the founders of their dynasties. This distinction aligns well with Han-era discourses during the reigns of Emperors Wen and Wu, neither of whom was the first emperor of the Han. To establish a virtue or legitimize new rituals such as the *fengshan* ceremonies, signs occurring during their reigns needed to be incorporated into the interpretative framework. Gongsun Chen and Zhang Cang's choices exemplify this approach. When discussing the signs of Han's virtue, both scholars focused on omens observed during Emperor Wen's reign, with Gongsun specifically considering future omens rather than past events. Because Gaozu had not received a definitive sign from Heaven, early Han

始皇本紀, scholars such as Kurihara Tomonobu 栗原朋信 have argued that Qin's adoption of the Water Virtue is not a historical fact. Instead, they suspect this idea originated from the constructions of Five Phases theorists in the early Han period. See Kurihara, "Shin suitoku setsu no hihan" 秦水德說の批判, in *Shin Kan shi no kenkyū* 秦漢史の研究 (Tokyō: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1960), 45–91. A systematic critique of the theory that the Qin adhered to the Water Virtue is also presented by Kamada Shigeo. See Kamada, *Shin Kan seiji seido no kenkyū*, 43–74. Chen Kanli 陳侃理 further argues that Qin's association with the Water Virtue reflects Sima Qian's interpretation, which lacked direct support from original Qin sources. Instead, Sima relied on the virtue-cycle theory, which gradually developed after Emperor Wen, to legitimize the Han dynasty as embodying the Earth Virtue. See Chen, "Ruhe dingwei Qindai: Liang Han zhengtong guan de xingcheng yu queli" 如何定位秦代——兩漢正統觀的形成, *Shixue yuekan* 2022.2: 12–13.

[551] "(Zou Yan) claimed that since the division of Heaven and Earth, the Five Virtues have alternated in succession, each suited to its respective era, with auspicious signs appearing accordingly" (稱引天地剖判以來，五德轉移，治各有宜，而符應若茲). See *Shiji* 74.2344. Gu Jiegang believes that this passage in the *Lüshi Chunqiu* "can be trusted as representing Zou Yan's teachings," since it does not identify the Qin dynasty as belonging to the Water Virtue, probably because it simply transcribed Master Zou's theory without further embellishment. See Gu, "Wude zhongshishuo xia de zhengzhi yu lishi," 420–421. I agree with Gu that this excerpt in the *Lüshi Chunqiu* was not significantly altered by the Qin people and, therefore, reflects the basic understanding of Five Virtues from the Warring States period.

thinkers were compelled to identify signs in their own time. Consequently, they left room in their theoretical framework for non-founding rulers to receive and interpret such signs as well. Second, the *Lüshi Chunqiu* primarily emphasizes natural phenomena. Apart from the red crow carrying a cinnabar script, there are no supernatural animals. By contrast, the *Shiji* features mysterious animals, especially dragons of various colors, as the primary signs. This contrast is evident in the approaches of Gongsun Chen and Zhang Cang: Gongsun championed dragons as signs, whereas Zhang favored natural phenomena.

The eventual fulfillment of Gongsun Chen's prophecy, the appearance of a yellow dragon, played a pivotal role in embedding mystical animals into the Han dynasty's ideological framework and legitimizing his claims. Employing mythical animals as symbols of the Mandate of Heaven proved particularly effective. On one hand, their rarity and uniqueness distinguished them from ordinary creatures. On the other, as living beings with a semblance of agency, their appearances could be interpreted as voluntary acts, lending greater credibility than other natural phenomena. Consequently, Emperor Wen not only endorsed Gongsun's proposal but also appointed him as an Erudite, tasking him with formalizing plans to adopt a new calendar and change the color of official attire.[552] At that time, auspicious signs were interpreted independently of the reigning emperor's personal achievements or virtues. The emperor was understood as a passive recipient of such omens, with a duty to act appropriately in response. However, this interpretive framework began to shift with the involvement of a master of methods and recipes (*fangshi* 方士), Xinyuan Ping 新垣平 (d. 163 BCE), whose ideas redefined the ruler's role in accepting auspicious signs.

[552] *Shiji* 28.1381.

> The following year [163 BCE], Xinyuan Ping sent someone to present a jade cup, submitting a memorial beneath the palace gates to offer it. Xinyuan said to the emperor, "Beneath the gates, there is an auspicious aura of precious jade emanating." Upon investigation, it turned out that someone indeed came forward to present a jade cup, which was inscribed with the words, "The ruler's life will be extended." Xinyuan further claimed, "I predict the sun will align at its zenith twice." Shortly afterward, the sun indeed appeared to retreat and align again. Thereupon, the seventeenth year of Emperor Wen's reign was reset as the first year of a new era, and grand gatherings for drinking were ordered throughout the empire.
> 其明年，新垣平使人持玉杯，上書闕下獻之。平言上曰：「闕下有寶玉氣來者。」已視之，果有獻玉杯者，刻曰「人主延壽」。平又言「臣候日再中」。居頃之，日卻復中。於是始更以十七年為元年，令天下大酺。[553]

Under Xinyuan's influence and his deliberate manipulations, Emperor Wen established new sacrificial sites dedicated to the Five Emperors to acknowledge these heavenly auspices and began to show an interest in the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices.[554] These innovations culminated in the unprecedented action of resetting the era.[555] Two factors directly prompted this decision: the jade cup with its inscription promising the ruler a prolonged life and the celestial phenomenon of the sun's realignment. Since the sun symbolized the emperor in ancient Chinese astrology, its renewed alignment could be understood as another symbol of the rejuvenation of the ruler's life.[556] Unlike earlier omens of virtue proposed by figures such as Gongsun Chen and Zhang Cang, which were tied to dynastic virtue, Xinyuan's auspicious signs offered a repeatable pattern. For

---

[553] Ibid. 28.1383.
[554] Ibid. 28.1382.
[555] Before Emperor Wen, only a few rulers, such as King Huiwen of Qin and King Hui of Wei during the Warring States period, had changed the regnal era. As Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682) and Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩 (1745–1819) point out, both rulers changed the era not for symbolic renewal but simply to switch from counting years as marquises to counting years as kings, reflecting their ascension to the title of king. See Gu, *Rizhilu* 日知錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 555–558 and Liang, *Shiji zhiyi* 史記質疑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 113–114. Such cases differ fundamentally from Han emperors' practices of resetting eras. In this sense, Emperor Wen of Han was the first ruler to change the era purely as an expression of imperial will.
[556] Xin Deyong 辛德勇 points out that "the ruler's life will be extended" not only refer to the emperor's personal unending health, but also signifies the continuation of the dynastic mandate, aspiring for the enduring stability of imperial rule for countless generations. Inaugurating a new era symbolizes renewal, reform, and a fresh beginning for the people, and thus serves as an important means of symbolically "extending the years" of the dynasty. See Xin, *Jianyuan yu gaiyuan: Xi Han Xin Mang nianhao yanjiu* 建元與改元：西漢新莽年號研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 7.

signs of virtue, once the calendar system and attire colors had been adjusted to align with the virtue, even if a yellow dragon were to reappear, it would merely reaffirm the existing virtue of the dynasty, requiring no further action from the emperor. However, the auspicious omens provided by Xinyuan introduced a new framework in which signs were not only repeatable but could demand ongoing imperial responses, such as resetting the era. In other words, Xinyuan's new type of auspicious omen introduced a continuous source of innovation for future emperors and diviners. Modern astronomy dismisses the possibility of the sun "realigning" in the manner described, and the narrative strongly suggests that the presentation of the jade cup was orchestrated by Xinyuan. Though Xinyuan's schemes were eventually exposed, resulting in his execution and the extermination of his clan, his methods set a precedent for later masters during the reign of Emperor Wu. These later practitioners shifted the focus of auspicious signs from affirming dynastic virtue to promising longevity and celebrating the emperor's personal achievements. This evolution marked a significant departure from earlier interpretations of auspicious signs.

After the exposure of Xinyuan's schemes, Emperor Wen grew disillusioned with efforts to alter the calendar, change attire color, or invoke divine favor through new rituals. The systematic exploitation of auspicious signs, however, gained new prominence nearly half a century later under Emperor Wu, who linked such signs closely with the *fengshan* sacrifices.

The teenage Emperor Wu posed a series of questions to Dong Zhongshu regarding the principles of governance,[557] later known as the "Three Questions of Heaven and Humanity" (天人三

[557] The timing of Dong Zhongshu's responses has been a subject of considerable debate, with several influential theories proposed. Ban Gu, in the "Annals of Emperor Wu," attributed the event to 134 BCE, a date supported by modern scholars such as Shi Ding 施丁 and Xu Jianwei. See Shi, "Dong Zhongshu tianren sance zuoyu Yuanguang yuannian bian: jiantan Dong Zhongshu bushi 'bachu banjia duzun rushu' de chuangshi ren" 董仲舒天人三策作於元光元年辨——兼談董仲舒不是"罷黜百家，獨尊儒術"的創始人, *Shehui kexue jikan* 1980.3: 92–101 and Xu, "Faxian Dong Zhongshu: Duzun rushu de lishi chongsu" 發現董仲舒：獨尊儒術的歷史重塑, *Wenxue pinglun* 2022.2: 186–196. However, Sima Guang

策). In his first query, Emperor Wu asked: “In the five hundred years following the death of the sage kings, so many rulers and officials have sought to preserve and promote the principles of the former kings to elevate their own eras. Yet they were still unable to restore the glory of the past, instead gradually declining until their downfall. Was this because what they adhered to was flawed, deviated from the correct path, and thus lost its mandate? Or was it because Heaven’s mandate, once bestowed, cannot be reversed, and decline is inevitable, ceasing only after reaching the depths of collapse?” He further inquired: “The Three Dynasties each received the

---

司馬光 (1019–1086) listed the event under 140 BCE, a position later refuted by Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202), who also favored 134 BCE. Su Chengjian 蘇誠鑒 proposed 124 BCE, a hypothesis endorsed by Wang Baoxuan 王葆玹 but criticized by scholars like Yue Qingping 岳慶平. See Su, “Dong Zhongshu duice zai Yuanshuo wunian yi” 董仲舒對策在元朔五年議, *Zhouguoshi yanjiu* 1984.3: 87–92; Wang, “Tianren sance yu Xi Han zhongye de guanfang yueshu: zailun ‘bachu baijia, duzun rushu’ de shijian wenti” 天人三策與西漢中葉的官方學術——再論“罷黜百家，獨尊儒術”的時間問題, *Zhexue yanjiu* 1990.6: 98–108; and Yue, “Dong Zhongshu duice niandai bian” 董仲舒對策年代辨, *Beijing daxue xuebao* 1986.3: 114–120. Qing scholar Qi Shaonan 齊召南 (1703–1768) and Japanese scholar Fukui Shigemasa argued for 136 BCE. See Wang Xianqian, *Hanshu buzhu* 漢書補註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 4002; and Fukui, *Kandai Jukyō no shiteki kenkyū: Jukyō no kangakuka o meguru teisetsu no saikentō* 漢代儒教の史的研究: 儒教の官學化をめぐる定說の再檢討 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2005). Cheng Zuming 成祖明 viewed the composition of Dong’s treatises as a dynamic process, suggesting that the first to third treatises might have been presented over an extended period, spanning 137 to 135 BCE. Similarly, Yu Jianping 余建平 proposed that the first and third responses were composed between 137 and 136 BCE, while the second response might date slightly later, to 135 or 134 BCE. See Cheng, “Zhaoce xianliang wenxue zhidu beijing xiade ‘tianren sance’” 詔策賢良文學制度背景下的“天人三策,” *Lishi yanjiu* 2012.4: 134–143 and Yu, “ ‘Tianren sance’ wenben shunxu kaobian: jianlun Dong Zhongshu xianliang duice zhi niandai” “天人三策”文本順序考辨——兼論董仲舒賢良對策之年代, *Beijing shehui kexue* 2019.6: 53–63. I align with this developmental perspective, arguing that the event most likely occurred during the transition between the late Jianyuan 建元 period (140–135 BCE) and the early Yuanguang 元光 period (134–129 BCE). Regardless of the exact dating, this event represents the earliest of the texts discussed here that involve *furui*. Loewe argues that Dong’s three responses were likely edited by Ban into a fine and accomplished piece of literature, noting that “Chapter 56 of the *Han shu* does not necessarily include Dong Zhongshu’s *ipsissima verba*.” While Ban Gu may have made stylistic edits and adjustments in contextualizing Dong’s memorials, these modifications are unlikely to impact my forthcoming analysis, unless we assume that Ban Gu directly inserted new lines. However, there is no evidence to support such a claim. Moreover, it is both unlikely and unnecessary for Ban to have altered Emperor Wu’s edicts. If these edicts remained largely intact, it follows that Dong’s responses would also have been preserved in a form close to the original. Otherwise, the structure of the exchange would no longer align (e.g., the discussion of *fu* 符 first appears in Wu’s edict, then in Dong’s response). See Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, a “Confucian” Heritage and the Chunqiu Fanlu* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 118–121.

Mandate of Heaven, but what are the signs of the Mandate?" Dong Zhongshu replied that Heaven's benevolence and its love for the ruler are demonstrated by sending repeated warnings to rulers, granting them opportunities to reflect and reform. Unless an era is marked by profound moral decay, Heaven seeks to stabilize the state. He argued that governance ultimately depends on the ruler's actions; the Mandate of Heaven, once bestowed, can indeed be reversed or restored by human effort. Regarding the signs of the Mandate of Heaven, Dong stated that they must arise spontaneously, beyond human intervention. They would manifest when people all under Heaven unite their hearts and turn to such a ruler as if to a parent. Citing a Han commentary on the *Shangshu*, Dong mentioned King Wu of Zhou, whose boat was graced by a white fish leaping aboard, and a divine fire that transformed into a crow as examples of such signs.[558] These signs, according to Dong, served as ultimate affirmations of a ruler's virtue and required no further action beyond acceptance. Dong's interpretation marked a significant departure from earlier frameworks proposed by figures such as Gongsun Chen and Zhang Cang, whose omens were tied to the dynasty as a whole. For Dong, signs were intimately linked to the ruler's personal conduct and moral standing. He posited that Heaven could admonish rulers through disasters and anomalies while rewarding virtue through auspicious signs. In this sense, receiving the Mandate of Heaven was no longer a singular, foundational event but an ongoing process requiring vigilance and virtuous rule from every emperor. What echoes with the proposal of Gongsun, however, is Dong's preference of mystical animals as the suitable signs, and his indication that other than the founders of the dynasty, subsequent rulers also have the potential to receive such signs. Dong's framework also leaves profound space for succeeding emperors to renew the mandate even when they believe that they are losing Heaven's favor. He explicitly argued that even if a dynasty were

[558] *Hanshu* 56.2498–2501.

on the path to decline, an assiduous ruler could restore the fading Mandate of Heaven, just like the setting sun can rise back to its zenith. These philosophical reflections were particularly significant given the context in which Emperor Wu posed his questions. Frequent famines, natural disasters, and celestial anomalies had cast doubt on Emperor Wu's rulership.[559] Dong's assurance that the mandate could be revived through diligent rule likely provided the young emperor with a measure of confidence. This concept of mandate renewal would underpin such imperial attempts from the mid-Western Han through the early Eastern Han.

At this point in his reign, Emperor Wu had not yet received many auspicious signs, nor had he demonstrated a clear preference for either Dong Zhongshu's interpretation or for actively seeking to confirm his mandate through such signs.[560] Nearly two decades later, during Emperor Wu's mature reign, the topic of auspicious signs resurfaced.[561] In 118 BCE, the fifth year of the Yuanshou 元狩 reign (122–117 BCE), Emperor Wu conducted a suburban sacrificial ceremony at Yong 雍 and captured a white one-horned beast, which was considered the auspicious creature *lin* 麟.[562] Since Kongzi was also said to have encountered a *lin*, this event reignited debate about

[559] See the records of disasters and unusual phenomena in the "Annals of Emperor Wu" in the *Hanshu*, particularly during the first six years of Emperor Wu's reign. These events likely provide the background for Emperor Wu's inquiry into calamities and anomalies.
[560] *Hanshu* 22.1032. Xu Jianwei points out that the veneration of Dong Zhongshu only emerged during the mid-to-late Western Han period. It was particularly under the promotion of figures like Wei Xiang and Liu Xiang that Dong Zhongshu was constructed as a crucial scholar who played a decisive role in influencing Emperor Wu's policy of "upholding Confucianism as the sole orthodoxy." See Xu, "Faxian Dong Zhongshu," 190–196.
[561] Kern observes that records of auspicious signs became increasingly recurrent and even dominant between 113 and 93 BCE, a period marked by intense ritual, particularly sacrificial activities, during Emperor Wu's reign. These omens served to reinforce the emperor's political sovereignty and apparent control over their interpretation. However, while Kern primarily focuses on the emperor's intent in interpreting these signs, my analysis centers on how his subordinates engaged in their interpretation. See Kern, "Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation," 29–31.
[562] Although the *Hanshu* presents the capture of the *lin* as the immediate reason for Emperor Wu's renaming of the era to Yuanshou 元狩, according to the "Treatise on *Fengshan*" in the *Shiji*, the *lin* was captured in the fifth year of Yuanshou (118 BCE). Therefore, Zhong Jun's memorial, which corresponds to this event, must also date to this year. For a detailed discussion on the relationship between the era title

the proper imperial response. Two of the most prominent contributions to this discourse came from Zhong Jun 終軍 (d. 112 BCE) and Sima Xiangru, both advocating for the performance of *fengshan* ceremonies to honor the occasion. Zhong Jun's memorial articulated a compelling argument for seizing the momentous event to solidify the mandate. Zhong Jun wrote:

> … [Such a ruler] gathers all virtues yet remains humble, embraces enlightenment without being presumptuous, establishes three palaces that balance refinement with simplicity, and aligns subordinates to their appropriate duties. Even those earlier rulers who have performed the *fengshan* sacrifices have not heard such accomplishments. When Heaven's Mandate is newly established, all matters are nascent. It is only when the whole empire shares the same customs that the enlightened sage brings it to full glory, ensuring the legacy is passed down forever. Thus, it was only in the time of King Cheng of Zhou that regulations were formalized, and auspicious signs manifested…. In the past, when King Wu crossed the river, the white fish leapt into his boat; he took it and offered it in sacrifice, prompting ministers to exclaim, "How excellent!" … [Capturing the *lin*] is Heaven's way of bestowing favor, and it is a sign of divine correspondence. It is fitting to seize this opportune moment to proclaim a new era. Sacrificial white grasses from the Yangtze and Huai Rivers should be laid along, and a grand title should be declared at Mount Tai, fulfilling the harmony and illumination.
> ……履眾美而不足，懷聖明而不專，建三宮之文質，章厥職之所宜，封禪之君無聞焉。夫天命初定，萬事草創，及臻六合同風，九州共貫，必待明聖潤色，祖業傳於無窮。故周至成王，然後制定，而休徵之應見。……昔武王中流未濟，白魚入於王舟，俯取以燎，群公咸曰「休哉！」……此天之所以示饗，而上通之符合也。宜因昭時令日，改定告元，苴白茅於江淮，發嘉號于營丘，以應緝熙。[563]

Zhong Jun's memorial begins by listing Emperor Wu's accomplishments, particularly his successful campaigns against the barbarians to the north and south, asserting that these deeds already surpass those of earlier rulers who performed the *fengshan* sacrifices. He then emphasizes the role of an "enlightened sage" in advancing the founding emperor's legacy to its pinnacle,

---

Yuanshou and the timing of Zhong Jun's composition, See Xin Deyong, *Jianyuan yu gaiyuan*, 27–36. I adopt Xin's argument, placing the events in 118 BCE. It was also in this year, according to *Shiji*, that Emperor Wu received Sima Xiangru's essay on the *fengshan* sacrifices. Kern highlights the political significance of this event, arguing that "the capture of the unicorn was celebrated as a supreme symbol of the Han Chinese conquest of the neighboring western regions." See Kern, "Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation," 20.

[563] *Hanshu* 64B.2815–2816.

drawing a parallel with King Cheng of Zhou, whose reign symbolized the zenith of the Zhou dynasty. Finally, he compares the white *lin* with the white fish that leapt into King Wu's boat, viewing both as divine signs from Heaven. Zhong concludes that a grand *fengshan* ceremony at Mount Tai and the proclamation of a new era are the appropriate responses to such an auspicious event. Many of Zhong Jun's statements resonate with the earlier proposals of Gongsun Chen, Xinyuan Ping, and Dong Zhongshu. Zhong incorporates Gongsun's emphasis on mystical animals as manifestations of Heaven's will, Xinyuan's linkage of Heaven's auspices with the resetting of the era, and Dong's notion that subsequent emperors, not just dynastic founders, can receive the Mandate of Heaven. Moreover, he introduces the *fengshan* sacrifices as a critical element in this framework, arguing that it is not the founding emperor but a successor who is uniquely positioned to solidify the dynasty's principles and earn divine signs. In Zhong's construction, the status of a succeeding emperor is not a disadvantage but a necessity; it is the continuation and perfection of the dynasty that makes the ruler eligible for Heaven's rewards. The white *lin*, therefore, becomes a license for performing the *fengshan* ceremony. This theme is further elaborated in a posthumous essay by Sima Xiangru, also written in 118 BCE, which explicitly encourages Emperor Wu to proceed with the ritual.[564]

> King Wen of Zhou reformed the system; the Zhou dynasty prospered greatly and reached its peak under King Cheng…. Thus, the royal enterprise achieved its zenith when King Cheng ascended the throne as a child, surpassing even King Wen and King Wu. Yet when examining his achievements from beginning to end, there were no particularly extraordinary deeds that could be examined now. Nevertheless, he ascended Mount Liangfu and Mount Tai to proclaim grand titles and dignified names. The virtue of the great Han dynasty… and the

[564] While most scholars argue that this essay straightforwardly encourages the emperor to perform the *fengshan* ceremony, at times even bordering on obsequious flattery, some suggest that it subtly admonishes Emperor Wu's ambitions. For criticisms of the essay's overly flattering tone, see Su Shi 蘇軾, *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集, annot. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 2010. For the opposing view, see Qing scholar Zhang Yuzhao's 張裕釗 (1823-1894) comment, discussed in Ding Youguo 丁有國, "Lun Zhang Yuzhao 'Bian Sima Xiangru Fengshan wen'" 論張裕釗《辨司馬相如〈封禪文〉》, *Ezhou daxue xuebao* 2004.2: 24–26.

numerous auspicious omens it has received, are already so abundant, yet it is still considered unworthy to mention *fengshan*. During the Zhou dynasty, a leapt fish died in [King Wu's] boat, and he used fire to roast it as a sacrifice to Heaven. How insignificant that was, and yet it was regarded as an auspicious omen! On this basis, he ascended Mount Tai to perform the *fengshan* ceremony. Was that not a cause for shame? How vast is the difference between rashness and humility in such matters! At this, the Commander-in-chief said: "Your Majesty's… virtue is equal to that of the ancient sages, and your achievements are unmatched. Your meritorious deeds are harmonious, and auspicious omens have appeared in abundance, arriving successively at the appointed times…. Yet, Your Majesty, in your humility, refrains from performing the *fengshan* ceremony, thereby disappointing the deities of Heaven, Earth, and the mountains, and neglecting the rituals essential to the Way of Kings. This would also cause your ministers to feel ashamed. Some say that even if Heaven's evidence is not entirely obvious, once rare and auspicious signs appear, they cannot be dismissed. To decline would mean missing the opportunity to carve commemorative inscriptions on Mount Tai and Mount Liangfu. Each ruler rose to prominence according to the circumstances of their time. If all rulers with the ability to bring peace and prosperity to the world had chosen humility and refrained [from performing *fengshan*], what would later generations have to praise? What meaning would there be in speaking of the seventy-two monarchs who did perform *fengshan*? It is by cultivating great virtue that Heaven grants auspicious signs. Honoring these signs through proper rituals is not overstepping propriety.…" Hearing this, the emperor changed his demeanor and said: "Excellent! I shall attempt it." He then reconsidered his position, gathered the opinions of his ministers, and began inquiring into the *fengshan* rites. He composed poems extolling the vastness of his virtue and the richness of the auspicious signs.

文王改制，爰周郅隆，大行越成……是以業隆於繈褓而崇冠于二后。揆厥所元，終都攸卒，未有殊尤絕迹可考于今者也。然猶躡梁父，登泰山，建顯號，施尊名。大漠之德，……符瑞臻茲，猶以為薄，不敢道封禪。蓋周躍魚隕杭，休之以燎，微夫斯之為符也，以登介丘，不亦恧乎！進讓之道，其何爽與？於是大司馬進曰：「陛下……德侔往初，功無與二，休烈洽洽，符瑞眾變，期應紹至……陛下謙讓而弗發也。挈三神之驩，缺王道之儀，群臣恧焉。或謂且天為質闇，珍符固不可辭；若然辭之，是泰山靡記而梁父靡幾也。亦各並時而榮，咸濟世而屈，說者尚何稱於後，而云七十二君乎？夫修德以錫符，奉符以行事，不為進越。……」於是天子沛然改容，曰：「愉乎，朕其試哉！」乃遷思回慮，總公卿之議，詢封禪之事，詩大澤之博，廣符瑞之富。[565]

Sima's essay shares many arguments with Zhong Jun's memorial. Both highlight King Cheng's role in elevating the Zhou dynasty to its peak, regard King Wu's capture of a white fish as a

[565] *Shiji* 117.3064–3070. Martin Kern questions the authenticity of *Shiji* chapter 117, the biography of Sima Xiangru, arguing that several features indicate the chapter as a whole postdates Sima Qian's original work by at least a century. However, given the minimal differences between the versions of this essay in the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, I have chosen to present the *Shiji* version here. See Kern, "The 'Biography of Sima Xiangru' and the Question of the *Fu* in Sima Qian's *Shiji*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123, no. 2 (2003): 303–316.

significant auspicious sign from the past, and emphasize that Emperor Wu's morality and achievements surpass those of all previous rulers. What distinguishes Sima's essay, however, is its strong focus on *furui* 符瑞, a term that appears three times within the text. The central argument of the essay asserts that auspicious signs are the most critical prerequisite for conducting the *fengshan* ceremony. According to Sima, once these signs manifest, they must not be ignored; the emperor is obliged to honor them through *fengshan* rituals. Sima is likely one of the earliest writers to develop a strong interest in articulating these signs.[566] Following his usage, this term gained popularity and became widely employed in mid-to-late Han discourses concerning Heaven's will. Sima concludes his essay with a poem extolling four auspicious signs, three of which were mystical animals, each giving a stanza of at least eight lines. The fourth sign, a miraculous grain with six ears on a single stalk, was given only two lines.[567] The animals featured in the poem are the Zouyu 騶虞, a *lin*, and a yellow dragon. Although there are no extant records of a Zouyu being captured or a yellow dragon being sighted during Emperor Wu's reign, the question of whether these animals actually appeared is less important than Sima's portrayal and interpretation of them. The eulogy reads:

> Zouyu: It was known by reputation in the past, but now it has arrived. Its appearance leaves no trace, marking it as a characteristic of Heaven-sent auspicious omens. It also appeared during the time of Shun, and it was from this that the Yu dynasty prospered.
> （騶虞）蓋聞其聲，今視其來。厥塗靡從，天瑞之徵。茲爾於舜，虞氏以興。
> *Lin*: Before the Three Dynasties, it had never appeared.
> （麟）三代之前，蓋未嘗有。

[566] Although this term also appears sporadically in some late Warring States and early Han texts, such as *Guanzi*, *Xinyu*, and *Xinshu*, these instances lack further elaboration. It remains unclear whether these usages refer to the same category of auspicious signs as those described by Sima Xiangru.
[567] The poem also references sweet dew; however, given that the essay employs the metaphor of vapor and water to symbolize the Han's virtue, and sweet dew is not listed as one of the auspicious signs in the main body of the essay, I interpret the mention of sweet dew in the poem as metaphorical rather than a description of an actual *furui*.

