In Pursuit of the Great Peace: Han Dynasty Classicism and the Making of Early Medieval Literati Culture

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Abstract
This dissertation is focused on communities of people in the Han dynasty (205 B.C.-A.D. 220) who possessed the knowledge of a corpus of texts: the Five Classics. Previously scholars have understood the popularity of this corpus in the Han society as a result of stiff ideology and imperial propaganda. However, this approach fails to explain why the imperial government considered them effective to convey propaganda in the first place. It does not capture the diverse range of ideas in classicism. This dissertation concentrates on Han classicists and treats them as scholars who constantly competed for attention in intellectual communities and solved problems with innovative solutions that were plausible to their contemporaries. This approach explains the nature of the apocryphal texts, which scholars have previously referred to as shallow and pseudo-scientific. It also reveals the root of the Scripture of the Great Peace in Han classicism and apocryphal texts. This dissertation explores how the study of the classics increasingly came to shape the literati culture and communities of the Han Empire and Early Medieval China. It shows that classicism led to innovations in solving crises of the empire as well as envisioning an ideal empire. The popularity of classicism gave birth to a peripatetic and epistolary scholarly culture marked by the use of calligraphy and poetry in the social life of newly mobile teachers and disciples throughout imperial China. These men strove to be erudite advisors to the destined emperor who would work to achieve the Great Peace, the utopian goal of a human society fully in accordance with Heaven.

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IN PURSUIT OF THE GREAT PEACE: HAN DYNASTY CLASSICISM AND THE
MAKING OF EARLY MEDIEVAL LITERATI CULTURE

Lu Zhao
A DISSERTATION
in
East Asian Languages and Civilizations
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in
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Acknowledgment

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I would like to thank my parents, who are always caring and supportive of my career choice. Without their moral and material support, I would not be able to start graduate school, let alone finish it. Their hard work and pursuit of professional excellence in their own field have set up a paragon for me to follow.

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Niu, Jeff Rice, Eiren Shea, Jonathan Smith, Song Yunu, Ori Tavor, Maddie Wilcox, and Zhou Yi. They have provided me tremendous support of various kinds. Their care and love transform all the hardships of my Ph. D. life into a beautiful, memorable journey.
ABSTRACT

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Lu Zhao
Paul R. Goldin

This dissertation is focused on communities of people in the Han dynasty (205 B.C.–A.D. 220) who possessed the knowledge of a corpus of texts, the Five Classics. Previously scholars have understood the popularity of this corpus in the Han society as a result of stiff ideology and imperial propaganda. However, this approach fails to explain why the imperial government considered them effective to convey propaganda in the first place. It does not capture the diverse range of ideas in classicism. This dissertation concentrates on Han classicists and treats them as scholars who constantly compete for attention in intellectual communities and solving problems with innovative solutions that were plausible to their contemporaries. This approach explains the nature of the apocryphal texts, which scholars previously have referred as shallow and pseudo-scientific. It also reveals the root of the Scripture of the Great Peace in Han classicism and apocryphal texts. This dissertation explores how the study of the classics increasingly came to shape the literati culture and communities of the Han Empire and Early Medieval China. It will show that classicism led to innovations in solving crises of the empire as well as envisioning an ideal empire. The popularity of classicism gave birth to a peripatetic and epistolary scholarly culture marked by the use of calligraphy and poetry in the social life of newly mobile teachers and disciples throughout imperial China. These men strove to be erudite advisors to the destined emperor who would work to achieve the Great Peace, the utopian goal of a human society fully in accordance with Heaven.
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Introduction

Scriptures are an intriguing phenomenon in both the ancient and modern world. From the Talmud, Bible, and Qur’an to the Chinese classics, they seem to provide unfailing guidance for the people who are devoted to them. More than that, they have been responsible for forming communities, shaping social identities, and stimulating intellectual innovations throughout history. If anyone doubts the role of scriptures in the modern world, they could look to the curriculum of Sunday schools in America, the reading lists that Chinese teachers make for their students to understand Chinese culture, and what the adult-to-be will read in their Bar or Bat Mitzvah. In the ancient world, from the innovation of the codex to Eusebius’ library, from the formation of Medieval European countries to the Muslim Conquests, scriptures played an indispensable role.

This dissertation is about the production of knowledge based on scriptures and its impacts. I will focus on a corpus of texts labeled as the “classics,” or jing, in the Han dynasty (205 B.C.–A.D. 220). These classics were the backbone of elite culture, education, and politics in imperial China. However, few have paid full attention to the vital and exciting period when scholar-officials were still learning to rule the very first mature empire, when not only the concept of what the ideal empire should be was far from settled, but also the framework of the debate had yet to be established. This was a time when Confucianism was still untamed and subversive, and when groups of intellectuals used the classics of antiquity to envision an unprecedented type of state. My dissertation explores how the study of the Confucian classics increasingly came to shape the intellectual communities of the Han Empire. This trend led to innovations in the understanding of dynastic cycles based on the Mandate of Heaven in various commentarial traditions and prophecies. My dissertation will show that this new intellectual fashion gave birth to a peripatetic and epistolary scholarly culture marked by the use of calligraphy and poetry in the social life of newly mobile teachers and

1 This corpus of texts is often referred to as the “Confucian classics.” However, I have avoided using the terms “Confucian” and “Confucianism” loosely. By saying “Chinese classics,” I indicate the corpus of texts incorporated in a collection edited by Ruan Yuan, as mentioned in chapter 1, page 6. For my use of the term “Confucian,” see chapter 1, pages 33 to 38.
2 For how Yemeni judicial process relied on Qur’an, see Brinkley Messick, The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
4 For how I use the term “Confucianism,” see note 211 in chapter 1, page 43.
disciples throughout imperial China. These men strove to be erudite assistants to the
destined emperor, who worked to achieve the Great Peace, the utopian goal of a
human society fully in accordance with Heaven that Chinese scholars returned to
again and again over time.

Previous scholarship on Han classicism has long focused on the controversy
between the “new script” and “old script” groups of texts. Modern scholars have
treated scholars of these items as two mutually hostile schools. Meanwhile, many
modern scholars also equate Han classicism with Confucianism, and treat classicism
as static political propaganda and an obstacle to innovation. Recently, Michael Nylan
has questioned the significance of the old-script vs. new-script controversy, and
Michael Loewe has expressed doubts about the existence of a clear-cut definition of
“Confucianism.”5 Nevertheless, while scholars have cast old models away,
perspectives to better define the intellectual world of Chinese late antiquity and the
nature of the texts known as “old-script” classics have yet to be established. My
dissertation is an attempt to examine the dynamic between scholars, canonical texts,
intellectual innovations, and political reality. In this dynamic, classicism is not a form
of floating, immutable knowledge. Instead of treating Han classicists as thoughtless
puppets in strict transmission lines, I see them as individuals in intellectual
communities learning from, making alliances with, and competing with each other
over interpretations of the classics. Through the constant appropriation of the classics,
inTELlectual innovations took place among these communities, and thus gradually
formed the political and literati culture that became fundamental to imperial China.
This literati culture and many elements in Han hermeneutics of the classics became
sources of inspiration for Daoist sects after the collapse of the Han dynasty.

In order to examine how social dynamics stimulated intellectual innovation in
this period, I adopt Randall Collins’ Interaction Ritual Chains theory (IR theory). IR
theory is particularly useful for generating a macro-sociological landscape that
describes general intellectual trends and social conditions, while still giving weight to
micro-investigations of individuals’ philosophies, scholarship, and their relationships
with their intellectual fellows. IR theory assumes that during positive personal
contacts, individuals receive attention, or Emotional Energy (EE). The accumulation
of EE not only leads to further contacts and the recharging of EE, but also makes the

5 See chapter 1, page 36.
topics and objects of those personal interactions “sacred objects,” which certain
groups of individuals come to consider special and essential. In Collins’ *The
Sociology of Philosophies*, the application of IR to the intellectual world predicts
ubiquitous patterns of scholarly innovation, rather than the static transmission of
knowledge.⁶ These innovations are primarily due to competition for attention. In
order to receive attention from others, scholars need to prove that their approaches to
significant topics are important. The significance of the topics and the plausibility of
their approach are based on appropriations of sacred objects shared by their
intellectual communities. This theory reveals the driving force for innovations and
their origin *inside* scholarly groups. Hence IR not only provides me with a theoretical
basis to focus on the internal dynamics of intellectual communities as the primary
stimulus of change in Han classicism, it also allows me to link the scholarship of
individuals or single innovations together as elements in series of changes.

In order to examine these issues more thoroughly, I undertake a comprehensive
exploration of a previously obscure corpus of texts called apocrypha (*chenwei* 諸緯).
This corpus emerged from the first century CE as commentaries on the classics,
purportedly revealed by Heaven. Apocrypha contain anecdotes, instructions for rituals,
and miscellaneous passages reflecting how their authors understood the cosmos,
history and the Great Peace. Furthermore, apocryphal texts can provide invaluable
evidence to fill the gaps in our knowledge of the connections between Han-dynasty
classicism and various Daoist cults after the Han dynasty. However, besides Jack
Dull’s dissertation “A Historical Introduction to the Apocryphal (Ch’an-wei) Texts of
the Han Dynasty” from 1966, there is no substantial study of the apocrypha in
Western languages. In my dissertation, I put apocryphal texts and other traditionally
more orthodox commentarial traditions together to show a more complete picture of
the Han intellectual world. More importantly, I show that so-called “Confucian” and
“Daoist” scholars actually had much common ground in Eastern Han (A.D. 25–220)
written culture. The labeling of intellectuals as members of these two “intellectual
schools” does not accurately reflect their ideas or social groupings. This dissertation
uses primary material from three sources.

In my dissertation, the first chapter is a literature review on the relevant
scholarship in the recent hundred years. This review will clarify many perplexing

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⁶ See chapter 1, page 43 to 45.
terminologies. More importantly, it will better present why my approach is necessary and useful in comparison with the previous approaches. The second chapter deals with how groups of literati contested the understanding of the classics as part of their struggles to establish the Great Peace in the late Western Han (206 B.C.—A.D. 9). The third chapter explores the formation of apocryphal texts and its relationship to literati’s knowledge about the classics in the beginning of the Eastern Han. The fourth chapter surveys the interaction between politics and culture, arguing that Emperor Ming (r. A.D. 58–75) adopted apocrypha to depict himself as a latter-day Confucius in order to claim that he could bring the Great Peace. The fifth chapter is a social history about how the recruitment of the Han bureaucracy led to the flourishing of Eastern Han local academies, which encouraged more frequent travel, contacts among literati, and greater accessibility of texts, and which consequently changed literati’s understanding of classics and literary works. A trend of erudition emerged from such a context. The last chapter shows how these changes led important second-century commentators to pursue the Great Peace by adhering to the spirit of ancient texts, rather than following them to the letter. In this chapter, we will see how one of the earliest Daoist scriptures, the Scripture of the Great Peace (Taiping jing 太平經), was tightly connected to the world of the classics.
I. The Problems of Contract-Debate Model and its Solution

Classicism played an essential part in the imperial Chinese educational system, philosophy, and literati culture in general. Various kinds of categorizations, commentarial traditions, and glossaries precipitated jargons that are opaque to modern scholars of classicism. Meanwhile, the scholarship on this topic is extremely abundant, many authors of which were the intellectual descendants of certain schools of classicism in late imperial China. Therefore, in many cases, their stances further complicated the already perplexing history of Han classics. Therefore, before moving to Han classicism, we need to first examine the previous scholarship on the topic in order to gain a clear picture of classicism in imperial China in general and the issues of Han classicism raised by previous scholarship.

In the first section of this chapter, we will have a brief introduction to the classics we will focus on, as well as how scholars of imperial China, especially those of the Qing dynasty (A.D. 1644–1912), usually perceived them in the context of their academic trends. Then, in the second section we will explore modern Chinese scholarship, which was adopted from their Qing intellectual predecessors. Many of them have an approach to Han classicism that I call the “contrast-debate model,” in which scholars assume that there were two separate and opposite camps, namely new script and old script schools, promoting two sets of the classics in the Han dynasty. In the third section, we will review Japanese scholarship, and their construction of the “Confucianization of the Han Empire.” In the next section, we will see Western scholars’ reflections on the issues brought up by Chinese and Japanese scholars, particularly the contrast-debate model and problems caused by a loose use of “Confucianism.” The last section will introduce the approach this dissertation adopts, namely Interaction Ritual Chains theory, and the significance of this approach for solving the problems previous scholarship is facing.

1. The Emergence of the New and Old Script Controversy in the Qing Dynasty

Qing scholars are largely responsible for shaping the general ideas modern scholars possess of the classics and new/old script schools of the Han dynasty. These
ideas thus serve as the foundation of modern scholarship. Therefore, before proceeding, I will briefly introduce the tradition of the study of the classics (Jing Xue 經學) from the mid-Qing to early Republican period. Firstly, what were the classics (jing 經) in the eyes of Qing scholars? Based on the reprint of the Southern Song dynasty version of *Thirteen Classics with Commentaries and Sub-commentaries (Shisan jing zhu shu 十三經注疏)* in the 21st year of Jiaqing 嘉慶 (A.D. 1816), a project spearheaded by Ruan Yuan 阮元 (A.D. 1764–1849),¹ the classics are most essentially a corpus of the following texts:

The *Changes of Zhou* (*Zhou yi* 周易, usually referred as *Yijing 易經*, or the *Classic of Changes*)²

The *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu 尚書*)³

The Mao tradition of the *Book of Poetry* (*Mao Shi 毛詩*, initiated by Mao Heng 毛亨 of the early Western Han, in which Mao refers to a commentary tradition of the *Book of Poetry*, or the *Classic of Poetry*, *Shijing 詩經*)⁴

The *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli 周禮*)

The *Ceremonies and Rites* (*Yili 儀禮*)⁵

The Zuo Tradition of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu Zuo zhuan 春秋左傳*)

The Gongyang Tradition of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan 春秋公羊傳*)

The Guliang Tradition of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu Guliang zhuan 春秋谷梁傳*)⁶

The *Analects* (*Lunyu 論語*)

The *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing 孝經*)

¹ Ruan Yuan 阮元 ed., *Shisan jing zhushu 十三經注疏* (Commentaries and sub-commentaries of the Thirteen Classics) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980), 1-2.
³ For the textual issues and different images of sage kings in different chapters of the text, see Nylan, *The Five “Confucian Classics,”* 120-67.
⁴ For the formation and the use of poems in the text, see Nylan, *The Five “Confucian Classics,”* 72-119.
⁵ For a summary of the content of the *Rites* corpus, see Nylan, *The Five “Confucian Classics,”* 168-201.
⁶ For some important concepts and the historical significance of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the three commentarial traditions, see Nylan, *The Five “Confucian Classics,”* 253-306.
It is obvious from the list that the “Thirteen Classics” here are not “classics” in the strict sense. For example, the text of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* appears three times in the list with three different commentarial traditions. Therefore, what are counted three times here actually are the three commentarial traditions instead of the plain text of the *Annals*.

**Layers in the “Thirteen Classics”**

The “Thirteen Classics” as a group of texts can be loosely divided into distinct layers based upon how people in Chinese history related them to each other. This corpus, the “Thirteen Classics,” contains corpora that were advocated at one time or another as the subject of “the study of Classics,” now referred to as Jing Xue 經學, which aimed at illuminating the classics written by the ancient sages. Since people from different periods had different ideas of what the classics are and how they ought to be understood, we get various theories and lists of the classics. The list of the “Thirteen Classics” with certain commentarial traditions is thus the one accepted by the imperial government of the Qing dynasty and many Qing scholars. It is more a reflection of and compromise of the previous traditions than a pure invention by the Qing scholars.

For example, if we turn to the *Annotated Catalog of the Complete Library of the Four Treasures* (Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao 四庫全書總目提要) completed in the 47th year of Qianlong 乾隆 (A.D. 1782), we would find several layers in the “Thirteen Classics” corpus. The first layer is the “Five Classics” section, including the

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7 People from different time periods of Chinese history might have different understanding of what should be “classics.” Nevertheless, the “classics” (with various names, such as “Liu yi 六藝, or “Jia bu 甲部” as a bibliographical category has existed since the Western Han dynasty in Liu Xiang’s 劉向 “Qi lüe 七略, or the “Seven Epitomes.” See Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫, *Mulu xue fawei 目錄學發微* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2007), chart following page 174.

8 For example, Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (A.D. 1613–1682) argues that the learning of the Classics is the learning of the principle, but after one hundred and fifty years’ intellectual development, Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (A.D. 1738–1801) argues that the learning of the Classics is the learning of history. See Yu Ying-shih, “Zhang Xuecheng Versus Dai Zhen: A Study in Intellectual Challenge and Response in Eighteenth-Century China,” in Philip J. Ivanhoe ed., *Chinese Language, Thought, and Culture* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 127-38.
Classic of the Changes, Book of Documents, Classics of Poetry, the three Rites corpus and Spring and Autumn Annals. This section has existed since Liu Xiang 劉向 (ca. 77–6 B.C.) and his son Liu Xin’s 劉歆 (50 B.C.–A.D. 23) bibliography, “Seven Epitomes” (“Qi lüe” 七略), later included in Ban Gu’s 班固 (A.D. 32–92) History of Han (Han shu 漢書).⁹ One of the major differences between the bibliography and the Annotated Catalogue is that in the “Seven Epitomes,” the section that contains the Five Classics is called “Six Arts” 六藝, in which texts about the Music are also included. However, the author already mentions that the learning of Music became “more and more obscure.”¹⁰ Editors of the Annotated Catalogue put Music as an independent section, and mention that there was no such a text called “Classic of Music” like other classics.¹¹

In addition, the Classic of Filial Piety is attached to this category in both texts. The “Seven Epitomes” explains the significance of the Classic of Filial Piety by pointing out the special role of filial piety among the Heaven and Earth. It also considers Confucius the author of the text.¹² In the Annotated Catalogue, the author of that section no longer believes Confucius as the author. The Classic of Filial Piety was no longer part of the civil examination inventory in the Qing dynasty.¹³ Nevertheless, it is still one of the Classics preserved in Ruan Yuan’s reprint of the Thirteen Classics.

The second layer is the “Four Books” (Si Shu 四書) section. It includes the Analects, the other text attached to the section of Six Arts in the “Seven Epitomes,” Mencius, and two chapters from the Records of Rites: “The Doctrine of Mean” (“Zhongyong” 中庸) and “The Great Learning” (“Daxue” 大學). Zhu Xi 朱熹 (A.D. 1130–1200) from the Southern Song dynasty (A.D. 1127–1270) strongly advocated this curriculum along with his commentaries on these four texts. Later the Mongols adopted his curriculum and the philosophy represented by his lineage into

⁹ See “Jing bu” 經部 (The category of the classics), Yong Rong 永瑢 etc., Siku quanshu zongmu 四庫全書總目 (The catalogue of the Complete Library of the Four Treasure) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1965), 1.
¹¹ See “Jing bu, Yue lei” 經部 樂類 (The section on Music in the category of the classics), Yong Rong, Siku quanshu zongmu, 320.
¹² Ban Gu, “Yi wen zhi,” Han shu, 30: 1719.
¹³ Benjamin Elman, A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 736-7.
the civil examination system. In spite of the growing dissatisfaction with Zhu Xi’s philosophy and his approach to the Four Books, the Four Books with Zhu Xi’s commentary became part of the civil examination system for most of the period from the Yuan dynasty (A.D. 1271–1368) to the year the civil examination was abandoned (A.D. 1905).

The third layer visible in the Annotated Catalogue is Er ya, a glossary text compiled under the section of “Elementary Learning” (Xiao Xue 小學) in the Annotated Catalogue. According to the editor of this section, the “Elementary Learning” is supposed to be about texts for learning the writing system and vocabularies. This theory agrees with the definition of the same section in “Seven Epitomes.” However, counterintuitively, in the “Seven Epitomes,” Er ya is not listed under the section of the Elementary Learning, but “Classic of Filial Piety.” It is unclear why this is the case. However, judging from the other titles in this section, this section includes texts that cannot be categorized into other sections. As we will see below, the Old Script and New Script controversy driven by the Qing scholars surrounds the first layer, that of the Five Classics.