> Yellow dragon: It is recorded in the commentaries, saying that it is the vehicle for the one who has received the mandate.
> （黃龍）於傳載之，云受命所乘。[568]

The stanza on Zouyu echoes Dong Zhongshu's argument that true omens from Heaven must arise spontaneously, beyond human manipulation. Its previous appearance in Shun's time indicates that its current appearance will also bring prosperity to Emperor Wu's reign. The appearance of the *lin* is portrayed as even more significant. Unlike the Zouyu, the *lin* had never appeared even during the legendary golden age preceding the Three Dynasties. This unprecedented event underscores Emperor Wu's unparalleled achievements, positioning them above those of the ancient sage kings. The most intriguing interpretation is that of the yellow dragon. While Gongsun Chen earlier identified the yellow dragon as an omen of the Han's Earth virtue, Sima reinterprets it as the chariot of the ruler who has received the Mandate of Heaven. This depiction recalls a later account by Gongsun Qing 公孫卿 (fl. late second century BCE), who claimed that the Yellow Emperor ascended to immortality by riding a dragon.[569] Although this essay does not explicitly address immortality, the imagery of riding a dragon resonates with themes from his other works, such as his *fu* on the Great Man, which reflect Emperor Wu's fascination with immortality.[570] This connection suggests that while Sima's discussion of *furui* primarily revolves around the *fengshan* ceremony, the omens he describes were already imbued with undertones of immortality, probably influenced by the contemporary masters of methods. As a result, *furui* became a

---

[568] *Shiji* 117.3070–3071.
[569] Ibid. 28.1394. In the Eastern Han, Ying Shao and Wang Chong both dismissed the story of the Yellow Emperor ascending to Heaven on a dragon as falsehood. Ying Shao remarked: "Riding a dragon to ascend to Heaven, how could that not be absurd?" (騎龍升天，豈不怪乎); Wang Chong explained: "Dragons rise with clouds and rain. When the clouds disperse and the rain stops, they return to the depths. If the Yellow Emperor truly rode a dragon, he would have been cast into the abyss along with it" (龍起雲雨，因乘而行，雲散雨止，降復入淵。如實黃帝騎龍，隨溺於淵也). See Ying, *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu*, 69 and Huang, *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 315.
[570] *Shiji* 117.3057.

conceptual bridge between Confucian scholars and the masters, serving as a shared rhetorical tool for their respective agendas.[571] Despite differing interpretations of the *fengshan* ceremony's significance, both groups employed auspicious signs to persuade Emperor Wu to perform the ritual without delay. These signs, inherently ambiguous in meaning, relied entirely on the interpretations of those who invoked them. Hence, the significance of *furui* evolved over time: Initially, they symbolized the virtue of a dynasty. Later, they became closely associated with the emperor's personal morality and achievements. Ultimately, they were interpreted as Heaven's explicit encouragement for the emperor to perform the *fengshan* ceremony.[572] However, after Emperor Wu conducted the *fengshan* ceremony, *furui* gradually lost their centrality in imperial discourse. Even though numerous auspicious signs reportedly appeared during Emperor Xuan's reign, the emperor returned to the more passive role of simply acknowledging their presence. Following this brief period of interest, imperial and scholarly attention shifted toward the opposite of auspicious signs, calamities and anomalies, which became the dominant focus of political and cosmic interpretation from the mid-Western Han onward.[573]

---

[571] Liu Shipei 劉師培 notes that Sima Xiangru, along with other scholars and masters who discussed *fengshan*, were fully aware of Emperor Wu's pursuit of immortality. Emperor Wu integrated *furui* into the *fengshan* rituals, prompting Confucian scholars, who had previously focused on the rituals themselves, to shift their discussions toward *furui*, driven by a desire to flatter the ruler's quest for immortality. See Liu, *Guoxue fawei* 國學發微 (Jiangsu: Guangling shushe, 2016), 1423.

[572] Therefore, it is understandable that Sima Qian's "Treatise on *Fengshan*" contains the most frequent mentions of *furui* during this period. Sima Qian also adopted Sima Xiangru's statement at the beginning of this treatise, which asserts that "There has never been a case where a ruler who witnessed auspicious signs did not ascend Mount Tai" (未有睹符瑞見而不臻乎泰山者也). In this text, both the manipulation of *furui* by scholars and masters is recorded in detail.

[573] Wolfram Eberhard, Homer H. Dubs, and Hans Bielenstein have examined Han records and interpretations of calamities. Bielenstein argues that the authority to report and interpret omens rested with court officials and that these reports could serve as indirect criticism of the emperor. See Bielenstein, "An Interpretation of the Portents in the *Ts'ien Han Shu*," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 22 (1950): 127–43 and Wolfram Eberhard, "The Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China," in *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, ed. John. K. Fairbank (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 33–70. For critiques of these theories, see Kern, "Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation," 2–4.

4.2 *Fuming* 符命 (tokens of the mandate): The Greatest Weapon and the Biggest Weakness of an Eclectic

In the first chapter, I discuss the two late Western Han traditions of emphasizing ritual classics and historical precedents and show how Wang Mang synthesized them through his unprecedented use of *gushi* to establish his authority. However, it is noteworthy that ritual classics did not play a central role in Wang Mang's reforms, and engagement with the *Zhouli* was cursory at best.[574]. Instead, his policies drew on three primary sources: the existing Han system with minor adjustments, names borrowed from classical texts but redefined with new meanings, and entirely new creations.[575] This demonstrates that Wang was not the restorationist he is often imagined to be: one who sought to revive the ideals and practices of a golden past.[576] Rather, he eclectically gathered elements from a wide array of sources to serve his agenda. This approach is especially evident in the miscellaneous methods he employed to guide and legitimize his rule. While

[574] Although Liu Xin and over seventy scholars are said to have praised Wang Mang for "discovering" the *Zhouli*, the official system Wang Mang implemented was a haphazard patchwork, distorted and drawn from various sources. In practice, he did not fully implement the *Zhouli*. Scholars have noted that Wang Mang's reforms differed more from the *Zhouli* than they resembled it. For example, see Liu Qiyu, "*Zhouli* zhenwei zhizheng ji qishu xiecheng de zhenshi yiju," 624–25, Hou Jiaju 侯家駒, Zhouli *yanjiu* 周禮研究 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1987), 285; and Jin Chunfeng 金春峰, *Zhouguan zhi chengshu jiqi fanying de wenhua yu shidai xinkao* 周官之成書及其反映的文化與時代新考 (Taipei: Dong da tushu gongsi, 1994), 239. Some scholars thus argue that Wang Mang would not have forged a text that provided little practical support for his enterprise, suggesting instead that the *Zhouli* must predate them. For example, see Qian Mu, "Self-preface," in *Liu Xiang Xin fuzi nianpu* 劉向歆父子年譜 (Shanghai: Zhongguo wenhua fuwushe, 1948), 1–6.

[575] Yang Tianyu, *Jingxue tanyan lu* 經學探研錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004), 139.

[576] This understanding is heavily influenced by Ban Gu's depiction in the *Hanshu*, where Wang is depicted as a person to act merely out of admiration for antiquity without considering present circumstances. See *Hanshu* 24A.1143 and 99B.4131. Such views are not uncommon among contemporary scholars. For example, Shen Zhong 沈重 regards Wang Mang's reforms as a "historical tragedy of Confucian revivalism." See Shen, "Rujia fugu zhuyi de lishi da beiju: lun Wang Mang gaizhi" 儒家復古主義的歷史大悲劇——論王莽改制, *Nanchang daxue xuebao (renwen shehui kexue ban)* 1987.1: 55–61.

Wang's use of both modern- and ancient-script classics has been well-studied,[577] and his reliance on diverse precedents has also been examined in previous chapters, less attention has been paid to his extensive use of astronomical phenomena, auspicious timing, apotropaic magic (*yansheng* 厭勝),[578] calendrical reforms, *qi* 氣 observation, and divination techniques. For example:

> In the seventh year of the Tianfeng reign [20 CE], Jupiter will be in the Daliang celestial sphere and the azure dragon [i.e., *taisui* 太歲 (Grand Duke Jupiter)] will be in Gengchen. At this time, the rites of royal inspection tours will be conducted. In the following year, Jupiter will be in the Shichen celestial sphere, the azure dragon will be in Xinsi. Then, the capital at Luoyang, the center of the Earth, will be inaugurated.
> 更以天鳳七年，歲在大梁，倉龍庚辰，行巡狩之禮。厥明年，歲在實沈，倉龍辛巳，即土之中雒陽之都。
>
> [Wang ordered to] replace Jiazi with Wuzi as the start of the sixty-day cycle. He designated Wuzi as an auspicious day of capping ceremonies while declaring the ten-day period starting with Wuyin as inauspicious for marriage. However, many among the populace did not comply.
> 戊子代甲子為六旬首。冠以戊子為元日，昏以戊寅之旬為忌日。百姓多不從者。
>
> Wang Mang personally conducted the southern suburban sacrifice and cast the "Mighty Dipper," made of five *dan* of copper and shaped like the Northern Dipper. It was two feet and five inches long. Wang intended to use it to overpower his enemies through apotropaic magic.
> 莽親之南郊，鑄作威斗。威斗者，以五石銅為之，若北斗，長二尺五寸，欲以厭勝眾兵。

---

[577] For example, Sun Shaohua analyzes Wang Mang's background in classical studies and his application of these traditions, concluding that Wang Mang drew on both the *guwen* (ancient script) and *jinwen* (modern script) traditions in implementing his political measures. See Sun, "'Sanqi zhi e' yu Liang Han zhiji jingxue sixiang zhi ganxi: yi Lu Wenshu, Gu Yong, Wang Mang wei zhongxin" "三七之厄" 與兩漢之際經學思想之關係——以路温舒、谷永、王莽爲中心, *Lingnan xuebao* 2018.1: 101–103. Similarly, see Zhang Haifang 張海防, "Han Xin xihe guan shezhi kao: jianlun Wang Mang guanzhi gaige zhong de jin gu wen jing" 漢新羲和官設置考——兼論王莽官制改革中的今古文, *Guanzi xuekan* 2015.3: 120–123.

[578] Authoritative dictionaries and lexicons generally treat the terms 厭 (*yan*), 厭勝 (*yansheng*), and 厭當 (*yandang*) as referring to the same concept, commonly defining them as superstitious methods used to "resist," "curse," "suppress," or "subdue" others or misfortunes. However, such interpretations are unconvincing. *Yansheng* is better understood as a form of magic that relies on establishing a "correspondence" between reality and prediction, with the goal of mitigating misfortunes through this correspondence rather than using curses to subdue disasters. See Shi Jiepeng 史傑鵬, "'*Yansheng*' zhi ciyi kaobian ji xiangguan wenti yanjiu" "厭勝" 之詞義考辨及相關問題研究, *Liyun xuekan (yuyan juan)* 2013.2: 83–108.

> In the spring of the sixth year, Wang Mang observed widespread banditry and robbery. He thus ordered the Grand Astrologer to calculate a calendar spanning 36,000 years, instituting a system where the reign title would change every six years, which was promulgated throughout the empire.
> 六年春，莽見盜賊多，乃令太史推三萬六千歲曆紀，六歲一改元，布天下。
>
> Many *qi* observers reported signs indicating the necessity of construction. Wang Mang, noting the widespread presence of bandits, sought to lay a foundation for a dynasty that would endure for ten thousand generations, so he issued an edict, stating: "… I divined the area north of the Bo River and south of Lang Pond, and the oracle yielded an auspicious sign. I also divined the area south of the Jin Water and west of the Hall of Brightness, and the oracle likewise yielded an auspicious sign. I will construct anew there." Based on this, he initiated a project [to build nine temples] south of Chang'an.
> 望氣為數者多言有土功象，莽又見四方盜賊多，欲視為自安能建萬世之基者，乃下書曰：「……予乃卜波水之北，郎池之南，惟玉食。予又卜金水之南，明堂之西，亦惟玉食。予將新築焉。」於是遂營長安城南。[579]

These examples demonstrate that Wang Mang was far from a steadfast restorationist or classicist. Instead, he freely drew from a broad spectrum of intellectual and esoteric traditions, regardless of their origins or connection to ancient texts, to consolidate his authority. He incorporated practices clearly inspired by Emperor Wu's reforms, such as era name changes every six years and a calendrical innovation, as well as techniques from masters of methods, such as *qi* observation and determining auspicious or forbidden days. However, these esoteric methods played a relatively minor role in his overall governance. Wang's reliance on *furui* and, even more importantly, *fuming* 符命, was central to his strategies of legitimation.[580]

[579] *Hanshu* 99B.4134; 4138; 99C.4151; 4154; 4161.
[580] Previous scholars have sometimes failed to distinguish between these terms. For example, David Knechtges overgeneralizes by categorizing all auspicious omens during Wang Mang's reign as *fuming*, whether naturally occurring or artificially fabricated. However, as I will demonstrate below, *fuming* and *furui* represent two fundamentally distinct types of portents. Cf. Knechtges, "Uncovering the Sauce Jar: A literary Interpretation of Yang Hsiung's 'Chü Ch'in mei Hsin'," in *Ancient China: Studies in Early Civilization*, eds. David T. Roy and Tsuen-Hsiun Tsien (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1978), 232–33.

Wang Mang's reliance on *furui* was most prominent before he officially became emperor and established the Xin dynasty.[581] The earliest and most significant of these omens was the white pheasant, presented as tribute by barbarians at Wang's instigation.

> Initially, [Wang covertly directed] Yi Prefecture to encourage the barbarian tribes beyond the borders to offer a white pheasant as tribute.… Consequently, ministers highly proclaimed: "Wang Mang's merits and virtues have brought about the auspicious omen of the white pheasant, akin to the one seen during the time of King Cheng, aligning with the signs of a thousand years ago. According to the principle of sage kings, those who achieve great deeds should be honored with illustrious titles in their lifetimes. Thus, the Duke of Zhou received his title while still alive, entrusted with the name Zhou. Since Wang Mang has accomplished the great deeds of stabilizing the state and ensuring peace of the Han, he should be granted the title of Duke of Stabilizing Han."
> 始，風益州令塞外蠻夷獻白雉，……於是群臣乃盛陳：「莽功德致周成白雉之瑞，千載同符。聖王之法，臣有大功則生有美號，故周公及身在而託號於周。莽有定國安漢家之大功，宜賜號曰安漢公。」[582]

This episode with the white pheasant marked a well-designed starting point for Wang Mang's political ascent. According to the *Shangshu dazhuan* 尚書大傳 and *Han Shi waizhuan*, a southern barbarian tribe once presented a white pheasant to the Duke of Zhou, attributing favorable local weather conditions to the emergence of a sage in the central state. At that time, King Cheng was still a child, and it was the Duke of Zhou who wielded actual power. The sage in question was therefore not King Cheng but the Duke of Zhou. This historical precedent closely parallels Wang Mang's role as regent during Emperor Ping's reign. Therefore, upon receiving the white pheasant, ministers enthusiastically hailed it as the reappearance of the same divine token from a thousand years earlier. Just as the Duke of Zhou was honored with the name "Zhou," Wang Mang

[581] Béatrice L'Haridon analyzes how Wang Mang developed his own claim to sovereign legitimacy by establishing a line of his ancestors and through the exhibition and interpretation of bizarre events and *fuming*. However, she does not distinguish between different types of such "bizarre events." See L'Haridon, "Wang Mang 王莽 (c. 45 b.c.e.–23 c.e.) and Classical Learning as Path to Supreme Power," *Early China* 45 (2022): 52.
[582] *Hanshu* 99A.4046.

was granted a title incorporating "Han." The brilliance of selecting the white pheasant as the auspicious omen lies in its unique association. Unlike most auspicious signs, which were typically linked to the nominal ruler, the white pheasant was historically tied to the de facto ruler. Even during Huo Guang's 霍光 (d. 68 BCE) regency, Huo refrained from publicly associating himself with auspicious omens or calamities. Throughout the Han dynasty, it was generally understood that only the emperor could be the rightful recipient of such signs. Wang Mang's deliberate handling of the white pheasant therefore represented a calculated and innovative attempt to redefine who could be acknowledged as the recipient of auspicious omens.

Despite this innovation, auspicious omens suffered from two fundamental limitations by the time of Wang Mang. First, their frequent appearance during the Han dynasty had eroded their novelty and significance. During Emperor Xuan's twenty-six-year reign alone, over ten instances of auspicious omens were recorded, with multiple types sometimes appearing simultaneously. No fewer than three imperial edicts concerning auspicious omens were issued during his reign. This overabundance diminished the impact of newly reported omens, making them less effective as indicators of virtue and merit. The inflation of auspicious signs is vividly illustrated in an edict issued during Wang Mang's career granting him the Nine Bestowals (*jiuxi* 九錫): "Heavenly signs continuously arrive; the primordial energy is in great harmony. *Lin*, phoenix, tortoise, dragon, and all types of auspicious omens, there are more than seven hundred" (天符仍臻，元氣大同。麟鳳龜龍，眾祥之瑞，七百有餘).[583] Second, and more crucially, auspicious omens like the white pheasant, which directly acknowledged the merits of a subject rather than a ruler, were exceedingly rare. The vast majority of auspicious signs were attributed to the nominal ruler. For instance, in Wang Mang's memorial to the Grand Empress Dowager, omens such as "timely

[583] Ibid. 99A.4074.

winds and rains, the descent of sweet dew, the sprouting of divine fungi, the millets with double ears, and the red grass" were credited to the Grand Empress Dowager's virtue.[584] Similarly, in Zhang Song's 張竦 (fl. early first century CE) memorial drafted for Chen Chong 陳崇 (fl. early first century CE), even when the intent was to praise Wang Mang's achievements, the "pileup of auspicious omens" (嘉瑞疊累) was attributed first to Emperor Ping's "ability to recognize talent and appoint the worthy."[585] In other words, no matter how many auspicious signs were documented, they remained tied to the ruler and could not elevate Wang Mang beyond his role as a minister to the position of emperor.

Recognizing this inherent limitation, Wang Mang shifted his strategy after Emperor Ping's death. He almost completely abandoned the use of auspicious signs to validate himself and instead turned to a new form of *fu* 符: the *fuming* 符命 (Mandated Token),[586] which could directly and unambiguously express his claim to authority.[587]

> In that month, Xie Xiao, Guardian of the Hui Guang area [part of the Metropolitan Area] reported that Wugong Chief Meng Tong, while digging a well, had discovered a white stone. The stone was round on top and square at the base, bearing cinnabar inscriptions that read: "Proclaiming the Duke of Stabilizing Han, Wang Mang, as emperor." This event marked the beginning of the flourishing of *fuming*. Wang Mang had senior officials present this finding to the Grand Empress Dowager, who responded: "This is a fabrication meant to deceive the world and cannot be acted upon!" Grand Protector Shun advised the Grand Empress Dowager, saying: "Things have already reached this point, and nothing can be done.

[584] Ibid. 99A.4050.
[585] Ibid. 99A.4060.
[586] Although both Dong Zhongshu and Sima Xiangru used the term *shouming zhifu* 受命之符, their references appear to differ significantly from Wang Mang's *fuming*. It is more likely that this term is influenced by Emperor Ai's edict on renewing the mandate, which states, "The Han state has once again obtained the token of receiving the mandate" (漢國再獲受命之符). This refers to a mystical text similar in nature to Wang Mang's *fuming*.
[587] Corresponding to this transition, Michael Loewe observes a significant shift in the references to earlier heroes or paragons during Wang Mang's career as regent and later as emperor. Between 1 and 9 CE, there were frequent references to the Duke of Zhou and occasional mentions of Huo Guang. However, after 9 CE, repeated assertions of Wang Mang's descent from Shun emerged, which had not been made previously. See Loewe, "Wang Mang and His Forbears: The Making of the Myth," *T'oung Pao* 80, no. 4/5 (1994): 198–99.

> Resisting it will not stop it. Besides, Wang Mang does not intend anything beyond consolidating his authority and pacifying the realm."
> 是月，前煇光謝囂奏武功長孟通浚井得白石，上圓下方，有丹書著石，文曰「告安漢公莽為皇帝」。符命之起，自此始矣。莽使群公以白太后，太后曰：「此誣罔天下，不可施行！」太保舜謂太后：「事已如此，無可奈何，沮之力不能止。又莽非敢有它，但欲稱攝以重其權，填服天下耳。」[588]

Following the discovery of this white stone inscribed with cinnabar, Wang Mang assumed the title "Regent Emperor" 攝皇帝, and the era name was changed to Jushe 居攝 (Regency), signifying a substantial transition from subject to sovereign. The key difference between *furui* and *fuming* lies in their nature and interpretability. Unlike *furui*, whose meanings were subject to interpretation and debate, *fuming* spoke for itself, delivering a direct and unequivocal message. Prophetic objects bearing inscriptions were not Wang Mang's invention. As early as the rebellion of Chen Sheng 陳勝 (d. 208 BCE), similar tactics were employed, such as placing silk inscribed with "Chen Sheng becomes the king" in the belly of a fish for future discovery. Wang Mang's white stone was thus a repetition of this established strategy. This type of *fuming* violated a fundamental characteristic of *furui*: their spontaneous and natural emergence, free from human intervention. However, precisely because *fuming* involved human-crafted inscriptions, they were able to convey messages with extreme clarity, even if those messages lacked support from classical or historical precedents. What is particularly interesting here are the similar attitudes of supporters and opponents regarding this matter. The opponents, represented by the Grand Empress Dowager, dismissed such a man-made *fuming* as a petty fabrication meant to deceive the people. Even Wang's supporter Wang Shun 王舜 (d. 11 CE) did not regard it as a genuine symbol of the Mandate of Heaven, either. Instead, he described it as a "situation that has already progressed too far to be reversed," a pragmatic tool for consolidating power, indicating his awareness of the

[588] *Hanshu* 99A.4079–4079.

falsehood underlying such *fuming*. Evidently, *fuming* garnered the wholehearted support of only its direct beneficiary, Wang Mang himself. Even within Wang's own camp, reservations about its legitimacy persisted, a stark contrast to the widespread support *furui* enjoyed among ministers.

Despite its contested legitimacy, *fuming* became Wang Mang's principal ideological resource for bridging the gap between subject and sovereign.[589] Every step in his path to emperorship, from removing "Regent" from his title to establishing the Xin dynasty and formally proclaiming himself emperor, relied fundamentally on *fuming*. In the autumn of the year he ascended the throne, he compiled all the *fuming* that had bolstered his claim to power and widely disseminated them across the empire, solidifying their role as the cornerstone of his authority.

> In the autumn, Wang Mang dispatched Five-Might General Wang Qi and eleven others to distribute forty-two chapters of *fuming* across the empire. These consisted of five Virtuous Omens, twenty-five Mandated Tokens, and twelve Fortuitous Responses. Altogether, there were forty-two chapters. The Virtuous Omens referenced events like the appearance of the yellow dragon during the reigns of Emperors Wen and Xuan in Chengji and Xindu, or the catalpa pillar at the gate of Wang's great grandfather's tomb sprouting branches and leaves. The Mandated Tokens included things like the well stone and the golden coffer. The Fortuitous Responses described phenomena such as a hen transforming into a rooster.… A summary of the narrative proclaimed: "…Heaven gazes upon us with favor, transferring the Mandate from the Han to the Xin, beginning with the cinnabar-inscribed stone issued to the emperor. The emperor, however, out of humility, assumed the role of regent, which did not yet align with Heaven's will. Therefore, in the autumn of the seventh month, Heaven sent another token: a three-constellation horse with patterns. Again, the emperor declined to ascend the throne. Hence, Heaven issued tokens in succession: the iron covenant, the stone tortoise, the Yu talisman, the jade tablet with patterns, the dark seal, the inscribed stone from Maoling, the black dragon stone, the divine well, the great divine stone, and the copper tally with silk illustrations. These successive omens grew increasingly evident, culminating in twelve signs that declared the new emperor. The emperor, deeply mindful of Heaven's majesty and unwilling to show disregard, relinquished the title of regent but continued to use a provisional title…. However, this too fell short of Heaven's intent in solemnly delivering the tokens. Thus, on that day, Heaven once again issued an urgent message to encourage him. Additionally, Attendant Wang Xu reported seeing a person dressed in plain white clothes with a red-embroidered square collar, wearing a small cap, standing in front of the

[589] Although the abdication theory associated with Yao and Shun offered some support for Wang Mang's legitimacy, it failed to answer why Wang Mang specifically, rather than someone else, was entitled to receive the Han emperor's abdication. Only the *fuming*, which explicitly bore his name, could serve to fulfill this purpose.

Wanglu Hall. This figure said to Xu: 'Today, [Five Deities] in Heaven are aligned in the same color and have entrusted all the people under Heaven to the emperor.' Xu was astonished and, after taking a few steps, the figure suddenly disappeared. By the evening of the Bingyin day, a golden coffer with illustrated text appeared in Gaozu's Temple, stating: 'Gaozu received the Mandate of Heaven and now passes the state to the emperor of Xin.' The next morning, Chamberlain for the Imperial Clan, Marquis Zhongxiao, Liu Hong reported this to the court. Wang Mang summoned the officials to deliberate, but no decision was reached. Then, the great divine stone emitted a voice like a human, declaring: 'Quickly have the new emperor receive the Mandate at Gaozu's Temple; do not delay!' Thus, the new emperor immediately mounted the imperial chariot and proceeded to Gaozu's Temple of the Han to formally receive the Mandate."

秋，遣五威將王奇等十二人班符命四十二篇於天下。德祥五事，符命二十五，福應十二，凡四十二篇。其德祥言文、宣之世黃龍見於成紀、新都，高祖考王伯墓門梓柱生枝葉之屬。符命言井石、金匱之屬。福應言雌雞化為雄之屬。……總而說之曰：「……皇天眷然，去漢與新，以丹石始命於皇帝。皇帝謙讓，以攝居之，未當天意，故其秋七月，天重以三能文馬。皇帝復謙讓，未即位，故三以鐵契，四以石龜，五以虞符，六以文圭，七以玄印，八以茂陵石書，九以玄龍石，十以神井，十一以大神石，十二以銅符帛圖。申命之瑞，寖以顯著，至于十二，以昭告新皇帝。[590]皇帝深惟上天之威不可不畏，故去攝號，猶尚稱假……然非皇天所以鄭重降符命之意，故是日天復決以勉書。又侍郎王盱見人衣白布單衣，赤繢方領，冠小冠，立于王路殿前，謂盱曰：『今日天同色，以天下人民屬皇帝。』盱怪之，行十餘步，人忽不見。至丙寅暮，漢氏高廟有金匱圖策：『高帝承天命，以國傳新皇帝。』明旦，宗伯忠孝侯劉宏以聞，乃召公卿議，未決，而大神石人談曰：『趣新皇帝之高廟受命，毋留！』於是新皇帝立登車，之漢氏高廟受命。」[591]

Among the forty-two chapters, only the twenty-five *fuming* pertain directly to events in Wang Mang's time. The Virtuous Omens and Fortuitous Responses reinterpret earlier anomalies not personally related to Wang. For instance, since Wang asserted that his Xin dynasty represented the Earth virtue and the color yellow, the yellow dragon, previously interpreted as a symbol of

[590] There is ongoing debate over whether the name *Xin* means "new" or refers to Wang Mang's fief, Xindu 新都. It is plausible that the term encompasses both meanings. This ambiguity is particularly evident in the usages here, where *xin huangdi* can be interpreted as either "the new emperor" or "the emperor of the Xin dynasty." For discussions on the meaning of Wang Mang's dynasty name, see J. J. L. Duyvendak's book review, which argues that *xin* cannot possibly mean "new" in this context, and Chauncey S. Goodrich's opposing article, which offers a more flexible interpretation. See Duyvendak, "Clyde Bailey Sargent, *Wang Mang*, a Translation of the Official Account of His Rise to Power as Given in the *History of the Former Han Dynasty*, with Introduction and Notes (Book Review)," *T'oung Pao* 40, no. 1/3 (1950): 226–27 and Goodrich, "The Reign of Wang Mang: Hsin or New?" *Oriens* 10, no. 1 (1957): 114–18.

[591] *Hanshu* 99B.4112–4113.

Han's virtue, was now recast as a prophecy of Xin's virtue. Liu Xiang, during Emperor Cheng's reign, interpreted the catalpa pillar at the gate of the Wang family's ancestral tomb sprouting branches and leaves as a sign of the Wang clan's impending overthrow of the Han dynasty.[592] Similarly, the phenomenon of a hen transforming into a rooster during the reigns of Emperors Xuan and Yuan was later interpreted by Ban Gu as foreshadowing the rise of Wang Mang's aunt, the Grand Empress Dowager.[593] While Liu Xiang, Wang Mang, and Ban Gu evidently held differing emotional attitudes toward these anomalies, their interpretations were remarkably consistent.[594] This suggests that Wang Mang probably repurposed earlier criticisms of his family and reframed them as prophecies of his eventual rise to power.[595]

What truly facilitated Wang Mang's ascent to the throne, however, were the twenty-five *fuming*. Although many are only briefly mentioned in the texts, leaving their specific contents unclear, it is evident that most carried explicit and direct messages. In addition to the white stone, items such as the seal, the inscribed stone, and the copper tally with silk illustrations likely bore written inscriptions. Other tokens, such as the golden coffer, explicitly conveyed the Mandate of Heaven to Wang Mang on behalf of Gaozu, the founder of the Han dynasty. Earlier in the *Hanshu*, Ban Gu noted that the golden coffer was fabricated by Ai Zhang 哀章, a man infamous for his lack of moral integrity and penchant for extravagant statements. The coffer has two marks. One read: "The Heavenly Emperor's Seal, the Golden Coffer Illustration" 天帝行璽金匱圖, and the other reads: "The Red Emperor's Seal, the Golden Inscription that [Liu Bang] Passed

[592] Ibid. 36.1961.
[593] Ibid. 27B(a).1370.
[594] It is noteworthy that Liu did not interpret the hen transforming into a rooster as corresponding to Wang Mang's aunt, but rather to the powerful eunuch Shi Xian. Ibid. 27B(a).1370.
[595] For example, a hen transforming to a rooster is traditionally interpreted as a sign of misfortune. Ibid. 27B(a).1371.

to the Yellow Emperor" 赤帝行璽某傳予黃帝金策書.[596] The inscriptions on these two marks perfectly provided Wang Mang with the two most critical sources of legitimacy: Heaven and the previous dynasty. As with any emperor, Heaven's will was the most essential foundation of imperial authority. However, as an emperor who ascended the throne through abdication, Wang Mang's claim to power required additional reinforcement. Nothing could be more persuasive than portraying the founder of the previous dynasty as personally transferring the Mandate of Heaven to him, symbolically bridging the transition from Han to Xin.

In addition to its decisive role in Wang Mang's ascension to the throne, *fuming* continued to play a pivotal role in various significant events after his enthronement, including establishing the capital, appointing an heir, and selecting a new empress.[597] Wang Mang's heavy reliance on *fuming* encouraged many people to provide *fuming* in the hope of receiving generous rewards. Since *fuming* inherently required human fabrication, their creators often exploited the process for personal gain. For instance, Ai Zhang, the creator of the aforementioned golden coffer, wrote his own name on the list of high officials. Zhen Xun 甄尋 (d. 10 CE) went even further, claiming in a *fuming* that Wang Mang's daughter, the widow of Emperor Ping, should marry him. Enraged by this, Wang Mang had Zhen Xun arrested and executed. Such incidents not only undermined the credibility of *fuming* but also tarnished their public perception. According to Ban Gu, those who refrained from fabricating *fuming* at that time mocked each other, saying, "Do you not have a text from the Heavenly Emperor?" (獨無天帝除書乎？)[598] Clearly, many contemporaries were well aware of the falsehood underlying *fuming.* This awareness highlights the stark contrast between Wang Mang's enthusiastic embrace of *fuming* and the detachment exhibited by

[596] Ibid. 99A.4095.
[597] Ibid. 99B.4132; 99C.4159; 4168.
[598] Ibid. 99B.4122.

mainstream scholars. For example, in the first year of the Jushe reign (6 CE), after Zhang Song's senior cousin rebelled alongside a Liu clan member, Zhang surrendered to Wang Mang. In his memorial praising Wang Mang's achievements and mercy, Zhang notably omitted any mention of the *fuming* that had elevated Wang Mang to power, despite acknowledging Wang's legitimacy as emperor. This omission stands in sharp contrast to Zhang's earlier memorial, which had been replete with references to auspicious omens.

Some might argue that the widespread emergence of *fuming* occurred around 9 CE, the first year of the Xin dynasty's establishment. Consequently, it might seem unsurprising that *fuming* was not explicitly mentioned in 6 CE, as they were just beginning to gain prominence. However, even when analyzing Yang Xiong's work "Denigrating Qin and Praising Xin" (*Ju Qin mei Xin* 劇秦美新), written in the fourth or fifth year of the Xin dynasty,[599] we find that his attitude toward *fuming* remains notably ambiguous. Yang Xiong wrote:

> The Way of emperors and kings requires caution, and one must not deviate from it. Those who are upright and able to correctly understand it will have an exhaustive supply of good portents; those who deviate from it and are blind to it, will suffer extreme anomalies and calamities. If one looks into antiquity, there were cases of rulers who, though they depended

[599] The dating of "Ju Qin mei Xin" has been the subject of considerable debate. Lu Kanru 陸侃如 argues that it was written in the first year of Shijianguo 始建國 (9 CE), a view supported by Yi Xiaoping 易小平. In contrast, Liu Yuejin 劉躍進 suggests that, like Yang Xiong's eulogy for the Grand Empress Dowager, the work was composed in the fifth year of Shijianguo (13 CE), reflecting an element of gratitude toward Wang Mang. Liu Zhiwei 劉志偉 and Shao Jie 邵傑 conclude that it was likely created in the summer of the fourth year of Shijianguo (12 CE). See Lu, *Zhonggu wenxue xinian* 中古文學係年 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1985), 40; Yi, *Xi Han wenxue biannianshi* 西漢文學編年史 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 433; Liu, *Qin Han wenxue biannianshi* 秦漢文學編年史 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2006), 316; and Liu and Shao, "*Wenxuan* suo shou 'Ju Qin mei Xin' zhi zuonian ji she Mang shishi kaolun" 《文選》所收《劇秦美新》之作年及涉及莽時事考論, *Henan shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 2014.5: 135–139. Yang also references Wang Mang's nine ancestral temples in the essay, which were constructed in 20 CE. Given that Yang died in 18 CE, it seems improbable that he could have been aware of their existence, raising the possibility of later tampering. However, the presence of a single anachronism does not constitute sufficient evidence to dismiss the entire piece as a forgery. For further discussion on the authorship and interpretation of this text, see Knechtges, "Uncovering the Sauce Jar," 229–33.

> on propitious omens, still perished. How, then, could one who followed an evil path maintain himself intact?... When the great Xin received the mandate, the Heavenly Emperor returned his aid, and the Sovereign Earth thought fondly and cherished [the Xin]. Dark tokens, sacred covenants, and yellow omens bubbled forth…. These were certainly things not to be declined. Thereupon, Your Majesty acceded to Heaven's mandate, gained the utmost favor and the highest honor. You divided divine tallies with Heaven and joined in sacred covenants with Earth…. These unusual things and distinctive anomalies were preserved by the Five-Might Generals and distributed across the empire in forty-eight chapters. They mounted up to the celestial vault and spread out over the earth below. If not the Xin house, who was worthy of receiving them? Splendid and magnificent, they were true emblems of a Son of Heaven! As for the white pigeon, vermilion crow, white fish, and severed serpent, they are worthless in comparison. [The Xin dynasty] received the mandate with extraordinary ease, and portents arrived with remarkable frequency.
> 帝王之道，兢兢乎不可離已。夫能貞而明之者，窮祥瑞；回而昧之者，極妖愆。上覽古在昔，有憑應而尚缺，焉壞徹而能全？……逮至大新受命，上帝還資，後土顧懷，玄符靈契，黃瑞湧出。……必有不可辭讓云爾。於是乃奉若天命，窮寵極崇，與天剖神符，地合靈契……其異物殊怪，存乎五威將帥；班乎天下者，四十有八章。登假皇穹，鋪衍下土，非新家其疇離之。卓哉煌煌，真天子之表也！若夫白鳩丹烏，素魚斷蛇，方斯蔑矣。受命甚易，格來甚勤。[600]

In this memorial, the discussion of auspicious omens occupies less than 200 characters in a text totaling approximately 1200 characters. These references appear exclusively in the earlier portion of the text, while the latter half predominantly focuses on Wang Mang's achievements, particularly his promotion of ancient classics and the restoration of ancient practices.[601] Toward the conclusion, Yang remarks, "the affairs of Heaven and man are flourishing, and the expectations of the ghosts and spirits are truly fulfilled" (天人之事盛矣，鬼神之望允塞), encouraging Wang to conduct the *fengshan* sacrifices as an appropriate response. In Yang's narrative, it is not *furui* or *fuming* that truly lead to the *fengshan* ceremony, but rather the emperor's accomplishments. Auspicious signs serve merely as permits for assuming the throne. It is only by restoring the ancient Way of Kings after ascending to power that one becomes qualified to perform the *fengshan*

[600] Liu Yuejin, *Wenxuan jiuzhu jicun* 文選舊註輯存 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2017), vol.16, 9826–9838. Translation adapted and revised from Knechtges, "Uncovering the Sauce Jar," 236–40.
[601] As Knechtges points out, what Yang found most praiseworthy about the Xin dynasty was its promotion of classical learning. See Knechtges, "Uncovering the Sauce Jar," 249.

ceremony. This perspective marks a significant departure from earlier frameworks established by Sima Xiangru and other Han scholars, who emphasized a strong causal link between auspicious omens and the *fengshan* ceremony. Yang replaces this relationship with a new framework, where sufficient merit, not omens, determines the eligibility to perform *fengshan*.

Yang's handling of auspicious signs cited above is particularly thought-provoking. At first glance, he seems to refer directly to the *fuming* distributed by Wang Mang's Five-Might Generals in forty-eight chapters. However, the term *fuming* never appears, nor are any specific *fuming* items identified. Instead, Yang strategically blurs the distinction between *fuming* and *furui*, effectively transforming Wang Mang's *fuming* into the more traditional framework of *furui*. For example, the Xin dynasty's receipt of the mandate is demonstrated by "dark tokens" 玄符 and "yellow omens" 黃瑞, said to originate from Heaven and Earth. This aligns better with traditional cosmological discourse rather than the fabricated *fuming* Wang Mang utilized. Also, just like Sima Xiangru compared contemporary *furui* with King Wu's white fish to argue that Han's auspicious omens greatly surpassed those of the Zhou dynasty, Yang juxtaposes mystical animals from antiquity, such as Tang's white pigeon, King Wu's vermilion crow and white fish, and Gaozu's severed serpent, with the Xin dynasty's signs. He concludes that the Xin dynasty's portents far outshine those of its predecessors, despite the essential differences between Wang Mang's *fuming* and earlier *furui*. Yang's approach is consistent in his other writings. In the elegy he composed for Wang Mang's aunt, the Grand Empress Dowager, Yang references only one sign symbolizing the Xin dynasty's rise: the yellow dragon that appeared in Xindu during Emperor Xuan's reign: a traditional animal-based *furui*. Beyond this, he avoids mentioning *fuming* altogether. As in the "Denigrating Qin and Praising Xin," he refers to the numerous *fuming*

associated with Wang Mang's rise as "collective auspicious signs" (*qunxiang zhongrui* 群祥眾瑞),[602] employing terminology deeply rooted in the discourse surrounding *furui*.

Moreover, when Yang referred to *fuming*, his language often betrays a subtle hint of sarcasm. For example, in reference to the forty-eight chapters, he used the phrase "unusual things and distinctive anomalies" 異物殊怪. Neither *yi* 異 nor *guai* 怪 is typically used to describe auspicious things. On the contrary, in the *Hanshu*'s "Treatise on the Five Elements" 五行志, both terms consistently carry negative connotations and are often associated with ominous political events. Additionally, when Yang noted that the Qin dynasty's tyrannical rule resulted in the appearance of anomalies rather than auspicious omens, he concluded: "If one looks into antiquity, there were cases of rulers who, though they depended on propitious omens, still perished." This statement directly contradicts the framework he previously outlined, where auspicious omens reward virtue, and anomalies serve as warnings. According to that logic, rulers who receive auspicious omens should not exhibit any "defects" (*que* 缺). This inconsistency suggests that Yang's comment was intended as a cautionary note to certain rulers who had already received auspicious omens, hinting at potential flaws despite their claims to legitimacy. Yang's tone becomes particularly pointed near the end of his description of Wang Mang's omens. He states, "Xin received the mandate with extraordinary ease and portents arrived with remarkable frequency." This remark borders on mockery, likely aimed at the widespread eagerness among opportunists to present fabricated *fuming* during Wang Mang's reign.

[602] Yan Kejun 嚴可均, *Quan Han wen* 全漢文 in *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), j.54, 554–555.

It is essential to note, however, that this analysis does not imply that "Denigrating Qin and Praising Xin" is wholly a satire of Wang Mang's regime, as some scholars have suggested.[603] On the contrary, the latter half of the text appears genuinely sincere in its praise of Wang Mang's achievements.[604] Nevertheless, Yang Xiong's deliberate avoidance of the term *fuming* and his occasional sarcastic tone probably reflect a broader consensus among the intellectual elite of the time, who were skeptical of *fuming* as a legitimate symbol of the mandate. This skepticism is especially understandable given Yang Xiong's personal history. He narrowly escaped death after being implicated in a case involving fabricated *fuming*.[605] His mistrust of such symbols and his lack of goodwill toward them is therefore unsurprising.

As the credibility of *fuming* quickly deteriorated under Wang Mang and some opportunists' overuse, *fuming* rapidly disappeared from the historical stage after Wang Mang's downfall.

---

[603] For example, Xu Jie 許結 argues that, in this essay, Yang Xiong indirectly warns against Wang Mang's despotism by critiquing the cruelty of Qin. Some scholars take this interpretation further, suggesting that the text serves as a direct condemnation of Wang Mang's oppressive regime. Huang Kan 黃侃, for instance, claims that the essay outright condemns Wang Mang for completely dismantling the Han system. Conversely, Zhang Pu 張溥, in his preface, assesses "Ju Qin mei Xin" as a work of sycophancy. Yang Xiong's moral character has also been a subject of criticism. For example, Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–ca. 597) accuses Yang of compromising his integrity with this piece, and Li Shan 李善, in his annotation of *Wenxuan*, remarks: "When Wang Mang covertly usurped the throne, Yang Xiong neither stepped forward to protest in court with forceful and upright words, nor withdrew into seclusion to preserve his principles. Instead, he flaunted his talent to seek favor, concealing his true feelings to acquire wealth." These conflicting interpretations highlight the tension in evaluating Yang Xiong's motivations: whether his work reflects a veiled critique or mere flattery. See Xu, "'Ju Qin mei Xin' fei yuwen bian" 《劇秦美新》非"諛文"辯, *Xueshu yuekan* 1985.6: 72–78; Huang, *Wenxuan Huangshi xue* 文選黃氏學 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1977), 229; Wang Liqi, *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 顏氏家訓集解 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 221; and Liu Yuejin, *Wenxuan jiuzhu jicun*, 9812.

[604] Knechtges observes that questions regarding Yang Xiong's "sincerity" and "intention" are ultimately unanswerable. From a literary perspective, concerns about intention and sincerity are not appropriate lines of inquiry, as they risk falling into the interpretative trap of the "intentional fallacy." Nevertheless, this does not mean we should disregard the text's paradoxical language or its underlying tone. Instead, it becomes essential to analyze the apparent mockery and contradictions embedded within the text. Cf. Knechtges, "Uncovering the Sauce Jar," 234.

[605] This event took place in the second year of Shijianguo (10 CE), prior to Wang Mang's composition of the text. See *Hanshu* 99B.4123; 87B.3584.

Replacing it was a more textualized and dematerialized new symbol of the Mandate of Heaven: *tuchen*. Similarly, just as *fuming* provoked polarized attitudes among rulers and ministers during Wang Mang's era, *tuchen* also elicited such divided responses during the rise of the Eastern Han.

4.3 *Tuchen* 圖讖 (prophetic illustrations and texts)[606]: The Divergence Between Rulers and Scholars on Predicting and Arguing for the Mandate

In the *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (Book of the Later Han), the frequent emergence of the phrase "the people's hearts yearned for the Han/Liu clan" 人心思漢/劉氏 to describe the late Wang Mang period transforms the turbulent power struggles and chaotic wars of the transition between the two Han dynasties into a narrative of Liu Xiu's 劉秀 (5 BCE–57 CE, i.e., Emperor Guangwu) smooth restoration of the Han dynasty. This narrative significantly influenced later generations' understanding of this period. For example, Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727–1814), in his *Notes on Twenty-Two Histories* 廿二史札記 concludes: "Looking through the accounts of those who initiated uprisings, either they claimed to be descendants of the Liu clan, or they acted in the name of restoring the Han. This shows that at the time, the people's hearts yearned for the Han, and the entire realm acted in unison. Thus, Guangwu's acquisition of the empire was easy; within less than

[606] Although the term *chenwei* 讖緯 is typically translated as "apocrypha," this rendering aligns more closely with the character *wei* than with *chen*. The combination of these two characters into a single term is a late Eastern Han innovation. By examining the historical development of *chen* and *wei*, it becomes evident that *chen* existed independently at first, without *wei*. What later emerged during the Eastern Han as *wei* were, in essence, reinterpretations of *chen*: prophecies repurposed to supplement and reinterpret the Confucian classics, serving as a kind of "weft." See Zhang Fengyi 張峰屹, "Liang Han chenwei kaolun" 兩漢讖緯考論, *Wenshizhe* 2017.4: 5–24. While *tuchen* was widely used at the beginning of the Eastern Han, the application of *wei* to refer specifically to those *chen* associated with the classics only became prevalent toward the end of the Eastern Han. See Wang Tie 王鐵, *Handai xueshushi* 漢代學術史 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1995), 215 and Huang Fushan 黃復山, *Handai* Shangshu *chenwei xueshu* 漢代《尚書》讖緯學述 (Taipei: Huamulan wenhua chubanshe, 2007), 66–70.

three years of raising his army, he ascended the throne as emperor. Such swift success, unprecedented in ancient times, stemmed from the will of the people and was therefore achieved with minimal effort" (歷觀諸起事者, 非自稱劉氏子孫, 即以輔漢為名。可見是時人心思漢, 舉天下不謀而同。是以光武得天下之易，起兵不三年， 遂登帝位，古未有如此之速者，因民心之所願，故易為力也).[607] However, as Chen Suzhen 陳蘇鎮 insightfully points out, Liu Xiu's unification of the empire was far from easy. The notion that "the people's hearts yearned for the Han" only became prominent when Liu Xiu and his brother Liu Yin 劉縯 (d. 23CE) raised their armies, and especially when Liu Xuan 劉玄 (r. 23–25 CE, i.e., Emperor Gengshi) proclaimed himself emperor, but this was not the case before or after. This notion quickly dissipated due to Liu Xuan's incompetence, which eroded the Liu clan's appeal. This decline in support led to the rise of non-Liu claimants declaring themselves emperors, casting serious doubt on the notion of the Han dynasty's restoration. Consequently, Liu Xiu's authority and appeal were significantly weakened, and his eventual success was the result of over a decade of arduous warfare to eliminate rival political forces.[608] Therefore, the promotion of *tuchen* was one of his strategies to address this deficiency, mirroring Wang Mang's reliance on the *fuming* to legitimize his ascent to the throne.

While I generally agree with Chen's analysis, I would like to further emphasize that even during the period when the belief in a Han revival and yearning for the Liu clan was prevalent, this sentiment did not translate into unequivocal support for Liu Xiu. A paradox emerged: when the idea of restoring the Liu clan flourished, there were too many claimants bearing the Liu

[607] See Zhao Yi 趙翼, *Nian er shi zhaji jiaozheng* 廿二史札記校正, annot. Wang Shumin 王樹民 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 72–73.
[608] See Chen Suzhen 陳蘇鎮, *Chunqiu yu Han dao: Liang Han zhengzhi yu zhengzhi wenhua yanjiu* 春秋與漢道：兩漢政治與政治文化研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 380–81.

name; but when Liu Xiu became the sole Liu-named contender, public belief in the inevitability of the Liu clan reclaiming the empire had already diminished. In 23 CE, three individuals claimed the title of emperor under the surname Liu. Among them was Wang Chang 王昌 (i.e., Wang Lang 王郎), who posed as Liu Ziyu 劉子輿, a son of Emperor Cheng.[609] Wang Chang thus proclaimed himself emperor at Handan 邯鄲. This occurred shortly after Emperor Gengshi had dispatched his general, Liu Xiu, to pacify the same region, so Wang placed a substantial bounty for anyone who brought him Liu Xiu's severed head. At that time, Geng Kuang 耿況 (d. 36 CE), the governor of Shanggu 上谷, sent his eldest son, Geng Yan 耿弇 (3–58) to the capital, Chang'an, to pay homage to Emperor Gengshi to secure his position. Along the way, Geng Yan encountered a remarkable situation when news of Wang Chang's proclamation as emperor reached his party:

> Geng Yan discussed the situation with his clerks, Sun Cang and Wei Bao, during their journey. Sun and Wei said, "Liu Ziyu is the legitimate heir of Emperor Cheng. How can we not turn to him and instead undertake a long and uncertain journey?" Geng Yan, gripping his sword, responded, "Ziyu is a worthless bandit and will end up as a captured prisoner. When we reach Chang'an, I will present the military resources in Yuyang and Shanggu to the court … and [crush this band of rebels] like breaking dry branches or rotting wood. From what I see, you two lack discernment and will not escape the destruction of your clans for long." Sun Cang and Wei Bao refused to follow him and instead defected to Wang Lang.
> 弇從吏孫倉、衛包於道共謀曰：「劉子輿成帝正統，捨此不歸，遠行安之？」弇按劍曰：「子輿弊賊，卒為降虜耳。我至長安，與國家陳漁陽、上谷兵馬之用……如摧枯折腐耳。觀公等不識去就，族滅不久也。」倉、包不從，遂亡降王郎。[610]

For many people of the time, there seemed to be little distinction between one Liu emperor and another. If both Liu Ziyu and Emperor Gengshi were members of the Liu clan, why abandon the nearer claimant to pursue one farther away? Although Geng Yan himself remained firmly aligned

[609] Fan Ye 范曄, *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, annot. Li Xian 李賢 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 1A.11. The other two are Liu Xuan 劉玄 and Liu Wang 劉望 (i.e., Liu Sheng 劉聖).
[610] *Hou Hanshu* 19.704.

with Emperor Gengshi, his arguments failed to persuade his followers. Given Wang Lang's popularity among the local populace,[611] the decision of Sun and Wei was not an isolated case. By 27 CE, two years later, the situation had grown even more fragmented, with five individuals claiming the title of emperor under the Liu name, including Liu Xiu.[612] As a former general under Emperor Gengshi, Liu Xiu's legitimacy in terms of ruler-minister hierarchy seemed particularly tenuous. This precarious position perhaps explains why Liu Xiu repeatedly refused his subordinates' suggestions to declare himself emperor, until he received an exceedingly clear and direct mandate in the form of a prophetic text specifically pointing to him:

> A former roommate of Liu Xiu from his time studying in Chang'an, Qiang Hua, brought him the Chifu Prophecy from the Guanzhong region. The prophecy reads: "Liu Xiu will raise an army to capture the unrighteous. The four barbarians will gather, and dragons will fight in the wild. At the interval of four sevens, fire will prevail." Following this, Liu's ministers submitted another memorial, saying: "Among all the signs of the Mandate of Heaven, those that correspond to human circumstances are the most significant. Across thousands of miles, the sign aligns with reality. Without planning, it reveals the truth of the situation. How can the white fish of the Zhou dynasty compare to this? Now there is no emperor in the realm, and the land is in chaos. The fulfillment of *furui* is so evident and well-known that it is time to respond to Heaven's decree and meet the expectations of the people."
> 光武先在長安時同舍生彊華自關中奉赤伏符，曰「劉秀發兵捕不道，四夷雲集龍鬥野，四七之際火為主」[613]。群臣因復奏曰：「受命之符，人應為大，萬里合信，不議同情，周之白魚，曷足比焉？今上無天子，海內淆亂，符瑞之應，昭然著聞，宜荅天神，以塞群望。」[614]

---

[611] The *Hou Hanshu* records that when Wang Lang's edict to capture Liu Xiu reached Ji, the people of Ji rose in arms to support Wang. As Emperor Guangwu hastily set out, crowds of commoners filled the streets, loudly gathering to watch him. The throngs were so dense that Liu Xiu could not proceed, effectively blocking his path (時王郎檄書到薊，薊中起兵應郎。光武趨駕出，百姓聚觀，諠呼滿道，遮路不得行). See *Hou Hanshu* 20.731. It is very likely that the people were not merely "watching" Liu Xiu pass by, but had a clear intention of preventing him from escaping.

[612] They are Liu Penzi 劉盆子, Ruzi Ying 孺子嬰, Liu Yong 劉永, Liu Xuan 劉玄, and Liu Xiu.

[613] The term "four seven" can be interpreted in multiple ways: it may refer to the 228 years that elapsed between Gaozu's reign and Liu Xiu's uprising, Liu Xiu being 28 years old when he raised his army, or it could symbolize the widespread presence of warlords at the time. Here, I have chosen to leave *siqi* untranslated. For different interpretations, see Huang Fushan 黃復山, "Dong Han tuchen 'Chifu fu" benshi kao" 東漢圖讖《赤伏符》本事考, in *Dong Han chenweixue xintan* 東漢讖緯學新探 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 2000), 54–55.

[614] *Hou Hanshu* 1A.21–22.

As early as 22 CE, three years before the Chifu Prophecy was presented, the brothers Li Tong 李通 (d. 42 CE) and Li Yi 李軼 (d. 25 CE) attempted to persuade Liu Xiu to raise an army using a different prophetic text. The text stated, "The Liu clan shall rise again, with the Li clan as their assistants" 劉氏當復起，李氏為輔.[615] Liu Xiu, however, dismissed the prophecy entirely, regarding the Li brothers' claims as deceitful. He refused their proposal, after which the Li brothers immediately abandoned Liu Xiu and sought other allies to launch their uprising.[616] This episode illustrates that, at the time, vague references to the "Liu clan" in the *chen* conferred no specific personal charisma upon Liu Xiu. Nor did such predictions convince potential followers of his destined role.[617] This new prophecy, explicitly naming Liu Xiu, was clearly an innovation designed to encourage Liu to ascend the throne.[618] It is very likely that this prophecy originally

---

[615] This prophecy likely originated from an earlier one fabricated by Wang Kuang 王況 in 21 CE. Near the end of Wang Mang's reign, Wang Kuang remarked to Li Yan 李焉: "Since the founding of the Xin dynasty, people have been prohibited from buying and selling land, slaves, and servants; currency has been repeatedly changed; taxes and labor conscriptions have grown frequent and burdensome; military campaigns have caused turmoil; and surrounding barbarians have invaded on all fronts. The common people are resentful, and bandits have risen everywhere. The house of Han is destined to be restored. Your surname, Li, corresponds to the sound *zheng*, and *zheng* pertains to fire, which will aid the Han" (新室即位以來，民田奴婢不得賣買，數改錢貨，徵發煩數，軍旅騷動，四夷並侵，百姓怨恨，盜賊並起，漢家當復興。君姓李，李音徵，徵火也，當為漢輔). Wang then fabricated a prophetic text to align with this statement. In this instance, the prediction of the Han's revival does not appear to originate from prophetic texts but instead seems to be derived from an analysis of the prevailing political situation. See *Hanshu* 99C.4166.

[616] *Dongguan Hanji jiaozhu*, 1.3.

[617] Huang Fushan convincingly argued that prior to Emperor Gengshi's ascension, Liu Xuan and Liu Yan 劉縯 enjoyed the greatest popular support, whereas Liu Xiu was relatively unknown. Once Liu Xuan declared himself emperor, local forces rallied around him, leaving no space for any *chen* proclaiming "Liu Xiu as the Son of Heaven" to emerge at that time. See Huang, "Dong Han tuchen 'Chifu fu" benshi kao," 30–38.