**Intellectual Transitions of the Qing Dynasty**

Although the first class Qing scholars studied all the “Thirteen Classics” among other ancient texts, with different intellectual background, they emphasized distinct corpora of texts, commentarial traditions, and methodologies. In the late Ming dynasty, Wang Yangming’s 王陽明 (A.D. 1472–1529) philosophy became popular among the literati. Wang’s intellectual descendants extended his philosophy to the extreme, denying the value of ancient classics, and the distinction between good and evil. Dissatisfied with these polemic arguments, some literati criticized such tendencies,
and sought means of correcting it. Huang Zongxi (A.D. 1610–1695), for example, pointed out that Wang Yangming’s pondering on the human mind is based on scrutinizing the classics. Huang thus encouraged scholars to go back to the classics and histories. With the same concern, Gu Yanwu (A.D. 1613–1682) argued that scrutinizing the classics was the prerequisite for understanding the Dao, or the Way. More specifically, the method for doing so was to determine the ancient pronunciations of the words and then scrutinize texts. The Han classicists, especially Zheng Xuan’s (A.D. 127–200) commentaries became a crucial base of Gu’s understanding of the classics. Gu further incorporated Dao learning into his methodological framework with his famous slogan: “The learning of Dao is indeed the learning of classics.”

Gu and Huang’s proposals led to a reevaluation of many Song and Ming scholars’, especially Zhu Xi’s, philosophy and philological approach to the classics in the mid-Qing period. During this movement of reevaluation, Qing scholars labeled Zhu Xi and his Northern Song predecessors’ approach as the “learning of Song.” The critics of this approach disparaged it as deviant from the commentarial traditions of the Han dynasty and full of adulterating sayings. They accordingly called the methodology they preferred the “learning of Han,” implying their commitment to the Han commentarial traditions and philological methodologies.

It is noteworthy that the first several generations of the advocate of the learning of Han largely aimed at opposing the philological methods putatively characteristic of the learning of Song. Nevertheless, it does not mean that all of them accepted Han commentaries indiscriminately, or that they necessarily had a clear-cut preference among the Han

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19 Qian Mu, Zhongguo jin sanbai nian xueshu shi (A history of Chinese scholarship of the most recent three hundred years) (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 1966), 9-10.
20 Ibid., 25.
21 Ibid., 28-9, 31.
22 Ibid., 133. The “Dao” Gu Yanwu mentions here is in the context of Zhu Xi and the Dao learning. For a definition of Dao learning, the Dao in this context and other relevant terms, see, for example, Peter Bol, Neo-Confucianism in History (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 78-9.
23 Bol, Neo-Confucianism in History, 134.
24 See the entry “Han people commenting on the classics ("Han ren zhu jing" 漢人注經)” in Gu Yanwu, Ri zhi lu (The record of daily knowing) (Shanghai: Guji, 2006), 1487-92, esp. 1487.
25 Qian Mu, Zhongguo jin sanbai nian xueshu shi, 134.
26 Jiang Fan, Guochao Hanxue shicheng ji (The record of the learning of Han’s transmission lineages in our dynasty), in Qian Zhongshu ed., Hanxue shicheng ji (wai er zhong) 漢學師承記 (外二種) (The record of the learning of Han transmission lineages with two other works) (Beijing: Sanlian, 1998), 6.
27 Ibid., 7-8.
With renewed methodology and broadening perspectives, Scholars from the late Qianlong (A.D. 1736–1795) to the Jiaqing (嘉慶 (A.D. 1796–1820) reigns became dissatisfied with the label “learning of Han.” Some of them thought that this label could no longer accurately summarize their approach. Some of them thus substituted “learning of Han” with “Evidential Research” (考據). This term, which strongly implied a philological orientation, was not satisfactory to some of the scholars either. For instance, Jiao Xun 焦循 (A.D. 1763–1820), who had a strong affiliation with the Changzhou school (see below), argued that this “evidential research” cannot help us to understand why the sages wrote their words. The concern embedded in Jiao Xun’s criticism of the term is that their approach should not be merely about method; it ought to illuminate the intentions of the sages as well.

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The Changzhou School & New Script vs. Old Script Controversy

The reorientation toward sages’ message in the classics brought the Changzhou 常州 school, previously a marginal school in the intellectual atmosphere of Qianlong and Jiaqing period, into the center of academia from the Daoguang (A.D. 1821–1850) reign. As Benjamin Elman mentions, the Changzhou school was the designation of a Qing-dynasty intellectual school located in the modern city Changzhou 常州, Jiangsu 江蘇 province. It mainly indicates the branch of classical scholarship of the Zhuang 莊 family and their affiliates. In this school, the Gongyang commentary was the most crucial source for seeking the intention of

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28 See Luo Jianqiu 羅檢秋. Qianjia yilai Hanxue chuantong de yanbian yu chuancheng 乾嘉以來漢學傳統的衍變與傳承 (The evolution and transmission of the tradition of the learning of Han since Qianjia reign) (Beijing: Renmin daxue, 2006), 9. Gu Yanwu specifically says that the Han commentaries have their own advantages and disadvantages, and any given commentary might have mistakes. Gu Yanwu, Ri zhi lu, 453.

29 Luo Jianqiu, Qianjia yilai Hanxue chuantong de yanbian yu chuancheng, 11; Luo Zhitian 羅志田, “Fangfa cheng le xueming: Qingdai kaoju heyi cheng xue” 方法成了學名:清代考據何以成學 (Methodology becoming the name of a field: How Evidential Research became a field in the Qing dynasty), Wenyi yanjiu 2010.2: 24-31.

30 Jiao Xun 焦循, Diao gu ji 雕菰集 (The collection of carving millet) (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 1966), 215.

31 By using “Changzhou school” in the sense of an academic school, I follow Benjamin A. Elman’s designation of “school.” See his Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: The Ch’ang-chou school of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China (Berkeley: University of California Press), 4-5.

32 Luo Jianqiu, Qianjia yilai Hanxue chuantong de yanbian yu chuancheng, 12.

33 For more geographical information about the Changzhou school, see Elman, Classicism, Politics, and Kinship, xxxiii.

34 Many people from the Liu family, Zhuang’s most important affiliated family, also belong to the Changzhou school. See Ibid., 37-48, 59-73.
the sage, Confucius.  

Members of the Changzhou school in the Qianlong period such as Zhuang Cunyu 莊存與 (A.D. 1719–1788) did not intend to disparage other classics or commentarial traditions. However, certain parts of the classics were under severe appraisal by their contemporary and predecessors. Yan Ruoqu 閻若璩 (A.D. 1638–1704), in his Sub-commentary and Evidence on the Old Script [sections of] Book of Documents (Guwen Shangshu shuzheng 古文尚書疏證) and Hui Dong 惠棟 (A.D. 1697–1758), in his An Examination of the Old Script [sections of] Book of Documents (Guwen Shangshu kao 古文尚書考), forcefully demonstrates that the twenty-one chapters once identified in old script in the Book of Documents are forgeries. Wang Su 王肅 (A.D. 195–256) became the scapegoat in this case of forgery. The doubt extended to other old script classics including the Zuo tradition of the Spring and Autumn Annals and the Rites of Zhou. The forger of these texts became Liu Xin, who supposedly played a major role in Wang Mang’s usurpation.

Reacting to this doubt, the Zhuangs from the Changzhou school, especially Zhuang Cunyu and Zhuang Youke 莊有可 were cautious about completely abandoning the old script classics. Instead, they believed these texts did contain original information, but later on some scholars added, deleted, or rearranged certain parts of them to suit their own purposes. In other words, they saw the old script classics as “contaminated.” They thus turned to the “pure” portion of the classics and its commentarial traditions.

Liu Fenglu 劉逢祿 (A.D. 1776–1829), a grandson of Zhuang Cunyu, adopted

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35 Ibid., 172.
36 Ibid., 171.
37 For a brief summary of Qing scholars’ evaluation of the old script sections of the Book of Documents, see Edward L. Shaughnessy’s chapter “Shangshu 尚書 (Shu ching 書經)” in Michael Loewe eds., Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide (University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 383-5. For a study of the textual formation of the Book of Documents, see Michael Nylan, The Five “Confucian Classics,” 127-36. For Yan Ruoqu’s methodology and his contemporaries’ attitude toward the authenticity of the Documents, see Lin Qingzhang 林慶彰, Qing chu de qun jing bianwei xue 清初的群經辨偽學 (The study of classics’ authenticity in Early Qing) (Shanghai: Huadong shifan, 2011), 146-250.
38 I am certainly not denying the possibility of Wang Su as a forger, but I do not accept this theory as definite. I see this issue mainly as Qing scholars' attempt to explaining why the chapters Book of Documents are not consistent. For scholars’ changing evaluation of Wang Su as the forger, see Yu Wanni 屈萬里, “Yi Ding Yan Shangshu yu lun wei zhongxin kan Wang Su wei zao Guwen Shangshu zhuan shuo: cong kending dao fouding hou zhi sikao” 以丁晏《尚書餘論》為中心看王肅偽造《古文尚書傳》說——從肯定到否定後之思考 (Examining the theory of Wang Su forging the Old Script Book of Documents and its commentary by focusing on Ding Yan’s the Leftover Discussion on the Book of Documents: a pondering on the [changing attitude] from accepting to negating it), Zhongguo wen zhe yanjiu jikan 中國文哲集刊 37 (2010): 131-52.
his grandfather’s scholarship on the Gongyang tradition. He expressed his preference for the Gongyang tradition and He Xiu’s 何休 (A.D. 129–182) commentary on it with well-accepted philological methodologies and premises. Carrying on his predecessors’ search for the “pure” part of the classical tradition, Liu Fenglu systematically argued that the Western Han transmission of the Five Classics was pure and trustworthy. He also argued that He Xiu preserved the authenticity of the original teachings. He referred to this transmission line of the Five Classics in the Western Han as the New Script school. Old script classics like Zuo tradition and the Rites of Zhou thus became the tradition of the Old Script school, mainly forged by Liu Xin, and with the support of many Eastern Han scholars especially Zheng Xuan. Three beliefs of Liu Fenglu greatly influenced later generations of scholars in understanding Han classicism: 1) Western Han scholars transmitted the Five Classics in an exclusive, clear-cut manner that preserved the authenticity of the commentarial tradition of earlier generations, 2) Liu Xin was the “master of forgery,” responsible for ruining the authenticity of the transmission line with the manipulation of the old script classics, and 3) since the debate between Zheng Xuan, who had a preference for the Zuo tradition, and He Xiu, there has bad been a hostile relationship between the Han New Script scholars and Old Script scholars.

2. Depicting the Old and New Script Schools: the model of the Han Old/New Script controversy since the Twentieth Century

Pi Xirui and Ma Zonghuo: The 20th-Century Legacy of the Changzhou and Yangzhou Schools

In his A History of the Learning of Classics (Jingxue lishi 經學歷史) first published in 1907, Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 (A.D. 1850–1908) adopted many of Liu Fenglu’s

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40 For Liu’s scholarly orientation, see Qian Mu, Zhongguo jin sanbai nian xueshu shi, 526-32. For a detailed study on Zhuang Cunyu, Liu Fenglu, and the Changzhou “New script” school, see Elman, Classicism, Politics, and Kinship, 186-256.

41 Ruan Yuan did not include Zhuang Cunyu’s work in the Huang qing jing jie 皇清經解 (The explanation of the classics of the royal Qing) for Zhang did not use the “evidential research” methods. However, that is no longer a problem for Liu’s work. See Elman, Classicism, Politics, and Kinship, 221-2.

42 Elman, Classicism, Politics, and Kinship, 229.

43 Ibid., 250. For Liu’s attitude toward Liu Xin’s forgery of the Zuo tradition, see Liu Fenglu, Chunqiu Zuo zhuan kao zheng 春秋左傳考證 (The evidential examination of the Zuo tradition of the Spring and Autumn Annals), Huang Qing jing jie 皇清經解, vol.1295 (Gengshen bu kan ben, 1860). 6a.
assumptions. He believes that during Emperor Wu of Han’s time (r. 140–87 B.C.), the learning of classics was the “purest” (zui chun zheng 最純正). In transmitting the classics, Han scholars followed their masters’ teaching strictly. The dichotomy of the Old Script and New Script schools grew initially from the difference in script, but after Liu Xin’s advocacy of the old script classics, in the Eastern Han dynasty, the commentarial tradition pertaining to them also differed. Although he does not consider Liu Xin a villain for forging classics like Liu Fenglu and Kang Youwei did, Pi Xirui does think that Liu Xin managed to decode the old script, and invented explanations of it (chuang tong guwen 創通古文). The Old Script and New Script schools were still sharply divided until the appearance of Zheng Xuan’s commentary. For Pi Xirui, Zheng mixed the old script tradition with the new script one, making these traditions indistinguishable. He thus accuses Zheng Xuan of undermining Han classicism. Following the Changzhou school’s tradition, Pi Xirui also believes that Confucius wrote and compiled the Six Classics to transmit the ultimate principles to the later generations. He thus dismisses the theories that weight Duke of Zhou or the mysterious sage king Fu Xi 伏羲 over Confucius.

Not everyone agreed with the Changzhou school’s perspective. Beginning in the 18th century, the Yangzhou school, for example, favored the old script classics. The Liu family of the Yangzhou school from Liu Wenqi 劉文淇 (A.D. 1789–1854) to his great grandson, Liu Shipei 劉師培 (A.D. 1884–1919) among others, such as Yu Yue 俞樾 (A.D. 1821–1907), are useful examples. They did not take as dismissive a tone toward the new script tradition as the Changzhou school adopted toward the old script tradition, and often reacted strongly against such stridently formulated attacks on

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45 Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞, Jingxue lishi 經學歷史 (A history of the learning of classics) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2004), 41.
46 Ibid., 45.
47 Ibid., 54.
48 Ibid., 55.
49 Ibid., 100.
50 Ibid., 101.
51 Ibid., 105.
52 Ibid., 6-7. For the Changzhou school’s overall attitude toward Confucius and Duke of Zhou, see Elman, Classicism, Politics, and Kinship, 228.
53 Elman, Classicism, Politics, and Kinship, 9-11. For a survey of the Yangzhou school tradition, especially from Liu Wenqi 劉文淇 (A.D. 1789–1854) to his great grandson, Liu Shipei 劉師培 (A.D. 1884–1919), see Zhang Shunhui 張舜徽, Qing dai Yangzhou xueji 清代揚州學記 (The record of the Yangzhou school in the Qing dynasty) (Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue, 2005), 160-202. For Yu Yue’s attitude toward the classics, see Luo Jianqu, Qianjia yilai Hanxue chuantong de yanbian yu chuancheng, 260-2. For a study of Yangzhou school’s academic
the old script tradition. For example, from the last years of the 19th century to the early 20th century, Wei Yuan 魏源 (A.D. 1794–1857), Liao Ping 廖平 (A.D. 1852–1932), and Kang Youwei adopted Liu Fenglu’s understanding of Liu Xin as the forger of the Zuo tradition and other old script classics, implying that the transmission of the old script classics was impure. This culminated in Kang Youwei’s *An Examination of the Forged Classics of the Xin Learning* (Xin xue wei jing kao 新學偽經考), in which Kang Youwei reduces the value of the old script classics to nil.

However, in reacting to Kang’s polemic view, Liu Shipei of the Yangzhou school made a more moderate argument. He argued that the old script classics had transmission lineage in the Western Han dynasty too, but the Han government did not put old script lineages’ teachings in the official curriculum. Although Liu maintained that there was a division between an old script and a new script tradition, yet he explicitly argued that there was no division between those traditions before the Han dynasty.

The difference between the two traditions lay only in the writing disciplines and their relationship with other schools, see Feng Qian 冯乾, “Qing dai Yangzhou xuepai xueshu yuanyuan kaobian 清代扬州学派学术渊源考辨 (An examination of the Qing dynasty Yangzhou school and its origin), *Jingxue yanjiu luncong* 经学研究论丛, 15 (2008): 163-192. The author argues that the Yangzhou school derived from Dai Zhen’s 戴震 *Wujing yiyi 五經疑義* as his major evidence for the opposition. However, as Li Xueqin’s examples show, the strict opposition did not exist in Xu Shen’s work. See Li Xueqin 李學勤, “Jin gu wen bian yi 今古文辨義 (On the distinction between the meaning of old and of new script) in Fu Jie 傅傑 ed., *Zhang Taiyan xueshu shi lunji* 章太炎學術史論集 (A collection of Zhang Taiyan’s works on the history of Chinese scholarship) (Kunming: Yunnan, 2008), 455-461, esp. 460. For Zhang Binglin and his school’s influence in early 20th century, see Sang Bing 桑兵, *Wan Qing Minguo de xueren yu xueshu 晚清民國的學人與學術* (Scholars and scholarship in late Qing and the Republic period) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2008), 225-52.

56 See Liu Shipei 刘师培, “Han dai guwen xue bianyi 今古文辨義 (On the distinction between the meaning of old and of new script)” in Liu Shipei Quanji 刘师培全集 (The complete collection of Liu Shipei) (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao, 1997), 189.

Therefore, he argued, there was no tension or factionalism peculiar to these two traditions in the beginning of the Western Han dynasty. Liu found that during that time, scholars usually learned and transmitted the old script classics no matter what commentarial traditions they followed. He also argued against Wei Yuan’s theory that the Old Script schools dominated in the Eastern Han, and caused the Western Han lineage to perish. This does not mean that Liu Shipei did not have a preference for what he saw as two separate traditions; he preferred the old script tradition, for the new script tradition was largely associated with teachings outside the Confucian tradition, such as Zou Yan’s (fl. 4th B.C.) association of the Five Phases with Confucius and other sage kings. For Liu Shipei, Zou Yan’s bizarre theory was not part of the classics’ transmission tradition, but a notion that some Western Han scholars adopted to cater to the Han emperors. Liu Shipei, reacting to the arguments of the Changzhou school, used this evidence to insinuate that the new script classics’ transmission was not pure.