[618] According to Huang Fushan's study, the name Liu Xiu in the Chifu prophecy originally referred to Liu Xin (who had changed his name to Xiu to avoid Emperor Ai's name taboo) during the 23 CE rebellion. At that time, the prophecy did not explicitly suggest that Liu Xiu would become emperor. The association of Liu Xiu with the prophecy as the destined new emperor is considered an innovation dating to 25 CE. See Huang, "Dong Han tuchen 'Chifu fu" benshi kao," 38–41. For different theories of the origins and dating of this prophecy, see Liu Liyun 劉力耘, "Han 'Chifu fu' shiyi" 漢《赤伏符》釋義, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 2017.1: 315–331.

lacked a specific name and consisted only of two lines: "Liu Xiu will raise an army to capture the unrighteous. A Liu clan member [composed of the radicals of *mao* 卯 and *jin* 金, forming the right half of *liu* 劉] cultivates virtue to become the emperor" (劉秀發兵捕不道，卯金修德為天子), since these are the only two lines cited in the edict proclaiming Liu Xiu's claim to the throne, where the text is referred to simply as *chenji* 讖記 (prophetical writings), without any specific title.[619] The name *chifu* 赤符 for this prophecy appeared for the first time 32 years later, when Emperor Guangwu conducted the *fengshan* ceremony.[620] Notably, these two lines make no mention of the revival of the Han dynasty, likely because the fabricator of this prophecy recognized that such a statement would do little to bolster Liu Xiu's claim to the throne. Instead, the prophecy aligns closely with the tradition of *fuming* that had elevated Wang Mang to power: Like Wang Mang's *fuming*, the prophecy explicitly identified the recipient of the Mandate of Heaven and their destiny to become emperor.[621] However, unlike the materialized *fuming*, such as stones, seals, and the golden coffer, used by Wang Mang, Liu Xiu's prophecy was nearly entirely textual,

[619] *Hou Hanshu* 1A.22.
[620] For an examination of how this prophecy evolved, see Huang Fushan, "Dong Han tuchen 'Chifu fu" benshi kao," 40–47.
[621] The rise of *tuchen* appears to have begun during the reign of Emperor Cheng, with one of the most famous examples being the prophecy by Gan Zhongke 甘忠可, which stated that the Han emperor needed to renew the Mandate of Heaven. However, Wang Mang was the first ruler to systematize and institutionalize *tuchen* studies. In the fourth year of the Yuanshi 元始 era (4 CE), scholars proficient in prophetic texts, esoteric arts, and other specialized skills were summoned to the capital to begin organizing the *tuchen*. During the Jushe era, Cui Fa 崔發 assisted Wang Mang in editing and rearranging these texts, inserting content that explicitly proclaimed Wang Mang's receipt of the Mandate of Heaven. An example of *tuchen* being used to bolster Wang's rule occurred in 16 CE, when a collapse on the west bank of the Yong and Jing Rivers caused the rivers to cease flowing. Wang's ministers interpreted this as fulfilling the prophecy "Earth will fill water," which they claimed signaled the destruction of the Xiongnu. It is clear that *tuchen* was only one among many techniques employed by Wang Mang to solidify his legitimacy. It does not appear to have been highly valued or central to his broader strategies. For a detailed examination of the early history of *tuchen* and its evolving conceptual framework, see Zhang Xueqian 張學謙, "Dong Han tuchen de chengli jiqi guannianshi bianqian" 東漢圖讖的成立及其觀念史變遷, *Wenshi* 2019.4: 51–67.

with no known accompanying physical object. Later accounts suggest that such *tuchen* were recorded on ordinary media, such as scrolls, rather than inscribed on special items.[622] This abstraction diminished their supernatural aura and authoritative visual impact, making their production significantly easier. As a result, many regional powers during this period also utilized *tuchen* to bolster their legitimacy. For example, Liu Yang 劉楊 (d. 26 CE), King of Zhending 真定 and a ninth-generation descendant of Gaozu, fabricated a *chenji* stating: "After the nine generations of Red Virtue, the goitered Yang shall become ruler" (赤九之後，癭揚為主), leveraging his physical affliction to claim divine favor.[623] Under such pressures, almost immediately after claiming the throne, Liu Xiu began organizing scholars to arrange and formalize an official version of the existing *tuchen*.[624] However, his efforts did not appear to eliminate new fabrications or achieve universal acceptance among scholars or local forces, indicating the continued fluidity and contested nature of prophetic texts during his reign.[625] In other words, *tuchen* likely did not function as effectively as Liu Xiu had hoped in legitimizing his rule. To most contemporaries, Liu Xiu's Chifu prophecy likely held no fundamental distinction from Liu Yang's fabrication and garnered little serious attention.

---

[622] It is said that Emperor Guangwu spent considerable time reading *tuchen*, sitting in an exposed area beneath the eaves, where he was struck by the wind and subsequently fell ill. This account suggests that *tuchen* were unlikely to be inscribed on heavy objects that would have been difficult to move around the palace. Instead, it is more plausible that they were written on ordinary bamboo slips or silk scrolls, which were lightweight and easily portable. See *Dongguan Hanji jiaozhu* 1.12.

[623] *Dongguan Hanji jiaozhu* 11.400.

[624] *Hou Hanshu* 79B.2573.

[625] The most famous debate regarding differing interpretations of *tuchen* occurred between Liu Xiu and Gongsun Shu, where they exchanged letters attempting to demonstrate that the implications of *tuchen* favored themselves rather than their opponents. See *Hou Hanshu* 13.538 and Chang Qu 常璩, *Huayang Guozhi jiaobu tuzhu* 華陽國志校補圖注, annot. Ren Naiqiang 任乃強 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2013), 331. The fact that Liu Xiu felt compelled to counter Gongsun Shu's arguments underscores his belief that Gongsun's interpretations of *tuchen* could significantly undermine morale and shake confidence among Liu's own followers. If Liu had regarded Gongsun's claims as inconsequential, there would have been no need for him to issue a rebuttal.

In the year Liu Xiu declared himself emperor, the political situation across the realm had become increasingly fractured. Emperor Gengshi had been killed, and the House of Han no longer commanded widespread loyalty. People's attachment to the Liu family had waned, and there was no consensus on who would inherit the Mandate of Heaven.[626] Since 26 CE, numerous non-Liu powers declared themselves kings or emperors, leading to heightened competition. Especially in 26 and 27 CE, Liu Xiu was just one among many regional powers vying for dominance, frequently embroiled in rebellions within his territory. Since 27 CE, Liu Xiu engaged in a prolonged conflict with Qin Feng 秦豐 (d. 30 CE), the self-styled King Li of Chu, who controlled the Southern Commandery 南郡. Contemporary accounts reveal divided opinions about the likely outcome of this struggle.

> At that time, Tian Rong was holding a large force in Yiling. Upon hearing that Qin Feng was under siege, he feared the arrival of a massive army and considered surrendering. However, his brother-in-law Xin Chen persuaded him otherwise, arguing: "Now the heroes of the realm are each occupying their own commanderies and kingdoms, while Luoyang is no more than the size of a palm. It would be better to keep your troops prepared and observe how the situation unfolds."
> 時田戎擁眾夷陵，聞秦豐被圍，懼大兵方至，欲降。而妻兄辛臣諫戎曰：「今四方豪傑各據郡國，洛陽地如掌耳，不如按甲以觀其變。」[627]

> Initially, Deng Zhongkuang, a general under Yan Cen, occupied Nanyang's Yin County with his forces and turned to banditry. Liu Xin's nephew, Liu Gong, served as his advisor. At that time, Su Jing was in Nanyang and wrote a letter to Liu Gong to persuade him to surrender, stating: "…You are situated in Yin, a land abundant with virtuous scholars. If you take just a short moment to thoroughly investigate and compare the differences between actions, examine the *tushu*, and measure them against human affairs, then the benefits and harms will become evident before your eyes…. There are shallow scholars today, who, unable to

[626] "Now Gengshi has misgoverned, and his officials are corrupt and immoral.... The common people lament deeply and begin to long for the Wang Mang era once more" (今更始失政，君臣淫亂 ……元元叩心，更思莽朝); "When Gengshi's regime descended into chaos and lost control of the realm again, the people looked around in despair, and the empire disintegrated" (遇更始政亂，復失天下，眾庶引領，四方瓦解); "Now Gengshi's generals act with unchecked brutality, pillaging wherever they go. The people are disillusioned and have no one to rely upon or follow" (今更始諸將從橫暴虐，所至虜掠，百姓失望，無所依戴). See *Hou Hanshu* 19.706; 13.539; 17.640.
[627] *Hou Hanshu* 17.658.

distinguish sobriety from drunkenness, pontificate recklessly about the current age, spreading doubt and confusion. Some say that as the world rises and falls in succession. It is uncertain who will emerge as the rightful ruler, and thus one should raise an army and occupy land to seek opportunities to become emperor. Others say that the sage king has not yet arisen, so it is better to observe the times and events, rely on strength, align with greater powers, and cautiously defend one's position. Are either of these arguments valid? Confucius's secret texts proclaim that the Han is destined to bear the Red Virtue. Hidden in profound chambers and covered by mystery, though the writings are obscure, their meaning is clear: the Fire Virtue continues from Yao. Even if momentarily dimmed, it will inevitably shine brightly. The Han dynasty inherits the accumulated blessings of many generations and holds eternal tokens. Though Wang Mang exploited chaos to usurp the throne, he ultimately suffered catastrophic punishment, his body dismembered, and his lineage exterminated. Is this not evidence of the divine order? … Some Ru scholars claim that now the five stars have deviated from their paths and the celestial order is in disarray…. They attribute such omens to the state. Yet disasters do not occur without cause; each corresponds to its designated region and ruler…. Rebellious ministers and treacherous people spread false interpretations, causing widespread errors and confusion. How, then, can we expect celestial phenomena to adhere to order?... The Bi hexagram governs this year. The Kun trigram governs the beginning of winter, and the Kan trigram governs the winter solstice. Water suppresses fire, so the southern armies will suffer misfortune this year. Virtue resides in the central palace, while punishment resides in wood. Wood overcomes earth, so punishment will dominate virtue, and military conflicts will come to an end within this year, leading to peace in central states. Among the thirty-five surnames [recorded in the *tuchen*], the Peng, Qin, and Yan clans are absent. How, then, can you be confused and rely on such claims? ... The *tuchen* and the validations of many anomalies are things you understand well. The distinctions between good and evil, and the decisions to advance or retreat, must not go unexamined…" Su Jing also wrote to Deng Zhongkuang with similar advice, though the details were not recorded due to its length. As a result, both Deng Zhongkuang and Liu Gong surrendered [to Liu Xiu].

初，延岑護軍鄧仲況擁兵據南陽陰縣為寇，而劉歆兄子龔為其謀主。竟時在南陽，與龔書曉之曰：「……君處陰中，土多賢士，若以須臾之閒，研考異同，揆之圖書，測之人事，則得失利害，可陳於目……世之俗儒末學，醒醉不分，而稽論當世，疑誤視聽。或謂天下迭興，未知誰是，稱兵據土，可圖非冀。或曰聖王未啟，宜觀時變，倚彊附大，顧望自守。二者之論，豈其然乎？夫孔丘祕經，為漢赤制，玄包幽室，文隱事明。且火德承堯，雖昧必亮，承積世之祚，握無窮之符，王氏雖乘閒偷篡，而終嬰大戮，支分體解，宗氏屠滅，非其效歟？……諸儒或曰：今五星失晷，天時謬錯……以為諸如此占，歸之國家。蓋災不徒設，皆應之分野，各有所主。……賊臣亂子，往往錯互，指麾妄說，傳相壞誤。由此論之，天文安得遵度哉！……今年比卦部歲，坤主立冬，坎主冬至，水性滅火，南方之兵受歲禍也。德在中宮，刑在木，木勝土，刑制德，今年兵事畢已，中國安寧之效也。五七之家三十五姓，彭、秦、延氏不得豫焉。如何怪惑，依而恃之？……圖讖之占，眾變之驗，皆君所明。善惡之分，去就之決，不可不察。……」又與仲況書諫之，文多不載，於是仲況與龔遂降。[628]

[628] Ibid. 30A.1041–1046. Although the *Hou Hanshu* does not explicitly state the date of this letter, it can be reasonably inferred. Yan Cen 延岑 (d. 36 CE) only joined forces with Qin Feng in 27 CE, and he was

Evidently, there was a strong tendency among regional powers at the time to prioritize self-preservation by maintaining their forces. This inclination is reflected in Su Jing's letter to Deng Zhongkuang and Deng's advisor, where he noted a prevailing belief that no sage king had emerged who could unify the hearts and minds of the realm. Consequently, the most prudent strategy was to preserve strength and wait for an opportune moment to seek greater advantages. At that time, Liu Xiu's forces were too weak to be considered those of a "rightful ruler" or a "sage king." As Xin Chen observed, Liu Xiu's sphere of influence was no larger than "the size of a palm," prompting Tian Rong to delay surrender. Even in Su Jing's letters, where the main purpose was to persuade southern forces to surrender, it is striking that there is no mention of Liu Xiu's personal qualities, no analysis of the current political situation, and no direct comparison of military strength. Instead, Su's arguments are primarily drawn from astrology, prophetic texts (*tushu* 圖書/ *tuchen*), and Jing Fang's hexagram theories from the studies of *Yijing*.[629] Remarkably, interpretations of astronomical phenomena occupy nearly 40% of the letter. For example, Su Jing interpreted the chaotic movements of planets as omens foretelling the defeats of Dong Xian and Peng Chong at the hands of Liu Xiu's forces. Similarly, the white rainbow seen in Qin

defeated at Wudang 武當 the following year. Therefore, this letter, which predicts their military misfortune, was most likely written no later than the end of 28 CE.

[629] The passage discussing the *Bi* Hexagram and the *Kun* and *Kan* Trigrams is heavily grounded in Jing Fang's interpretations of the *Yijing*. In Jing's system, *Kan* is associated with the North and corresponds to the Winter Solstice as a seasonal marker, while *Kun* corresponds to the solar term of the Beginning of Winter. Both solar terms, Beginning of Winter and Winter Solstice, are linked to the North, which, in the Five Phases theory, is attributed to Water. According to this framework, Water overcomes Fire, and since the South corresponds to Fire, the conclusion that "the armies of the South will suffer misfortune this year" arises. If Su Jing submitted this memorial in 28 CE, then, according to the Eight Palace Hexagram System (*Bagong Gua* 八宮卦), that year was indeed governed by the *Xu* and *Bi* Hexagrams. The invention of the Eight Palace Hexagram System is very likely attributable to Jing Fang. See Que Hai 闕海, "Lun liangzhong 'gua zhusui'" 論兩種 "卦主歲," *Zhouyi yanjiu* 2023.1: 55–60. The statement regarding the thirty-five surnames likely originates from the *Yi Wei Qian Zao Du* 易緯乾鑿度, which contains phrases such as "there were thirty-five kings" 王有三十五 and "thirty-five [rulers] received the mandate" 五七受命. See Zhao Zaihan 趙在翰, *Qi wei* 七緯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 50; 57.

Feng's capital and the meteor in Yan Cen's camp were viewed as signs of impending calamities for these opponents. Su Jing also employed the Five Phases and hexagram theories to conclude that the southern armies would face misfortune, and peace would prevail in the central regions within the year. However, this prediction proved overly optimistic: it would take at least two more years to pacify the North China Plain,[630] and Yan Cen, who fled to join Gongsun Shu 公孫述 (d. 36 CE) after his defeat by Liu Xiu in 28 CE, remained one of Liu Xiu's final opponents, resisting him until the end.

As for the *tuchen*, Su was either unaware of or deliberately ignored the Chifu prophecy that had elevated Liu to the throne three years earlier. Instead, the *tuchen* he cited comprised only two lines: "Confucius's secret texts proclaim that the Han is destined to bear the Red Virtue" and "Among the thirty-five rulers listed in the *tuchen*, the Peng, Qin, and Yan clans are absent." Neither of these statements explicitly foretells the revival of the Han dynasty or directly legitimizes Liu Xiu. Especially the claim that Confucius had laid the foundation for the Han dynasty was a longstanding and widely recognized idea by this time, frequently invoked by individuals with differing political agendas since the end of the Western Han. However, this statement (and the *tuchen* it references) offers no inherent indication that the Liu clan would reclaim power. For instance, after Wang Mang ascended the throne, he issued an edict stating:

> Since Confucius composed the *Chunqiu* as a model for future kings, it has been observed that the era ends in the fourteenth year of Duke Ai's reign. Correspondingly, it is now the fourteenth year since Emperor Ai's ascension. The cycle of the Red Dynasty has reached its end and cannot be forcibly extended.
> 然自孔子作春秋以為後王法，至于哀之十四而一代畢，協之於今，亦哀之十四也。赤世計盡，終不可強濟。[631]

[630] *Hou Hanshu* 1B.48.
[631] *Hanshu* 99B.4109.

Similarly, Gongsun Shu, Liu Xiu's final major opponent during his campaign to unify the realm, also cited this *chenji* to assert that the Han dynasty's mandate had ended:

> Gongsun Shu was also fond of *fuming*, deities, spirits, and auspicious signs. He recklessly cited *chenji*, claiming that Confucius composed the *Chunqiu* to establish the system of the Red Dynasty, which ended with twelve rulers. This illustrates that the Han dynasty, having reached its twelfth emperor, Emperor Ping, had exhausted its mandate, and no single clan can receive Heaven's Mandate twice.
> 述亦好為符命鬼神瑞應之事，妄引讖記。以為孔子作春秋，為赤制而斷十二公，明漢至平帝十二代，歷數盡也，一姓不得再受命。[632]

These examples highlight that the consensus derived from *tuchen* was that Confucius had indeed established the foundation for the Han dynasty. However, the duration of Han's legitimacy remained subject to interpretation. While Su Jing suggested that the Fire Virtue could shine again even after dimming, this interpretation appears to have been a personal reading rather than an intrinsic aspect of the *tuchen*, just like Wang Mang and Gongsun Shu's different interpretations of how Confucius's *Chunqiu* foretold the end of the Han. The absence of a widely accepted *tuchen* predicting the Han dynasty's revival is further evidenced by an earlier memorial submitted to Wang Mang by Zhi Yun 郅惲 (fl. the early first century CE).

> During Wang Mang's reign, as bandits and rebels rose across the land, Zhi Yun observed the celestial phenomena and sighed to a friend: "Currently, Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars are all located within the Han's astrological domain, the Yi and Zhen mansions. Their departure and return indicate that the Han dynasty will receive the Mandate of Heaven once again. Fortune will favor the virtuous. If someone aligns with Heaven's will and acts accordingly, they will achieve great success." … Yun then traveled west to Chang'an and submitted a memorial to Wang Mang, stating: "I have heard that Heaven and Earth value their people and cherish their resources… The *tulu* was prepared in advance. The Han dynasty has endured for a long time, and Confucius established the Red Virtue to prevent the ignorant and confused from harming others or plunging the era into chaos. The wise follow this order to achieve virtue, while the foolish oppose it and bring disaster upon themselves. The divine apparatus of rulership follows its mandate and cannot be seized in vain. Heaven has issued warnings to awaken Your Majesty from above, urging you to relinquish the throne to turn disaster into fortune…"

[632] *Hou Hanshu* 13.538.

> 王莽時，寇賊群發，惲乃仰占玄象，歎謂友人曰：「方今鎮、歲、熒惑並在漢分翼、軫之域，去而復來，漢必再受命，福歸有德。如有順天發策者，必成大功。」……西至長安，乃上書王莽曰：「臣聞天地重其人，惜其物……圖錄豫設。漢歷久長，孔為赤制，不使愚惑，殘人亂時。智者順以成德，愚者逆以取害，神器有命，不可虛獲。上天垂戒，欲悟陛下，令就臣位，轉禍為福。……」[633]

Zhi Yun's reference to the *tulu* 圖錄 (i.e. *tuchen*) was consistent with the common claim that Confucius had established a system for the Han. However, Zhi's conclusion that the Han would receive the mandate again was derived not from *tuchen* but from his interpretation of astronomical phenomena.[634] Since the Yi and Zhen mansions were commonly associated with the Chu 楚 region,[635] where Gaozu had raised his army to establish the Western Han, the reappearance of three planets in these mansions could be interpreted as a sign of Han's revival. In other words, in Zhi's argument, the primary evidence of Heaven's will was not *tuchen* but celestial patterns. This reliance on astronomy mirrors Su Jing's approach, which also prioritized astrological observations over *tuchen* to support his arguments. This raises the question of whether Zhi, Su, and the audiences of their messages genuinely believed in the authority of *tuchen*. While both Zhi and Su felt the need to acknowledge the existence of *tuchen*, the specific sections they cited, particularly those asserting that Confucius had preemptively legislated for the Han dynasty, were insufficient to substantiate claims about the current mandate or the broader political situation. Consequently, they relied on other methods, such as astrology, to bolster their arguments.

---

[633] Ibid. 29.1024.

[634] Similarly, when Ximen Junhui 西門君惠 persuaded Liu Xin to rebel against Wang Mang, he relied primarily on astrological phenomena as his key arguments, although he also drew on his expertise in *chenji* to fabricate a *chen* that referenced Liu Xin's name. Liu Xin, in turn, regarded the astronomical signs, particularly the appearance of Venus, as the decisive indicator of the correct time to rebel. This reliance on celestial timing, however, caused him to miss the appropriate moment, ultimately leading to his failure. See *Hanshu* 99C.4185.

[635] Ibid. 28B.1665.

The apparent reliance on other techniques probably suggests a prevailing skepticism toward *tuchen* among scholars of the time. Although Wang Mang had edited and promulgated numerous *tuchen* texts at the beginning of his reign,[636] making them widely available, both Zhi and Su only referenced one idea from these texts: the claim that Confucius had established a foundation for the Han dynasty. They did not draw on any passages linking *tuchen* to contemporary rulers. Unlike many *tuchen* of the period, which had little connection to classical texts,[637] the narrative of Confucius establishing rules for the Han was an extension of the Gongyang school's interpretation of the *Chunqiu* as Confucius's blueprint for a new ruler.[638] This suggests that scholars at the time were drawn more to texts with roots in the classics and techniques that could be verified than to the type of *tuchen* fabricated by Wang Mang, Liu Xiu, or other rulers.[639]

---

[636] In the biography of Yin Min 尹敏, it is recorded that Emperor Guangwu, recognizing Yin's intelligence and extensive knowledge of the classics, tasked him with examining and revising the *tuchen*. He specifically instructed Yin to remove sections that had been compiled and arranged by Cui Fa 崔發 for Wang Mang's purposes. See *Hou Hanshu* 79A.2558. This narrative indicates that Wang Mang had already edited and expanded the *tuchen* texts to serve his own agenda.

[637] At the end of Wang Mang's reign, the *chenji* fabricated by practitioners of esoteric arts were not yet connected to the Confucian classics. In 29 CE, when the Imperial Academy was established, Emperor Guangwu organized scholars to lecture on *tuchen* to the students, which clearly aiming at aligning the *tuchen* with the teachings of the Confucian classics. Under such official promotion, the integration of classical doctrine with *tuchen* began to take shape. This later became known as the *weishu* 緯書 in subsequent eras. As the Qing scholar Xu Yangyuan 徐養原 (1758–1825) remarked: "The *tuchen* originated as the words of masters of methods and had no connection to classical doctrine. It was later that people forcibly linked the *tuchen* to the Confucian classics." See Zhang Xueqian, "Dong Han tuchen de chengli jiqi guannianshi bianqian," 67–69.

[638] For example, in the *Chunqiu fanlu*, it is said that *Chunqiu* "responds to Heaven's will and establishes enterprises for a new king" (應天作新王之事). See *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 187.

[639] At the end of the Eastern Han, Zhang Heng presented a memorial advocating for the strict prohibition of *tuchen*. In his memorial, Zhang clearly distinguished *tuchen* from other methods, such as pitches and calendars (*lüli* 律曆), hexagrams and seasonal observations (*guahou* 卦候), the Nine Palaces (*jiugong* 九宮), and wind divinations (*fengjiao* 風角). Zhang argued that these methods had proven efficacy, yet the world neglected to study them, instead competing to praise the unverified books of prophecy (*tuchen*). Clearly, what emerges from the statements of Zhi Yun and Su Jing aligns more closely with the techniques that Zhang Heng deemed to have "proven efficacy" (徵效), rather than the "books of unverified prophecies" (不占之書) that he criticized.

The reluctance of scholars to invoke the concept of *tuchen* in their discussions of the Mandate of Heaven during the early Eastern Han period is evident.[640] For example, when Wei Ao 隗囂 (d. 33 CE) decided to ally with Gongsun Shu in rebellion against Liu Xiu, several individuals wrote letters urging Wei to reconsider, including Dou Rong 竇融 (16 BCE–62 CE), Shentu Gang 申屠剛 (fl. first century CE), and Ban Gu's father Ban Biao 班彪 (3–54 CE). None of these letters referenced *tuchen*, let alone those specific *tuchen* supporting Liu Xiu's legitimacy. Dou's letter criticized Wei's decision as strategically unwise, analyzing the imbalance of power and unfavorable political conditions.[641] Shentu and Ban, however, framed their arguments within the broader narrative of the inevitable Mandate of Heaven.[642] Shentu declared that: "Reflecting on the fact that our dynasty [Liu Xiu's dynasty] embodies sacred virtue, raising righteous troops and executing Heaven's punishment, every opponent it faces is bound to be defeated. This is truly Heaven's blessing, not the result of human effort" (伏念本朝躬聖德，舉義兵，襲行天罰，所當必摧，誠天之所福，非人力也).[643] Ban Biao's "Treatise on the Mandate of Kings" 王命論 articulates this idea even more explicitly:

---

[640] The only exception appears in the discussions surrounding whether Dou Rong 竇融 (16 BCE–62 CE) should maintain his autonomous independence or submit to Liu Xiu in 29 CE. The *Hou Hanshu* states that some wise men said: "The emperor's surname and title are found in the *tushu*" (皇帝姓號見於圖書) and references the Chifu prophecy. See *Hou Hanshu* 23.798. However, no similar cases appear in other earlier materials from the Eastern Han. As Huang Fushan has pointed out, this statement is dubious and very likely a later fabrication by historians who assumed the widespread influence of Liu Xiu's prophecies. See Huang Fushan, "Dong Han tuchen 'Chifu fu" benshi kao," 41–42.

[641] *Hou Hanshu* 23.801–802.

[642] Their attitudes likely reflect an earlier comment by Sima Qian on the rise of the Han: "Is this not the will of Heaven? Is this not the will of Heaven! Who but a great sage could bear this mandate and become emperor?" (豈非天哉，豈非天哉！非大聖孰能當此受命而帝者乎？) However, Sima also states: "The one who issues orders has changed hands three times. Since the beginning of humanity, there has never been a succession of the mandate as frequent as this" (號令三嬗。自生民以來，未始有受命若斯之亟). Thus, his concept of "receiving the mandate" is not limited to Gaozu alone but also encompasses figures like Chen She 陳涉 (d. 208 BCE) and Xiang Yu 項羽 (232–202 BCE). See *Shiji* 16.760 and 16.759.

[643] *Hou Hanshu* 29.1015.

> Thus, the Liu clan inherits the blessings of Yao, and its lineage is recorded in the *Chunqiu*. The Tang dynasty occupied the Fire Virtue, and the Han succeeded it. When Gaozu first rose from the marsh in Pei, the mother of a deity wailed in the night, marking the sign of the Red Emperor. From this, …never has a ruler ascended to the position of emperor without an established lineage, destiny with divine provenance, or recorded merits and virtue. Common people see that Gaozu arose from humble origins and fail to understand the underlying reasons. They assume it was merely by chance amidst chaos, that he seized the opportunity with his sword. Some rhetoricians even compare the empire to a game of chasing deer, attributing success to luck and agility. They do not realize that the divine mandate cannot be obtained through cleverness or effort alone. This is predestined…. Gaozu's rise can be attributed to five aspects: first, he was a descendant of Emperor Yao; second, his appearance was extraordinary; third, he was wise and mighty accompanied by divine signs and omens; fourth, he was broad-minded, enlightened, benevolent, and forgiving; fifth, he was skilled at recognizing talent and delegating responsibilities…. When he first received the mandate, a white serpent was severed; when he entered the Hangu Pass to the west, the five planets converged. Thus, Han Xin and Zhang Liang declared that his success was Heaven-given, not human effort…. For those who gained *furui* unlike those of Gaozu, but blindly covet power for personal gain and self-indulgently seize authority beyond their station, who failed to measure their external strength and lacked an understanding of their destiny, they will inevitably lose their family's inheritance and shorten their Heaven-given lifespan.
> 是故劉氏承堯之祚，氏族之世，著乎春秋。唐據火德，而漢紹之，始起沛澤，則神母夜號，以章赤帝之符。由是言之，……未見運世無本，功德不紀，而得屈起在此位者也。世俗見高祖興於布衣，不達其故，以為適遭暴亂，得奮其劍，游說之士至比天下於逐鹿，幸捷而得之，不知神器有命，不可以智力求也。……蓋在高祖，其興也有五：一曰帝堯之苗裔，二曰體貌多奇異，三曰神武有徵應，四曰寬明而仁恕，五曰知人善任使。……始受命則白蛇分，西入關則五星聚。故淮陰、留侯謂之天授，非人力也。……符瑞不同斯度，而苟昧於權利，越次妄據，外不量力，內不知命，則必喪保家之主，失天年之壽。[644]

Ban Biao composed this treatise in response to Wei Ao's question: Would the current period of fragmentation endure for several generations, like the Warring States period? Ban replied that contemporary warlords (other than Liu Xiu) lacked the long lineage of the seven kingdoms, and the populace yearned for the restoration of Han rule under the Liu family. Wei, however, dismissed this reasoning as overly simplistic. He pointed out that during the late Qin, the Liu name was unfamiliar to most, and Gaozu merely "seized the deer" by chance.[645] Though ostensibly

[644] *Hanshu* 100A.4208–4212.
[645] For the discussion of the two competing theories of predestined mandate and "chasing the deer", see Hou Xudong 侯旭東, "Zhulu huo tianming: Hanren yanzhong de Qin wang Han xing" 逐鹿或天命：漢

discussing the Western Han's founding, their exchange implicitly addressed their own time, an era lacking a ruler with clear military or moral supremacy. In such uncertainty, Wei argued, no one could reliably predict the ultimate victor. Notably, Ban Biao's treatise avoids explicit mention of Liu Xiu, *tuchen*, or Han restoration. Instead, his argument draws exclusively on Western Han history, relying heavily on the *Shiji* accounts to demonstrate Gaozu's extraordinary qualities. Moreover, the sign of Gaozu's receiving the mandate that Ban cited follows the traditional discourse of *furui*: a mystical animal. This approach aligns with Yang Xiong and other scholars of Wang Mang's time, who emphasized *furui* while deliberately avoiding *fuming*. Ban Biao's word choice cannot be attributed solely to literary convention. It is likely that, although he regarded Liu Xiu as the rightful ruler who had received the mandate,[646] Ban had little interest in or confidence in Liu's *tuchen*.[647] His assertion that Gaozu's success was Heaven-given rather than a result of human effort, seems to indicate that only signs free from human interference, such as the mythical animals or celestial patterns, could credibly demonstrate a ruler's mandate.

The persuasive power of Ban Biao's argument derives primarily from the theory of a fated mandate, as Shentu also claimed, and his distinctively historicized narrative. From the monarch's

人眼中的秦亡漢興, *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 2015.4: 177–203. However, Hou's article positions Ban Gu as the originator of Chinese historiography that deliberately upheld the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty, thereby stifling independent thought. This perspective likely overstates Ban Gu's role. It is perhaps more accurate to view Ban Gu's work as the natural culmination of the predestined mandate theory, which had been developing over time. Additionally, Hou presents *chenwei* texts and the predestined mandate theory as part of a unified propaganda effort, arguing that "the promotion of Han ideology through historical writing and *chenwei* dominated public discourse, forming the central theme of the era." Yet the two clearly emphasize different aspects.

[646] Intriguingly, after realizing that Wei Ao would not follow his advice, Ban Biao chose to serve Dou Rong rather than Liu Xiu.

[647] Even a generation later, during the reign of Emperor Ming (r. 57–75), when *tuchen* had long become central to official studies, Ban Biao's son, Ban Gu, did not cite any *tuchen* texts in his "Dianyin" 典引. Instead, he provided detailed descriptions of *xiangrui* and *furui*, such as the yellow dragon, sweet dew, and three-legged birds. By contrast, the term *tushu* was mentioned only in passing, without further elaboration. See *Wenxuan jiuzhu jicun*, 9908–9909.

perspective, the predestined mandate theory offers little utility in legitimizing a ruler who has yet to unify the realm. This is because this theory is inherently retrospective, deriving its rationale from outcomes: only a ruler who successfully achieves unification is retrospectively narrated as possessing the mandate. Moreover, Ban Biao's historical argument about Gaozu's rise to power can only demonstrate Gaozu's possession of the mandate. It does not establish that the mandate will continue to reside with the Liu clan. As such, it provides no legal or moral advantage for Liu Xiu in his quest for legitimacy. From the perspective of scholars, the concept of predestined mandate functions as a form of preemptive allegiance to the individual who ultimately unifies the realm. If every emperor were truly predestined to rule, there would be no need to laboriously employ *fuming* or *tuchen* to justify their legitimacy, as the mere fact of "becoming emperor" would itself constitute the strongest proof of legitimacy.

Nevertheless, Ban successfully constructed a narrative framework for this emerging dynasty, one that historicized it as a continuation of an enduring lineage of dynasties: Just as the Western Han was presented as the successor to Tang's legacy, the Eastern Han was positioned as the continuation of the Western Han. In this way, the argument for Emperor Gaozu's legitimacy could seamlessly be transferred to Liu Xiu. Writing about the history of the Western Han thus became an implicit commentary on contemporary events, circumventing the risks of censorship or criticism associated with direct engagement with current affairs. This narrative strategy was further refined by Eastern Han historians. In their rewriting of early Western Han history, Ban Biao's account of Gaozu's receipt of the mandate into his *Hanshu* was explicitly incorporated and amplified. For example, in the "Treatise on Astronomy," the author explicitly identified the convergence of the five planets as the sign of Gaozu's receipt of the mandate (此高皇帝受命之

符也).[648] Yet in the *Shiji*, this celestial phenomenon was never regarded as a "sign" and was not related to Gaozu personally. Instead, it is framed more broadly as evidence that Heaven manifests signs above in correspondence with major events on earth.[649] Moreover, the *Shiji* places this phenomenon not in Gaozu's biography as proof of his merits but in a minor dialogue between peripheral figures:

> When Zhang Er was defeated and on the run, he reflected that among the feudal lords, there was no one he could turn to. He said, "The King of Han and I share an old bond, yet Xiang Yu is powerful and granted me kingship. I consider going to Chu." However, the revered Mr. Gan said, "When the King of Han entered the Pass, the five planets converged in the Eastern Jing constellation. The Eastern Jing represents the Qin territory. Whoever reaches it first will become hegemon. Although Chu is strong, it will ultimately fall to Han." Thus, Zhang Er fled to Han.
> 張耳敗走，念諸侯無可歸者，曰：「漢王與我有舊故，而項羽又彊，立我，我欲之楚。」甘公曰：「漢王之入關，五星聚東井。東井者，秦分也。先至必霸。楚雖彊，後必屬漢。」故耳走漢。[650]

In Mr. Gan's account, the convergence of the five planets is interpreted solely as a sign that Han would conquer the Qin dynasty, without any added moral or mystical connotations. His primary argument for siding with Han rather than Chu was grounded in the widely known agreement made by King Huai and the local forces at the end of the Qin: "Whoever first enters the Guanzhong region will be made king."[651] As noted at the beginning of this chapter, it seems to have

---

[648] *Hanshu* 26.1301. Ban Gu passed away before completing the *Hanshu*, and Emperor He (r. 88–106) commissioned Ban's sister, Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca. 49–ca. 120), to continue the unfinished work. However, Ban Zhao passed away after completing the Eight Tables. Emperor He then summoned Ma Xu 馬續 (fl. 90–141) to finalize the remaining "Treatise on Astronomy" 天文志. Although this treatise was not composed by the Ban family, it likely incorporates materials from their work and probably preserves Ban Gu's original intent.

[649] "When the Han rose, the five planets converged in the Eastern Jing constellation. … From this, it can be observed that no great event occurs without first manifesting signs, followed by its corresponding fulfillment" (漢之興，五星聚于東井。……由是觀之，未有不先形見而應隨之者也). See *Shiji* 27.1348–1349.

[650] *Shiji* 89.2581.

[651] Ibid. 8.356.

been a consensus in the early Han period that Gaozu had not received a definitive sign from Heaven. It was only in the *Hanshu* that this phenomenon was elevated to the status of the most significant "sign" of Gaozu's time.

The enthusiastic emphasis on this astronomical phenomenon in the *Hanshu* readily calls to mind a similar story about Liu Xiu recorded in the *Dongguan Hanji* 東觀漢記 (Records of Han in the Eastern Lodge).[652] Following a major victory around the time of his accession, Liu Xiu wrote a letter to Zhu Boran 朱伯然, stating: "On the day of the clash, a divine star appeared in the daytime, and Venus shone bright and clear" (交鋒之日，神星晝見，太白清明).[653] It might not be a mere coincidence that this letter was preserved in Liu Xiu's biography by Ban Gu and other scholars: Just as Gaozu's entry into Chang'an was accompanied by the convergence of the five planets, Liu Xiu's entry into Luoyang was marked by the appearance of a divine star. Many scholars have observed that numerous narratives about Liu Xiu are clear imitations of the descriptions of Gaozu in the *Shiji*.[654] However, it is less frequently noted, though equally true, that certain narratives about Gaozu were also retroactively shaped by the history of the Eastern Han. For instance, the term "sign of receiving the mandate" 受命之符, which is absent from Sima

[652] Emperor Ming, Liu Zhuang 劉莊 (r. 57–75), commissioned Ban Gu and others to compile the history of the current dynasty, with the "Annals of Emperor Guangwu" 世祖本紀 being the first to be completed. This marked the early stages of the *Dongguan Hanji*. The story in question likely originates from the "Annals of Emperor Guangwu" compiled by Ban Gu.

[653] *Dongguan Hanji jiaozhu* 1.7. In the cited text, "破聖公" appears in some versions as "破二公," seemingly referring to Liu Xiu defeating Wang Yi 王邑 and Wang Xun 王尋 at Kunyang 昆陽. If the term is indeed "破聖公," it would refer to Liu Xuan (Emperor Gengshi). Although Liu Xiu did not directly engage Liu Xuan, he did command generals like Feng Yi 馮異 (d. 34 CE) to defeat Liu Xuan's key commander Zhu Wei 朱鮪. While it remains uncertain which version is correct, the latter version carries particular significance. Liu Xiu's victory over Zhu Wei allowed him to secure Luoyang as his capital, which parallels Liu Bang's earlier entry into Guanzhong. This symbolic parallel might make the "破聖公" reading more plausible.

[654] For example, both Liu Bang and Liu Xiu were associated with a mystical birth, prophecies from *qi* observers, and an extraordinary appearance that set them apart from ordinary people.

Qian's narrative,[655] became a central piece of evidence in the *Hanshu* for Gaozu's predestined ascent to the throne. In this way, the first ruler in the Western Han became the last to retrospectively "receive his sign." For Ban Biao, Ban Gu, and their contemporaries, the history of the Western Han had effectively become "contemporary history."[656] Any significant event of their present day was expected to find its counterpart in Western Han history. As a result, the Western Han became, in their eyes, the greatest source of legitimacy for the Eastern Han and Liu Xiu.

However, a stark divergence emerges between the rulers' and the scholars' inclinations.[657] While scholars emphasized parallels between Gaozu and Liu Xiu to bolster the Eastern Han's historical continuity, Liu Xiu himself placed greater reliance on *tuchen* as the primary source of his legitimacy. This is evident in the stele inscription from Liu Xiu's *fengshan* ceremony, dated one year before his death, which meticulously records six prophecies from various apocryphal texts asserting that Liu Xiu was destined to become emperor and perform the *fengshan* ritual.

---

[655] The term appears only once in the *Shiji*, in Sima Xiangru's "Refuting the Elders of Shu" 難蜀父老, where it refers to Emperor Wu's enterprise. However, the text does not clarify what constitutes the "sign."

[656] For later emperors in the Eastern Han, since they had established themselves as rulers received the mandate, they adopted the strategy of using the Western Han as a benchmark for comparison. Consequently, they were often dissatisfied with Sima Qian's portrayal of Western Han, particularly his discussions on the fall of Qin and the rise of Han, viewing them as containing "subtle criticisms and veiled satire that belittled the present." This need for reinterpreting and glorifying Western Han history became evident in Emperor Ming's question about Sima Qian's comments at the Yunlong Gate in 74 CE. See Ban Gu's "Dianyin" in *Wenxuan jiuzhu jicun*, 9859–9863. Ban Gu's compilation of the *Hanshu* largely aligned with the court's expectations for repackaging Western Han history and praising the virtue of Han. For further analysis of the significance of Emperor Ming's question and his selection of Ban Gu to write the *Hanshu*, see Lü Shihao 呂世浩, *Cong* Shiji *dao* Hanshu: *zhuanzhe guocheng yu lishi yiyi* 從《史記》到《漢書》——轉折過程與曆史意義 (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue chuban zhongxin, 2009), 228–237.

[657] Some scholars have generalized the emperor's personal fascination with *chenwei* as a shared pursuit across all social strata of the time, which is a biased perspective. For example, Feng Yujie 馮渝傑 claims that emperors, court officials, historians, soldiers, Confucian scholars, and even bandits all made references to *chenwei* between the two Han dynasties. This overlooks the fundamental difference between how those in positions of power utilized *chenwei* and how other social groups engaged with it. Cf. Feng, "Cong Hanjia Shenhua kan Liang Han zhiji de tianming jingduo" 從漢家神化看兩漢之際的天命競奪, *Lishi yanjiu* 2015.1: 22–37.

These prophecies were listed as the most significant achievements of his life, placed ahead of all other accomplishments, even surpassing his unification of the empire.[658]

At the beginning of "Biographies of Masters of Methods" 方術列傳 in the *Hou Hanshu*, Fan Ye 范曄 (398-446) offers a critique of Liu Xiu's addiction to *tuchen*:

> Since the time of Emperor Wu, there has been a growing fascination with occult methods and techniques. Scholars throughout the realm, skilled in esoteric practices, all flocked eagerly to court, carrying their writings and clapping hands when talking, arriving as if borne by the wind. Later, Wang Mang manipulated *fuming*, while Emperor Guangwu placed even greater faith in *chen*. Scholars who aligned themselves with the prevailing trends enthusiastically fabricated and promoted these ideas, competing to discuss them…. Because of this, the learned scholars and distinguished thinkers, outraged by the falsehoods and lack of authenticity of these practices, passionately submitted memorials, arguing that they should be censored and excluded.
> 漢自武帝頗好方術，天下懷協道藝之士，莫不負策抵掌，順風而屈焉。後王莽矯用符命，及光武尤信讖言，士之赴趣時宜者，皆騁馳穿鑿，爭談之也。……是以通儒碩生，忿其姦妄不經，奏議慷慨，以為宜見藏擯。[659]

This is an influential evaluation of Wang Mang and Liu Xiu's reliance on human-made tokens and prophetic texts by a historian nearly four centuries later. Fan Ye draws a clear dichotomy between opportunistic individuals who flattered emperors with fabricated prophecies and upright scholars with integrity who rejected such practices. However, this opposition was not always expressed through direct criticism of the emperor, as exemplified by Huan Tan. Many scholars chose a more subtle or passive resistance to this trend. For example, Zheng Xing 鄭興 (fl. early first century CE), who believed that Heaven communicated warnings to rulers through celestial phenomena, modestly claimed that he lacked the expertise to interpret *tuchen*, thus excusing himself from offering related advice to Liu Xiu.[660] More intriguingly, Yin Min 尹敏 (fl. first

[658] *Hou Hanshu* 7A.3165–66.
[659] Ibid. 82A.2705.
[660] Ibid. 36. 1223.

century CE), an expert in dispelling calamities using his knowledge of the "Hongfan," mischievously inserted a self-serving line into the *tuchen* that Liu Xiu had tasked him with editing. This addition suggests that Yin should be elevated to the status of a high-ranking official. When questioned by Emperor Guangwu, he openly admitted: "I noticed that previous people often edited and altered the texts themselves, so I imitated them, hoping for a chance to soar to great heights" (臣見前人增損圖書，敢不自量，竊幸萬一).[661] Yin's mention of "previous people" clearly refers not only to Wang Mang and his followers who fabricated *fuming*, but also to Liu Xiu and his core *tuchen* group. Although from a modern perspective, the correspondence between celestial patterns, anomalies, and human affairs might seem equally tenuous as the *tuchen*, for those contemporary scholars, *tuchen* were evidently viewed as notoriously unreliable. This skepticism is reflected in the works of Su Jing, Zhi Yun, and Ban Biao, all of whom heavily emphasized celestial signs and historical precedents while conspicuously avoiding references to *tuchen*. In doing so, it is likely that they either did not regard *tuchen* as significant enough to warrant mention or tacitly expressed their disapproval of it. In a word, *fuming* and *tuchen* were not inherently effective in securing widespread acceptance upon their deployment. History does not always conform to the straightforward logic of "what the ruler favors, the subjects will excessively pursue." In the scattered fragments of surviving materials, we can still discern the stark contrast between the grand visions envisioned by emperors and the lukewarm responses they elicited in practice.

Fan Ye's critique suggests that Liu Xiu's attempt to legitimize his rule through *tuchen* was essentially unsuccessful, with his *tuchen* becoming as absurd a target for ridicule as Wang Mang's *fuming*. Historians ultimately won the battle for narrative control over the construction of dynastic legitimacy. However, precisely because of this, we must exercise particular caution

[661] Ibid. 79A.2558.

when interpreting retrospective accounts in historical records. As a military strategist and politician who personally overthrew Wang Mang's regime, would Liu Xiu have regarded the prophecies he relied upon as equivalent to Wang Mang's *fuming*? Or might there have been fundamental distinctions between *tuchen* and *fuming* that made Liu Xiu willing to employ a tool already tainted with infamy in the previous dynasty? Due to the inherent biases of historians, we may never fully understand the thinking of these emperors. Nevertheless, acknowledging the significant ideological divergence between those who recorded history and those who wielded power provides a necessary foundation for further analysis of these historical narratives.

CONCLUSION

All That Is Solid Melts into Air

The valorization of "newness" is often regarded as a hallmark of modernity. As a socio-cultural paradigm, modernity is typically associated with reflections on tradition, technological advancement, and the pursuit of innovation and change. It emphasizes progress and a future-oriented outlook, with newness serving as a key marker of this progress.[662] Accordingly, the contemporary era since the 20th century is often seen as the period in which Chinese intellectuals have most enthusiastically embraced the idea of newness, as reflected in numerous political and cultural movements that explicitly invoked the term. While these movements pursued distinct and sometimes conflicting political projects, their shared rhetoric of renewal underscores the centrality of newness in shaping intellectual discourse.[663] However, such intense preoccupation with newness

[662] Postmodernism, by contrast, challenges the linear historical narrative that equates "newness" with progress. Jean-François Lyotard argues that the grand narratives underpinning modernity, such as "progress," "liberation," and "scientific truth," are inherently oppressive, as they obscure diversity and heterogeneity. He emphasizes that "newness" does not necessarily signify progress. See Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 16–17. Similarly, Michel Foucault contends that history does not unfold as a linear progression but rather as a continual reconfiguration of power/knowledge relations. In this framework, the conventional narrative of progress or evolution is replaced by a multiplicity of overlapping, non-linear temporalities that defy fixed laws or trajectories. See Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Routledge, 1972), 8–12.

[663] To name only a few examples, modern Chinese history has witnessed numerous movements centered on the concept of *xin*: the Reform Movement (*Weixin bianfa* 維新變法) of 1898, the New Culture Movement (*Xin wenhua yundong* 新文化運動) of the 1910s and 1920s, the New Life Movement (*Xin shenghuo yundong* 新生活運動) of the 1930s, and, finally, the post-1949 propaganda of a "New China" (*Xin Zhongguo* 新中國). The emphasis on "newness" is also evident in journal titles, such as Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 (1873–1929) *Xinmin congkan* 新民叢刊 (Series of Journals for New Citizens or Renewing the Populace) and Chen Duxiu's 陳獨秀 (1879–1942) *Xin qingnian* 新青年 (New Youth). Similarly, several major intellectual works incorporate "new" in their titles, including Liang Qichao's *Xinmin shuo* 新民說 (On Renewing the Populace), Xiong Shili's 熊十力 (1885–1968) *Xin Weishi lun* 新唯識論 (New Treatise on Yogacara Philosophy), and Feng Youlan's 馮友蘭 (1895–1990) *Xin lixue* 新理學 (New Rational Philosophy).

was not exclusive to modernity. A comparable desire for renewal emerged during the late Warring States period and the early imperial era. In the "Daxue" 大學 (Great Learning), the author invokes three ancient classics to legitimize the concept of "newness": "The inscription on the basin of King Tang of Shang states, 'If one can be renewed in a single day, let one be renewed each day, and again renewed.' The 'Kang gao' 康誥 (Announcement to Kang) declares, 'Make the people anew.' The *Shijing* proclaims, 'Although Zhou is an ancient state, its mandate is new.'"[664] Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) interprets the legendary inscription on King Tang's washing basin as carrying both physical and moral significance: Just as daily cleansing removes bodily impurities, a gentleman should engage in constant moral self-examination and renewal.[665] However, this reading may be based on a misinterpretation of the original text. Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) noted that none of the approximately 4,000 extant Shang or Zhou bronze inscriptions function purely as moral exhortations. Based on this observation, he inferred that the original inscription on the basin was unlikely to convey a didactic message about self-renewal and was instead more plausibly a genealogical record.[666] Nevertheless, the issue at hand is not whether later generations "misread" earlier texts, since no later interpretation can ever fully align with the original intent of a text's producer. What matters is how later interpreters ascribed new meanings to these texts in ways that reflected their own social and intellectual contexts. Just as 20th-century social activists invoked passages on newness from the *Yijing*, *Shijing*, or *Liji* to support what were apparently Western-style revolutionary ideas, scholars of the late Warring States and early imperial

[664] *Liji zhengyi*,1861.（湯之盤銘曰：「苟日新，日日新，又日新。」《康誥》曰：「作新民。」《詩》曰：「周雖舊邦，其命惟新。」）.
[665] Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 5.
[666] Guo speculates that the original inscription likely read "兄日辛，祖日辛，父日辛," listing the names of the elder brother, grandfather, and father of the basin's owner. See Guo, "Tang pan Kong ding zhi yangque" 湯盤孔鼎之揚榷, in *Jinwen congkao* 金文叢考 (Beijing: renmin chubanshe, 1954), 93–95.

periods similarly invoked Shang bronze inscriptions to legitimize their unprecedented transformations. As Quentin Skinner has argued, studying the vocabulary we use to describe and evaluate the world offers three key insights: it reveals shifts in social beliefs and theories, changes in social perceptions and awareness, and transformations in social values and attitudes.[667] Following this approach, this dissertation takes *newness* as a paradigmatic term through which to trace the great transformations in discourse that took place during the Western Han.

As modern individuals, we tend to take the valorization of newness for granted. Since the late Qing dynasty, the pursuit of newness has repeatedly driven scholars and politicians across ideological divides to envision and construct a "New China." The legitimacy of the current "New China" is, to a significant extent, derived from its repudiation of the past. Within this context, it is easy to become conditioned by our own cultural heritage and accept newness as an uncontroversial virtue. Few, however, ask the fundamental question: why, and through what processes, did the veneration of newness become the norm? Skinner reminds us:

> …we have inherited a theory which we continue to apply, but which we do not really understand. If this is so, however, then one of the ways–perhaps the only way–of improving our understanding will be to go back to the historical juncture at which this way of thinking about politics was first articulated and developed. We shall then be able to see how the concepts we still invoke were initially defined, what purposes they were intended to serve, what view of public power they were used to underpin.[668]

This passage underscores how certain conceptual frameworks become so deeply ingrained in daily life that they escape critical scrutiny. It also articulates the precise rationale for my investigation into newness in the Han dynasty. However, my inquiry does not focus on the late Warring

[667] Skinner, "The Idea of a Cultural Lexicon," 171–172.
[668] Skinner, "Freedom and the Historian," in *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 109–110.

States and early imperial periods, when the concept of newness first emerged. Instead, I center my study on the mid-to-late Western Han, a century or two after this discourse had already taken shape. My inquiry is driven by a central question: if the rhetoric of newness was initially necessitated by the rise of empire, why did it remain so prevalent even in the mid-to-late Western Han, when the imperial system was already firmly established?

This dissertation has offered a preliminary response to this question: rather than being a period of rigid conservatism and intellectually stagnation, as many scholars have assumed, the mid-to-late Western Han was in fact an era of intellectual contention, in which competing voices debated how cultural and political traditions should be engaged with and redefined. It was precisely because many recognized the inexorable force of change that some so-called Reformists invoked the authority of antiquity: Many of their proposals emerged in direct response to the pressures exerted by the Precedentists, who championed the Han *gushi* and gained prominence after Emperor Wu's reign. A parallel can be drawn to 20th-century China: in the face of "an unprecedented transformation in thousands of years,"[669] alongside the numerous scholars advocating for innovation, the voices calling for a return to the past became all the more pronounced.[670] Just as in the Western Han, these revivalist thinkers did not merely seek to restore the past; rather, they selectively engaged with tradition as a resource to address the pressing challenges of their

[669] See Li Hongzhang's 李鴻章 (1823–1901) "Memorial on Maritime Defense Deliberations" 籌議海防折 presented to the throne in 1874.

[670] For example, the *Guocui* 國粹 (National Essence) school was a highly influential revivalist movement that emerged in the late Qing period, advocating for the preservation and restoration of traditional Chinese culture. Key figures included Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869–1936), Liu Shipei 劉師培 (1884–1919), and Lin Shu 林紓 (1852–1924). The movement gained formal recognition with the establishment of the National Studies Preservation Society (*Guoxue baocun hui* 國學保存會) in 1905, and its core publication, *Guocui xuebao* 國粹學報 (Journal of National Essence), played a central role in promoting its ideology. During the May Fourth New Culture Movement, members of the *Guocui* school strongly opposed the movement's advocates, criticizing their rejection of traditional values and their embrace of Westernization.

present moment. Thus, as this dissertation argues, reducing the claims of Western Han Reformists to a simplistic call for a return to the golden age of the Zhou is both misleading and overly reductive. Even within this camp, there were divergent understandings of what constituted *gu* 古 and how it should be applied. These figures, therefore, should not be carelessly grouped into a monolithic category. Moreover, contrary to the common assumption that Reformists triumphed after Emperor Yuan's reign, the most influential political and intellectual figures during the reigns of Emperor Cheng and his successors can hardly be categorized as Reformists. Chapter 1 examines the political inclinations of these emperors and the governing styles of their appointed chancellors, revealing that few actively advocated for a return to a distant past. Chapters 2 and 3 analyze the works of Liu Xiang and Yang Xiong, the two most significant scholars of the late Western Han, both of whom explicitly championed innovation in their writings. It was within this prevailing atmosphere of seeking the new and embracing change that Wang Mang's Xin dynasty ultimately emerged. Rather than simply upholding antiquity, Wang Mang systematically gathered all available contemporary ideological resources to construct legitimacy, exemplifying the continued dynamism of Han intellectual and political thought.