Upholding similar stance to that of Liu Shipei, Ma Zonghuo 馬宗霍 (A.D. 1897–1976) wrote another “history” of the learning of classics. In his *A History of the Learning of Chinese classics* (Zhongguo jingxue shi 中國經學史, 1936), Ma Zonghuo relates Liu Shipei’s theory of the old script classics’ transmission line to the dichotomy of official learning and private learning (guan xue/ si xue 官學/私學). He argues that the Han literati did transmit old script classics beginning in the early Western Han dynasty, but the Han government never institutionalized these schools of learning. Accordingly, Liu Xin did not invent the old script traditions, but simply tried to include them as official, institutionalized schools of thought. Following Liu

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58 Ibid., 181.
59 Ibid., 184.
60 Ibid., 186-8.
61 Ibid., 190.
62 Liu Shipei 劉師培, “Xi Han jinwen xue duo cai Zou Yan shuo kao” 西漢今文學多采鄭衍說考 (The examination of the issue that the new script learning of the Western Han largely adopted Zou Yan’s theory), in Zuoan ji 左盦集 (The collection of Zuoan), Liu Shipei Quanji 劉師培全集 (The complete collection of Liu Shipei) (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Yangdangxiao, 1997), 31-3.
63 The supporters of the old script classics do not necessarily use the same method to justify the authenticity of these texts. For example, Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 (A.D. 1848-1908), in his preface to the *Rectification of the meaning of Rites of Zhou*, writes that the Qin burning of books destroyed the *Rites of Zhou*, but people rediscovered this text from the wall of Confucius’ family house. Liu Xin did make his own commentary and explanation of this text for Wang Mang’s interest. However, Liu Xin neither forged the text, nor was his commentary an intentional misinterpretation of it. See Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, Zouli zhengyi 周禮正義 (The *Rectification of the meaning of Rites of Zhou*) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987), 2-3.
64 Ma Zonghuo 馬宗霍, *Zhongguo jingxue shi* 中國經學史 (A History of the Learning of Chinese classics) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1984), 41-2. Ma Zonghuo focuses on four pairs of concepts in the chapter about
Shipei, Ma Zonghuo believes that the Western Han followers of the new script classics were also well informed regarding the old script tradition. Their hostile attitude toward each other began in the Eastern Han dynasty.65 Ma Zonghuo follows Pi Xirui’s assumption that Han scholars strictly followed their masters’ teaching.66 He further agrees with Pi Xirui that Zheng Xuan integrated the old script tradition with the new script tradition. However, instead of lamenting the confusion of the clear-cut lineages, Ma Zonghuo celebrates Zheng Xuan and his predecessors’ eclecticism.67

It is clear that Pi Xirui favors the new script tradition, and Ma Zonghuo the old script tradition. Their works, however, hold many assumptions in common. Firstly, both of them believe that in the Han dynasty the old script and new script traditions were the only two camps of classical scholars. The various commentarial traditions belonged to either the former or the latter one. Secondly, despite contacts between the two traditions, carriers of each tradition transmitted their master’s teaching exclusively and faithfully. Thirdly, during the Eastern Han dynasty, the supporters of the new script tradition and of the old script tradition severely competed with each other. Fourthly, after Zheng Xuan integrated the two traditions, the boundary of the two camps became blurry, and eventually disappeared. Fifthly, both of them attribute the collapse of Han classicism to its scholasticism and its trivial, but longwinded commentarial style.68

Modern scholars adopt many of the above assumptions, especially the sharp contrast between the old script and new script tradition. Zhou Yutong 周予同 (A.D. 1898–1981), in his “Jing jin, guwen xue” 經今古文學 (The learning of old script an new script classics),69 focuses on the difference between the two traditions. Accepting Pi Xirui’s framework without necessarily dismissing the arguments of the supporters of the old script classics, he delivers the characteristics of the two

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65 Ibid., 45.  
66 Ibid., 50.  
67 Ibid., 46.  
68 Ibid., 58-60. Differing from Ma Zonghuo, Pi Xirui believes the confusion of the transmission lines led to this scholasticism. Pi Xirui, Jingxue lishi, 89-90.  
69 The article was first published in 1925, with the title “Jing jin, guwen zhi zheng ji yi tong” 經今古文之爭及其異同 (The controversy of the new script and old script traditions and their differences). See Zhou Yutong 周予同, “Jing jin, guwen xue” 經今古文學, in Jingxue shi lunzhu xuanji 經學史論著選集 (Shanghai: Shanghai renming, 1996), 1.
traditions by contrasting each of them and listing the debates of the two traditions.\(^{70}\) In his “The Foundation of the History of Chinese Classics” (“Zhongguo jingxue shi de jichu” 中國經學史的基礎), Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (A.D. 1904–1982) depicts the transmission line of all the received commentarial traditions in the Western Han dynasty in great detail.\(^{71}\) His thick textual study of the transmission lines is an elaboration of Pi/Ma’s model of the lineage of Han classicists. This contrast-debate model based on the presumption of seamless lineages became a standard theory of the Han classicism.\(^{72}\) For example, in the Renmin press’ newly reprinted *A History of Chinese Learning of Classics (Zhongguo jingxue shi 中國經學史)* in 2010, the section on Han classicism still focuses on the differences and conflicts between the old text and next text schools.\(^{73}\)

*The First Critiques of the Contrast-Debate Model: Qian Mu’s Criticism of Kang Youwei*

In 1930, Qian Mu 錢穆 (A.D. 1895–1990) published his “The Chronicle of Liu Xiang and his Son Liu Xin” (“Liu Xiang Xin fuzi nianpu” 劉向歆父子年譜), a systematic refutation of Kang Youwei’s theory that Liu Xin forged all the old script classics.\(^{74}\) The format of this article is annalistic: Qian first lists the year; then lists events concerning relevant people, especially Liu Xiang or Liu Xin; then quotes from

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\(^{70}\) See the list Zhou Yutong makes in ibid., 9.

\(^{71}\) Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, “Zhongguo jingxue shi de jichu” 中國經學史的基礎, in *Xu Fuguan jingxue shi liang zhong 徐復觀經學史兩種* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2005), 58-133.

\(^{72}\) This model becomes almost a cliché; for example, see Song Yanping 宋豔萍, *Gongyang xue yu Handai shehui 公羊學與漢代社會* (The Gongyang tradition and Han society) (Beijing: xueyuan, 2010), 135. Many other scholars, such as Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 and Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 also accept this view. For these scholars’ view and its relation to their political agenda, see Hans van Ess, “The Old Text/New Text Controversy: Has the 20th Century Got It Wrong?” *T’oung Pao* 80,1-3 (1994): 146-70. There are also revisionist views on the new/old script controversy. For example, Huang Zhangjian 黃彰健 argues that Liu Xin’s promotion of the old script classics was purely academic, but Wang Mang’s was to serve for his usurpation. See his *Jing jin gu wen wenti xinlun 經新古文問題新論* (New discussion on the issue of new and old script classics) (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 1982), 770.


\(^{74}\) See for example, Qian Mu 錢穆, “Liu Xiang Xin fuzi nianpu” 劉向歆父子年譜 (The chronicle of Liu Xiang and his son Liu Xin),“ in *Liang Han jingxue jin gu wen ping yi 兩漢經學今古文評議* (The evaluation and examination of the Han dynasty’s old and new script traditions in the learning of classics) (Beijing: Shangwu, 2001), 104-107, 118-9. For Qian Mu’s discontent with Kang Youwei’s theory and his historiography in general, see Li Fan 李帆, “Cong Liu Xiang Xin fuzi nianpu kan Qian Mu de Shixue linian 從《劉向歆父子年譜》看錢穆的史學理念” (Qian Mu’s historiography as reflected in his “The chronicle of Liu Xiang and his son Liu Xin”), *Shixue shi yanjiu* 118 (2005.2): 46-54.
Nevertheless, Qian Mu’s ambition is greater than simply criticizing Kang Youwei. By focusing on the difference between the beliefs of Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 B.C.), a follower of the Guliang tradition, and his son Liu Xin, a follower of the Zuo tradition, Qian Mu examines diachronic intellectual transitions through debates or conflicts at the end of the Western Han dynasty. Qian Mu differs from Pi Xirui and Ma Zonghuo in that he does not adhere to the assumption that the old script tradition and new script traditions were exclusive or static transmission lineages. He believes that the classicists did not stick to a single commentarial tradition, and the so-called “old script tradition” is merely a combination of several commentarial traditions shared by contemporary scholars. 75 The dichotomy of the old script and new script traditions is an invention of the Qing New Script school scholars such as Liao Ping. 76 At this point, Qian Mu’s argument seems to be little more than an extension of Liu Shipei and Ma Zonghuo’s theory that there was no division of the two traditions in the early Western Han dynasty; Qian Mu argues that this is true through the end of the Western Han period. However, Qian Mu actually goes further. In “The Chronicle of Liu Xiang and His Son, Liu Xin,” Qian Mu attempts to explicate why Liu Xin advocated the use of old script texts and why Wang Mang adopted Liu Xin’s ideas. Qian Mu’s theory is that the emergence of the old script tradition was an outgrowth of intellectual developments since Emperor Wu’s time (r. 140–87 B.C.), rather than part of Wang Mang’s scheme of usurpation. 77

Gu Jiegang's Study of the Han Classicism and his Emphasis on the Political Factor

Qian Mu states that the aims of his study are to override the old and new script

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75 Ibid., 151-2.
76 Ibid., 150.
77 In a comment on Kang Youwei’s theory about “chapter and verse” (zhang ju 章句), Qian Mu asks a rhetorical question: If Liu Xin did forged all the old script classics, why were the erudite scholars with comprehensive knowledge (boqia tong ru 博洽通儒) fooled by this, but the ignorant and ill-informed (gulou zishou zhe 孤陋自守者) were not? His question implies that the point is not that Wang Mang and Liu Xin succeeded in fooling these scholars, but they represented contemporary intellectual trends so that they could gain support. See ibid., 119. Qian Mu believes that Wang Mang’s adoption of the Rites of Zhou derives from the need for centralization. See ibid., 136-7.
dichotomy, which derived from Qing scholars’ perspectives, and to discover historical facts about Han classicism.\textsuperscript{78} The article was never intended to be a comprehensive study of Han classicism.\textsuperscript{79} With the same goal, Gu Jiegang, a pioneer of the “doubting antiquity” movement,\textsuperscript{80} extended his research on Han classicism to the span of two hundred and fifty years, from Emperor Wu’s reign (r. 140–87 B.C.) to the end of the Eastern Han dynasty (A.D. 220).\textsuperscript{81} He was not content with discovering how Qing scholars misinterpreted Han-dynasty usage of old script and new script text; more radical than Qian Mu, Gu examined who invented the commentarial traditions of the Han dynasty, and how they did so.\textsuperscript{82} In his \textit{The Masters of Methods and the Confucian scholars in the Qin and Han Dynasty} (\textit{秦漢的方士與儒生}),\textsuperscript{83} Gu Jiegang maintains a division between new script and old script traditions, but argues that both were corrupted in the service of political power. He argues that the new script traditions in the Western Han dynasty deviated from Confucius’ original teaching, because Confucian scholars adopted practices and thought from the masters of methods (\textit{fangshi 方士}). The latter group originated in the state of Qi and Yan during the Warring States periods (475–221 B.C.). They pursued practices for obtaining immortality, and further included Zou Yan’s theory of correlation between the cosmos and humans in their teachings. In the Western Han, especially during the reign of Emperor Wu, Confucian scholars started to adopt the practices and theories of masters of methods in order to suit the emperor’s preference.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 5-6.

\textsuperscript{79} For the background on why Qian Mu wrote this work and for people’s reviews of this work, especially Gu Jiegang 魏源剛, see Liu Wei 劉維, “‘Liu Xiang Xin fuzi nianpu’ de xuexue Beijing yu chushi fanxi”《劉向歆父子年譜》的學術背景與初始反響 (The academic background of “The Chronicle of Liu Xiang and his Son Liu Xin” and people’s review), \textit{Lishi yanjiu} 2001.3: 45-64.

\textsuperscript{80} For an insightful study of Gu Jiegang’s historiography, see Laurence A. Schneider, “From Textual Criticism to Social Criticism: The Historiography of Ku Chieh-kang,” \textit{The Journal of Asian Studies}, 28, 4 (1969): 771-788. For the a more comprehensive study of Gu Jiegang and his role in the field of Chinese history in China, see the same author, \textit{Ku Chieh-kang and China’s New History: Nationalism and the quest for Alternative Traditions}, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971. For the development of his and especially his followers’ ideas regarding the Critique of Ancient History (\textit{Gushi bian 古史辨}), see Luo Zhitian 羅志田, “\textit{Gushi bian de xueshu he sixiang Beijing: Shu Luo Xianglin shaoweiwenzhi de yi yan jiwen} 《古史辨》的學術和思想背景——述羅香林少為人知的一篇舊文 (The academic and intellectual background of \textit{Critiques of Ancient History}: On one of Luo Xianglin’s old papers that is not widely known), \textit{Shehui kexue zhanxian} 2008.2: 110-5.

\textsuperscript{81} “Xu 序 (Preface),” Gu Jiegang 魏源剛, \textit{Qin Han de fangshi yu rushing 秦漢的方士與儒生} (The masters of methods and the Confucian scholars) (Shanghai: Guji, 1998.), 4.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 4-5. Or as Schneider puts it: “The significant reality for Ku is no longer high antiquity, but the concept of the past in the minds of the scholars of middle antiquity.” See “From Textual Criticism to Social Criticism,” 781.

\textsuperscript{83} The book started with an outline of a class in 1933, and was published in 1935 in the name \textit{Handai xueshu shilue 漢代學術史略} (The outline of the history of Han scholarship) by Yaxiya press 亞細亞. The book was revised, and republished with the name \textit{Qin Han de fangshi yu rushing}. Gu Jiegang also wrote a preface to this version. Although at the end of his preface, he expresses his devotion to Marxism and Maoism, the main arguments of the book retain intact. See Gu Jiegang, \textit{Qin Han de fangshi yu rushing}, 6-7, 9-11.
This virtually made the former group indistinguishable from latter one. Since the emperor liked what he heard from these scholars, he appointed more and more of them to official positions, resulting in the institutionalization of a corrupt “new script” tradition. As for the old script texts, Gu further argues that at the end of the Western Han dynasty, while working at the imperial library, Liu Xin had the chance to manipulate texts in old script to forge the Zuo tradition in support of Wang Mang’s usurpation. Gu argues that the founder of the Eastern Han dynasty then had to use apocrypha, “something that is deviant and preposterous” (yaowang guaidan de dongxi 妖妄怪誕的東西) to claim legitimacy superior to that of Wang Mang. 

The conspiracy between the emperors and some literati made apocryphal texts dominant in the Eastern Han dynasty. However, Gu writes, these texts were too preposterous, so some scholars turned to the philological study of the old script texts to achieve a certain degree of objectivity (keguan xing 客觀性). 

By and large, Gu Jiegang’s ambition was to reevaluate ancient Chinese history. We can see that Gu Jiegang combined scholars’ criticism of both the new and old script traditions. In his arguments, we find Liu Shipei’s statement that new script tradition adopted Zou Yan’s theory. We also find the theory that Liu Xin was the forger of the Zuo tradition, advocated by Kang Youwei and others. In explaining the dynamics of Han-dynasty intellectual transitions, he not only added a political dimension, but further pointed out that the political factor was actually the driving force behind “Chinese history.” In his theory, there was a conspiracy between the emperor and intellectuals, in which the former became the ultimate beneficiary of enforcing intellectual schemes.

Gu Jiegang did not concentrate on depicting lineage lines, but neither did he deny the existence of a new script tradition lineage. However, both of these supposed traditions were low in his esteem, which distinguished him from Pi Xirui and Ma Zonghuo. In his theory, intellectuals and their thought were merely tools of

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84 Ibid., 6.
85 Ibid., 6-7.
86 Ibid., 8-9.
87 For previous scholars’ influence on Gu Jiegang, especially Kang Youwei and Cui Shu 翟述 (A.D. 1740–1816), and how Gu Jiegang accommodated their scholarship, see Schneider, “From Textual Criticism to Social Criticism,” 777-781.
88 See Schneider, “From Textual Criticism to Social Criticism,” 775.
89 The latter is thus the “parasite of the ruling class,” as Schneider translates. See ibid., 783, 785.
90 Though he considers it polluted by the thought of the masters of methods.
“ruling class,” and their thought mere political slogans. Following this trend, Xu Fuguan states that the learning of the classics was the “face” (mianmao 面貌) of Han politics. This theory implies that Han politics shaped Han classicism, and that classicism was thus of primary importance in the intellectual realm. The Renmin Press version of *A History of Chinese Learning of Classics* holds a similar view in explaining intellectual transitions in the Han. For example, in explaining the emergence of the old script classics, it says: “At the end of the Western Han, social crises increased, and the new script tradition could no longer provide any effective medicine to cure them. However, in the newly discovered old script classics [Han people] seemed to be able to find the institution, regulations, and model of reforms that could solve the crises.” Social factors incontestably affect intellectual developments.

Nevertheless, why certain plans “seemed to be” better than others has yet to be explained. As in this example, why would Wang Mang, Liu Xin, or whoever was of a similar mind think that using old script classics was a better idea than any other? Gu Jiegang’s theory of political interaction between the emperor and intellectuals does not demonstrate why any given ideology would have been considered convincing to scholars of various sophisticated schools of thought.

Gu Jiegang’s negative attitude toward apocryphal texts is also apparent, since he calls them “deviant and preposterous.” He attributes the popularity of these texts to the preferences of the founder of the Eastern Han, Liu Xiu’s 劉秀 (6 B.C.–A.D. 57), who found them politically useful. Nevertheless, this does not explain why adopting apocryphal texts could help the founder gain political power in the first place. Also, since the Eastern Han dynasty was a period of decentralization, the emperor

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91 Schneider, “From Textual Criticism to Social Criticism,” 786.
92 “Therefore, as for politics in the Western Han and the Han dynasty by and large, it took imperial authoritarianism as its polity, and Confucian teaching as the outline of ideology and the appearance of the polity.” (則西漢乃至兩漢的政治，是以皇權專制為政體……以儒家之教為思想的綱維，為政治的面貌). Xu Fuguan, “Zhongguo jingxue shi de jichu,” 163.
93 Wu Yannan etc. eds, *Zhongguo jingxue shi* 中國經學史 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin; Beijing: Renmin, 2010), 107.
could not publicly support apocrypha without taking his officials preferences into account. Even if we were to accept that the emperor could do so, we still could not explain why “mastering apocrypha” has positive connotations in epigraphs on memorial steles.\footnote{Ebrey, “The Economic and Social History of Later Han,” 122.} This throws doubt on Gu Jiegang’s theory that intellectuals were merely a tool for the ruling class. If we reduce apocryphal texts to political nonsense empowered by imperial authority as Gu Jiegang does,\footnote{Ibid., 123.} we will obscure the role these texts played among Han literati and the intellectual traditions they adopted, transmitted and appropriated. In summary, we must entertain other approaches that seek a more comprehensive causal analysis of Han classicism. Michael Nylan and Chen Suzhen are two scholars that have employed unique approaches to the topic.

In her “The chin wen/ku wen Controversy in Han Times,” Michael Nylan convincingly refutes the idea that there was an old script and new script controversy in the Han dynasty.\footnote{Michael Nylan, “The chin wen/ku wen Controversy in Han Times,” \textit{T'oung Pao} 80.1-3 (1994): 83-145.} She surveys, and challenges the main assumptions about the controversy that most modern scholars accept. The article begins by explaining modern scholars’ understanding of the term \textit{guwen} 古文, and points out that however differently many modern scholars use it, the term reflects the Old Script and New Script controversy in the Qing dynasty instead of the Han.\footnote{Ibid., 86, 136. Liu Lizhi 劉立志 gives a more comprehensive and systematic review of modern scholars’ theories of “guwen.” See his \textit{Han dai Shiijing xue shi lun} 漢代《詩經》學史論 (Discussions on the history of the Han learning of the Book of Poetry) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2007), 71-83.} \textit{Guwen} does not mean “a cohesive interpretive ‘school’” as Wang Guowei 王國維 argues, nor does it refer to “old books” as Qian Mu 錢穆 states.\footnote{Ibid.} To Nylan, the term simply means “old script,” which might be used to indicate “the Warring States script form that evolved in the Ch’i-Lu region,” “the canonical texts written in a pre-Ch’in script form,” “any text written entirely in the particular pre-Ch’in script form known as \textit{ku wen},” or “any text that included some sources treat authoritative texts preserving older traditions as \textit{ku wen}.”\footnote{Ibid., 90.} Han scholars might be familiar or use these old script texts, but it does not mean that there were transmission lines with defenders.\footnote{Ibid., 95.} Therefore, it is even harder to imagine hostile debates directly derived from the new script and old script
Michael Nylan also surveys three criteria for modern scholars to assign a Han scholar’s affiliation to either the new or old script tradition: (1) literary evidence hinting his affiliation to old script lineage, (2) whether gu xue 古學, literally “old learning,” is mentioned as part of his training, (3) his attitude toward apocryphal texts, and (4) his attitude toward the “commentaries by chapter and verse” (zhang ju 章句). For the first criterion, Nylan argues that many scholars after ca. 100 B.C. mastered both so-called old script and new script classics, meaning that this criterion does not point to a clear-cut lineage line. As for gu xue, the term itself is vague, and it refers to ancient learning without indicating specific lineages. She also disputes the last two criteria for both putatively “old script” and “new script” scholars use apocryphal texts and the “chapter and verse” as a commentarial style.

Nylan is not saying that we need better criteria to account for the new script and old script controversy. Instead, she is saying that the veracity of “new script” texts and “old script” texts was not the crux of contemporary scholarly controversies, and that we face more complex intellectual activities than the theory of new/old script controversy can predict. She argues that only after abandoning the old model will we be able to think about the question of what “learning” meant in Han China, what it constituted, and how it was associated with economical and political situations.

In his comprehensive study of Han political history, Spring and Autumn Annals and the Way of Han: Studies on Politics and Political Culture in the Two Han dynasty (Chunqiu yu “Han dao:” liang Han zhengzhi yu wenhua yanjiu 《春秋》與“漢道”——兩漢政治與政治文化研究), Chen Suzhen 陳蘇鎮 no longer adopts the model of new/old script controversy. He argues that the study of old script texts, centered on the Zuo tradition and the Rites of Zhou, did not have any fundamental differences from the study of new script texts. In fact, in the Eastern Han dynasty, “the

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103 Ibid., 117-122.
104 Ibid., 108.
105 Ibid., 109.
106 Ibid., 109-112.
107 Ibid., 112-115.
109 Ibid., 117.
110 Ibid., 134.
scholars of the study of old script,” or guwen xue jia 古文學家, agreed with Gongyang scholars’ many premises, especially rituals’ central position in state policy (Gongyang scholars supposedly belong to the “new text” school).  