If the mid-to-late Western Han was not entirely dominated by Reformists, why has this perception persisted among modern readers? I propose at least three reasons. First, the rhetorical conventions of scholars during this period, which relied heavily on classical citations, have undoubtedly contributed to this misconception. When we observe how intellectuals consistently referenced the *Shijing* and *Shangshu*, or how memorials frequently invoked figures such as Yao, Shun, the Duke of Zhou, and Kongzi, it is easy to assume that these scholars sought to reject the corrupt present and restore a bygone age of sage-kings and moral perfection. However, we must distinguish between rhetoric and argument. Citing the classics and invoking the authority of

ancient sages was not necessarily an expression of literal antiquarianism; rather, it was a widely accepted rhetorical strategy, a means of demonstrating one's erudition and establishing credibility within intellectual discourse. As my analysis of *Yantielun* illustrates, scholars on opposing sides of a debate could cite the very same classical texts to support radically different positions. In other words, rhetorical conventions and substantive arguments were not intrinsically linked. Acknowledging Kongzi's authority did not mean one was solely committed to Confucian ideals, nor did extolling antiquity necessarily imply a belief that the past was a flawless utopia. Instead, we must move beyond what they said to ask *why* they said it. Invoking Kongzi's teachings could serve as an implicit critique of contemporaries who failed to uphold those teachings; praising antiquity could function as a veiled denunciation of contemporary politics. Thus, beneath the surface-level invocation of the Three Dynasties, we must probe deeper: What was the speaker's core argument? What evidence did they employ? Only by doing so can we uncover the distinct and often divergent positions obscured by the outward veneer of Reformist rhetoric.

Second, and perhaps more crucially, our understanding of this period has been overwhelmingly shaped by Ban Gu's *Hanshu*. For a long time, scholarship on the *Hanshu* has focused primarily on comparative analysis with the *Shiji*, examining historiographical differences in early Han historical writing. After Emperor Wu's reign, the absence of substantial alternative historical sources has led the *Hanshu* to become the definitive narrative of the period. While some scholars have acknowledged Ban Gu's biases, there has yet to be a comprehensive study of how his perspective systematically shaped the historical record.[671] As a result, readers inevitably absorb Ban

[671] Hans van Ess examines Ban Gu's reconstruction of the reigns of Emperors Yuan and Cheng, highlighting Ban's skepticism toward the Ru 儒 (classical experts or Reformists), both in terms of their abilities and their integrity. Van Ess argues that Ban Gu criticized these scholars because he saw them as paving the way for Wang Mang's usurpation and, ultimately, bearing responsibility for the fall of the Former Han. While I do not agree that Ban Gu's criticisms of certain Reformists should be generalized into a wholesale critique of the entire movement, I contend that Ban's attribution of the Western Han's downfall

Gu's framework, often arriving at conclusions that align with his interpretive lens. The only way to mitigate his influence is to prioritize firsthand sources from the period itself. This is why this dissertation grounds its arguments in a close examination of primary materials. For instance, in memorials attributed to Reformists, we often find that their arguments are not necessarily derived from the Zhou model or distant past but are instead justified on entirely different grounds. In Liu Xiang's anecdotes collections, we see a scholar who actively restructured tradition rather than merely preserving it. In Yang Xiong's autobiography and *Fayan*, we encounter a fiercely independent thinker whose ideas stand in stark contrast to Ban Gu's characterization of him as an imitator of antiquity. In the tumultuous period between the fall of the Western Han and the rise of the Eastern Han, we uncover alternative historical perspectives that challenge Ban Biao's narrative of an inevitable and preordained Mandate of Heaven. While we may never fully escape Ban Gu's interpretive framework, we can still identify alternative readings by scrutinizing the fissures within the textual edifice he constructed. These alternative perspectives open new avenues for reassessing the intellectual and political landscape of the late Western Han.

Third, the broader challenge lies in our own historical perspective: as modern readers situated within a forward-moving historical trajectory, we may struggle to grasp what *newness* meant in its specific historical context over two millennia ago. When applying contemporary standards of *newness* to the Han dynasty, we may find that little seems to meet these criteria. As a result, while scholars have long noted the Han literati's tendency to title their works with *xin*, they have often failed to articulate precisely what was new about these texts. Only by situating these works

---

to these figures led him, to some extent, to overstate their influence in the late Western Han. See Hans van Ess, "Ban Gu's View on the 'Second Victory' of 'Confucianism' and the Fall of the Former Han," 15–49. Another scholar who has examined biases in the *Hanshu* is Anthony E. Clark. Clark argues that Ban Gu sought to enhance his own clan's standing at court by reshaping the historical narrative of the Western Han. See Clark, *Ban Gu's History of Early China* (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria, 2008).

within their textual traditions can we appreciate their innovations. By examining the anecdotal tradition that preceded Liu Xiang, we can better understand how his *Xinxu* and *Xinyuan* marked a departure from earlier collections. By tracing the evolution of master texts prior to Huan Tan, we can fully grasp how his *Xinlun* diverged from pre-Qin philosophical and political writings. By analyzing discourses on the Mandate of Heaven across different periods of the Han dynasty, we can discern why emperors during times of political transformation were so eager to establish new and distinctive symbols of their legitimacy. Thus, we must move beyond our modern assumptions and immerse ourselves in the intellectual world of the Han dynasty to uncover how contemporaries themselves defined newness. Only by understanding their criteria for innovation can we fully appreciate what was considered new in their time and in what ways it was new.

In tracing the persistent discourse on "newness" from the mid-to-late Western Han, we uncover a world in which the seemingly unshakeable edifice of tradition was constantly tested and reconfigured. If modernity is often defined by relentless rupture and perpetual reinvention, the Han dynasty reminds us that the valorization of the new is neither exclusive to our time nor a self-evident historical trajectory. Rather, it is an unstable construct: one that emerges, gains authority, and is inevitably reconfigured as political and intellectual conditions shift. The mid-to-late Western Han presents a striking case in which newness became the very language through which authority, tradition, and legitimacy were contested. Here, the past was not merely revered; it was reworked, mobilized, and even weaponized in competing visions of the present.

To call attention to this process is not merely to re-historicize the Western Han but to challenge how we conceptualize intellectual and political transformation more broadly. The invocation of *newness* is never purely a break from the past. It is always entangled with it. Whether in the ideological ferment of the Warring States, the reform projects of the Han, or the revolutionary

fervor of twentieth-century China, claims to the *new* often emerge through a dialectic of continuity and rupture. The Western Han case reveals that what appears as a conservative return to antiquity often coexists with a radical quest for innovation, reflecting the fluid interplay between the invented past and the imagined future. By examining these moments of rupture and reinvention, this study underscores that the pursuit of newness is never without tension, yet it is within this tension that profound transformations take root, dissolving old certainties into new possibilities.

Marx's famous dictum that "all that is solid melts into air," speaks not only to the fluidity of modern capitalism but also to the deeper instability of political and intellectual constructs across history. If the Han world could be stabilized only through constant acts of renewal, then we, too, should recognize that what we call the new is never static but always evolving. To think with the Han is to understand that no claim to newness can ever be absolute; it is always, in some sense, already dissolving into air.

APPENDIX

The cases of *jin*, *gu*, *wang*, and *xi* in the discourses by the Counselor, Literati, and Worthies

		Counselor	Literati	Worthies
Jin 今	Noun ("now"/ "the present")	(51 cases) 今以近世觀之，自以目有所見，耳有所聞，世殊而事異。 今政非改而教非易也，何世之彌薄而俗之滋衰也！ 飾虛言以亂實，道古以害今。 今將何從而可矣？ 方今為天下腹居郡，諸侯並臻，中外未然，心憧憧若涉大川，遭風而未薄。 今賢良、文學臻者六十餘人。 信往而乖於今，道古而不合於世務。 今議者欲罷之，內空府庫之藏。 今山澤之財，均輸之藏，所以御輕重而役諸侯也。 今吳、越之竹，隋、唐之材，不可勝用。 今者，廣進賢之途，練擇守尉，不待去鹽、鐵而安民也。 今夫越之具區，楚之雲夢，宋之鉅野，齊之孟諸，有國之富而霸王之資也。	(78 cases) 今郡國有鹽、鐵、酒榷、均輸，與民爭利。 今廢道德而任兵。 今釋其所有，責其所無。 今贏驢之用，不中牛馬之功。 自古及今。 今世俗壞而競於淫靡。 當今世，非患禽獸不損，材木不勝， 今陛下繼大功之勤，養勞勌之民。 今公卿辯議，未有所定，此所謂守小節而遺大體。 昔文帝之時，無鹽、鐵之利而民富；今有之而百姓困乏。 今商鞅之冊任於內，吳起之兵用於外。 今商鞅棄道而用權，廢德而任力。 至今不亡，名非不長也。 今秦怨毒商鞅之法，甚於私仇。 今則不然。	(57 cases) 瘡痍至今未息。 今故陳之，曰： 今富者逐驅殲罔罝，掩捕麑觳，骫湎沉酒鋪百川。 今富者井幹增梁，雕文檻楯，璧幔壁飾。 今民間雕琢不中之物，刻畫玩好無用之器。 今富者連車列騎，驂貳輜軿。 今富者縟繡羅紈，中者素綈冰錦。 今庶人富者銀黃華左搔，結綬韜杠。 今富者顯韶，狐白鳧翁。 今富者鞮耳銀鑷，黃金琅勒。 今富者銀口黃耳，金罍玉鍾。 箕子之譏，始在天子，今在匹夫。 今民間酒食，殽旅重疊，燔炙滿案。 今賓昏酒食，接連相因，析酲什半。

		今山川海澤之原，非獨雲夢、孟諸也。 今子弟遠勞於外，人主為之夙夜不寧。 今又欲罷諸用，減奉邊之費，未可為慈父賢兄也。 今鹽、鐵、均輸，所從來久矣， 今欲罷之，絕其源，杜其流，上下俱殫，困乏之應也 今俱是民也，俱是臣也，安危勞佚不齊，獨不當調邪？ 今內無以養，外無以稱，貧賤而好義，雖言仁義，亦不足貴者也！ 今人主張官立朝以治民，疏爵分祿以褒賢。 今舉亡而為有，虛而為盈，布衣穿履，深念徐行，若有遺亡， 今儒者釋耒耜而學不驗之語，曠日彌久，而無益於治。 今文學言治則稱堯、舜，道行則言孔、墨，授之政則不達。 自以為知古今之義，明君臣之禮。 今之學者，無太公之能，騏驥之才。 今守、相親剖符贊拜，蒞一郡之眾，古方伯之位也。	今以公卿之上位，爵祿之美，而不能致士。 今當世在位者。 居今之朝，不易其俗。 今民陷溝壑，雖欲無濡，豈得已哉？ 今九州同域，天下一統。 今公卿意有所倚，故文學之言，不可用也。 今也純，儉，吾從眾。 今狗馬之養，蟲獸之食，豈特腐肉肥馬之費哉！ 今不減除其本而欲贍其末。 今縣官之多張苑囿、公田、池澤。 今天下合為一家，利末惡欲行？ 今欲損有餘，補不足，富者愈富，貧者愈貧矣。 今去而侵邊，多斥不毛寒苦之地，是猶棄江皋河濱，而田於嶺阪菹澤也。 方今郡國，田野有隴而不墾，城郭有宇而不實。	今閭巷縣佰，阡伯屠沽，無故烹殺。 今富者祈名嶽，望山川，椎牛擊鼓。 今世俗寬於行而求於鬼，怠於禮而篤於祭。 今世俗飾偽行詐，為民巫祝。 今富者黼繡帷幄，塗屏錯跗。 今富者繡茵罽柔，蒲子露床。 今熟食徧列，殽施成市，作業墮怠。 今富者鐘鼓五樂，歌兒數曹。 今富者繡牆題湊。 今厚資多藏，器用如生人。 今富者積土成山，列樹成林。 今俗因人之喪以求酒肉。 今富者皮衣朱貉，繁露環佩。 今生不能致其愛敬，死以奢侈相高。 今諸侯百數，卿大夫十數，中者侍御，富者盈室。是以女或曠怨失時，男或放死無匹。

		今一一則責之有司，有司豈能縛其手足而使之無為非哉？ 今曰施惠悅爾，行刑不樂；則是閔無行之人，而養惰奢之民也。 蒙恩被澤，而至今猶以貧困，其難與適道若是夫！ 今縣官鑄農器，使民務本，不營於末。 今明天子在上，匈奴公為寇，侵擾邊境。 今匈奴未臣，雖無事，欲釋備，如之何？ 今三垂已平，唯北邊未定。 行役戍備，自古有之，非獨今也。 今欲以軍興擊之，何如？ 高皇帝仗劍定九州；今以九州而不行於匈奴。 今有帝名，而威不信於長城之外。 今四夷內侵，不攘，萬世必有此長患。 今匈奴蠶食內侵，遠者不離其苦，獨邊境蒙其敗。 今以漢國之大，士民之力，非特齊桓之眾，燕、趙之師也。 今匈奴挾不信之心，懷不測之詐。	今五十已上至六十，與子孫服輓輸，並給繇役， 今或僵尸，棄衰絰而從戎事，非所以子百姓，順孝悌之心也。 今推胡、越數千里，道路迴避，士卒勞罷。 當今之務，在於禁苛暴，止擅賦。 今中國弊落不憂，務在邊境。 今踰蒙恬之塞，立郡縣寇虜之地，地彌遠而民滋勞。 今之在位者，見利不虞害，貪得不顧恥。 今公卿以其富貴笑儒者，為之常行，得無若太山鴟嚇鵷鶵乎？ 今之有司，盜主財而食之於刑法之旁。 今有司盜秉國法，進不顧罪。 以為今時不師於文而決於武。 今之執政，亦未能稱盛德也。 方今入穀之教令，張而不施，食祿多非其人。 今齊世庸士之人，不好學問，專以己之愚而荷負巨任。	今工異變而吏殊心，壞敗成功，以匿厥意。 今猛獸奇蟲不可以耕耘，而令當耕耘者養食之。 古今之通義也。 今縣官多畜奴婢，坐稟衣食，私作產業。 今蠻、貊無功，縣官居肆，廣屋大第。 今蠻、夷交脛肆踞。 今富者中名工，輕靡使容，紈裹紃下。 方今公卿大夫子孫，誠能節車輿，適衣服，躬親節儉，率以敦樸。 今欲下箴石，通關鬲，則恐有盛、胡之累。 今吏道雜而不選，富者以財賈官，勇者以死射功。 今守、相或無古諸侯之賢，而蒞千里之政，主一郡之眾。 今小吏祿薄，郡國繇役，遠至三輔。 今大川江河飲巨海，巨海受之，而

		今文學引亡國失政之治，而況之於今。 今西南諸夷，楚、莊之後。 今匈奴不當漢家之臣郡，非有六國之用、賢士之謀。 信往疑今，非人自是。 夫道古者稽之今，言遠者合之近。 今馳道不小也，而民公犯之，以其罰罪之輕也。 善言古者考之今。 古今一也，或以治，或以亂。 今願聞治亂之本。	今不覩鮑叔之力，而見汨羅之禍，雖欲以壽終，無其能得乎？ 今子安取亡國之語而來乎？ 今子不聽正義以輔卿相，又從而順之，好須臾之說。 今之孝者，是為能養，不敬， 今之士，今之大夫，皆罪人也。 今子不忠不信，巧言以亂政，導諛以求合。 今子處宰士之列，無忠正之心。 以故至今未決。 今公卿處尊位，執天下之要，十有餘年， 今執政患儒貧賤而多言，儒亦憂執事富貴而多患也。 方今為縣官計者，莫若偃兵休士，厚幣結和親。 至今不絕。 今匈奴牧於無窮之澤，東西南北，不可窮極。 今乃留心於末計，摧本議，不順上意，未為盡於忠也。	欲谿谷之讓流潦；百官之廉，不可得也。 今廢其紀綱而不能張，壞其禮義而不能防。 今天下之被誅者，不必有管、蔡之邪、鄧晢之偽，恐苗盡而不別，民欺而不治也。 今不省其所以然，而曰『陰陽之運也』，非所聞也。 方今之務，在除饑寒之患，罷鹽、鐵。 今縣官作鐵器，多苦惡，用費不省。 今總其原，一其賈，器多堅磳，善惡無所擇。 今萬方絕國之君奉贄獻者，懷天子之盛德，而欲觀中國之禮儀。 今乃以玩好不用之器、奇蟲不畜之獸、角抵諸戲、炫燿之物陳夸之。 今貴人之所賤，珍人之所饒，非所以厚中國而明盛德也。 使中國干戈至今未息。

			今中國為一統，而方內不安，徭役遠而外內煩也。 今近者數千里，遠者過萬里。 今不建不可攻之城，不可當之兵，而欲任匹夫之役，而行三尺之刃，亦細矣！ 今明王脩聖緒，宣德化。 今夫國家之事，一日更百變。 方今律令百有餘篇，文章繁，罪名重， 今馳道經營陵陸，紆天下，是以萬里為民穿也。 今盜馬者罪死，盜牛者加。 今取人兵刃以傷人，罪與殺人同，得無非其至意與？ 今廢仁義之術，而任刑名之徒。 今商鞅、反聖人之道，變亂秦俗。 今斷獄歲以萬計，犯法滋多。 今之所謂良吏者，文察則以禍其民。 今殺人者生，剽攻竊盜者富。	今百姓所以囂囂，中外不寧者，咎在匈奴。 今山東之戍馬甲士戍邊郡者，絕殊遼遠，身在胡、越，心懷老母。 今我來思，雨雪霏霏。 今天下不得其意者，非獨西宮之女，宋之老母也。 若今則繇役極遠，盡寒苦之地，危難之處。

			今無行之人，貪利以陷其身，蒙戮辱而捐禮義。 今以子誅父，以弟誅兄，親戚相坐，什伍相連，若引根本之及華葉。 哀今之人，胡為虺蜥！ 今之治民者，若拙御之御馬也，行則頓之，止則擊之。 古之所謂愚，今之所謂智。 古之所謂賊，今之所謂賢也。	
	Adverb (“if”)	(9 cases) 今放民於權利，罷鹽鐵以資暴彊，遂其貪心，眾邪群聚，私門成黨，則強禦日以不制，而并兼之徒姦形成也。 今罷去之，則豪民擅其用而專其利。 今以趙高之亡秦而非商鞅，猶以崇虎亂殷而非伊尹也。 今仲由、冉求無檀柘之材，隋、和之璞，而強文之，譬若雕朽木而礪鈆刀，飾嫫母畫土人也。 今不征伐，則暴害不息；不備，則是以黎民委敵也。 今不固其外，欲安其內，猶家人不堅垣牆，	(3 cases) 今舉異才而使臧駿御之，是猶扼驥鹽車而責之使疾。此賢良、文學多不稱舉也。 今傷人持其刀劍而亡，亦可謂盜武庫兵而殺之乎？ 今傷人未有所害，志不甚惡而合於法者，謂盜而傷人者耶？	(2 cases) 今時雨澍澤，種懸而不得播，秋稼零落乎野而不得收。 今道不舉而務小利，慕於不急以亂群意，君子雖貧，勿為可也。

		狗吠夜驚，而闇昧妄行也。 今不取，必為四境長患。 今誠得勇士，乘強漢之威，凌無義之匈奴，制其死命，責以其過，若曹劌之脅齊桓公。 今欲以敦朴之時，治抏弊之民，是猶遷延而拯溺，揖讓而救火也。		
	Pronoun (“this”)			(1 case) 今茲往而來歲旋。
Gu 古		(28 cases) 夫往古之事，昔有之語，已可覩矣。 道古以害今。 通先古，明當世。 道古而不合於世務。 古之立國家者，開本末之途，通有無之用， 古者，宮室有度，輿服以庸。 故工商梓匠，邦國之用，器械之備也。自古有之，非獨於此。 非務變古也，亦所以救失扶衰也。 古者，名山大澤不以封，為下之專利也。 故夫貴於朝，妻貴於室，富曰苟美，古之道也。 古者，經井田，制廛里，	(36 cases) 古者，貴以德而賤用兵。 古者之賦稅於民也，因其所工，不求所拙。 蓋古之均輸，所以齊勞逸而便貢輸，非以為利而賈萬物也。 古者，十一而稅。 是以古者尚力務本而種樹繁，躬耕趣時而衣食足。 古者，商通物而不豫，工致牢而不偽。 夫上古至治，民樸而貴本、安愉而寡求。 自古及今，不施而得報，不勞而有功者， 古者，采椽不斲，茅茨不翦，	(47 cases) 古者，穀物菜果，不時不食。 古者，采椽茅茨，陶桴復穴。 古者，衣服不中制，器械不中用。 古者，諸侯不秣馬。 古者，庶人耋老而後衣絲，其餘則麻枲而已。 古者，椎車無柔，棧輿無植。 古者，鹿裘皮冒，蹄足不去。 古者，庶人賤騎繩控，鞮皮薦而已。 古者，汙尊抔飲，蓋無爵觴樽俎。 古者，燔黍食稗，而捭豚以相饗。

	堅據古文以應當世，猶辰參之錯，膠柱而調瑟。 懷古道而不能行，言直而行枉，道是而情非。 自以為知古今之義，明君臣之禮。 夫重懷古道，枕籍詩、書，危不能安。 若穿踰之盜，自古而患之。 今守、相親剖符贊拜，蒞一郡之眾，古方伯之位也。 古之君子，善善而惡惡。 古者，明王討暴衛弱，定傾扶危。 行役成備，自古有之，非獨今也。 賢良、文學稱引往古，頗乖世務。 是以古者，蒐獮振旅而數軍實焉，恐民之愉佚而亡戒難。 自古明王不能無征伐而服不義，不能無城壘而禦強暴也。 古者，為國必察土地、山陵阻險、天時地利，然後可以王霸。 夫道古者稽之今，言遠者合之近。 是以古者作五刑，刻肌膚而民不踰矩。	古者，貴德而賤利，重義而輕財。 古之仕者不穡，田者不漁。 古者，市朝而無刀幣，各以其所有易所無。 往古，幣眾財通而民樂。 故聖人上賢不離古，順俗而不偏宜。 古者，制地足以養民，民足以承其上。 故古者分地而處之，制田畝而事之。 古有大喪者，君三年不呼其門，通其孝道。 古者，天子之立於天下之中，縣內方不過千里。 古之君子，守道以立名，修身以俟時。 古者，事業不二，利祿不兼。 故古者大夫思其仁義以充其位，不為權利以充其私也。 夫服古之服，誦古之道，舍此而為非者，鮮矣。 而斯、高以妖孽累其禍，廢古術，隳舊禮，專任刑法。	古者，庶人春夏耕耘，秋冬收藏。 古者，庶人糲食藜藿，非鄉飲酒腰臘祭祀無酒肉。 古者，庶人魚菽之祭，春秋脩其祖祠。 古者，德行求福，故祭祀而寬。 古者，君子夙夜孳孳思其德；小人晨昏孜孜思其力。 古者，無杠楄之寢，床栘之案。 古者，皮毛草蓐，無茵席之加， 古者，不粥飪，不市食。 古者，土鼓凷枹，擊木拊石。 古者，瓦棺容尸。 古者，明器有形無實，示民不可用也。 古者，不封不樹，反虞祭於寢。 古者，鄰有喪，舂不相杵。 古者，男女之際尚矣。 古者，事生盡愛，送死盡哀。 古者，夫婦之好，一男一女。

	善言古者考之今。 古今一也。	復往古之道，匡當世之失，莫不云太平。 古之道也，雖舜、禹興，不能易也。 古之用師，非貪壤土之利，救民之患也。 古者，無過年之繇，無逾時之役。 是以古者，明王茂其德教，而緩其刑罰也。 古者，傷人有創者刑，盜有贓者罰。 古者，其禮而明其教。 古者，君子不近刑人，刑人非人也。 古者，明其仁義之誓，使民不踰。 非二尺四寸之律異，所行反古而悖民心也。 古之所謂愚，今之所謂智。 古之所謂賊，今之所謂賢也。	古者，凶年不備，豐年補敗。 古者，不以人力徇於禽獸，不奪民財以養狗馬。 古者，人君敬事愛下，使民以時。 天子以天下為家，臣妾各以其時供公職，古今之通義也。 古者，親近而疏遠，貴所同而賤非類。 古者，庶人麤菲草芰，縮絲尚韋而已。 古聖人勞躬養神，節欲適情。 古之進士也，鄉擇而里選，論其才能。 古者，封賢祿能，不過百里。 今守、相或無古諸侯之賢，而蒞千里之政，主一郡之眾。 古之制爵祿也，卿大夫足以潤賢厚士，士足以優身及黨。 故古者大夫將臨刑，聲色不御。 古者，篤教以導民，明辟以正刑。

				古者，春省耕以補不足，秋省斂以助不給。 古者，政有德，則陰陽調。 古者，千室之邑，百乘之家。 古者，君子立仁修義，以綏其民。 古者，天子封畿千里，繇役五百里。 而欲得之，各反其本，復諸古而已。 古者，行役不踰時，春行秋反。 古者，上取有量，自養有度。
Wang 往	“past”	(11 cases) 往者，郡國諸侯各以其方物貢輸。 往者財用不足，戰士或不得祿。 往者，豪強大家，得管山海之利。 信往而乖於今，道古而不合於世務。 夫往古之事，昔有之語，己可睹矣。 往者，四夷俱強，並為寇虐。 賢良、文學稱引往古，頗乖世務。 往者，縣官未事胡、越之時，邊城四面受敵，北邊尤被其苦。	(7 cases) 往古，幣眾財通而民樂。 聞往者未伐胡、越之時，繇賦省而民富足。 往者，軍陣數起，用度不足。 復往古之道，匡當世之失。 往者，匈奴結和親，諸夷納貢，即君臣外內相信，無胡、越之患。 往者，兵革亟動，師旅數起。	(3 cases) 往者，常民衣服溫暖而不靡，器質朴牢而致用。 往者，民間酒會，各以黨俗，彈箏鼓缶而已。 是以往者，郡國黎民相乘而不能理，或至鋸頸殺不辜而不能正。

		往者，匈奴據河、山之險，擅田牧之利。 信**往**疑今，非人自是。 **往**者，應少、伯正之屬潰梁、楚。	**往**者，通關梁，交有無，自單于以下，皆親漢內附。	
	Other meanings	(8 cases) **往**來煩雜，物多苦惡。 天下穰穰，皆為利**往**。 儒、墨內貪外矜，**往**來游說。 **往**來浮游，不耕而食。 引之不來，推之不**往**。 主思臣謀，其**往**必矣。 不知見欺而**往**，愚也。 孔子不以因進見而能**往**者。	(3 cases) 直道而事人，焉**往**而不三黜？ **往**來長城之下。 未聞善**往**而有惡來者。	(4 cases) 負粟而**往**，挈肉而歸。 昔我**往**矣，楊柳依依。 今茲**往**而來歲旋。 生而**往**，死而旋，彼獨非人子耶？
Xi 昔		(13 cases) **昔**禹水湯旱，百姓匱乏。 **昔**管仲以權譎霸，而紀氏以強本亡。 **昔**孫叔敖相楚，妻不衣帛，馬不秣粟。 **昔**商君相秦也，內立法度。 **昔**商君明於開塞之術。 **昔**李斯與包丘子俱事荀卿。 **昔**魯穆公之時，公儀為相。 夫往古之事，**昔**有之語，己可睹矣。	(13 cases) **昔**桀女樂充宮室，文繡衣裳。 **昔**秦常舉天下之力以事胡、越。 **昔**文帝之時，無鹽、鐵之利而民富。 **昔**周公之相也，謙卑而不鄰。 **昔**趙高無過人之志，而居萬人之位。 **昔**秦以武力吞天下，而斯、高以妖孽累其禍。 **昔**者，商鞅相秦，後禮讓，先貪鄙。	(4 cases) **昔**者，晏子相齊，一狐裘三十載。 **昔**周公處謙以卑士，執禮以治天下。 **昔**晏子脩之樽俎之間，而折衝乎千里。 **昔**商鞅之任秦也，刑人若刈菅茅。

	昔狄人侵太王，匡人畏孔子。 **昔**夏后底洪水之災，百姓孔勤。 **昔**者，戎狄攻太王於邠。 **昔**宋襄公信楚而不備，以取大辱焉。 **昔**徐偃王行義而滅，魯哀公好儒而削。	**昔**周室之盛也，越裳氏來獻，百蠻致貢。 **昔**齊桓公內附百姓，外綏諸侯。 **昔**湯以七十里，為政於天下。 **昔**秦始皇已吞天下，欲并萬國。 **昔**秦法繁於秋荼，而網密於凝脂。 **昔**吳使宰嚭持軸而破其船	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Pre-Han:

Cheng, Shude 程樹德. *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990.

Chen, Qiyou 陳奇猷. *Lüshi chunqiu xinjiaoshi* 呂氏春秋新校釋. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002.

Chunqiu guliangzhuan zhushu 春秋穀梁傳註疏 (*Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏). Beijing: Beijing daxue shubanshe, 2000.

Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi 春秋左傳正義 (*Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經註疏). Beijing: Beijingdaxue chubanshe, 2000.

Gao, Ming 高明. *Boshu Laozi jiaozhu* 帛書老子校註. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996.

Huang, Huaixin 黃懷信. *Yi Zhoushu jiaobu zhuyi* 逸周書校補注譯. Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 2006.

Jiang, Lihong 蔣禮鴻. *Shangjun shu zhuizhi* 商君書錐指. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986.

Lou, Yulie 樓宇烈. *Laozi Daozejing zhu jiaoshi* 老子道德經註校釋. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju: 2008.

Mao Shi Zhengyi 毛詩正義 (*Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經註疏). Beijing: Beijingdaxue chubanshe, 2000.

Peng, Yushang 彭裕商, Wu Yiqiang 吳毅強. *Guodian Chujian Laozi jishi* 郭店楚簡老子集釋. Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2011.

Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian 清華大學藏戰國竹簡. Beijing: Zhongxi shuju, 2011.

Shangshu zhengyi 尚書正義 (*Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經註疏). Beijing: Beijingdaxue chubanshe, 2000.

Sun, Yirang 孫詒讓. *Mozi jiangu* 墨子閒詁. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001.

——. *Zhouli zhengyi* 周禮正義. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987.

Wang, Liqi 王利器. *Wenzi shuyi* 文子疏義. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000.

Wang, Xianshen 王先慎. *Han Feizi ji jie* 韓非子集解. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998.

Wang, Xianqian 王先謙. *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007.

——. *Zhuangzi jijie* 莊子集解. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987.

Xu, Weiyu 許維遹. *Lüshi Chunqiu jishi* 呂氏春秋集釋. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009.

Xu, Yuangao 徐元誥. *Guoyu jijie* 國語集解. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002.

Yang, Bojun 楊伯峻. *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981.

——. *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979.

Zhouyi zhengyi 周易正義 (*Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經註疏). Beijing: Beijingdaxue chubanshe, 2000.

Han and post-Han:

Bai, Zhaolin 白兆麟, *Huan Tan Xinlun jiaozhu* 桓譚新論校註. Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2017.

Ban, Gu 班固. *Hanshu* 漢書. Annot. Yan Shigu 顏師古. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962.

Chang, Qu 常璩. *Huayang Guozhi jiaobu tuzhu* 華陽國志校補圖注. Annot. Ren Naiqiang 任乃強. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2013.
Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu 春秋公羊傳注疏 (*Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經註疏). Beijing: Beijingdaxue chubanshe, 2000.
Dong, Zhongshu 董仲舒, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 春秋繁露義證. Annot. Zhong Zhe 鍾哲. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992.
Duan, Yucai 段玉裁. *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981.
Fan, Ye 范曄. *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書. Annot. Li Xian 李賢. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965.
Han, Jing 韓敬. *Fayan* 法言 (*Zhonghua jingdian mingzhu quanben quanzhu quanyi congshu* 中華經典名著全本全注全譯叢書). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012.
He, Ning 何寧. *Huainanzi jishi* 淮南子集釋. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999.
Huang, Hui 黃暉. *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990.
Liji zhengyi 禮記正義 (*Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經註疏). Beijing: Beijingdaxue chubanshe, 2000.
Shen, Qinhan 沈欽韓. *Hanshu shuzheng* 漢書疏證. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006.
Shi, Guangying 石光瑛. *Xinxu jiaoshi* 新序校釋. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009.
Shiji huizhu kaozheng fu jiaobu 史記會註考證附校補. Eds. Takigawa Kametarō 瀧川資言 and Mizusawa Toshitada 水澤利忠. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986.
Sima, Guang 司馬光, *Taixuan jizhu* 太玄集註. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998.
Sima, Qian 司馬遷. *Shiji* 史記. Annots. Pei Yin 裴駰, Sima Zhen 司馬貞, and Zhang Shoujie 張守節. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982.
Wang, Liqi 王利器, *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu* 風俗通義校注. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981.
——. *Xinyu jiaozhu* 新語校註. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986.
——. *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 顏氏家訓集解. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980.
——. *Yantie lun jiaozhu* 鹽鐵論校注. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992.
Wang, Rongbao 汪榮寶, *Fayan yi shu* 法言義疏. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987.
Wang, Xianqian 王先謙. *Hanshu buzhu* 漢書補註. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983.
——. *Hou Hanshu jijie* 後漢書集解. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984.
Wei, Zheng 魏徵. *Suishu* 隋書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973.
Wu, Shuping 吳樹平. *Dongguan Hanji jiaozhu* 東觀漢記校註. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008.
Xiang, Zonglu 向宗魯. *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 說苑校正. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987.
Xiaojing zhushu 孝經註疏 (*Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經註疏). Beijing: Beijingdaxue chubanshe, 2000.
Yan, Kejun 嚴可均. *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958.
Yan, Zhenyi 閻振益 and Zhong Xia 鍾夏, *Xinshu jiaozhu* 新書校註. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000.
Yao, Zhenzong 姚振宗. *Qilüe Bielu yiwen* 七略別錄佚文. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995.
Yinqueshan Hanmu zhujian 銀雀山漢墓竹簡. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1975.
Zhang, Zhenze 張震澤. *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu* 揚雄集校註. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993.

Zhao, Shanyi 趙善诒. *Xinxu shuzheng* 新序疏證. Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1989.
Zhao, Zaihan 趙在翰. *Qi wei* 七緯. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012.
Zhou, Zhenfu 周振甫. *Wenxin diaolong zhushi* 文心雕龍注釋. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981.
Zhou, Zumo 周祖謨. *Fangyan jiaojian* 方言校箋. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993.
Zhu, Jihai 朱季海. *Shuoyuan jiao li; Xinxu jiao li* 說苑校理; 新序校理. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011.
Zhu, Qianzhi 朱謙之. *Xinjiben Huan Tan Xinlun* 新輯本桓譚新論. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009.
Zhu, Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集註. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983.

Secondary Materials

Alston, Richard. *Rome's Revolution: Death of the Republic and Birth of the Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
Arbuckle, Gary. "Restoring Dong Zhongshu (BCE 195–115): an Experiment in Historical and Philosophical Reconstruction." Ph.D. Diss., University of British Columbia, 1991.

Baker, Timothy. "The Imperial Ancestral Temple in China's Western Han Dynasty: Institutional Tradition and Personal Belief." Ph.D. Diss., Harvard University, 2006.
Bielenstein, Hans. "An Interpretation of the Portents in the *Ts'ien Han Shu*." *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 22 (1950): 127–43.
Bian, Jiazhen 邊家珍. "Yang Xiong dui Xi Han xin ruxue de chonggou jiqi yiyi" 揚雄對西漢新儒學的重構及其意義. *Dongyue luncong* 2002.6: 93–96.
Bol, Peter. "A Literati Miscellany and Sung Intellectual History: The Case of Chang Lei's 'Ming-tao tsa-chih.'" *Journal of Song-Yuan studies* 25 (1995): 121–151.
Boltz, William G. "Chou li." In *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide*. ed. Michael Loewe. Berkeley, Calif.: Society for the Study of Early China and Institute of East Asian Studies, 1993: 24–32.
——. "The Fourth-Century B. C. Guodiann Manuscripts from Chuu and the Composition of the Laotzyy," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 119 (1999): 590–608.
Bullock, Jeffrey. *Yang Xiong, Philosophy of the Fa Yan: A Confucian Hermit in the Han Imperial Court*. Highlands, N.C.: Mountain Mind Press, 2011.

Cai, Liang. "Excavating the Genealogy of Classical Studies in the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.–8 C.E.)." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131.3 (2011): 371–394.
——. *Witchcraft and the Rise of the First Confucian Empire.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014.
Cao, Daoheng 曹道衡. "*Fengsu tongyi* he Wei Jin Liuchao xiaoshuo" 《風俗通義》和魏晉六朝小說. *Wenxue yichan* 1988.3: 10–17.
Chao, Gongwu 晁公武. *Junzhai dushu zhi* 郡齋讀書志. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990.
Chen, Dengyuan 陳登原. *Guoshi jiuwen* 國史舊聞. Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1958.

Chen, Guoqing 陳國慶. *Hanshu Yiwen zhi zhushi huibian* 漢書藝文志注釋彙編. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983.
Chen, Kanli 陳侃理. “Ruhe dingwei Qindai: Liang Han zhengtong guan de xingcheng yu queli” 如何定位秦代——兩漢正統觀的形成, *Shixue yuekan* 2022.2: 5–18.
Chen, Pan 陳槃. “Qin Han jian zhi suowei ‘fuying’ lunlüe” 秦漢間之所謂“符應”論略. In *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院曆史語言研究所集刊 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), vol. 16, 1–67.
Chen, Qiyun 陳啟雲. *Ruxue yu Handai lishi wenhua* 儒學與漢代歷史文化. Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2007.
Chen, Suzhen 陳蘇鎮. *“Chunqiu” yu “Han Dao”: liang Han zhengzhi yu zhengzhi wenhua yanjiu* 《春秋》與「漢道」: 兩漢政治與政治文化研究. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011.
Chen, Shuguo 陳戍國. *Zhongguo lizhi shi: Qin Han juan* 中國禮制史・秦漢卷. Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002.
Cheng, Shuijin 程水金 and Feng Yiming 馮一鳴. “*Liezi* kaobian shuping yu *Liezi* weishu xinzheng” 《列子》考辨述評與《列子》偽書新證. *Zhongguo zhexue shi* 2007.2: 40–48.
Cheng, Sudong 程蘇東. *Cong liuyi dao shisanjing* 從六藝到十三經：以經目演變為中心. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2017.
——. “Jianting zeming: Liuxin zhengli guwenjing shijian zai kaolun,” 兼聽則明: 劉歆爭立古文經事件再考論, *Guoxue yanjiu* 39.1 (2017): 189–97.
Cheng, Weirong 程維榮. “Youguan Qin Han ‘Jinbulü’ de ruogan wenti” 有關秦漢《金布律》的若干問題. *Lanzhou daxue xuebao (shehui keixue ban)* 2010.4: 67–73.
Cheng, Zuming 成祖明. “Zhaoce xianliang wenxue zhidu beijing xiade ‘tianren sance’” 詔策賢良文學制度背景下的“天人三策”. *Lishi yanjiu* 2012.4: 134–143.
Clark, Anthony E. *Ban Gu’s History of Early China*. Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria, 2008.
Csikszentmihalyi, Mark. *Readings in Han Chinese Thought*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006.

Daiwie, Fu. “The Flourishing of *Biji* or Pen-Notes Texts and its Relations to History of Knowledge in Song China (960–1279).” *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* 29 (2007): 103–130.
De Crespigny, Rafe. *Fire over Luoyang: a history of the Later Han dynasty 23–220 AD*. Brill, 2016.
Ding, Youguo 丁有國. “Lun Zhang Yuzhao ‘Bian Sima Xiangru Fengshan wen’” 論張裕釗《辨司馬相如〈封禪文〉》. *Ezhou daxue xuebao* 2004.2: 24–26.
Doeringer, Franklin Melvin. *Yang Hsiung and his formulation of a classicism*. Columbia University, 1971.
Dong, Junyan 董俊彥. *Huanzi* Xinlun *yanjiu* 桓子《新論》研究. Taibei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1989.
Drège, Jean-Pierre. “La lecture et l'ecriture en Chine et la xylographie.” *Etudes Chinoises* 10.1-2 (1991): 77–111.
Du, Jiaqi 杜家祁. “Liu Xiang bianxie *Xinxu*, *Shuoyuan* yanjiu” 劉向編寫新序說苑研究. Ph.D. Diss., Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1999.
Dubs, Homer. *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner & Co., 1938.

Duyvendak, J. J. L. “Clyde Bailey Sargent, *Wang Mang*, a Translation of the Official Account of His Rise to Power as Given in the *History of the Former Han Dynasty*, with Introduction and Notes (Book Review).” *T’oung Pao* 40, (1951): 216–27.

Eberhard, Wolfram. “The Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China.” In *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, ed. John. K. Fairbank. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957, 33–70.

Elman, Benjamin, and Martin Kern eds. *Statecraft and Classical Learning: The Rituals of Zhou in East Asian History*. Boston: Brill, 2009.

Fahr, Paul. “On General Terms for Texts in Early China,” *T’oung Pao* 108 (2022): 559–587.

——. “On the Meaning of *shi* 事 in Han Historiography.” *T’oung Pao* 107 (2021): 189–196.

Feng, Shi 馮時. “‘Zhengzi jiasang’ yu *Duoshi wei*” 《鄭子家喪》與《鐸氏微》*Kaogu* 2012.2: 76–83.

Feng, Yujie 馮渝傑. “Cong Hanjia Shenhua kan Liang Han zhiji de tianming jingduo” 從漢家神化看兩漢之際的天命競奪. *Lishi yanjiu* 2015.1: 22–37.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Routledge, 1972.

Fukuda, Tetsuyuki 福田哲之. *Zhongguo chutu guwenxian yu Zhanguo wenzi zhi yanjiu* 中國出土古文獻與戰國文字之研究. Taipei: Wanjuanlou tushu gufen youxian gongsi, 2005.

Fukui, Shigemasa 福井重雅. *Kandai Jukyō no shiteki kenkyū: Jukyō no kangakuka o meguru teisetsu no saikento* 漢代儒教の史的研究：儒教の官学化をめぐる定説の再検討. Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 2003.

——. “Shin Kan jidai ni okeru hakase seido no tenkai: Gokei hakase no secchi o meguru gigi sairon” 秦漢時代における博士制度の展開：五經博士の設置をめぐる疑義再論. *Toyoshi kenkyu* 54 (1995): 1–31.

——. “Tō Chujo no taisaku no kisoteki kenkyū” 董仲舒の対策の基礎的研究, *Shigaku zasshi* 106 (1997): 157–204.

Fuyang Hanjian Zhouyi *yanjiu (fu “Rujiazhe yan” zhangti, “Chunqiu shiyu” zhangti ji xiangguan zhujian* 阜陽漢簡《周易》研究（附：《儒家者言》章題）、《春秋事語》章題及相關竹簡. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004.

Gale, Esson. *Discourses on Salt and Iron: A Debate on State Control of Commerce and Industry in Ancient China, Chapters I–XXVIII, Translated from the Chinese of Huan K’uan with Introduction and Notes*. Taipei: Ch’eng Wen Publishing Co., 1967.

Gan, Huaizhen 甘懷真. *Huangquan, liyi yu jingdian quanshi: zhongguo gudai zhengzhishi yanjiu* 皇權、禮儀與經典詮釋：中國古代政治史研究. Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2008.

Gentz, Joachim. “The Past as a Messianic Vision: Historical Thought and Strategies of Sacralization in the Early Gongyang Tradition.” In *Historical truth, historical criticism, and ideology: Chinese historiography and historical culture from a new comparative perspective*, ed. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer et al. Leiden: Brill, 2005, 227–254.

Goldin, Paul R. “Han Law and the Regulation of Interpersonal Relations: ‘The Confucianization of the Law’ Revisited.” *Asia Major* (third series) 25.1 (2012): 1–31.

——. *The Art of Chinese Philosophy: Eight Classical Texts and How to Read Them.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020.
——. "Women and Moral Dilemmas in Early Chinese Narrative." In *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy and Gender*. ed. Ann A. Pang-White. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, 25–36.
——. "*Xunzi* and Early Han Philosophy." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 67.1 (2007): 135–66.
——. and Elisa Levi Sabattini. *Lu Jia's New Discourses: A Political Manifesto from the Early Han Dynasty*. Brill, 2020.
Goodrich, Chauncey S. "The Reign of Wang Mang: Hsin or New?" *Oriens* 10, no. 1 (1957): 114–18.
Gu, Jiegang 顧頡剛. *Handai xueshu shilüe* 漢代學術史略. Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1996.
——. *Gushi bian* 古史辨, 7 vols. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982.
——. *Qin Han de fangshi yu rusheng* 秦漢的方士與儒生. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005.
——. " 'Zhougong zhili' de chuanshuo he *Zhouguan* yishu de chuxian" "周公制禮" 的傳說和《周官》一書的出現. In *Wenshi* 文史. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979. Vol. 6.
Gu, Mingdong. *Chinese Theories of Reading and Writing*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005.
Gu, Yanwu 顧炎武. *Rizhilu* 日知錄. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985.
Gu, Yixin 顧一心. "The Enchantment of Erudition: Models and Manifestations of Literary Culture in Han-Wei China." Ph.D. Diss., Princeton University, 2022.
Guo, Junming 郭君銘. *Yangxiong* Fayan *sixiang yanjiu* 揚雄《法言》思想研究. Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1989.
Guo, Moruo 郭沫若. *Jinwen congkao* 金文叢考. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1954.
——. *Liang Zhou jinwenci daxi tulu kaoshi* 兩周金文辭大系圖錄考釋. Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1957.
Guo, Peipei 郭培培. "Han Wudi nianhao yu fengshan guanxi tanxi" 漢武帝年號與封禪關係探析. *Weinan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 36 (2021): 28–33.

Hayashi, Taisuke 林泰輔. *Shūkō to sono jidai* 周公と其時代. Tōkyō: Ōkuraya Shoten, 1915.
He, Fasu 何發甦. "Cong yinxu zhilu dao huaiyi zhitu: Han zhi Ming xuezhe guanyu Kongzi yu *Shangshu* guanxi zhi lunshu" 從因循之路到懷疑之途：漢至明學者關於孔子與《尚書》關係之論述. *Kongzi yanjiu* 2016.1: 110–119.
He, Lingxu 賀凌虛. *Xi Han zhengzhi sixiang lunji* 西漢政治思想論集. Taibei: Wunan tushu chuban gongsi, 1988.
He, Zeheng 何澤恆. "Kongzi yu 'Yizhun' xiangguan wenti fuyi" 孔子與《易傳》相關問題覆議. *Zhouyi yanjiu* 2001.1: 32–48.
He, Zhigang 何直剛. "'Rujiazhe yan' lüeshuo"《儒家者言》略說. *Wenwu* 1981.8: 20–22.
——. and Liu Shishu 劉世樞. "Dingxian 40 hao Hanmu chutu zhujian jianjie" 定縣 40 號漢墓出土竹簡簡介. *Wenwu* 1981.8: 11–13.
Henry, Eric trans. *Garden of Eloquence/ Shuoyuan 說苑*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021.
Hou, Jiaju 侯家駒. *Zhouli yanjiu* 周禮研究. Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1987.

Hou, Wailu 侯外廬. *Zhongguo sixiang tongshi* 中國思想通史. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1957.
Hou, Xudong 侯旭東. “Zhulu huo tianming: Hanren yanzhong de Qin wang Han xing” 逐鹿或天命：漢人眼中的秦亡漢興. *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 2015.4: 177–203.
Hu, Pingsheng 胡平生. “Fuyang shuangudui Hanjian yu *Kongzi jiayu*” 阜陽雙谷堆漢簡與《孔子家語》. In *Guoxue yanjiu* 國學研究. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000. Vol. 7, 515–546.
Huang, Fushan 黃復山. *Dong Han chenweixue xintan* 東漢讖緯學新探. Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 2000.
——. *Handai Shangshu chenwei xueshu* 漢代《尚書》讖緯學述. Taipei: Huamulan wenhua chubanshe, 2007.
Huang, Kan 黃侃. *Wenxuan Huangshi xue* 文選黃氏學. Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1977.
Huang, Zhen 黃震. *Huangshi richao* 黃氏日抄. Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2019.
Hunter, Michael. *Confucius Beyond the Analects*. Leiden: Brill, 2017.
——. “The *Lunyu* as a Western Han Text.” In *Confucius and the Analects Revisited: New Perspectives on Composition, Dating, and Authorship*. Eds. Michael Hunter and Martin Kern (Boston: Brill, 2018), 67–91.
——. “The ‘Yiwen zhi’ 藝文志 (Treatise on Arts and Letters) Bibliography in Its Own Context.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 138 (2018): 763–780.

Indraccolo, Lisa. “Living the past: the Classics as “place” of moral cultivation in early imperial China.” *International Communication of Chinese Culture* 4 (2017): 299–315.

Jiang, Liangfu 姜亮夫 and Tao Qiuying 陶秋英. “Huan Tan yinian de taolun” 桓譚疑年的討論. *Hangzhou daxue xuebao: renwen kexue ban* 1962.1:46–55.
Jiang, Yuhua 姜聿華. *Zhongguo chuantong yuyanxue yaoji shulun* 中國傳統語言學要籍述論. Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1992.
Jin, Chunfeng 金春峰. *Handai sixiangshi* 漢代思想史. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006.
——. *Zhouguan zhi chengshu jiqi fanying de wenhua yu shidai xinkao* 周官之成書及其反映的文化與時代新考. Taipei: Dong da tushu gongsi, 1994.
Jin, Wen 晉文. “Lun jingxue yu Handai shouming lun de quanshi” 論經學與漢代“受命”論的詮釋. *Xuehai* 2008.4: 151–154.

Kamada, Shigeo 鎌田重雄. *Shin Kan seiji seido no kenkyū* 秦漢政治制度の研究. Tokyo: Nihon Gakujutsu Shinkokai, 1962.
Kanaya, Osamu 金谷治. *Shin Kan shisōshi kenkyū* 秦漢思想史研究. Tōkyō: Nihon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai, 1960.
Kaneko, Shuuichi 金子修一. “Kandai niokeru koushi, soubyou seido no keisei to sono un’you” 漢代における郊祀・宗廟制度の形成とその運用. In *Chuugoku kodai koutei saishi no kenkyuu* 中国古代皇帝祭祀の研究. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2006, 141–214.

Karlgren, Bernhard. "*The Early History of the Chou li and Tso chuan Texts*." *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 1931.3: 1–59.
Kase, Tatsuo 嘉瀬達男. "Guanyu *Fayan* de renwu piping" 關於《法言》的人物批評. In *Gudai wenlun yanjiu de huigu yu qianzhan: Fudan daxue 2000 nian guoji xueshu huiyi lunwenji* 古代文論研究的回顧與前瞻：復旦大學 2000 年國際學術會議論文集. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2002, 504–518.
——. "*Hougen* no hyougen: kyousho no enyou to mohou" 『法言』の表現: 經書の援用と模倣. *Gakurin* 36/37 (2003): 148–74.
Kern, Martin. "'Changing with the times': The 'Confucian' career of a 'Legalist' dogma in Western Han Ritualism." Presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, San Diego, March 9–12, 2000.
——. "Creating a Book and Performing It: The 'Yao lüe' Chapter of the *Huainanzi* as a Western Han *Fu*." In *The* Huainanzi *and Textual Production in Early China*. Eds., Sarah A. Queen and Michael Puett. Boston: Brill, 2014, 124–150.
——. *Die Hymnen Der Chinesischen Staatsopfer: Literatur Und Ritual In Der Politischen Repräsentation Von Der Han-Zeit Bis Zu Den Sechs Dynastien.* Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1997.
——. "In Praise of Political Legitimacy: The *miao* and *jiao* Hymns of the Western Han." *Oriens Extremus* 39.1 (1996): 29–67.
——. "Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation: The Case of the Han Wudi Period (141-87 B.C.)." *Chûgoku shigaku* 10 (2000): 1–31.
——. "Review of *Writing and Authority in Early China*." *China Review International* 7, no. 2 (2000): 336–376.
——. "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of *Wen* in Early China." *T'oung Pao* 87.1-3 (2001): 43–91.
——. "The 'Biography of Sima Xiangru' and the Question of the Fu in Sima Qian's *Shiji*." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123, no. 2 (2003): 303–316.
——. *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation*. New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000.
——. "Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63 (2003): 383–437.
Knechtges, David R. "Uncovering the Sauce Jar: A Literary Interpretation of Yang Hsiung's 'Chü Ch'in mei Hsin.'" In *Ancient China: Studies in Early Civilization*. Eds. David T. Roy and Tsuen-hsuin Tsien. 229–252. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1978.
——. "The Liu Hsin/ Yang Hsiung Correspondence on the *Fang yen*." *Monumenta Serica* 33 (1977): 309–25.
——. "To Praise the Han: The Eastern Capital Fu of Pan Ku and His Contemporaries." In *Thought and law in Qin and Han China*. Brill, 1990, 118–139.
Knoblock, John. *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.
Kojima, Tsuyoshi 小島毅. "Koushi seido no hensen" 郊祀制度の変遷. *Touyou bunka kenkyuuzyo kiyou* 東洋文化研究所紀要 108 (1989): 123–219.
Kroll, Juri. *Spor o Soli i Zheleze*. St. Petersburg: Peterburzhskoe vostokovedenie, 1997.
Kurihara, Tomonobu 栗原朋信. "Shin suitoku setsu no hihan" 秦水德說の批判. In *Shin Kan shi no kenkyū* 秦漢史の研究. Tokyō: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1960, 45–91.