Chen Suzhen further identifies two camps in the ru group with different political philosophies. One emphasized “transforming the people’s ethos by virtue” (yi de hua min 以德化民), the other “governing with rites” (yi li wei zhi 以禮為治). These two tendencies are responsible for forming the dynamics of political culture during the Han dynasty. They eventually combined with each other in the Eastern Han dynasty, and became a political theory that took the Great Peace as its ideal, and considered rites and laws as the means of achieving this ideal. Chen Suzhen, nevertheless, does not merely substitute the old dichotomy with his new one. He does not understand the political culture of the Han dynasty as a mix of several static sets of thought struggling for political dominance. Instead, he perceives Han political culture as a dialectical evolution.

3. Defining and Redefining the Confucian State: the Model of the Nationalization of Confucianism in the Han Dynasty and its Relation to Han Classicism

Rather than expanding the contrast-debate model of intellectual conflict in the Han dynasty, many scholars have turned to the similarities between participants in intellectual disputes. From this perspective, “Confucianism” and its permeation of

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111 See Chen Suzhen 陳蘇鎮, Chunqiu yu “Han dao:” liang Han zhengshi yu zhengshi wenhua yanjiu 《春秋》與“漢道”——兩漢政治與政治文化研究 (Spring and Autumn Annals and the way of Han: studies on politics and political culture in the two Han dynasty) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2011), 617. This book is based on many of Chen’s previous studies such as his “Han dao, wangdao, tiandaos: Dong Zhongshu Chunqiu gongyang shuo xintan” 漢道、王道、天道——董仲舒《春秋》公羊說新探 (The way of Han, the king and of Heaven: a new exploration of Dong Zhongshu’s Gongyang study), Guoxue yanjiu 國學研究, 2 (1994), 313-37, and “Chunqiu yu ‘Han dao’: Dong Zhongshu ‘yi de hua min’ shuo zaitan” 《春秋》與“漢道”——董仲舒“以德化民”說再探 (The Spring and Autumn Annals and the “Way of Han:” a reexamination of Dong Zhongshu’s theory of transforming [the ethos of] people by virtue), Guoxue yanjiu 國學研究, 4 (1997), 39-62
112 Ibid., 617.
113 Although in this section I will mainly introduce Japanese scholarship on the establishment of Confucian state, I do not mean to ignore scholars’ works on the old/new script issue such as Shigezawa Toshiō 重沢俊郎, “Kinko bungaku no honshitsu” 今古文學の本質 (The essence of old and new script learning), Shiragakukan 支那學 9-4 (1939): 669-697; Uchino Kumaichirō 内野熊一郎, Kansho keishogaku no kenkyū 漢初經書學の研究 (A study of the learning of classics in the beginning of the Han dynasty)  (Tokyo: Shimizu shoten, 1948), and more recently, Ikeda Shūzō 池田秀三, “Kieta Sashi setsu no nazo: Gokan Sashigaku no keisei tokushitsu” 消えた左氏說の謎——後漢左氏學的形成特質 (The riddle of the disappearance of the Zuo tradition: the characteristics of the formation of the learning of the Zuo in the Eastern Han), Nihon Chūgoku Gakkai hō 日本中國學會報 54 (2002), 16-31. In Ikeda's article, the author still considers the new/old script controversy the “underlying axis” (kijiku 基軸) of Eastern Han intellectual development. See his “Kieta Sashi setsu no nazo,” 16.

Han-dynasty thought has become the major preoccupation of their scholarship. In his *History of Chinese Philosophy*, Fung Yu-lan characterizes most of Chinese history, the period from Emperor Wu of Han to Kang Youwei as the “period of the study of the Classics.” With their devotion to the classics, the Confucian school took over the Han Empire. Fung Yu-lan calls this the “triumph of Confucianism.” That is to say, scholars who had different opinions on the classics in the contrast-debate model are now treated as a unified group under the name of Confucianism.

Many Japanese scholars now concentrate on the nationalization (*kokkyōka* 国教化) of Confucianism in Han China. This research evolved from the study of Han-dynasty *jūkyō* 儒教 (Confucianism), and *jūgaku* 儒學 (the study of Confucianism). In the first half of the 20th century, the popular assumptions among Japanese scholars about Confucianism in Han China were still that Emperor Wu installed Confucianism as a national school of thought, and that Dong Zhongshu was the main advocate and architect of this undertaking. Their main evidence in support of these assumptions was Emperor Wu’s establishment of the five official positions associated with each Confucian classic, the “Five Classics Erudites.” However, since the late 1960’s, scholars have started to rethink their assumptions about the emergence of Confucianism in Han China, and its nationalization. For example, in 1967, Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅 threw doubt on the establishment of the Five Classics Erudites and Dong Zhongshu as a crucial Confucian figure during emperor Wu’s time. He doubts the reliability of the main historical source *Han shu* 漢

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116 Ibid., 400-7, esp. 403.
117 For a detailed literature review of this issue, see Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅, “*Jukyō no kangakuka o meguru gakusetsu kenkyū* 儒教の官學化をめぐる學說研究略史 (A brief literature review on theories of the transformation of Confucianism into the official learning), in *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説の再検討 (A historical study of Confucianism during the Han dynasty: a reexamination of the standard theory of the transformation of Confucianism into the official learning) (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2005), 23-96.
118 Some of the Japanese scholars use the word *jūkyō* as “Confucian teaching,” other as “Confucian religion.” See Watanabe Yoshihiro 渡邊義浩, “*Nichin ni okeru *jūkyō no kokkyōka* o meguru kenkyū ni tsuite* 日本における“儒教の国教化”をおめぐる研究について (Japanese study of the nationalization of the Confucian teaching or religion), In Watanabe Yoshihiro 渡邊義浩 ed., *Ryō Kan no Jukyō to seiji kenryoku* 両漢の儒教と政治権力 (Confucianism in the Han dynasty and political power) (Tōkyō: Kyūko shoin, 2005), 258-60. Therefore, I use “Confucianism,” also a more general word to translate it.
119 See for example, Shigezawa Toshirō 重沢俊郎, “Dōchūjo kenkyū* 董仲舒研究 (The study of Dong Zhongshu) in *Shū Kan shisō kenkyū* 周漢思想研究 (The study of thought from Zhou to Han), 1943, 143-265. This is still the most popular view held by most Chinese scholars and many Western scholars. For a summary of Western scholars who hold this view, see the appendix Michael Loewe gives in his *Dong Zhongshu, a ‘Confucian’ Heritage and the Chunqiu Fanlu* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 6-18. The view is too common among the Chinese scholars for me to list their name here.
on this issue, and thus doubts the popular theory that Confucianism became dominant during Emperor Wu’s reign.\textsuperscript{120} Fukui’s article has sparked many debates and discussions. No matter how strongly one might disagree with Fukui’s own theory, the traditional theory of Confucianism as a national teaching has been challenged.\textsuperscript{121}

**National Religion: Itano & Nishijima’s Model**

Itano Chōhachi’s 板野長八 made another challenge to the old assumptions about the nationalization of Confucianism in his article from the 1970’s, “The Establishment of Confucianism” (Jukyō no kenkyū 儒教の成立),\textsuperscript{122} which is peppered with three words: supernatural (jujutsu 叩術), mysterious (shinpi 神秘) and extra-human (chou-ningen 超人間).\textsuperscript{123} He argues that Confucianism became important as a national religion during Emperor Guangwu’s reign (r. A.D. 25–57), when Guangwu employed apocryphal texts to deify the emperor as a heavenly, supernatural being.\textsuperscript{124} Other than simply seeing the acceptance of apocryphal texts as a tool for the ruling class as Gu Jiegang does,\textsuperscript{125} Itano understands their acceptance as the result of previous intellectual and social developments. He thus explains why Guangwu may have chosen this strategy, and why it would have been acceptable to the contemporary literati. According to his theory, two developments in the Western Han dynasty eventually led to the promotion of apocrypha. One of them was the promotion of the emperor’s power. Along with the diminishing of regional kings’ power, the Western Han Empire adopted filial piety as a moral ideal, and used the *Classic of Filial Piety* to consolidate the emperor’s authority.\textsuperscript{126} The other development was the inclusion of the mysterious and superhuman dimension into

\textsuperscript{120} Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅, “Jūkyō seiritsu shijo no nisan no mondai: gokyō hakase no secchi to Dōchūjo no jiseki ni kansuru gigi” 儒教成立史上の二三の問題——五經博士の設置と董仲舒の事跡に関する疑義 (A few questions about the history of the establishment of Confucianism: doubts about the opening of the position of Five Classics Erudites and Dong Zhongshu’s deeds), *Shigaku zasshi* 史學雜誌, 76, 1 (1967): 1-34.

\textsuperscript{121} For a summary of different theories on the Confucianism as a national teaching or religion, see Watanabe Yoshihiro, “Nihon ni okeru ‘jūkyō no kokkyōka’ o meguru kenkyū ni tsuite,” 264-9.


\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 494.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 526.

\textsuperscript{125} Itano does agree that Confucianism is a tool for the emperor and officials to control the commoners. See ibid., 493.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 501.
Confucian teaching. Texts like “The Commentary of the Classic of Changes” (“Yi zhuan” 易傳) and “The Grand Commentary on the Book of Documents” (“Shangshu dazhuan” 尚書大傳) are part of this development. The aim of including this dimension was to give superhuman authority to the emperor. During Guangwu’s time, therefore, these two developments merged into one in apocryphal texts, and hence led to the establishment of Confucianism as the national religion.

Itano’s study does share certain premises with previous scholarship. Although he does not believe that Dong Zhongshu managed to fully establish Confucianism during the Han dynasty, Itano still considers him a crucial advocate of it. For Itano, Dong Zhongshu played a crucial role in the shift of emphasis from the human to the superhuman realm. Itano argues that the ruling class’ desire for political control is the primary factor that explains contemporary intellectual developments, which echoes Gu Jiegang’s view. However, Itano does not consider emperors the stick by which to measure the ruling class. Instead, he argues that the ruling class contained various camps, and the emperor was one camp unto himself, which was sometimes subject to the actions of others. This is crucial because only then can one focus on the people who adopted, transmitted, and reproduced intellectual traditions without reducing their complex motivations and ideas to the mere desire for reproducing power. While he examines the intellectual traditions of the Han dynasty, Itano does not fall into longwinded descriptions of court debates or the trap of the old/new script dichotomy. He instead points out a general shift in emphasis from the human to the superhuman, sketches how these transitions took place, and shows how this change is reflected in contemporary texts.

Nishijima Sadao 西嶋定生 argues that the establishment of Confucianism as the national religion and the tendency to emphasize the supernatural willfully matured

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127 Itano believes that this dimension is not part of Confucius’ original teachings, but a result of compromise. See ibid., 508.
128 Ibid., 504.
129 Itano has a more elaborate study specifically on the importance of apocryphal texts for the establishment of Confucianism as a national religion, see his “Toshin to jukyō no seiritsu (1)” 図讖と儒教の成立（一）(Apocryphal texts and the establishment of Confucianism, 1), Shigaku zasshi 史學雜誌, 84:2 (1975): 125-73; “Toshin to jukyō no seiritsu (2)” 図讖と儒教の成立（二）(Apocryphal texts and the establishment of Confucianism, 2), Shigaku zasshi 史學雜誌, 84:3 (1975): 283-99.
130 Ibid., 516.
131 Ibid., 496-7.
132 Ibid., 493.
133 See Itano’s theory about the emergence of prophecy at the end of the Western Han dynasty and Wang Mang’s enthronement. Ibid., 522-524.
by Wang Mang’s time.\textsuperscript{134} The increasingly numerous Confucians in the government since Emperor Yuan’s reign (49–33 B.C.) were responsible for the success of Confucianism.\textsuperscript{135} Nishijima offers several forms of evidence for these conclusions. He first points out that the Grand Chancellor (\textit{chengxiang} 丞相) became the role responsible for keeping the balance of \textit{yin} and \textit{yang}, evidence of the increasing importance of supernatural phenomena to the political world.\textsuperscript{136} Secondly, he lists a series of ritual reforms of the late Western Han period based on what he calls Confucian standards, and takes them as evidence of the nationalization of Confucianism.\textsuperscript{137} Thirdly, he examines the mystic characteristics of the apocryphal texts, and their link to the emperor. This link was the result of the integration of the Confucian conceptualization of emperorship and popular “mysticism” (\textit{shinpi shugi 神秘主義}). It grants mysterious authority to the emperor. Therefore, Nishijima argues, during his interregnum, Wang Mang enforced these ritual reforms, and largely followed apocryphal texts, which led to the comprehensive institutionalization of Confucianism.\textsuperscript{138}

There are several similarities between Itano and Nishijima’s theories. Firstly, both of them are interested in finding when the nationalization of \textit{jūkyō 宗教} completed in the Han dynasty. Secondly, whether explicitly or inexplicitly, they understand the term \textit{jūkyō} was “Confucian religion.” Therefore, they both focus on sacrifices and ritual practices in the court, which are one of their major criteria for determining the time of the establishment of a Confucian state. Thirdly, the apocryphal texts and their mystic characteristics play a major role in granting heavenly authority to the emperor. Fourthly, these characteristics were not in the original teachings of Confucius, but derived from popular belief at the end of the Western Han dynasty. Han Confucians appropriated them to consolidate the role of the emperor.

Compared to the new/old script theory, the Itano/Nishijima model emphasizes developments and transitions instead of oppositions and conflicts. Itano especially argues that Confucianism’s reorientation toward Heaven and its increasingly mystic character grew out of original Confucian teachings. This phenomenon, he argues, was

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\item\textsuperscript{134} Nishijima Sadao 西嶋定生, \textit{Shin Kan teikoku 秦漢帝國} (The Qin and Han empires) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1975), 344.
\item\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 308-11.
\item\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 306-8.
\item\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 311-22, esp. 318.
\item\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 325-7.
\end{itemize}
a common tendency throughout the Western Han dynasty, and eventually led to the nationalization of Confucianism. This is significant in the sense that in their theory the new and old script traditions become aspects of major transitions instead of transitions being the result of greater or lesser emphasis on either the new or old script tradition. This model also gives us a wider perspective from which to examine what was common to the different traditions of classical study, and what were their broader, shared intellectual concerns.

*What Kind of Confucian Country and When: Fukui’s Critique*

As a radical skeptic of the victory of Confucianism during Emperor Wu’s reign and Dong Zhonshu’s role in it, Fukui Shigemasa has two major complaints about Itano/Nijishima’s model that are helpful to mention here. The first one is about their acceptance, or “preservation” (onzon 溫存) of the old theory that Confucian officials took over the court during Emperor Wu’s time, and Dong Zhongshu was the main figure pushing this project. Based on his systematic studies on that Dong Zhongshu and the setup of the Five Classics Erudites as official positions, Fukui argues that scholars’ impression of the comprehensive victory of Confucianism led by Dong Zhongshu in the Han court is due to the bias from Ban Gu, and his work the *History of Han*, the source that historians have relied upon most heavily. Therefore, building their arguments solely or primarily upon this suspect foundation makes their model less convincing.

Fukui’s second complaint concerns Itano and Nishijima’s criteria for the establishment of Confucian state. Both of them consider imperial sacrifices and other religious change as the major criteria for establishing the moment when the Confucian state came into full blossom. Fukui argues that the adoption of Confucian sacrificial or religious forms is the result of the establishment of a Confucian state rather than sign of its coming to fruition. Fukui points out that without enough Confucian scholars’ advocacy and support in the court, the state would not have accepted these...
religious practices in the first place. Therefore, Fukui believes that the more interesting question is how Confucianism took over the court. He thus states that we need to examine the “officialization” (kangakuka 官學化) of Confucianism. He accordingly proposes his definition of “kangaku” 官學: “the only thought and education system that the state and officialdom officially advocate, protect, reward, and cherish, and which the officials and commoners must learn and support.”

Following this definition, he argues that the officialization of Confucianism happened between Emperor Xuan’s reign (74–49 B.C.) and Emperor Yuan’s period (49–33 B.C.). The merit of Fukui’s model is its emphasis on the embodiment of Confucianism in the persons and ideas of Han bureaucrats. Fukui warns us that without a certain degree of representation in the bureaucratic and political spheres, Confucian thought is just a bubble flowing randomly. Especially when we consider the establishment of a Confucian state, the administrative and political structure of that is a key factor.

Watanabe’s Synthesis of the Creation of a Confucian Nation

Watanabe Yoshihiro 渡邊義浩 further polishes previous scholars’ various arguments on the Confucian nation in the Han dynasty, and synthesizes them into a single perspective. In his book State Control and Confucianism in the Later Han (Gokan kokka no shihai to Jukyō 後漢國家の支配と儒教), he establishes four criteria that identify the Eastern Han dynasty as a Confucian state: the use of Confucian thought as the political orthodoxy, an increase in the number of Confucians in officialdom, the use of Confucian thought as a means of control in specific sociopolitical occasions, and local acceptance of this control.

The fourth criterion is not merely an adoption of previous scholarship; it is Watanabe’s maneuver to reconcile imperial support of Confucian thought with the intermediate political structure between individuals and imperial government peculiar

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143 Ibid., 102.
144 Ibid., 104-6.
145 Ibid., 13.
146 Ibid., 106.
147 Watanabe Yoshihiro 渡邊義浩, Gokan kokka no shihai to Jukyō 後漢國家の支配と儒教 (State control and Confucianism in the Later Han) (Tōkyō: Yūzankaku Shuppan, 1995).
148 Ibid., 37-8.
to the Eastern Han. Specifically, he argues that local powers (zaichi seiryoku 在地勢力) formed a cooperative community (kyōdōtai 共同体) with commoners in the Eastern Han, and the former was directly responsible for controlling the latter. The local acceptance of the Confucian authority was the final step before the establishment of Confucian nation. Watanabe’s synthesis is an attempt to show how people practice Confucian thought in various social and political situations, and how it was suited to a particular social structure at a particular time.

From Itano to Fukui, then to Watanabe, the establishment of a Confucian state becomes a process divided into several phases. The number of stages increases, and the transition from one stage to another is portrayed in more and more detail. This is a sign of specialization of the field. Nevertheless, despite different theories on what incidents complete the establishment of the Confucian state, they all agree that Han Confucianism was distinguished by the new bureaucratic recruitment system implemented during Emperor Wu’s time, which increased the number of Confucian officials in government. From Wang Mang’s interregnum to the early Eastern Han, Han Confucianism evolved to include apocryphal texts, which contained “mutant” (i.e. supernatural) Confucian doctrines.

After defining and redefining the Confucian state, people might ask a basic, but crucial question: what is Confucianism? If, as Itano argues, Han Confucianism is a school of thought deviant from Confucius’ original teachings, then can it still be called “Confucianism?” If political and official uses of the classics and the Analects can prove the existence of Confucianism, then is this “Confucianism” merely a collection of political sayings? Were the more and more frequent references to the classics among the Han literati merely the result of accumulated habit? If not, does this phenomenon then necessary lead to a coherent, social or intellectual unity that may be appropriately labeled “Confucianism?” If we cannot satisfactorily answer these questions, then jumping to the “victory of Confucianism” or the “establishment of Confucian state” will not lead us any further. These are the questions that some Western scholars try to answer.

4. Growing doubts on the Standard Theories: Western Scholarship on Han

149 Ibid., 22-3.
150 Ibid., 31.
151 See Watanabe’s handy summary in his Gokan ni okeru “Jukyō kokka” no seiritsu 後漢における「儒教國家」の成立 (Tōkyō: Kyūko shoin, 2009), 21-25.
Classicism

In 1938, Homer H. Dubs published “The Victory of Han Confucianism,” in which he challenges the assumption that Confucianism triumphed in Emperor Wu’s time. Although he accepts the growing dominance of Confucianism in the Han dynasty, Dubs is not interested in dating when exactly the victory of Confucianism took place. On the contrary, he explicitly states that “[T]he Confucian victory can not however be fixed at any one particular date, nor did it occur in the reign of Emperor Wu.” From late 19th to the early 20th century, Marx Weber, Joseph R. Levenson, Homer Dubs, and others centered Confucianism among other “isms” as the obstacle to achieving modernity for China. No matter whether their tone is orientalist or not, their perspectives are similar in at least one way: Confucianism took over China at some point in the history, and since that moment, it has smothered China and prevented it from reaching modernity (i.e. the level of development in the Western world during their own time). In other words, they assumed Confucianism (and other isms) was a stable if not completely static unity overshadowing most aspects of Chinese society throughout history. Since these scholars use the term “Confucianism” to generalize the many developments in Chinese history, it grew into a monster of a word, the meaning of which is too complex to mean anything solid.