Lan, Xiulong 藍秀隆. *Yangzi Fayan yanjiu* 揚子法言研究. Taibei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1971.
Lewis, Mark Edward. *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007.
——. "The *feng* and *shan* sacrifices of Emperor Wu of the Han." In *State and Court Ritual in China*. Ed. Joseph Peter McDermott. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
——. *Writing and Authority in Early China*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.
Li, Ling 李零. "Beida Qindu 'Taiyuan you sizhe' jianjie" 北大秦牘《泰原有死者》簡介. *Wenwu* 2012.6: 81–84.
——. *Jianbo gushu yu xueshu yuanliu* 簡帛古書與學術源流. Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 2004.
Li, Xiaoding 李孝定. *Jiagu wenzi jishi* 甲骨文字集釋. 13 vols. Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1965.
Li, Xueqin 李學勤. "Fangmatan jian zhong de zhiguai gushi" 放馬灘簡中的志怪故事. *Wenwu* 1990.4: 43–47.
Liang, Yusheng 梁玉繩. *Shiji zhiyi* 史記質疑. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981.
Liu, Liyun 劉力耘. "Han 'Chifu fu' shiyi" 漢《赤伏符》釋義. *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 2017.1: 315–331.
Liu, Meihui. "Examining the Repetitions Within and Between Chapters in the *Xunzi*: Traces of Liu Xiang's Editorial Work." *T'oung Pao* 110, 3-4 (2024): 305–345.
Liu, Mingyi 劉明怡. "*Fengsu tongyi* de wenti tedian jiqi wenxue yiyi" 《風俗通義》的文體特點及其文學意義. *Wenxue yichan* 2009.2: 20–29.
Liu, Pak-yuen 廖伯源. "Shuo xin: jianlun nianhao zhi qiyuan" 說新：兼論年號之起源. In *Qin Han shi luncong* 秦漢史論叢. Taibei: Wunan tushu chuban gongsi, 2003, 1–30.
Liu, Qiyu 劉起釪. "*Zhouli* zhenwei zhizheng ji qishu xiecheng de zhenshi yiju" 《周禮》真偽之爭及其書寫成的真實依據. In *Gushi xubian* 古史續辨. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991, 619–653.
Liu, Shaojun 劉韶軍 and Xie Guian 謝貴安. *Taixuan Da Dai Li yanjiu*《太玄》《大戴禮》研究. Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1991.
——. *Yang Xiong yu* Taixuan *yanjiu* 楊雄與《太玄》研究. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2011.
Liu, Shipei 劉師培. *Guoxue fawei* 國學發微. Jiangsu: Guangling shushe, 2016.
Liu, Xianxin 劉咸炘. *Liu Xianxin xueshu lunji: jiaochouxue bian* 劉咸炘學術論集・校讎學編. Ed. Huang Shuhui 黃曙輝. Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010.
——. *Liu Xianxin xueshu lunji: zixue bian* 劉咸炘學術論集・子學編. Ed. Huang Shuhui 黃曙輝. Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2007.
Liu, Yuejin 劉躍進. *Qin Han wenxue biannianshi* 秦漢文學編年史. Beijing: Shangwu yinshu-guan, 2006.
——. *Wenxuan jiuzhu jicun* 文選舊註輯存. Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2017.
Liu, Zhiwei 劉志偉 and Shao Jie 邵傑. "*Wenxuan* suo shou 'Ju Qin mei Xin' zhi zuonian ji she Mang shishi kaolun" 《文選》所收《劇秦美新》之作年及涉及莽時事考論. *Henan shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 2014.5: 135–139.
Loewe, Michael. *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Western Han and Xin periods (221 BC - AD 24)*. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

——. *Chang'an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China*. Eds. Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015.
——. "'Confucian' Values and Practices in Han China." *T'oung Pao* 98 (2012): 1–30.
——. *Crisis and Conflict in Han China: 104 BC to AD 9*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974.
——. "Hsin yü." In *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide*. Ed. Michael Loewe. Berkeley, Calif.: Society for the Study of Early China and Institute of East Asian Studies, 1993: 24–32.
——. *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
——. *Dong Zhongshu, a "Confucian" Heritage and the Chunqiu Fanlu*. Boston: Brill, 2011.
——. *Problems of Han Administration: Ancestral Rites, Weights and Measures, and the Means of Protest*. Leiden: Brill, 2016.
——. "The Cosmological Context of Sovereignty in Han Times." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65.2 (2002): 342–49.
——. "Wang Mang and His Forbears: The Making of the Myth." *T'oung Pao* 80, no. 4/5 (1994): 197–222.
Lu, Kanru 陸侃如. *Zhonggu wenxue xinian* 中古文學係年. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1985.
Luo, Genze 羅根澤. "Lu Jia *Xinyu* kaozheng" 陸賈新語考證. In *Gushibian* 古史辨. Eds, Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 et al. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982. Vol. 4, 198–202.
Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
Lü, Shihao 呂世浩. *Cong* Shiji *dao* Hanshu: *zhuanzhe guocheng yu lishi yiyi* 從《史記》到《漢書》——轉折過程與曆史意義. Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue chuban zhongxin, 2009.
Lü, Simian 呂思勉. *Xian Qin xueshu gailun* 先秦學術概論. Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 2008.
L'Haridon, Béatrice. "Le Fayan de Yang Xiong and le questionnement confucéen de l'histoire." *Études chinoises* 24 (2005): 233–48.
——. "La recherche du modèle dans les dialogues du Fayan de Yang Xiong (53 av. J.-C. – 18 apr. J.-C.): écriture, éthique et réflexion historique à la fin des Han occidentaux." Ph.D. Diss., Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, 2006.
——. "Wang Mang 王莽 (c. 45 b.c.e.–23 c.e.) and Classical Learning as Path to Supreme Power." *Early China* 45 (2022): 51–72.

Ma, Da 馬達. *Liezi zhenwei kaobian* 列子真偽考辨. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2000.
Maeder, Erik W. "Some Observations on the Composition of the 'Core Chapters' of the *Mozi*." *Early China* 17 (1992): 27–82.
Mawangdui Hanmu boshu 馬王堆漢墓帛書. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980.
Meng, Wentong 蒙文通. "Cong shehui zhidu ji zhengzhi zhidu lun *Zhouguan* chengshu niandai" 從社會制度及政治制度論周官成書年代. In *Meng Wentong quanji* 蒙文通全集. Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2015. Vol. 3, 360–368.
Milburn, Olivia. "Palace Women in the Former Han Dynasty (202 BCE–CE 23): Gender and Administrational History in the Early Imperial Era." *NAN NÜ* 18, 2 (2016): 195–223.
——. *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Yan*. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Ning, Zhenjiang 寧鎮疆. “*Jiayu* de ‘cenglei’ xingcheng kaolun: Fuyang shuanggudui yihao mudu suojian zhangti yu jinben Jiayu zhi bijiao” 《家語》的“層累”形成考論：阜陽雙古堆一號木牘所見章題與今本《家語》之比較. *Qilu xuekan* 2007.3: 9–17.
Nylan, Michael. “A Problematic Model: The Han ‘Orthodox Synthesis,’ Then and Now.” In *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics*. Eds. Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson. Albany, SUNY Press, 1999, 17–56.
——. “Classics without Canonization, reflections on classical learning and authority in Qin (221–210 BC) and Han (206 BC–AD 220).” In *Early Chinese Religion, Part One, Shang through Han (1250 BC–AD 220)*. Eds. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski. Leiden: Brill, 2008, 721–776.
——. Trans. *Exemplary Figures/ Fayan 法言*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013.
——. “Han classicists writing in dialogue about their own tradition.” *Philosophy East and West* (1997): 133–188.
——. “Han Views of the Qin Legacy and the Late Western Han ‘Classical Turn.’” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 79 (2015): 51–98.
——. “Textual Authority in Pre-Han and Han.” *Early China* 25 (2000): 205–258.
——. *The Canon of Supreme Mystery by Yang Hsiung: A Translation with Commentary of the T'ai Hsuan Ching by Michael Nylan*. Albany, SUNY Press, 1993.
——. “The ‘Chin Wen/ Ku Wen’ Controversy in Han Times.” *T’oung Pao* 80, no. 1/3 (1994): 83–145.
——. “Manuscript Culture in Late Western Han, and the Implications for Authors and Authority.” *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 1 (2014): 155–85.
——. *Yang Xiong and the Pleasures of Reading and Classical Learning in Han China*. New Haven: The American Oriental Society, 2011.

Ōkubo, Takao 大久保隆郎. “Kantan sei sotsu nenkō” 桓譚生卒年考. *Fukushima daigaku kyōiku gakubu ronshū* 福島大學教育學部論集 20-2 (1968): 13–26.

Pan, Mingji 潘铭基. *Jia Yi ji qi Xinshu yanjiu* 賈誼及其《新書》研究. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2017.
Peng, Lin 彭林. *Zhouli zhuti sixiang yu chengshu niandai yanjiu*《周禮》主體思想與成書年代研究. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991.
Peterson, Willard J. “Making Connections: ‘Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations’ of the *Book of Change*.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42.1 (1982): 67–116.
Pi, Xirui 皮錫瑞. *Jingxue lishi* 經學歷史. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959.
——. *Jingxue tonglun* 經學通論. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1954.
Pian, Yuqian 駢宇騫. *Yinqueshan zhujian* Yanzi chunqiu *jiaoshi* 銀雀山竹簡《晏子春秋》校釋. Taipei: wanjuanlou tushu youxiangongsi, 2000.
Pines, Yuri. “Biases and Their Sources: Qin History in the ‘*Shiji*’.” *Oriens Extremus* 45 (2005): 10–34.
——. “Dating a Pre-imperial Text: The Case Study of the *Book of Lord Shang*.” *Early China* 39 2016: 1–40.
Polnarov, Anatoly. “Looking Beyond Dichotomies: Hidden Diversity of Voices in the *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論.” *T’oung Pao* 104, 5-6 (2018): 465–495.

Pokora, Timoteus. *Hsin-lun (New treatise), and Other Writings by Huan T'an (43 B.C.–28 A.D.): an Annotated Translation with Index.* Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1975.
——. "The Dates of Huan T'an." *Archív Orientální* 27, no. 4 (1959): 670–677.
Poo, Mu-chou 蒲慕州. "Xian Qin liang Han de zungu siwei yu zhengzhi quanwei" 先秦兩漢的尊古思維與政治權威. In *Han diguo de zhidu yu shehui zhixu* 漢帝國的制度與社會秩序. Ed. Lai Ming-chiu 黎明釗. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2012, 1–45.
Puett, Michael J. "Centering the Realm: Wang Mang, the *Zhouli*, and Early Chinese Statecraft." In *Statecraft and Classical Learning*. Eds. Benjamin Elman and Martin Kern. Leiden: Brill, 2010, 129–154.
——. "Nature and artifice: Debates in late warring states China concerning the creation of culture." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 57, no. 2 (1997): 471–518.
——. *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2002.
——. "The Temptations of Sagehood, or: The Rise and Decline of Sagely Writings in Early China." In *Books in Numbers: Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Harvard-Yenching Library Conference Papers*. Ed. Wilt L. Idema. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2007, 23–47.
——. *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-divinization in Rarly China*. No. 57. Harvard University Asia Center, 2002.
——. "Sages, Creation, and the End of History in the *Huainanzi*." In *The Huainanzi and Textual Production in Early China*. Leiden: Brill, 2014, 267–290.

Qian, Mu 錢穆. *Liang Han jingxue jinguwen pingyi* 兩漢經學今古文平議. Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 2001.
——. *Liu Xiang Xin fuzi nianpu* 劉向歆父子年譜. Shanghai: Zhongguo wenhua fuwushe, 1948.
——. "Ping Gu Jiegang wude zhongshishuo xia de xueshu yu zhengzhi" 評顧頡剛五德終始說下的學術與政治. In *Gushi bian* 古史辨. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982. Vol. 5, 625–629.
——. "*Zhouguan* zhuzuo shidai kao" 《周官》著作時代考. Beijing: Yanjing daxue chubanshe, 1932.
Qian, Xuan 錢玄. *Sanli tonglun* 三禮通論. Nanjing: Nanjing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1996.
Qian, Zhongshu 錢鍾書. *Xie zai rensheng bianshang de bianshang* 寫在人生邊上的邊上. Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian, 2001.
Qin, Jiming 秦際明. "*Fanyan* 'huo wen' beihou de ren yu si" 《法言》"或問"背後的人與思. *Ruzang luntan* 2017.1: 90–107.
Qiu, Xigui 裘錫圭. *Qiu Xigui xueshu wenji* 裘錫圭學術文集. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2015.
Qu, Lili 曲利麗. "Lun Liang Han zhiji de wangminglun sichao" 論兩漢之際的"王命論"思潮. *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 2012 (01):172–180.
Queen, Sarah A. *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-Shu*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
Que Hai 闕海. "Lun liangzhong 'gua zhusui'" 論兩種"卦主歲". *Zhouyi yanjiu* 2023.1: 55–60.

Ren, Jiyu 任繼愈. *Zhongguo zhexue shi* 中國哲學史. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1966.
Ren, Mingshan 任銘善. *Liji mulu houan* 禮記目錄後按. Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1982.
Richards, Ivor Armstrong. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936.
"'Rujiazhe yan' shiwen"《儒家者言》釋文. *Wenwu* 1981.8: 13–19.

Sato, Masayuki 佐藤將之. *Canyu tiandi zhi zhi: Xunzi lizhi zhengzhi sixiang de qiyuan yu gouzao* 參於天地之治：荀子禮治政治思想的起源與構造. Taibei: Guoli Taiwan daxue chuban zhongxin, 2016.
Schwermann, Christian. "Anecdote Collections as Argumentative Texts: The Composition of the *Shuoyuan*." In *Between History and Philosophy: Anecdotes in Early China*. Eds. Paul van Els and Sarah A. Queen. Albany: SUNY Press, 2017, 147–192.
Shaughnessy, Edward L. *Sources of Western Zhou History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
Shen, Zhong 沈重. "Rujia fugu zhuyi de lishi da beiju: lun Wang Mang gaizhi" 儒家復古主義的歷史大悲劇——論王莽改制. *Nanchang daxue xuebao (renwen shehui kexue ban)* 1987.1: 55–61.
Shi, Ding 施丁. "Dong Zhongshu tianren sance zuoyu Yuanguang yuannian bian: jiantan Dong Zhongshu bushi 'bachu banjia duzun rushu' de chuangshi ren" 董仲舒天人三策作於元光元年辨——兼談董仲舒不是"罷黜百家，獨尊儒術"的創始人. *Shehui kexue jikan* 1980.3: 92–101.
Shi, Jiepeng 史傑鵬. "'*Yansheng*' zhi ciyi kaobian ji xiangguan wenti yanjiu" "厭勝"之詞義考辨及相關問題研究. *Liyun xuekan (yuyan juan)* 2013.2: 83–108.
Shima, Kunio 島邦男. *Inkyo bokuji kenkyū* 殷墟卜辞研究. Hiromae: Chūkokugaku Kenkyūkai, 1958.
——. *Inkyo Bokuji Sōrui* 殷墟卜辭綜類. Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 1971.
Shirakawa, Shizuka 白川静. *Kinbun no sekai: In-Shū shakaishi* 金文の世界：殷周社会史. Tōkyō: Heibonsha, 1971.
——. *Kōkotsu kinbungaku ronshū* 甲骨金文学論集. Kyōto: Hōyū Shoten, 1974.
Skinner, Quentin. *Visions of Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
——. *Liberty before Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
Su, Chengjian 蘇誠鑒. "Dong Zhongshu duice zai Yuanshuo wunian yi" 董仲舒對策在元朔五年議. *Zhouguoshi yanjiu* 1984.3: 87–92.
——. *Huan Tan* 桓譚. Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1986.
Su, Shi 蘇軾. *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集. Annot. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986.
Sukhu, Gopal. "Yao, Shun, and Prefiguration: The Origins and Ideology of the Han Imperial Genealogy." *Early China* 30 (2005–06): 91–153.
Sun, Shaohua 孫少華. "Huan Tan shengzunian xinkao," 桓譚生卒年新考. *Huaibei shifan daxue xuebao: zhexue shehui kexue ban* 32 (2011):14–17.
——. "'Sanqi zhi e' yu Liang Han zhiji jingxue sixiang zhi ganxi: yi Lu Wenshu, Gu Yong, Wang Mang wei zhongxin" "三七之厄"與兩漢之際經學思想之關係——以路温舒、谷永、王莽爲中心. *Lingnan xuebao* 2018.1: 85–105.

——. *Wenben zhixu: Huan Tan yu liang Han zhiji chanshi sixiang de dingxing* 文本秩序：桓譚與兩漢之際闡釋思想的定性. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019.
——. “Xi Han zhuzi de shang xin chuantong yu xin xue yuanyuan” 西漢諸子的“尚新”傳統與“新學”淵源. *Wenxue pinglun*, 2012.2: 156–65.
Sun, Xianbin 孫顯斌. “*Qilüe*, *Bielu* bianzhuan kao” 《七略》《別錄》編撰考. *Tushuguan zazhi* 30 (2011): 88–91.
Sun, Xiao 孫筱. *Liang Han jingxue yu shehui* 兩漢經學與社會. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2002.

Tang, Lan 唐蘭. “Mawangdui chutu Laozi yiben juan qian guyishu deyanjiu” 馬王堆出土老子乙本卷前古佚書的研究. *Kaogu xuebao* 1 (1975): 7–38.
Tang, Yan 唐晏. *Liang Han Sanguo xue’an* 兩漢三國學案. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986.
Tang, Zhijun 湯志鈞, et al. *Xi Han jingxue yu zhengzhi* 西漢經學與政治. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994.
Taniguchi, Hiroshi 谷口洋. “Fu ni jijo o tsukeru koto: RyōKan no majiwari ni okeru sakusha no mezame” 賦に自序をつけること：両漢の交における作者のめざめ. *Tōhōgaku* 119 (2010): 22–39.
Tian, Hanyun 田漢雲. *Xinbian Wang Zhong ji* 新編汪中集. Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2005.
Tian, Tian 田天. *Qin Han guojia jisi shigao* 秦漢國家祭祀史稿. Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2015.
Tian, Xiaofei. “The Twilight of the Masters: Masters Literature (*Zishu*) in Early Medieval China.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126 (2006): 465–486.
Twitchett, Denis Crispin, and Michael Loewe. *The Cambridge History of China.* Vol. 1, *The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Van Ess, Hans. “The Apocryphal Texts of the Han Dynasty and the Old Text/ New Text Controversy.” *T’oung Pao* 85 (1999): 29–64.
——. “Ban Gu’s View on the ‘Second Victory’ of ‘Confucianism’ and the Fall of the Former Han.” *Early China* 45 (2022): 15–49.

Wan, Ming. “Discourses on Salt and Iron: A First Century B.C. Chinese Debate over the Political Economy of Empire.” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 17 (2012): 143–163.
Wang, Baoxuan 王葆玹. “Tianren sance yu Xi Han zhongye de guanfang yueshu: zailun ‘bachu baijia, duzun rushu’ de shijian wenti” 天人三策與西漢中葉的官方學術——再論“罷黜百家，獨尊儒術”的時間問題. *Zhexue yanjiu* 1990.6: 98–108.
——. *Xi Han jingxue yuanliu* 西漢經學源流. Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1994.
Wang, Baizhong 王柏中. *Shenling shijie: zhixu de goujian yu yishi de xiangzheng* 神靈世界：秩序的構建與儀式的象征. Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2005.
Wang, Jian 王健. “Cong Xin chao dao Dong Han: lunli zhengzhi yanjin de lishi kaocha” 從新朝到東漢：倫理政治演進的歷史考察. *Qin Han Yanjiu* no. 00 (2007): 77–84.
Wang, Mingsheng 王明盛. *Shiqi shi shangque* 十七史商榷. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937.
Wang, Qing 王青. *Yang Xiong pingzhuan* 揚雄評傳. Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2011.

Wang, Qimin 王啟敏. *Liu Xiang Xinxu, Shuoyuan yanjiu* 劉向《新序》、《說苑》研究. Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2011.
Wang, Sufeng 王蘇鳳. "Liu Xiang *Xinxu* zhuzuo xingzhi kaobian" 劉向《新序》著作性質考辨. *Hebei shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexueban)* 2000.3: 97–98.
Wang, Tie 王鐵. *Handai xueshushi* 漢代學術史. Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1995.
Wang, Yong 王永. *Yantielun yanjiu* 鹽鐵論研究. Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 2009.
Watanabe, Shin'ichirou 渡辺信一郎. *Zhongguo gudai de wangquan yu tianxia zhixu: cong rizhong bijiaoshi de jiaodu chufa* 中國古代的王權與天下秩序——從日中比較史的角度出發. Trans. Xu Chong 徐沖. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008.
Wei, Guanglai 衛廣來. *Han Wei Jin huangquan shandai* 漢魏晉皇權嬗代. Taiyuan: Shuhai chubanshe, 2002.
Wei, Jianzhen 魏建震. *Xian Qin shesi yanjiu* 先秦社祀研究. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008.
Weingarten, Oliver. "Delinquent Fathers and Philology: *Lunyu* 13.18 and Related Texts." *Early China* 37 (2014): 221–58.
——. "What Did Disciples Do? 'Dizi' 弟子 In Early Chinese Texts." *Harvard journal of Asiatic studies* 75 (2015) 29–75.
Wu, Ge 吳戈. "*Guoyu, Xin Guoyu* yu gushilei shishu" 《國語》、《新國語》與"故事類史書." *Nanjing shifan daxue wenxueyuan xuebao* 2016.1: 180–183.

Xiao, Gongquan 蕭公權. *Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiangshi* 中國政治思想史. Beijing: Xinxing chubanshe, 2010.
Xie, Lixia 解麗霞. *Yang Xiong yu Handai jingxue* 揚雄與漢代經學. Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2011.
Xie, Mingren 謝明仁. *Liu Xiang Shuoyuan yanjiu*. 劉向《說苑》研究. Lanzhong: Lanzhou daxue chubanshe, 2000.
Xin, Deyong 辛德勇. *Jianyuan yu gaiyuan: Xi Han Xinmang nianhao yanjiu* 建元與改元：西汉新莽年号研究. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013.
Xing, Yitian 邢義田. *Qin Han shi lungao* 秦漢史論稿. Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1987.
Xu, Fuguan 徐復觀. *Liang Han sixiangshi* 兩漢思想史. Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001.
Xu, Jianwei 徐建委. "Faxian Dong Zhongshu: Duzun rushu de lishi chongsu" 發現董仲舒：獨尊儒術的歷史重塑. *Wenxue pinglun* 2022.2: 186–196.
——. Shuo yuan *yanjiu: yi Zhan'guo Qin-Han zhi jian de wenxian leiji yu xueshu shi wei zhongxin* 《說苑》研究: 以戰國秦漢之間的文獻累積與學術史為中心. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2011.
——. *Wenben geming: Liu Xiang* Hanshu *"Yiwen zhi" yu zaoqi wenben yanjiu* 文本革命：劉向《漢書藝文志》與早期文本研究. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2017.
——. "Zhanguo Qin Han jian de gonggong sucai yu Zhou Qin Han wenxueshi xushi" 戰國秦漢間的"公共素材"與周秦漢文學史敘事. *Zhoushan daxue xuebao (shehui kexueban)* 2012.6: 1–9.
Xu, Jie 許結. "'Ju Qin mei Xin' fei yuwen bian" 《劇秦美新》非"諛文"辯. *Xueshu yuekan* 1985.6: 72–78.

Xu, Sufei 許素菲. *Liu Xiang Xinxu yanjiu* 劉向《新序》研究. Taibei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1980.
Xu, Xingwu 徐興無, *Liu Xiang pingzhuan (fu Liu Xin)* 劉向評傳（附劉歆）. Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2005.

Yan, Buke 閻步克. "Wang Mang bianfa qianhou zhishi qunti de lishi bianqian" 王莽變法前後知識群體的歷史變遷. *Shehui kexue yanjiu*, 1987.2:49–57.
Yan, Lingfeng 嚴靈峰. *Liezi bianwu ji qi zhongxin sixiang* 列子辯誣及其中心思想. Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1994.
——. "Liu Xiang 'Shuoyuan xulu' yanjiu" 劉向《說苑序錄》研究. In *Wuwiubeizhai xueshu xinzhu* 無求備齋學術新著. Taibei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1987.
Yang, Tianyu 楊天宇. "Lüeshu *Zhouli* de chengshu shidai yu zhenwei" 略述《周禮》的成書時代與真偽. *Zhengzhou daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 2000.4: 71–77.
——. *Jingxue tanyan lu* 經學探研錄. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004.
Yang, Xiangkui 楊向奎. *Xi Han jingxue yu zhengzhi* 西漢經學與政治. Beijing: Duli chubanshe, 1945.
——. "*Zhouli* de neirongfenxi jiqi zhuzuo shidai" 《周禮》的內容分析及其著作時代. In *Ershi shiji Zhonggguo lixue lunji* 二十世紀中國禮學論集. Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 1998, 173–198.
Yao, Juan 姚娟. "*Xinxu Shuoyuan* wenxian yanjiu" 《新序》《說苑》文獻研究. Ph.D. Diss., Central China Normal University, 2009.
Yao, Zhuming 姚竹銘. "The Synthetic Tongue: Speech, Writing, and 'Speech Writings' in Early China." Ph.D. Diss., Princeton University, 2023.
Yi, Xiaoping 易小平. *Xi Han wenxue biannianshi* 西漢文學編年史. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012.
Yin, Yushan 尹玉珊. "Han Wei zishu fancheng 'xinshu' zhi yuanqi ji qi shidai yiyi" 漢魏子書泛稱"新書"之緣起及其時代意義. *Xueshu luntan* 2011.7: 86–89.
——. "Han Wei zishu yanjiu" 漢魏子書研究. Ph.D. Diss., Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2010.
Yu, Jianping 余建平. "'Tianren sance' wenben shunxu kaobian: jianlun Dong Zhongshu xianliang duice zhi niandai" "天人三策"文本順序考辨——兼論董仲舒賢良對策之年代. *Beijing shehui kexue* 2019.6: 53–63.
Yu, Jiaxi 余嘉錫. *Gushu tongli* 古書通例. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987.
——. *Muluxue fawei* 目錄學發微. Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2004.
——. *Siku tiyao bianzheng* 四庫提要辨證. Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 2004.
Yu, Yingshi 余英時. *Shi yu Zhongguo wenhua* 士與中國文化. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1987.
Yu, Zhihui 俞志慧. "Yu, yizhong gulao de wenlei: yi yanlei zhiyu weili" 語，一種古老的文類：以言類之語為例. *Wenshizhe* 2007.1: 5–22.
Yue, Qingping 岳慶平. "Dong Zhongshu duice niandai bian" 董仲舒對策年代辨. *Beijing daxue xuebao* 1986.3: 114–120.

Zhan, Yinxin 詹鄞鑫. *Shenling yu jisi: Zhongguo chuantong zongjiaozonglun* 神靈與祭祀：中國傳統宗教綜論. Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1992.
Zhang, Baiheng 張白珩. “Shilun Liu Xiang *Xinxu* chengshu zhi tili” 試論劉向《新序》成書之體例. *Sichuan shiyuan xuebao (shehui kexueban)* 1980.3: 18–23.
Zhang, Fengyi 張峰屹. “Liang Han chenwei kaolun” 兩漢讖緯考論. *Wenshizhe* 2017.4: 5–24.
Zhang, Haifang 張海防. “Han Xin xihe guan shezhi kao: jianlun Wang Mang guanzhi gaige zhong de jin gu wen jing” 漢新羲和官設置考——兼論王莽官制改革中的今古文. *Guanzi xuekan* 2015.3: 120–123.
Zhang, Hongxing 張洪興. “*Liezi* zhenwei kaolun” 《列子》真偽考論. *Zhuzi xuekan* 2022.1: 76–95.
Zhang, Peilin 張沛林. “Xian Tang liujing cidi kao” 先唐六經次第考. *Jingxue wenxian yanjiu jiyan* 2017.1: 76–95.
Zhang, Rongming 張榮明. *Zhongguo de guojiao: cong shanggu dao Dong Han* 中國的國教——從上古到東漢. Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe, 2001.
Zhang, Shunhui 張舜徽. *Wenxianxue lunzhu jiyao* 文獻學論著輯要. Xi’an: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1985.
Zhang, Xueqian 張學謙. “Dong Han tuchen de chengli jiqi guannianshi bianqian” 東漢圖讖的成立及其觀念史變遷. *Wenshi* 2019.4: 51–67.
Zhang, Zhenglang 張政烺. “‘Chunqiu shiyu’ jieti”《春秋事語》解題. *Wenwu* 1977.1: 36–39.
Zhao, Lu, *In Pursuit of the Great Peace: Han Dynasty Classicism and the Making of Early Medieval Literati Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019.
Zhao, Yi 趙翼. *Nian er shi zhaji jiaozheng* 廿二史札記校正. Annot. Wang Shumin 王樹民. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984.
Zhao, Yi 趙毅 and Wang Yanhui 王彥輝. “Liang Han zhiji renxin si Han sichao pingyi” 兩漢之際“人心思漢”思潮評議. *Dongbei shida xuebao* 1994 (06): 1–6.
Zhao, Youlin 趙友林. Chunqiu *sanzhuan shufa yili yanjiu*《春秋》三傳書法義例研究. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2010.
Zhong, Zhaopeng 鍾肇鵬. “*Qilüe Bielu* kao”《七略》《別錄》考. *Wenxian* 1985.3: 59–73.
——. and Zhou Guidian 周桂鈿. *Huan Tan Wang Chong pingzhuan* 桓譚王充評傳. Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1993.
Zhou, Guidian 周桂鈿. *Dong Zhongshu yanjiu* 董仲舒研究. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2012.
Zhou, Haifeng 周海鋒. “Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian ‘Jinbulü’ yanjiu” 嶽麓書院藏秦簡《金布律》研究. *Jianbo yanjiu* 2017.1:176–195.
Zhu, Weizheng 朱維錚. *Zhou Yutong jingxue shilun* 周予同經學史論. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chunbanshe, 2010.
Zhuge, Junyuan 諸葛俊元. *Xi Han xueshu yu zhengzhi quanli bianqian* 西漢學術與政治權力變遷. Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 2015.
Zuo, Songchao 左松超. “Lun Liu Xiang bianzhuan *Shuoyuan*” 論劉向編撰說苑, *Xiangguang jinhui xueyuan xuebao* 13 (1986): 51–56.
——. *Shuoyuan jizheng* 說苑集證. Taipei: Guoli bianyiguan, 2001.