Confucianism: A Problematic Term

In 1978, Nathan Sivin published a review on the perplexity caused by the use of the terms “Taoism” and “Confucianism” in the Western scholarship. He points out scholars’ careless use of the two words and their abuse as the scapegoats for China’s perceived lack of modernity without any clarification of their meaning. Like the vague mystery of “Taoism,” “Confucianism” became “a defensible one-word code for the hierarchic, bureaucratic, and bookish values that in traditional

153 Ibid., 435.
156 Ibid., 327.
157 Ibid., 308-10.
158 Ibid., 314-5.
times were regularly invoked against change.” It contains so many meanings that if we combine the possible “Confucians” together, “we would encounter everyone in traditional China who had the slightest claim to social or intellectual standing.” Sivin warns us that without finding a place in society for people who formed particular doctrines, practices and way of thinking, using a vague label to refer to them does little for our understanding of the influence of them in Chinese history.

While Sivin’s discontent derives from scholars’ careless use of the word, Lionel M. Jensen sabotages “Confucianism” from its etymological origin. In his Manufacturing Confucianism, Jensen argues that “Confucius” and “Confucianism” are not what ancient Chinese know about them, but largely a Western invention. The former word usually corresponds to the Chinese word Kongzi 孔子; the latter one to several complex ones: rujia 儒家 (ru family), rujiao 儒教 (ru teaching), ruxue 儒學 (ru learning) and ruzhe 儒者 (the ru). He points out that these correspondences are problematic for the two Western terms went through a “process of manufacture in which European intellectuals took a leading role.” “Confucius” is a 17th-century, Jesuit Latinization of the Chinese word “Kong fuzi” 孔夫子, a term that cannot be found in Warring States period nor the Han period. Confucianism reappeared in 20th century intellectual discourse with nationalist and nativist connotations. Actually, “Confucianism” is a merging of ru 儒 and “Confucius (Kongzi),” and originated in tropes that Warring States philosophers used to refer to “excessive ritualism.” Because “Confucianism” conflates the person of Kong Qiu and ru. Jensen proposes that we should stop treating ru and Confucianism as equivalent, and be cautious with the modern connotations around “Confucianism” and “Confucius.”

Though Jensen’s historical survey demonstrates that the word “Confucianism” has a tainted history, I do not see why we need to abandon it solely because of its

159 Ibid., 316.
160 Ibid., 317.
161 Ibid., 316.
163 Translations are Jensen’s. See ibid.
164 Ibid.
165 Ibid., 81-4, esp. 81, 84.
166 Ibid., 5, 175-7, 284.
167 Ibid., 19-22.
168 Ibid., 5.
etymological history and 20th century usage. If all words with such tainted histories were discarded, then much of the vocabulary of living languages should be abandoned, because many words have gone through a long process of transformation with much more complicated cultural and intellectual background than “Confucius” or “Confucianism.” I believe that how words function in a given circumstance largely depends on people’s appropriation, accommodation, and definition of them. If a word does not succeed in carrying certain meaning, it is not the failure of the word, but rather people’s definition of it. As Sivin suggests, we can make word perplexing by using it carelessly, but we can also make a word appropriate to signify certain meanings by defining it neatly.

Also, if this Latinized term “Confucius” is problematic given Jensen’s reasons, “Kongzi” is equally problematic. The term is not how Confucius or his direct disciples refer to him in writing; instead, they use Qiu 丘 or Fuzi 夫子. Even this is not without problems, because now we project Mandarin pronunciation onto these terms. This is problematic, because Mandarin is an officially promoted modern language that did not exist at the time of Confucius’ contemporaries. This thus reflects our bias against both the original Classical Chinese pronunciation and other dialects spoken in China. The written form of the word, “Kongzi,” a Romanization derived from the pinyin system, is also a 20th century invention that no ancient Chinese person could possibly have been familiar with. If we dismiss the use of the term “Confucianism” for these reasons, then we must speak of our topic in the original classical Chinese, which leaves the term unexplained.

In an expansion of Jensen’s research principles, Nicolas Zufferey further challenges the correspondence between “Confucianism” and “Ru.”169 Zufferey accepts “Confucianism” as a designation that refers to Confucius’ immediate disciples and one or two generations after. Nevertheless, he argues, “Confucianism” and ru are two different things to ancient Chinese authors.170 The major literati of the early Western Han dynasty, according to his survey, belong to the group of ru, which is “not a well-structured group of Confucian thinkers,” but “advocates of wen values such as civilization, of culture, of tradition, of ancient rituals, and of texts.”171 Therefore, his theory predicts that learners of classics are not necessarily follower of Confucius

169 Nicolas Zufferey, To the Origins of Confucianism: The Ru in Pre-Qin Times and during the Early Han Dynasty (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003).
170 Ibid., 368, also 370.
171 Ibid., 371.
himself. Although many literati of the Han dynasty were immersed in the learning of Five Classics, they were not Confucian, but *ru*. Therefore, following Michael Nylan, Zufferey argues that it is also problematic to call the texts Han literati advocated “Confucian Classics,” because they were the common literary legacy from the ancients.\(^{172}\)

Zufferey insightfully points out the incomparability of the correspondence between “Confucianism” and *ru*, for the latter is a much broader group than the former. His definition of “Confucianism” solves the question of why the English correspondence of *ru* contains Confucius’ name. However, if we correlate the group of *ru* to the people that are called “*ru*” in the primary sources, then for the Han dynasty specifically, we simply change the label from “Confucianism” to “*ru*. This is not a bad start as long as we keep in mind that the term *ru* changed dramatically through time, and it might not refer to a single unit of people or organization at all.

Michael Nylan takes this principle one step further, and extends her doubt to “the victory of Confucianism” and the “Han orthodox synthesis.” In her “A Problematic Model: The Han ‘Orthodox Synthesis,’ Then and Now,” Nylan questions several premises related to the “victory of Confucianism.” She doubts that (1) the Confucians were a distinct group with a distinct ideology; (2) that the Han Empire needed for a single ruling orthodoxy; (3) that state sponsorship of Confucian activities was consistent and effective; and (4) that the thought and practice led by the state was uniform and distinct.\(^{173}\) She further points out that “widely different receptions of the Han ‘Confucian’ canon were born from the widely varying interests and needs that individual persons brought to the Classics.”\(^{174}\) They are more suitably denoted as “classicists.”\(^{175}\) In saying this, Nylan severs the link between the classics and Han “Confucians,” a premise adopted by many Chinese and Japanese scholars.

In his newly published *Dong Zhongshu, a ‘Confucian Heritage and Chunqiu Fanlu*, Michael Loewe presents a more radical view of Dong Zhongshu’s significance and the validity of the term Confucianism. Loewe argues that Dong Zhongshu was a marginal figure in the court, and he never enjoyed a prestigious reputation or high


\(^{174}\) Ibid., 25.

position during his lifetime. His reputation as a learned man and advocate of Confucius’ teaching only grew slightly during the Eastern Han. Later scholars and historians did not consider Dong Zhongshu the leader of scholars in his time until the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618–907). Since then, especially due to the promotion of Song and Qing scholars, Dong Zhongshu has appeared to modern scholars as the main intellectual architect of Emperor Wu’s reign and the crux of Han scholarly activities. Loewe supports his doubts of Dong Zhongshu’s role with a careful textual study of writings that people putatively attribute to Dong Zhongshu. According to Loewe, the Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu fanlu 春秋繁露), a main source scholars use to account for Dong Zhongshu’s thought, is a collection of texts from different time periods, and none of these texts can be attributed to Dong Zhongshu with absolute certainty. Among other writings, the three responses to Emperor Wu’s rescripts are the most reliable reflection of Dong Zhongshu’s thought, but they received very little attention from his contemporaries and subsequent generations.

Different from Fukui, Michael Loewe’s goal is not to point out that the victory of Han Confucianism lays in some factor besides the life and actions of Dong Zhongshu. Radically, he argues that there was no such coherent intellectual, philosophical, or social unity called “Confucianism.” Similar to Nylan’s theory, Loewe’s theory is radically different from major Chinese and Japanese scholarship and those opponents of mainstream scholarship who against the use of the term “Confucianism.” He does not argue that “Confucianism” is not a proper name for the thought of the group of people whom we previously called “Confucian.” He is

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176 Michael Loewe, Dong zhongshu, 75.
177 Ibid., 64-5.
178 Ibid., 67.
179 Ibid., 74-5.
180 Ibid., 192, 226-7, 212. I adopt Michael Loewe’s view on this. Chinese scholars such as Zhong Zhaopeng 鍾肇鵬 and Chen Suzhen take Chunqiu fanlu as Dong Zhongshu’s authentic writing. This leads to a radically different understanding of the intellectual development of the Han dynasty from mine. For example, based on many similarities, Zhong Zhaopeng argues that apocryphal texts derived from Chunqiu fanlu. I do not follow his argument for the reason that I do not believe that Chunqiu fanlu predates apocryphal texts. See his Chen wei lun lue 譯緯論略 (A brief discussion on apocrypha) (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu, 1991), 127. Chen Suzhen describes Dong Zhongshu’s political thought as “transforming people’s ethos by virtue,” or “yi de hua min 以德化民,” but he reconstructs his thought by using Chunqiu fanlu. He then argues that a group of ru held this proposal from the early Western Han to the end of Eastern Han dynasty. For the same reason by which I reject Zhong Zhaopeng’s theory, I do not take his either. See his Chunqiu yu “Han dao,” 159-206, 617.
181 Chen Suzhen, Chunqiu yu “Han dao,” 117.
182 Ibid., 182.
183 Ibid., 338.
184 Ibid., 36-7, 40.
questioning the existence of this group. He also disputes the idea that we can keep track of social and intellectual transitions in Han China by merely looking at the thought of those people who we considered “Confucian” or whatever other label we choose to apply to this oft-studied group of scholar. In fact, Loewe and Nylan’s theory sets future scholars free not only from the old script/new script dichotomy, but also the demand that they reconcile Han scholars’ thought with the jelled phantom, “Han Confucianism.”

*The Study of Apocryphal Texts and their Awkward Position in Han Classicism*

These two models, the old script/new script contrast-debate model and Confucian nationalization model, are unable to satisfactorily contextualize the apocryphal texts (*chen wei* 讫緯), miscellaneous passages that are putative interpretations of the classics in the Han Dynasty. The former model considers them either the ugly stepchild of the new script tradition, additions conceived with political purposes in mind, or borrowings from vulgar traditions, such as that of the masters of methods (*fangshi* 方士). Because the latter model points out the process by which the original Confucian teachings were linked to Heaven and its mysterious nature, adherents of the nationalization of Confucianism model are therefore able to explain why apocrypha also greatly emphasizes principles bequeathed from Heaven. However, it does not fully explain why apocrypha serve as a supplement to classics, and do not claim legitimacy of their own and abandon the classics.

In his 1926 study of Han apocrypha, “Apocrypha and the Learning of New and Old Script Classics” (“Weishu yu jing jin guwen xue” 纂書與經今古文學), Zhou Yutong argues that apocryphal texts are a hybrid of thought from classicists and masters of methods in the early Han dynasty. The foundation of this hybrid is the thought of masters of *yin/yang* and Confucian numerology. The First Emperor of Qin (r. 259–210 B.C.) and Emperor Wu were responsible for promoting masters

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185 I am certainly not arguing that Han scholars’ thought or philosophy have nothing to do with Confucius, Mencius or any other Warring States period philosophers," nor do I believe that we can ignore the links and relationships between Han scholars and their predecessors. What I mean here is that future scholars do not need to begin their research on Han scholars with the sentence “This individual’s philosophy deviates from Confucius’ original teaching by...”

186 Zhong Zhaopeng 鍾肇鵬 also holds this view. He states that the foundation of apocrypha is the classics, and the essence of it is theological superstition. *Chen wei lun lue* 讫緯論略 (A brief discussion on apocrypha) (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu, 1991), 2.
of methods, and thus led to this hybrid. Zhou believes that the new script traditions are the precursor of the apocryphal texts. Although old script schools had a chance to avoid this deviant trend, some members from old script traditions manipulated apocryphal texts to chase political success. Gu Jiegang and Chen Pan accept Zhou’s theory of the origin of apocryphal texts. Further developing this theory, Gu Jiegang specifically emphasizes that it was the Han emperors’ preference for apocryphal texts and other prophecies led to the dominance of those texts and prophecies. Chen Pan focuses more on the thought of the masters of methods as a social group since the Warring States period. Jack L. Dull sketches the line of apocrypha’s development from Dong Zhongshu to Jing Fang, and Yi Feng in his doctoral dissertation. He argues that through the development of “New Text Confucianism,” people refined Dong’s original idea to “fit the ruler into the cosmic shell.” Liu Xiu, the founder of the Eastern Han, combined New Text Confucianism with the “vague and ill-defined tradition in the classics concerning diagrams and texts from various rivers.” Therefore, apocryphal texts along with new script Confucianism became the ideological foundation of the Eastern Han dynasty.

Yasui Kōzan also agrees that there is a close relationship between apocrypha and the new script traditions. In accord with Itano’s theory of the Han development and popularity of the “mysterious thought” (shinpi shisō 神秘思想), Yasui argues that the masters of methods manipulated this trend of thought to support certain political groups, such as those who supported Wang Mang’s usurpation and Liu Xiu’s ascendency. Based on his meticulous survey of the Different Meanings

187 Zhou Yutong, Jingxue shi lunzhu xuanji, 52.
188 Ibid., 57.
189 Ibid., 58. Lü Simian 呂思勉 holds a similar view on this issue. See Lü Simian 呂思勉, Qin Han shi 秦漢史 (A History of Qin and Han) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2005), 741-2.
190 Chen Pan argues that the masters of methods forged documents, and put them under the title “River Chart” (He tu 河圖) and “Luo Writing” (Luoshu 洛書). See his Gu Chenwei yantao ji qi shulu jieti 古讖緯研討及其書錄解題 (Studies of ancient apocryphal texts and explanations on their titles). (Shanghai: Guji, 2009), 108-11.
191 Ibid., “Zhanguo Qin Han jian fangshi kao lun” 戰國秦漢間方士考論 (An examination of the masters of methods from the Warring States period to the Han dynasty), 179-254.
193 Ibid., 427, 430.
194 Ibid., 432.
195 Ibid., 433.
197 Ibid., 104-5.
of the Five Classics (Wujing yiyi 五經疑義) by Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. A.D. 58–146), Hans van Ess argues that the differences between the new and old script traditions lay in their distinct political stances. What the apocryphal texts contain opposes the old script traditions’ political point of view.198 While downplaying the role of the masters of methods and the opposition between new and old script scholars, Chen Suzhen also emphasizes the interaction between apocryphal texts and the Gongyong tradition.199

Many scholars hold negative attitudes toward apocryphal texts because of their faith in modern science, and the mysticism of apocryphal texts. Some scholars criticize the apocryphal texts because of their own ideological preference. In A Comprehensive History of Chinese Thought (Zhongguo sixiang tongshi 中國思想通史), apocryphal texts are described with the derogatory vocabulary of Marxist discourse, such as “superstition,” or “mi xin 迷信, and as “a mixture of Theology and vulgar classicism,” or “shenxue he yongsu jingxue de hunhe wu 神學和庸俗經學的混合物."200 Zhou Yutong 周予同 uses phrases like “deviant and chimerical thoughts” (yaowang de sixiang 妖妄的思想), and “foul, poisonous air” (wu yan zhangqi 烏煙瘴氣) to describe apocryphal texts, and identifies a “superstitious thread” of which apocrypha is one element.201 Chen Pan states that apocrypha is a “major collection of the adulteration and forgery” by the masters of methods, or “zha wei chengji zhi da jieji 詐偽成績之大結集.”202

Yasui also admits that the “superstitious” element exists in apocrypha, and categorizes apocryphal texts with other types of divination in Chinese history, playfully labeling them as “itan 異端, or “heterodox.”203 Zhong Zhaopeng 鍾肇鵬 draws the distinction between “classics” and “apocryphal texts,” saying the former are historical documents and the latter are forged myths and hearsay.204 The essence of the latter is “theological superstition,” or “shenxue mixin 神學迷信.”205

199 Chen Suzhen, Chunqiu yu “Han dao, 414, 454.
201 See Zhou Yutong, Jingxue shi lunzhu xuanji, 40-1.
202 Chen Pan, Gu Chenwei yantao ji qi shulu jieti 顧承微言談及其書目集 (1978-8).
204 Zhong Zhaopeng, Chen wei lun lue, “Introduction,” 5.
205 Ibid., 2.
texts as superstition and religious theology, deriding them as “vulgar and shabby,” or *cusu bilou* 粗俗鄙陋. In a related section of the book, the main topic becomes the struggles of some Han intellectuals against the “superstitious” apocrypha. Some scholars even use this view to revise the division of new and old script schools.

Robert P. Kramer, adopting Tjan Tjoe Som’s theory, argues that the division between Han scholars regarding the application of apocryphal text lay in the contrast between the “pursuit of baser motives,” a process that Kramer argues “inflated this esoteric pseudoscience with endless explanations,” and the rebellion against this “pernicious trend in classical studies” instead of the tension between the new script and old script camps.

“Supernatural (or its derogatory equivalent, “superstitious”)” and “political oriented” are two major characteristics which scholars attribute to apocryphal texts. The problem with the former is that “supernatural” and words similar to it usually have connotations of “evolution,” a process in which “rationality” and “causality” overcome whatever is “supernatural.” In this theory, what is “supernatural” is supposed to vanish for no other particular reason. However, “supernatural” did not exist as a category in ancient China. There is no division between the group that is “natural” and the one that is “supernatural” in the modern sense. Nor is it a case of conflict between “scientific” and “nonscientific” theories. Certainly, a Han intellectual like Wang Chong 王充 might consider one theory true, and dismisses the other as “bizarre,” “false,” or “hokum.”

I believe that the Eastern Han imperial government did use apocryphal texts for

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206 See Tian Changwu 田昌五 and An Zuozhang 安作璋 ed., *Qin Han shi* 秦漢史 (Beijing: Renmin, 2008), 647-58. Song Yanping, in her study on the Han Gongyang tradition, also calls apocrypha “huangdan cusu 荒誕粗俗,” or “bizarre and vulgar.” See her *Gongyang xue yu Handai shehui*, 158.


208 This is just as same as China’s Western counterpart. See Dale B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 11-3.

209 Or in his own word, wang 妄. See Wang Chong 王充, “Dui zuo” 對作 (Responding to “inventing”), *Lun heng* 論衡 (Doctrines Evaluated) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin, 1974), 29: 445.
political purposes. Nevertheless, this move should result from the popularity of the ideas in these texts instead of the other way around. The question that remains is whence was their popularity derived? Itano and Yasui correctly point out that mysterious and other supernatural ideas were popular at the end of the Western Han dynasty. Nevertheless, we still need to further explain why the Eastern Han imperial house as well as literati appropriated apocryphal texts to supplement and interpret the classics. In other words, why were classics still the central concern of the literati? Throughout Japanese scholarship on the establishment of Confucian state, the key criterion they use to judge whether one or another activity is Confucian or not is its link to the classics. Whether it is the establishment of Five Classics Erudites or the ritual reforms based on the *Rites* texts, they are all linked to the classics, especially the Five Classics. As Watanebe defines *Jukyō* 儒教: “Jukyō is the general name for Confucian teachings. It centers on interpretations of the classics, and is referred to the learning of classics.” Confucians, to Watanabe, largely seem to be literati with training in the classics. This also goes along with Zufferey and Nylan’s understanding of *ru*. In other words, Japanese scholars’ project of depicting the process of the “establishment of Confucian state” is actually a maneuver of explaining the social and intellectual developments of the learning of classics through the Han dynasty. Is there, then, anything we can start from here? The answer is yes.


So far we have seen the two models: the contrast-debate model and Confucian nationalization model. We have also mentioned several critiques of these models. Underneath these models and criticisms runs a common thread: the classics. Some scholars, for example, identify the classics with the Confucian school, some do not. No matter how valid each of these contending theories is, the importance of the classics and the flourishing of classicism in the Han dynasty in general are undeniable. The question before us now in the study of the Han dynasty is not what we can say about Confucians, which is a less meaningful category in that context. Rather, the
question is what we can say about Han dynasty classicists, some of whom we may be able to say were “Confucian.” Since the classics and interpretations of them are the media by which the literati conveyed their thought, we always need to go back to the basic question: how did Han literati understand the classics, and how did their understanding change over time? However, as Nylan and Loewe have thoroughly argued, our current models can no longer give us satisfactory answers. We can no longer assume that the dynamic of the development of classicism is due to the intellectual debates and political struggles between the defenders of the new and old script traditions. Nor can we retrospectively assume that there was a “victory of Confucianism,” toward which classicism was heading.

Is there, then, any alternative way to examine the intellectual transitions that Qian Mu brought up, or the dialectical evolution of Han classicism theorized by Chen Suzhen? Furthermore, can we come up with a way to reconcile the content of apocryphal texts and the intellectual-social background from which it emerged? In this dissertation, I will try to answer these questions by examining how certain people adopted, rejected, combined, or developed different commentarial traditions.

Classics are not created from nothing; they become classics via transmission and interpretation. The transmission process is rarely a monodrama, but involves groups of people. Therefore, when we talk about traditions of classics, they are first of all series of interactions between people. These interactions are not merely mechanical contacts uploading or downloading information as computers do. They contain emotions and they affect participants. As Randall Collins puts it in explaining his theory of Interaction Ritual Chains (IR), they are “momentary encounters among human bodies charged up with emotions and consciousness because they have gone through chains of previous encounters.” These temporary encounters accumulate such that the cumulative results and effects of previous encounters that predict the

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of basic convictions: (i) human beings are born with the capacity to develop morally; (ii) moral development begins with moral self-cultivation, that is, reflection on one’s own behavior and concerted improvement where it is found lacking; (iii) by perfecting oneself in this manner, one also contributes to the project of perfecting the world; (iv) there were people in the past who perfected themselves, and then presided over an unsurpassably harmonious society—these people are called ‘sages.’” Paul R. Goldin, Confucianism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 5. From this perspective, if one is committed to the literal authority of classics, he might be called “classicist.” However, this does not guarantee him being “Confucian.” At the same time, some people can be referred to as “Confucian,” but not necessarily “classicist,” such as Confucius’ favorite student Yan Yuan. In this dissertation, I will use “classicist” to loosely refer to people who were involved in transmitting or making arguments based on the classics. I leave the term Ru from primary sources untranslated if the connotations of it are unclear to me. I do not equate Ru to “classicist” with reasons mentioned by Goldin, ibid., 5.


framework of the next encounter.

Collins derives his use of “interaction ritual” from Erving Goffman and Émile Durkheim: “‘Interaction ritual’ is Goffman’s (1967) term, by which he calls attention to the fact that the formal religious rituals which Durkheim ([1912] 1961) analyzed are the same type of event which happens ubiquitously in everyday life.”\(^\text{214}\) In the case of Han classicists, their daily routine of learning, reciting, and ruminating on their master’s lectures on the classics are also “rituals” in this sociological sense. The analysis starts from local situations. As Randall Collins argues, an interaction ritual needs the following: “1. a group of at least two people is physically assembled; 2. they focus attention on the same object or action, and each becomes aware that the other is maintaining this focus, and 3. they share a common mood or emotion.”\(^\text{215}\) These three ingredients predict accumulative result and repeatable situation. This is different from solely emphasizing verbal chants, dress code, and other symbols and their meanings throughout the history. The symbols are subject to human emotion and more importantly, attention. It is obvious that in a certain religion or intellectual community at a specific historical moment, only certain symbols are significant. For example, In the Northern Song dynasty (A.D. 1127–1279), the “Four Books,” namely the *Analects of Confucius*, *Mencius*, “The Great Learning” and “The Doctrine of Mean” became dominant among Confucians. The philosophy and doctrine from this corpus was more important than the Five Classics among Zhu Xi’s school.

On the other hand, the three ingredients we are discussing here constitute the process and the mechanism of producing, keeping and renewing the emotions attached to and attention paid to the symbols. The shared emotion and mutual focus intensify cumulatively and trans-situationally. Emotion and focus are stored with bodily motions, vocal speeches and other events and information. This further leads to the feeling of the membership of a group with moral obligations to one another. Collins explains this process as follow: “In the series of IRs, participants are filled with emotional energy (EE), in proportion to the intensity of the interaction.”\(^\text{216}\) Different levels of emotional energy accumulated from previous IR decide whether or not a given person will choose to participate further in the IRs. EE is a trans-situational feeling that can ebb away or be recharged by participating in IRs.

\(^{215}\) Ibid., 22.
\(^{216}\) Ibid., 23.
This theory also works for intellectual communities. Through lectures, conferences, discussions and debates, members focus on “a common object uniquely their own, and build up distinctive emotions around those objects.” The intellectual IR “consists not in giving orders or practical information but in expounding a worldview, acclaims for understanding taken as an end in itself.”\textsuperscript{217} Members of intellectual communities have competitive conversations in order to gain attention to become the center of the conversations. The struggles take the shape of “my ideas are new,” “my ideas are important,”\textsuperscript{218} and “my ideas are truer.” Their ideas or innovations either result from the new combination of old ideas, or derive from opposition against old ideas. As Collins points out, intellectuals “of each generation operate within a lineup of existing intellectual factions, which gives a limited number of moves that can be made by recombining, negating, and abstracting existing ideas.”\textsuperscript{219} In other words, new ideas are always responses to the old ideas. Therefore, the so-called “intellectual transitions” or the “shifting of a paradigm” are the result of the accumulation of such innovations.

The Han transmitters of classics are not an exception. The students interacted in their daily activities. These gatherings drew attention to the sacred objects that they hold in common, the classics and their master’s understanding of them, and hence reinforce their group solidarity. Students not only learn worldview from this process, but also acquire “emotional commitment to their identifying symbols.”\textsuperscript{220} Members of various traditions competed over whose traditions better explained the classics, and whose traditions were more capable of answering contemporary questions. They defended the classics, their master’s teaching, and their worldview against competitors by arguing how their enemies make huge mistakes in their commentaries and how their tradition carried the original and true meaning of the classics. Although each classicist made innovations, good classicists appeared to be faithful guardians of the original meaning of the classics.\textsuperscript{221}

I will use IR to examine the interactions between the various commentarial traditions in order to explore how they combine or oppose each other in responding to common concerns such as why the classics are essential, and what the classics can
contribute to society. This theory lends us a new perspective to look at the portrayal of so-called “new script” school, “old script” school, and apocryphal texts in 19th and 20th-century scholarship on Han classicism. I approach the apocryphal texts and commentarial traditions conventionally associated with the “new script” and “old script” texts as three distinct corpora, each with its own way of claiming authority for interpretations of the Five Classics. As interpretations revealed by Heaven, apocryphal texts competed with those texts transmitted from Confucius, his disciples, and contemporaries. All reflected individuals’ or groups’ reading of the Five Classics. As successors further appropriated and redefined them, they contributed to the formation of philosophies, political agendas, and imperial ideologies throughout the Eastern Han dynasty.

I will argue that from the late Western Han to the Eastern Han dynasty, Han emperors and their supporters claimed that rulers, whose sage nature was bestowed by Heaven, were capable of, and even on the way to, bringing about 太平 “The Great Peace,” the ideal state of a society. Critics, on the other hand, tried to dispute their claims, and gave their competing definitions of a sage and ideal society. Both sides supported their arguments, claims and political moves with the Five Classics. This debate over what constituted an ideal society, and who could bring it about, characterizes the intellectual developments and commentarial traditions of the Eastern Han dynasty. The fledgling Daoist movement in the late Eastern Han also entered this debate on “the Great Peace.” Although they depended on a different set of mystical revelations, the writings of this movement to a large extent appropriated the premises and modes of argumentation of scholars’ understandings of the Five Classics.
II. Intellectual Transitions from the Late Western Han to Wang Mang’s Reign

If we are not going to understand the advocates of the old script classics as a long-existing, distinctive intellectual community through the Western Han dynasty, how then should we understand the appearance of the old script classics? To answer this question, it might be fruitful to start with Liu Xin, since he was the most famous and devoted promoter of the old script classics in the Western Han dynasty. As with many historical figures, Liu Xin is controversial. As we have seen in the introduction, some scholars accuse him of forging texts and helping Wang Mang to usurp the Western Han emperors. Others consider him a brilliant and genuine scholar who preserved ancient texts. These opposite views are based on different readings of Liu Xin’s promotion of the old script texts.¹ They are not merely derived from later historians’ different stances; Liu Xin’s proposal was already controversial to his contemporaries, and caused hostile debates.²

The question here is why Liu Xin chose to challenge many literati in certain ways, such as promoting old script texts, instead of choosing some other medium to express his opposition. Even if we were to believe that Liu Xin did so to support Wang Mang’s usurpation, we still need to ask why Wang Mang, Liu Xin and their followers considered this a good idea. In other words, we need to find out what intellectual trends led Liu Xin to promote the old script texts. Therefore, this chapter will examine the intellectual transitions from which Liu Xin’s perspective was forged, especially concerning the classics, from the late Western Han to Wang Mang’s period.

We will first examine the intellectual atmosphere in Emperor Xuan’s court (r. 73–49 B.C.), for it brought a concern, namely anxiety about Heaven’s will, which shaped the changes of literati thought on the classics for the rest of the Western Han dynasty. Literati and the emperor openly expressed their anxiety about Heaven’s will,

¹ Han shu, 36: 1967-72.
² Ibid., 1972.
and sought means of dealing with it. Dominant intellectuals like Wei Xiang 魏相 (?–59 B.C.) and Bing Ji 丙吉 (?–55 B.C.), brought the classics, or some chunks of classics, into this conversation not as manuals for moral cultivation, but as one expedient way of fulfilling the urgent need to restore the disturbed cosmological order.

The next generation of dominant intellectuals, including Liu Xiang and several disciples of Hou Cang 后蒼 (fl. 72 B.C.), started searching for a way to relieve anxiety that ill omens portended the Han dynasty house’s loss of Heaven’s mandate to rule. The government of the ancient sage kings, or the Kingly Way, became the paragon for the Han dynasty to follow, for it was in harmony with Heaven. The classics, putatively written by the sage kings to record the ideal government of the Golden Age, became the media for literati to imagine and realize sagely rule in their own troubled times.

The desire to harmonize with Heaven was the foundation for further intellectual innovations, which had a long-term impact throughout the first two centuries A.D. Building on the focus on the classics, two different paths of innovations both cast doubts on the existing transmission lines in the first two decades of the first century A.D. Liu Xin, on the one hand, suspected that the received versions of classics were incomplete from the true, original classics of the sage kings. Accordingly, he combined obscure and ignored versions of classics and commentarial traditions to restore the completeness of classics. Li Xun 李尋 (fl. 15–5 B.C.) and Xia Heliang 夏賀良, on the other hand, emphasized Heaven’s will in an effort to depart from the sages and overrode classics with the revealed text, the Scripture of the Great Peace. These two ways of innovation, combination in order to complete the old material, and departure from the old material, marked the last years of Western Han dynasty. They also prepared the ground for the apocrypha, a corpus of commentarial texts that reveal the Heavenly secrets hidden in classics.

1. Political Reorientation and the Search for Heaven’s Will in Emperor Xuan’s
Period

In a 72-B.C. edict, Emperor Xuan (r. 74–49 B.C.) asked officials’ opinion on whether the Han dynastic house should make temple music for Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 B.C.), who was well known for initiating many military campaigns and seeking personal immortality. Besides this specific inquiry, Emperor Xuan also used this chance to announce his political agenda by praising Emperor Wu’s achievements. For this newly enthroned emperor, military achievements and the installation of various sacrifices were the epitome of Emperor Wu’s greatness.\(^3\) Heaven even approved this greatness by sending down auspicious omens.

Most officials seconded this proposal except Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝 (fl. 72–51 B.C.). In his eye, Emperor Wu’s deeds were not achievements. He points out that the military campaign caused the death of many soldiers. Emperor Wu’s extravagant undertakings exhausted the people’s wealth and energy, and gave them a miserable life. These outrageous deeds actually led to inauspicious omens. Devastated by these circumstances, Han had not recovered even until now.\(^4\) Therefore, Emperor Wu was not a virtuous emperor, and it was not a good idea to make temple music for him. Replying to Emperor Xuan’s rescript on the same issue, Xiahou Sheng takes the people’s welfare, which is not mentioned in Emperor Xuan’s rescript at all, as the most crucial standard by which to judge Emperor Wu’s governance. Actually, Xiahou Sheng’s protest was not an isolated case, but reflected many literati’s dissatisfaction with Emperor Wu and his expansionist policies, in which a powerful, centralized empire outweighed people’s welfare.\(^5\)

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\(^3\) Han shu, 75: 3156.
\(^4\) Ibid., 3156-7.
\(^5\) Michael Loewe sees the change of literati’s attitude toward Emperor Wu as “the transformation from a modernist to a reformist point of view.” For Loewe, modernist policies “were directed to the effective use of the resources of the state to enrich and strengthen China; their aims were conceived in materialist terms, with a view to the present or the future rather than the past.” Since Emperor Zhao and Xuan’s time on, the modernist policies “had proved to be too expensive and had overtaxed China’s strength.” Therefore, “reformist hopes of purging contemporary government of its excesses and of harking back to the ideals of Chou in place of the practices of Ch’in were beginning to gain a following.” Michael Loewe, “The Former Han Dynasty,” in Denis Twitchett & Michael Loewe eds., The Cambridge history of China. Vol. 1, The Ch’in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.-A.D. 220. Denis Twitchett & John K. Fairbank eds., The Cambridge History of China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 179-197, esp. 104, 185. For more political events that reflect this transition, see Michael Loewe, Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 104 BC to AD 9 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974), 139-43.
Emperor Xuan, furious with Xiahou Sheng’s reaction, put him in jail, awaiting trial. However, another incident changed emperor’s mind:

In the summer of the fourth year [of Benshi reign] (70 B.C.), forty-nine prefectures had earthquakes on the same day. Some mountains collapsed, and destroyed city walls and houses. More than six thousand people were killed. The emperor therefore wore white clothes, and moved away from the main hall of his palace. He sent emissaries to give condolence to the local officials and people. He also bestowed money for the coffins of the dead. The emperor also made an edict: “Perhaps disasters and bizarreness are the admonitions of Heaven and Earth. I have received the grand undertaking. I am depended upon by the literati and the populace, but I failed to harmonize creatures. Previously, there was an earthquake in Beihai and Langya, and it broke the ancestral temple. I am very terrified by that. Therefore the dukes and officials with around two thousand dan salary please broadly ask the people who are with methods to respond to such change, and supplement what I lack.” Thus there was an amnesty. Xiahou Sheng got out of jail, and became an Official who Concurrently Serves in the Palace.

In 78 B.C., Sui Meng already warned the imperial house that Heaven was about to shift its mandate, and the succession of the Han would thus be terminated. Perhaps affected by this *fin de siècle* attitude and the growing dissatisfaction of literati with current policies, Emperor Xuan took the earthquake seriously as a warning. He read this earthquake as a sign of Heaven’s feelings toward his adoption of Emperor Wu’s state policy. Heaven’s disapproval led him to admit that he failed to take care of the populace. This failure caused the earthquake.
He thus issued an amnesty to pacify Heaven. However, after issuing acts such as this amnesty to provide relief from the immediate predicament, Emperor Xuan still needed to deal with a problem of long-term state policy: if Emperor Wu’s policy could not work, what would? Or framing it in the Western Han context, if Emperor Wu’s rule was not permitted by Heaven, what was? In the transition from Emperor Wu’s expansionist policy to a more modest one, Emperor Xuan and his officials played a very important role in bringing Heaven’s will under serious consideration. Compared to his predecessors, he was much more anxious about Heaven’s will. This anxiety led to a concern about how Heaven’s will worked, particularly in terms of the cosmological order such as *yin* and *yang*. His successors not only adopted these concerns, but they also pushed them into a central position in the political and religious spheres.

However, at this moment, Emperor Xuan had no plan to restore the ancient ideal as his successors did. In fact, Emperor Xuan gives historians an impression of resisting the imitation of ancient sages and governance purely based on virtue rather than laws and regulations. This does not mean that he neglected the value of the classics from ancient times. In fact, the *Classics of Changes* became a focus in Emperor Xuan’s court, where it was used as a tool for searching for cosmological order. However, the use of ancient texts, especially certain classics, was a maneuver

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1 Frequent mentioning of omens in his edicts reflects Emperor Xuan’s eagerness to gain approval from Heaven. See Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China*, 142-3.


3 For the religious reforms and the worship for Heaven taking place around 31 B.C., see Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China*, 154-92.

4 Emperor Xuan still adopted many policies from Emperor Wu, or in Loewe’s words, “it is clear from contemporary criticism that the Modernist attitude still coloured Hsüan ti’s government.” Ibid., 140. In Emperor Xuan’s time, many *xun li* 循吏, or merciful officials as opposite to the *ku li* 酷吏, or ruthless officials, of Emperor Wu’s time appeared. Responding to Xiahou Sheng’s complaint, they tended to take care of the populace’s welfare. However, as Nishijima Sadao mentions, the governance of *xun li* was based on the legal practices of Emperor Wu’s time. See Nishijima Sadao, *Shin Kan teikoku*, 295-7.

5 Loewe, *The Former Han Dynasty*, 190. *Han shu*, 9: 277. Chen Suzhen makes a comparison between these two emperors’ state policy, see his Chunqiu yu “Han dao,” 289-96. He also quotes the edict about temple music, and takes it as Emperor Xuan’s manifesto of his state policy. However, Chen Suzhen does not mention the later earthquake and the emperor’s regret.

6 The tradition of using the *Changes* to find cosmological order was not new in Emperor Xuan’ time. In the appendices of the *Changes*, Heaven and Earth, the trigram *Qian* and *Kun*, and *yang* and *yin* form a ternary correspondence. As Fung Yu-lan mentions, “Heaven and Earth are the physical representation of *ch’ien* and *k’un*, *yang* and *yin.” See his *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, 1, 382-7, esp. 386. Shaughnessy points out the celestial
more to gain Heaven’s approval than to restore the ancient ideal governance as his successors would devotedly pursue. In the next sections, we will see exactly how Emperor Xuan promoted certain classics and commentarial traditions in the pursuit of Heaven’s approval.

Curing the State: Cosmology as a Political Weapon

Since the Warring States period, generations of intellectuals emphasized the importance of an orderly cosmos, especially for ruling a state. During Emperor Xuan’s reign, officials brought this issue into the center of state policy. In Emperor Xuan’s court, many officials such as Bing Ji and Wei Xiang became concerned with the human realm as part of the cosmos. They turned to the balance of yin and yang and the harmony of qi. Bing Ji’s famous story can illuminate this point neatly. During a trip, Bing Ji witnessed two events: several people fighting, and a cow sticking out its tongue and gasping for breath. As an Imperial Chancellor, he did not take care of the melee, a seemingly illegal activity. Instead, he was worried about the cow’s bizarre behavior, for it is an omen that indicates irregular activity in the cosmos. For Bing Ji, keeping yin and yang in balance was the job of the highest Han officials. Bing Ji did not diminish the importance of laws and regulations, but he felt that maintaining

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18 Wei Xiang gained his high position from his success in political conflicts against the Huo family, the dominant clan from the reign of Emperor Zhao 昭 (87–74 B.C.) to the early reign of Emperor Xuan. See Loewe, Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 131-4.
19 Han shu, 74: 3147.
the cosmological order was more crucial for the empire. Bing Ji recognizes that the Han rule should not just lie in managing the human realm, but more importantly in the interaction of the human realm with the cosmos. The highest officials thus should deal with the cosmos, and leave relatively minor issues to lower officials.20

Wei Xiang drew a more specific blueprint in presenting principles of yin and yang in the *Classic of Changes*:

臣相幸得備員，奉職不修，不能宣廣教化。陰陽未和，災害未息，咎在臣等。臣聞《易》曰: 『天地以順動，故日月不過，四時不忒；聖王以順動，故刑罰清而民服。』天地變化，必繇陰陽。陰陽之分，以日為紀。日冬夏至，則八風之序立，萬物之性成，各有常職，不得相干。

I am fortunate enough to gain a place in the [official] recruitment. However, while occupying the position, I have not done my job, and have failed to advocate cultivation and transformation. Now yin and yang do not harmonize with each other, and disasters have not stopped yet. The guilt [of these] lies in us. I have heard from the *Changes* that “Heaven and Earth act based on smooth [progress]. Therefore the sun and moon do not behave excessively, and the four seasons are free from error. When the sage kings act based on smooth [progress], the penalty is fair and the populace is thus convinced.” The change of Heaven and Earth always follows yin and yang. The division of yin and yang takes the day as its mark. In establishing the order of Eight Winds and the completion of the myriad things’ nature, winter solstice and summer solstice have their regular positions, and are not supposed to interrupt each other.

Wei Xiang points out that under his governance, yin and yang have not harmonized with each other. This makes moral cultivation and transformation hard to be carried out instead of smoothly successful. Quoting from the *Changes*, he argues that yin and yang is the foundation of the changes of Heaven and Earth. That is to say, grasping the principle of yin and yang will make people master the changing processes of the cosmos. He goes on to explain the fundamental role of yin and yang for the empire and the human realm: “I think yin and yang is the base of the kingly undertaking, and

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21 *Han shu*, 74: 3139.
the mandate of the myriad creatures. Since antiquity none of the sages nor the worthies have not followed it. Purely following the Heaven and Earth and observing the previous sages are the duties of the Son of Heaven.”22 This punch line holds that yin and yang is the foundation of the human realm, including the empire and the populace. The operation of yin and yang is not just important for Han rule; it is the essence of human society throughout history. Therefore, the ancient sages had to follow it. Based on his statement about the cosmos and its effect on the human world, Wei Xiang argues that the emperor should follow Heaven and Earth, and he should also learn from the previous sages, by whom he means not so much ancient sage kings like Yao, Shun and Yu, as previous Han emperors and officials.23

“Yin and yang” and “qi” in Bing Ji and Wei Xiang’s cases are two oft-repeated concepts in cosmology from the late Warring States period on. In their understandings of the cosmos, qi, a fluid, but materialistic substance permeates the universe. Yin and yang, the oppositional aspects of qi, form the basic generational process of the cosmos. Human society, the human state, and even the human body as microcosms are linked to Heaven and earth by qi. Correspondingly, they not only are subject to, but also influence the overall cosmological process and principles.24 Based on this cosmology then, if a state, as an intermediary between Heaven and individuals, intends to function well, it needs to keep the various microcosms and the cosmos as a whole functioning regularly.25

This cosmology was hardly limited to Wei Xiang and Bing Ji’s time.26
Adopting it into one’s political philosophy was not their invention. Dong Zhongshu, for example, had already mentioned similar ideas to Emperor Wu:

刑罰不中, 則生邪氣; 邪氣積於下, 怨惡畜於上。上下不和, 則陰陽繆盭而妖孽生矣。此災異所緣而起也。 27
When the penalty does not hit the target, deviant qi is created. When deviant qi accumulates below, resentment and hatred are stored 28 above. If the above and below do not get along, yin and yang will be in disorder, and bizarreness and disasters will occur. This is from where calamities rise.

In this case, Dong Zhongshu warns the emperor that the imbalance of yin and yang will cause bizarre portents that lead to catastrophes. The “deviant qi,” shaped by the royal abuse of punishment, accumulates, and brings hatred to the empire. 29 We can see that Wei Xiang used a similar theory of qi and cosmology as Dong Zhongshu did. The link between earthquakes and an unharmonious populace mentioned in Emperor Xuan’s early edict also reflects, though inexplicitly, similar cosmology.

However, for Dong Zhongshu, the emperor’s virtue is the essential factor that affects the cosmological processes:

故為人君者, 正心以正朝廷, 正朝廷以正百官, 正百官以正萬民, 正萬民以正四方。四方正, 遠近莫敢不壹於正, 而亡有邪氣奸其間者。是以陰陽調而風雨時, 羣生和而萬民殖, 五穀孰而草木茂, 天地之間被潤澤而大豐美, 四海之內聞盛德而皆徠臣, 諸福之物, 可致之祥, 莫不畢至, 而王道終矣。 30
Therefore, as the ruler, he should rectify his mind to rectify the court. He should rectify the court to rectify the officials. He should rectify the officials to rectify the populace. He should rectify the populace to rectify the Four Directions. When the Four Directions are rectified, the near and the distant none dare to not be unified by the rectification. He should rectify the court to rectify the officials. He should rectify the officials to rectify the populace. He should rectify the populace to rectify the Four Directions. When the Four Directions are rectified, the near and the distant none dare to not be unified by the rectification. Then there would not be deviant qi to wreak havoc in

27 Han shu, 56: 2500.
28 Following the commentary, I read chu畜 as xu蓄, meaning “to store.” See ibid., 2501.
30 Han shu, 56: 2502-3.
the middle. Therefore, \textit{yin} and \textit{yang} is regulated, and the wind and rain are in timely order. The creatures are in harmony, and the populace reproduces. The Five Crops are ripe, and grass and trees flourish. [Everything] between Heaven and Earth are covered with nourishment and prospers. Hearing the grand virtue, [people] in the Four Seas all come to become subjects. None of these auspicious things and available good omens do not come. The Kingly Way is then complete.

Repeating the sentence structure of “do X in order to do Y” in Classical Chinese, Dong Zhongshu argues that rectification of the emperor’s heart is the root of all action that brings good rule to the state. Achieving the balance of the cosmological order starts with the emperor’s moral reflection. In order to solve the problem of deviant \textit{qi} and the imbalance of \textit{yin} and \textit{yang}, Dong Zhongshu does not emphasize means of understanding the cosmos better. Instead, he considers virtue the solution.

Extending one’s morally rectified mind to the state is part of political philosophy for the Confucian philosophers Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi. However, the moral rectification of the emperor does not affect the cosmological order according to texts associated to these authors. For example, some other texts such as the “Great Learning” (“Daxue” 大學) in the 	extit{Records of Rites} also speak of the extension of the moral self to the state.\textsuperscript{31} From this point of view, the ruler’s virtue is the foundation for a state’s rule, and the cosmological order does not play a direct role in controlling the fate of human society. This is particularly true for Confucius and Mencius’ philosophies.\textsuperscript{32} From Xunzi to Dong Zhongshu, Heaven and its order played a more and more important role in their philosophies. Nevertheless, in their philosophy, Heaven only leaves an incomplete world for human beings, and the order of the human realm is to be set up by human beings themselves.\textsuperscript{33} In Dong Zhongshu’s case, for example, the balance of the cosmos and the harmony of \textit{qi} are the result of the

\textsuperscript{31} See “Daxue” (The great learning), 	extit{liji zhengyi} (The rectified meaning of the Records of Rites), Ruan Yuan ed., 	extit{Shisan jing zhushu}, 1673. Also see James Legge’s translation of this part in 	extit{The Chinese classics, with a translation, critical and exegetical notes, prolegomena, and copious indexes}, 357-8.

\textsuperscript{32} Goldin, 	extit{Confucianism}, 80-1. Of course, this does not mean that Heaven is insignificant for Confucius or Mencius, but too complex to be unpacked for the sake of human affairs. See Michael Puett, “Following the commands of Heaven: The Notion of Ming in Early China,” in Christopher Lupke ed., 	extit{The Magnitude of Ming: Command, Allotment, and Fate in Chinese Culture} (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i press, 2005), 49-69, esp. 52.

\textsuperscript{33} This is particularly true for Xunzi, Lu Jia and Dong Zhongshu. See Paul Rakita Goldin, “Xunzi and Early Han Philosophy,” 	extit{Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies} 67.1 (2006): 150, 160.
ruler’s moral perfection. Although the cosmological process is crucial for the welfare of the state, the means of adjusting and maintaining it do not lie in the process per se, but in the moral adjustment of the ruler. That is to say, for Dong Zhongshu, morality commands cosmos.

In contrast, in Wei Xiang’s statement, the ruler’s morality is no longer the crux of adjusting the cosmological order. Instead, a better understanding of the cosmos and tools to manage it, instead of morality, are needed. Wei Xiang attaches certain hexagrams, namely Zhen, Li, Dui, and Kan to North, East, North and West respectively, which can be found in the “Explicating the Trigrams” (“Shuo gua”) chapter of the Changes. The four hexagrams also symbolize winter, spring, summer, and autumn. People need to use the hexagrams in a timely order, otherwise natural disasters will occur. He argues that the ruler should respect Heaven, and follow yin and yang. When the cosmological process is normal, natural disasters will disappear. In this condition, people can prosper. Then there will be no

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34 See ibid., 158.
35 This is also true for Lu Jia. As Puett mentions, “It is not just that the cosmos—including Heaven—sometimes fails to follow the proper patterns; it is that the cosmos needs the sages to organize it into the normative patterns.” See Puett, To Become a God, 255.
36 “Shuo gua” (Explicating the trigrams), Yijing zhengyi, Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing, 94. In a Mawangdui manuscript chapter called “Zhong” or “Kernel,” the first half of the “Shuo gua” chapter is found. However, “Zhong” does not mention the seasonal changes and the correspondence between trigrams and creatures in the world. Instead, it elaborates on yin and yang and softness and firmness. Later on in the “Zhong,” sentences almost identical to “Xici zhuan” (系辭傳) can be found. Starting with “作《易》者，其有憂患與”， they concentrate on virtues especially humanity and righteousness. Therefore, it seems to me that the author of “Zhong” tries to explain the whole spectrum of the cosmos from Heaven to human society. By comparison, the author of “Shuo gua” is only interested in the former issue. For the Mawangdui text, see Ding Sixin 丁四新, Chu zhushu yu Han boshu Zhou yi jiaozhu 楚竹書與漢帛書周易校注 (Chu bamboo manuscript and Han silk manuscript versions of the Changes of Zhou with annotations and collations) (Shanghai: Guji, 2011), 521-6, esp. 523, 525-6. For more information about this chapter, especially the meaning of its title and why the passage should not be considered part of “Xici zhuan,” see Liao Mingchun 廖名春, “Shi lun boshu ‘Zhong’ de pianming he zishu” 試論帛書《衷》的篇名和字數 (A tentative discussion on the title and the number of characters of “Zhong”), Zhouyi yanjiu, 55 (2002.5): 3-9.
37 Some scholars might call this type of theory “correlative thinking,” such as John B. Henderson, Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 1-59, esp.14-8; A.C. Graham, Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), 319-70, esp. 358-70. Some even attribute it to the Huang-Lao school or thought, such as John S. Major, Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 35-8. I do not consider “correlative thinking” a way of thinking indigenous to Chinese culture. I follow Puett’s systematic critique on this issue in his To become a God, 145-200. I am also cautious in using the term “Huang-Lao,” for, as Sivin points out, it is a vague term with contradictory definitions among scholars. See Nathan Sivin, “Old and New Daoisms,” Religious Studies Review 36 (2010 Mar.): 41-2.
38 For more information about this, see note no. 57 and 58.
39 Han shu, 74: 3139.
hatred or dissatisfaction.40 Wei Xiang does not mention anything about morality to achieve the harmony of cosmos. In Wei Xiang’s theory, unharmonious qi does not result from the ruler’s failure in moral extension. It is caused by his failure to follow the correct cosmological order. He then gives his proposal for the recruitment of officials:

願陛下選明經通知陰陽者四人，各主一時，時至明言所職，以和陰陽，天下幸甚！41

I hope your majesty selects four people who are enlightened in the classics, and comprehensively know yin and yang, and make one of them in charge of one of the four seasons respectively. When the season comes, the one responsible for it announces what trigram should be in charge in order to harmonize yin and yang. The All-under-Heaven would be very fortunate.

In this proposal, the welfare of the state does not depend on the ruler’s moral rectification, but officials with experience in dealing with yin and yang.

Wei Xiang and his successor Bing Ji had taken the path to the highest position in Emperor Xuan’s court, from Grandee Secretary (yushi dafu 御史大夫) to Grand Chancellor (chengxiang 丞相), two of the three most privileged official positions known as the Three Ducal Ministers (san gong 三公).42 On the one hand, they had training in Han law and statutes. On the other hand, they had training in the classics; the Classic of Changes, Rites or the Classic of Poetry.43

In solving the problem of ill-omened earthquakes and a dissatisfied, restless populace posed by Emperor Xuan, Bing Ji and Wei Xiang did not give any suggestion that could radically change the legal and administrative foundation of the Han dynasty.

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40 In comparing the Attached Statements with Lu Jia’s understanding of the sages’ duty, Puett insightfully picks up the nuance: “In the xici zhuan the sages are imitators; for Lu Jia they are responsible for the proper formation of the cosmos.” See Puett, To Become a God, 250.
41 Han shu, 74: 3140.
42 Wei Xian was promoted from Grandee Secretary to the Grand Chancellor in 67 B.C. He held this position until he died in 59 B.C. Bing Ji, the Grandee Secretary then, was promoted to the position of Grand Chancellor. It lasted until his death in 55 B.C. See An Zuozhang 安作璋 Xiong Tieji 熊鐵基, Qin Han guanzhi shi gao 秦漢官制史稿 (A Manuscript of the history of Qin and Han’s bureaucratic system) (Jinan: Qilu, 2007), 28.
43 Han shu, 74: 3133, 3145. They formed a pair, similar to two officials of Emperor Wu’s court, Gongsun Hong and Zhufu Yan, both of whom started with a legal background and later adopted the teaching of the Spring and Autumn Annals. Sima Qian 司馬遷, Shi ji 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959), 112: 2949, 2953-4.
Instead, they added the cosmological order on top of this foundation. For them, to be in tune with the cosmic order, the ruler must give the populace an environment to prosper and employ them in a timely manner. Only then the cosmos can function well, and accordingly the empire can last long.

In medical texts from the late Warring States period to the early Western Han dynasty, the balance and timely fluctuation of yin and yang qi guarantee the human body’s regular functioning. Accordingly, diseases result from irregularity of the qi in the human body. With tools, especially needles, the doctor’s task is to keep the fluctuation of qi in normal range. In curing diseases, they need to deal with aberrant situations including imbalances, clogs, and loss of qi in order to restore the regular state of the body.\(^4^4\) Wei Xiang and Bing Ji dealt with the state in a way very similar to this practice. The empire resembles the human body, in which the unobstructed and timely flow of qi makes it function normally.\(^4^5\) If the government fails to follow the timely change of the cosmos, the empire might become ill. The officials need to use policies, like doctors using needles, to cure the sickness. Although earlier generations of intellectuals had mentioned theories of qi or proposed regulating yin and yang, this idea of dealing with the empire like the human body as part of the cosmological order did not gain such emphasis and imperial support until Emperor Xuan’s time.

\(^4^4\) See e.g. Taicang Gong’s pathology in Sima Qian, “Bian Que Cang Gong lie zhuan” 扁鵲倉公列傳 (The biography of Bian Que and Taicang Gong), Shi ji, 105: 2813. For a comprehensive study of medical theories from late Warring States period to Han dynasty, see Nathan Sivin, Traditional medicine in contemporary China, 43-94.

\(^4^5\) We can find examples comparing ruling the state to regulating the human body. See e.g., “Qing zhong” 輕重 (The important and trivial), Yan tie lun 盐鐵論 (Discourses on salt and iron), Wang Liji 王利器 ed., Yan tie lun jiao zhu 盐鐵論校注 (Collations and commentaries on the Discourses on Salt and Iron), 180. Huan Tan 桓譚 (ca. 22 B.C.-?) also compared ruling the state to curing diseases: 由是察焉，則才能德行，國之鍼藥也 (According to this, capacity and virtues are the needle and medicine of a state.). However, Huan Tan does not pick up on tong 通, or unobstructed, a state which guarantees the normal movement of qi as part of this analogy. See Huan Tan, Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之 ed., Xin jiben Huan Tan Xin lun 新輯本桓譚新論 (Newly collected version of Huan Tan’s New Discussions) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2009), 9. I consider the content in the Discourses on Salt and Iron a retrospective reconstruction instead of the verbatim record of the contemporary debate. However, it does reflect many ideas popular in the mid-Western Han dynasty. On the authenticity and textual history of this text, see Michael Loewe, “Yen t’ieh lun 盐鐵論,” in Loewe ed., Early Chinese Texts, 477-82.
There are, explicitly or inexplicitly, several allusions to the *Changes* in Wei Xiang’s proposal. How, then, was the *Changes* helpful for Wei Xiang to make his point in front of his contemporaries? Or more specifically, what kind of text did Wei Xiang and his contemporaries perceive the *Changes* to be? It is well accepted that the hexagrams found in the received version of *Classic of Changes* were originally used for divination in the Eastern Zhou period (770–256 B.C.).⁴⁶ The received version contains strata of commentaries on prognostication, techniques there, and the significance of the *Changes* in general from the Warring States period. Among these strata, a passage, “Commentary on the Attached Statements,” or “Xici zhuan” 繫辭傳,⁴⁷ already circulating in the early Western Han dynasty, explains how humans can penetrate Heaven’s will.⁴⁸ Heaven and Earth change over time, and Heaven produces images to show the auspiciousness and inauspiciousness in this constantly changing world; the sage follows the changes of Heaven and Earth, and imitates Heaven’s image in order to understand the way of Heaven.⁴⁹ That is to say, the sage imitates Heaven and Earth’s changes to make perfect the correspondence between human and Heaven. The sage also created images based on nature, such as the Yellow River and Luo River, to be a human artifact of Heaven’s image. The images and the words he left to explain Heaven are the tool by which later generation to understand Heaven’s changes.⁵⁰ As Williard J. Peterson mentions, in dealing with the changing world, the “Commentary” “is an attempt to persuade the audience that they can best

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⁴⁷ It is hard to determine exactly when this text was composed, but the oldest version of it we have was excavated from the Mawangdui site, located in Changsha 長沙, Hunan province of China. For basic information about the Mawangdui corpus of the *Yijing*, see Shaughnessy. *I Ching = The classic of changes*, 14-27. Edward L. Shaughnessy, basing his assessment on the Mawangdui version, dates the text to around 300 B.C. See his “Xici zhuan de bianzhuan” 繫辭傳的編纂 (The formation and compilation of the commentary of the attached statements) in *Gushi guan yi 古史觀異* (Observing oddities in the ancient history). Shanghai: Guji, 2005, 294. Though this is a reasonable estimate, Shaughnessy’s date is largely a conjecture. I follow Peterson’s dating, which is around the beginning of the Western Han dynasty, since the tomb that contains the text was supposedly sealed in 168 B.C. See Peterson, “Making Connections,” 76.

⁴⁸ For an introduction to this passage and its dating, authorship, and textual issues, see Willard J. Peterson, “Making Connections: ‘Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations’ of the Book of Change,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42.1 (1982): 67-116. Based on Shuihudi 睡虎地 excavation of this text, Peterson argues that the text existed, and circulated to certain degree beginning the early years of the Western Han dynasty. See ibid., 76.

⁴⁹ “Xici shang” 繫辭上 (The first half of the commentary on the attached statements), *Yijingzhengyi*, Ruan Yuan ed., *Shisan jing zhushu*, 82.

⁵⁰ See Puett, *To Become a God*, 188-96. Puett points out that the Attached Statements claims that “cosmology and textual authority are inherently linked.” Ibid., 195.
do so by accepting the guidance of the *Changes.*" The “Commentary on the Attached Statements” points out that by using the *Changes,* cosmological processes are intelligible. Human beings can thus adjust to these processes in accord with the cosmos.  

During Emperor Xuan’s time, knowing what kind of governance Heaven approved became a central intellectual issue. Therefore, the *Classic of Changes* became an essential tool for understanding Heaven’s will. Its unique position as a guide derived from the intimate relationship between its images, especially hexagrams, and Heavenly omens and other signs from Heaven. According to the text, thanks to the ancient sages, we are able not only to translate Heaven’s language to something we can understand, but also to make Heaven’s regulation of the cosmos intelligible. For this reason, intellectuals increasingly used the *Classic of Changes* to understand the functioning of Heaven during Emperor Xuan’s time.

Around the same time, three scholars, taught by the same teacher, Tian Wangsun 田王孫, took the position of Erudite (boshi 博士) to transmit their commentarial traditions of the *Classic of Changes*: Shi Chou 施讎 (fl. 51 B.C.), Liangqiu He 梁丘賀 (fl. 59–48 B.C.) and Meng Xi 孟喜 (fl. 73–49 B.C.). They largely monopolized the transmission lines of the *Changes* in the imperial court (Chart 1, page 62). Liangqiu He in particular was more than a mere marginal consultant; he was also the Chamberlain for the Palace Revenues (shaofu 少府) from 59 to 48 B.C., one of the Nine Chamberlains, an important imperial position which was immediately after the Three Ducal Ministers in rank.

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51 Peterson, “Making Connections,” 85.
52 Ibid., 91.
53 Cf. Ikeda Shūzō, “Ryū Kō no gakumon to shisō,” 141.
54 As Sivin mentions, “[t]he Han scholars of the *Changes* were finding in this archaic book the regularities that govern experience of the external world and everything else.” See the appendix “Evolution of the Chinese Cosmological Synthesis” in *The way and the word,* 266-9, esp. 268.
55 Erudite as a position can be traced back at least to the Qin dynasty. People who took this job were responsible for answering emperors’ inquiries especially about rituals and historical records. In the Western Han dynasty, Erudites were under the leadership of Chamberlain for Ceremonies (Taichang 太常), though the latter was not in charge of recruiting the former. Beginning in Emperor Wu’s time, some of the Erudite positions were specifically for transmitters of one of the Five Classics. Later on, classicists took the majority of these positions. See Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 389; An Zuozhang and Xiong Tieji, *Qin Han guanzhi shi gao,* 93-6; Qian Mu, *Qin Han shi* 秦漢史 (*A History of Qin and Han*) (Beijing: Sanlian, 2005), 78-9.
56 The Chamberlain for the Palace Revenues was in charge of the imperial revenues, and he led the biggest group
Although the three masters’ works are lost, surviving fragments from Meng Xi’s work can still give us a rough impression of their scholarship. In a manner similar to Wei Xiang, Meng Xi uses Kan, Zhen, Li and Dui as the four major trigrams that explain the change of seasons. Like Wei Xiang and others, Meng Xi also matches them with the timely fluctuation of yin and yang qi. We can infer that based on
Meng Xi’s reading, the *Classic of Changes* appears to be a guide for understanding the cosmological process as well. The trigrams of the text, the ebb and flow of *yin* and *yang* and the change of seasons correspond with each other. Therefore, for many of Wei Xiang’s contemporaries, commanding the first one then implies mastery of the other two.

The emphasis on the *Changes* in Emperor Xuan’s time was also noticeable in the work of others besides these experts on the *Changes*. Besides the highest official in the court, Wei Xiang, who was a master of the *Changes*, Liu Xiang (77–6 B.C.), a prominent scholar since Emperor Yuan’s reign, was also trained in the *Changes* during Emperor Xuan’s reign.59 Zhang Yu 張禹 (?–5 B.C.), who occupied the position of Grand Chancellor (25–20 B.C.) in Emperor Cheng’s 成 王 reign (r. 33–7 B.C.), received the teaching of the *Changes* from Shi Chou (Chart 1, page 62).

An example reveals the unique position of the *Changes*, and at least some scholars’ view on the classics in general. Meng Xi’s father Meng Qing 孟卿 was a transmitter of the *Rites* and *Annals*. However, instead of teaching his son what he was good at, Meng Qing sent his son to Tian Wangsun for the *Changes*. His reason was that the *Rites* was overwhelmingly voluminous, and the material in the *Annals* was

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59 Han shu, 36: 1967.
varied and haphazardly combined. It is unclear whether Meng Qing sensed the political preference, but his choice does reflect his and some of his contemporaries’ complaint about the Rites and Annals. Meng Qing did not need to gather all the knowledge of the Five Classics to make a complete teaching as later generations did. For him, his son only needed to master one classic, and definitely not the one that contains too much “trivial” information.

As we can see from the example of Meng Qing and his son, the transmission of ideas and thought is never a process of “copying and pasting.” People are agents in this process reflecting and reacting to their reality. They receive knowledge from the community they are in, and find ways to fit into their community. A certain community, especially an intellectual one, at any given time not only receives knowledge and beliefs from previous generations, but also has contemporary concerns. Other communities might share knowledge, beliefs and concerns with them, form an alliance with, dispute with them or simply ignore them.

To survive and expand their social life, members of a community need to be involved in the shared concerns of their group. If a member wants to succeed, however, this is not enough. In an intellectual community in particular, one needs to tell others that his idea is “plausible.” What criteria establish “plausibility?” Among others, one’s idea should solve intellectual problems that are shared within his community with tools that are familiar to members of that community, but that are also innovative in some way.

In the case of the Changes, we can clearly see this happening. Xiahou Sheng, Wei Xiang and Bing Ji all shared an anxiety over understanding Heaven’s will, especially as it pertained to politics. In certain transmission traditions, people understood the Book of Changes as a text that dealt with the relationship between

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60 Han shu, 88: 3599. Meng Qing was not alone in this case. Sima Tan also considers that the classics have too much information to be mastered. See Sima Qian 司馬遷, “Tai shi gong zi xu” 太史公自序 (The preface by the Grand Historian), Shiji, 3290.

61 Among the classics, the Changes has the reputation of including myriad situations in its text, and thus being superior to the other classics. See “Yao” as in Ikeda Tomoshisa, “Bo shu ‘Yao’ shi wen,” 45 and Liu Bin, Bo shu “Yao” pian jiao shi, 160-70.
Heaven and humans, and “the heart of Heaven and Earth.” They might modify these traditions with other contemporary, well-accepted theories, such as the cosmology of *qi*. In theories like Wei Xiang’s theory, the *Changes* is combined with an understanding of the cosmology of *qi* in order to divine Heaven’s will.

In the following sections, we will see that Han literati’s concern over how to understand Heaven’s will became one of the major topics among Wei Xiang’s generation. Later generations, shifting from expediently using the *Changes* to adopting the whole package of the ancient legacy in classics, still built their arguments on Heaven’s will. Their restoration of an ancient ideal, the Great Peace, was always a Heaven-approved enterprise.

*Wang Ji & Moral Governance*

In Emperor Xuan’s court, scholarly readings of the *Changes* would not have

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62 See, e.g. “Yu cong yi” 語叢一 (First part of the gathering of sayings), an excavated passage of Warring States period from Guodian 郭店, Hubei province, China: “《易》所以會天道人道也 (The *Changes* is that by which the way of Heaven is merged with that of humans).” See Liu Zhao 劉釗, *Guodian Chu jian jiao shi* 郭店楚簡校釋 (Collations and interpretations of Guodian bamboo manuscripts) (Fujian: Fujian renmin, 2003), 191. Also see the Mawangdui manuscript, “Yao” 要 (The gist [of the *Changes*]): “故明君不時不宿，不日不月，不卜不筮，而知吉與凶。（Therefore, a wise lord does not [rely] on time, celestial lodges, the sun, the moon, divination with oracles or milfoil, but he knows auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. [That is because] he follows the heart of Heaven and Earth. This is the way of the *Changes*).” Zhang Zhenglang 張政烺 Li Ling 李零 ed., *Zhang Zhenglang lun Yi cong gao* 張政烺論《易》叢稿 (Zhang Zhenglang’s manuscripts on the *Changes*) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2011), 243.

63 For information about divination, especially the *jianchu* 建除 system, popular from the late Warring States period to the Western Han dynasty, see Michael Loewe, “The Almanacs (jih-shu) from Shui-hu-ti: a Preliminary Survey,” in his *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 214-35 and Kudō Motoo 工藤元男, *Sukochi Shinkan yori mita Shindai no kokka to shakai* 睡虎地秦簡よりみた秦代の國家と社會 (The state and society of Qin as seen in Shuihudi bamboo manuscripts) (Tōkyō: Sōbunsha, 1998), 131-40. This type of divination also relies on the seasonal change of a year. Nevertheless, the *jianchu* system is more interested in what days inauspicious for doing particular things. The result of an action has more to do with the auspiciousness of the timing than the action of the person himself. For example, in this system, killing a man does not necessarily disrupt the cosmological order, but it can still lead to inauspicious results on certain days and moments. It is unclear from the manuscripts if there is a specified agent causing change at all. In Wei Xiang’s theory, the changes of Heaven and Earth depend on *yin* and *yang*. Since there is a correspondence between the seasonal changes and the fluctuation of *yin* and *yang*, people can use certain arithmetic, in this case, the trigrams, to calculate the auspiciousness of certain behaviors by observing the timing of seasonal changes. Cf. Mu-chou Poo, “How to Steer through Life: Negotiating Fate in the *Daybook*,” in Christopher Lupke ed., *The Magnitude of Ming: Command, Allotment, and Fate in Chinese Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i press, 2005), 116. Also, although Wei Xiang’s theory bears some resemblance to the earlier methods in the Shuihudi divination texts, the important difference lies in the use of *qi* and *yin-yang* theory to determine the auspiciousness of a given action.
gained popularity if they had emphasized moral cultivation. Wang Ji (王吉, ?–48 B.C.), for example, a Grandee Remonstrant (jian dafu 諫大夫) in Emperor Xuan’s time, had an alternative blueprint with a different emphasis from Wei Xiang and Bing Ji’s. He did not think the current legal and administrative systems were the “foundation of the Great Peace (taiping zhi ji 太平之基).” In Wang Ji’s view, the emperor needed to carefully select his subjects. Nevertheless, their job was not to fix possible cosmological irregularities caused by human society as Wei Xiang might argue. Instead, Wang Ji believed that they were responsible for dealing with virtue. The emperor needed them to correct him, and spread virtue all over the empire. In ruling the state, the emperor should act according to virtue, because the populace is watching.

In his proposal, Wang Ji did not mention anything about the populace’s dissatisfaction leading to deviant qi as Dong Zhongshu did. However, this expansion of virtue from the near to the distant does resemble the political theory in Dong Zhongshu’s work and “Daxue.”

Wang Ji then provided the rationales and standards for selecting officials. He pointed out that the government of the whole empire should be based on the principles of the ancient rites and the Annals. Only these could eliminate duplicity and litigation, and eventually led the populace to a place of humanity and longevity, perceivable as the state of the Great Peace. Alluding to Heaven’s heart (tian xin 天心), he suggested that following the principles is in accord with Heaven’s will. Like Xiahou Sheng, Wang Ji touched the issue of what Heaven wanted, but he did not participate in Bing Ji and Wei Xiang’s type of cosmology. Instead Wang Ji fell into line with Dong Zhongshu by emphasizing moral cultivation.

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64 As seen in Emperor Xuan’s own rejection of moral cultivation: “The Han has its own institution. It originally combined the hegemonic way with kingly way. How come we should solely use moral cultivation and the Zhou government?” See Han shu, 9: 277.
65 Han shu, 72: 3062-3.
66 Ibid., 3063.
67 Han shu, 72: 3063.
Wang Ji mentioned a phrase that was fundamental in Han politics: the “Great Peace” (taiping 太平). The term deserves a close exploration for us to understand its political connotations in the Han dynasty. Now we take as step back from Wang Ji’s time to the beginning of the Western Han Dynasty. One of the earliest examples is from Lu Jia’s New Speeches (Xin yu 新語):

聖人因變而立功，由異而致太平，堯、舜承蚩尤之失，而思欽明之道，君子見惡於外，則知變於內矣。69

Sages establish their accomplishments based on changes. They transform bizarreness into the Great Peace. Yao and Shun adopted Chiyou’s errors, and they thought about the way of respect and brightness. When gentlemen see the evilness outside, they then know the changes inside.

Lu Jia is describing how sages transform the currently bad government into a good one. Judging from the context, the word “bizarreness” (yi 異) indicates bizarre omens caused by bad governance. Sages are the ones who can fix the chaos, and help the realm revert to an orderly state. Accordingly, the Great Peace indicates a state free from natural disasters and bizarre phenomena.70

During Emperor Wu’s time, Gongsun Hong brought the Great Peace up in the

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68 Two concise introductions to the term “Great Peace” in the Daoist context are available: Marx Kaltenmark, “The Ideology of the T’ai-p’ing ching,” in Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel eds., Facets of Taoism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 21-4; Barbara Hendrischke, The Scripture on Great Peace: The Taiping jing and the Beginnings of Daoism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4-13. A concept similar to the Great Peace is the “Great Unity” (datong 大同). See Itano Chōhachi 板野長八, “Raiki no daidō” 禮記の大同 (The Great Unity in the Records of Rites), Hokkaido Daigaku bungakubun kiyō 5 (1956): 85-115. One major difference between these two concepts of ideal society is that in datong the social relationships are impartial. For example, the text says that in the society of the Great Unity, people do not just show affection to their own son, but others’ son. See “Liyun” 禮運 (The movement of rites), Liji zhengyi, j. 21, Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing zhushu, 1414. The same cannot be said for the Great Peace.

69 Lu Jia, “Si wu” 思務 (Considering the important), Wang Liqi ed., Xinyu jiaozhu, 168.

context of recruiting Erudites:

Therefore, in practicing the teachings and transformation, from inside to outside, one should start with establishing the primary good in the capital. Now your majesty illuminates the ultimate virtue, opens the great brightness, matches Heaven and Earth, and takes human relations as essential. You advocate learning, work on rites, promote transformation and encourage the worthies in order to cultivate [broadcast?] the Four Directions. This is the source of the Great Peace.

Gongsun Hong argues for a top to bottom process of cultivation. With good officials in the court, cultivation can be carried out to the whole empire. Dong Zhongshu also mentions similar means of achieving the Great Peace in answering the following query from Emperor Wu: “The teachings of the three kings derive from different sources, but they all have shortcomings; others say that the Way is something that lasts but does not change. Are these two sayings different?” Dong Zhongshu answers:

The Greatness of the Way originated from Heaven. Heaven does not change, nor does the Way. Therefore, in Yu succeeding Shun and Shun succeeding Yao, the three sages taught each other [sequentially], and they stuck to the same Way; they had no [need for] government that corrected faults. Therefore we do not talk about that which they added and reduced. From this point of view, the Way for people who adopted the ordered world is the same; the Way for people who adopted the disordered world changes. Now Han follows the great disorder. It should reduce the refinement of Zhou, and employ Xia’s honesty. Your majesty has bright virtue and a beautiful Way. You feel sorry for the poor ethos, and lament the obscurity of the Kingly Way. Therefore you have promoted the worthy

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71 Shiji, 121: 3119.
72 Han shu, 58: 2514.
73 Ibid., 2518-9.
and upright people, and discussed issues with them. You desire to promote humane and proper virtue, illuminate the Kingly principle, and establish the Way of Great Peace.

For Dong Zhongshu, the ancient kings’ Way was in accord with each other and Heaven. However, the Han Empire is suffering from a bad ethos, and the Kingly Way is obscure. This situation results from the chaotic era before the Han dynasty. Therefore, although the Way is unchangeably one, rulers need to practice it differently based on different situations. Dong Zhongshu then points out that the recruitment of worthy and righteous people is the way to illuminate the kingly Way, and thus establish the Great Peace.

Then, what is the three kings’ government or the Way of the Great Peace like? Dong Zhongshu elaborates:

夫古之天下亦今之天下，今之天下亦古之天下，共是天下，古亦大治，上下和睦，習俗美盛，不令而行，不禁而止，吏亡姦邪，民亡盜賊，囹圄空虛，德潤草木，澤被四海，鳳皇來集，麒麟來游，以古準今，壹何不相逮之遠也！安所繆盭而陵夷若是？意者有所失於古之道與？有所詭於天之理與？試跡之古，返之於天，黨可得見乎？

The All-under-Heaven of antiquity is also the All-under-Heaven of today; the All-under-Heaven of today is also the All-under-Heaven of antiquity. They are all All-under-Heaven. It was in great order in antiquity. The above and below were in harmony. The customs were beautiful and flourishing. People acted before they were commanded; they stopped before they were forbidden. There were no evil or deviant officials. There were no robbers or thieves. Prisons were empty. Virtue even reached plants. The bounties covered the Four Seas. Fenghuang came to assemble, and qilin came to travel. Using antiquity as a standard to see today, aren’t they too far away from each other? How could they differ and deviate from each other like this? Maybe there is some way we failed in the Way of antiquity and there is something we departed from the principle of Heaven? If we try to follow the traces of antiquity and return to Heaven, could we see it?

There were no evil behaviors in the All-under-Heaven of the ancients. People were in harmony, and knew what was good and evil. Even plants benefited from governance,

74 Han shu, 58: 2519-20.
and auspicious animals came. For Dong Zhongshu, the ideal state of a society happened in the past. It did not emphasize the pursuit of advanced technology to make people live more conveniently; nor did it seek the people’s right to express different opinions against the government. In fact, in this ideal realm, people do not have different opinions at all because they are all cultivated by the ultimate Way. After depicting this scene, Dong Zhongshu points out that this is not a utopian illusion, but something achievable even in the present. If this is true, then why has the Han still not achieved it? Dong Zhongshu gives his reasons: the Han Empire fails to follow the ancient path and Heaven’s will. Without understanding the rationale of Heaven, people might deviate from the Way; without examining the ancient kings’ government, people do not have any model to follow.

With this background, we can see how much Wang Ji’s proposal resembles Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong’s proposal in terms of recruiting good officials to carry out top to bottom moral cultivation. Moreover, Wang Ji is similar to Dong Zhongshu in that both argue that in order to achieve the state of the Great Peace, Han needs to turn to the ancient sage kings’ government to first eliminate bad ethos. Wang Ji points out in particular that Han needs to adopt ancient kings’ rites that are suitable for the present.

Wang Ji’s attitude toward the ancients’ legacy is an expedient one. He is not making a fundamentalist argument that Han needs to practice every rite of the ancient kings literally. He simply argues that Han should adopt these as a stopgap measure before the empire made its own rites. Like Wei Xiang and Meng Qing, Wang Ji uses parts of the ancient legacy as an expedient way to govern, but he is not fully committed to its literal authority.

Emperor Xuan did not take Wang Ji’s advice, because it sounded circuitous (yukuo 迂闊) to him.⁷⁵ Indeed, Emperor Xuan was concerned with Heaven’s mandate. Nevertheless, he never thought of sticking to ancient practices in order to maintain it.⁷⁶ In his court, Xiahou Sheng, Wang Ji and Wei Xiang all sought to

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⁷⁵ Han shu, 72: 3065.
⁷⁶ Han shu, 9: 277.
understand what a Heaven-approved government might look like. Xiahou Sheng points out the importance of the populace for to Heaven. Wang Ji, emphasizing the self-cultivation of the emperor, argues that Heaven’s will lies in ancient rites. Wei Xiang, de-emphasizing the moral dimension and links the state to the cosmological order. As a result, Bing Ji and Wei Xiang, and their understanding of the cosmos were dominant in the court.

However, the situation was soon reversed. In the next section, we will see that the expedient use of ancient legacy was no longer good enough for Heaven. The literati in the generation after Wei Xiang and Bing Ji embraced the teaching of ancient sages in a more elaborate and committed way. Accordingly, the expedient use of the classics was out of fashion. Scholars trained in more than one classic took over the dominant positions in the last fifty years of the Western Han dynasty.

### 2. Emperor Yuan and the Restoration of the Kingly Way

Heaven’s will, the sages and the welfare of the populace formed a dynamic in political discourses from Emperor Xuan’s time on. This dynamic worked in two ways. The sages either played the role of the prophet interpreting Heaven and its order or of the designer of social order in accord with human nature, which is determined by Heaven. The populace’s welfare in the middle became the measure of either Han’s mastery of cosmological order or of human governance. In Emperor Xuan’s reign, the former dominated the court; Emperor Yuan to Wang Mang’s interregnum, the latter gained great popularity.

Indeed, Emperor Xuan was not interested in extending moral cultivation to the whole country. However, his successor, Emperor Yuan, did not follow his path. A conversation between Emperor Xuan and Emperor Yuan, the Crown Prince gives a fairly vivid depiction of these two emperors’ philosophies of government:
Once when he was waiting upon [Emperor Xuan] at a banquet, he said, with a deferential bearing, “Your Majesty is too severe in applying the laws. It would be proper to employ Ru masters [in your government].” Emperor Xuan changed color and said, “The Han dynasty has its own institutes and laws, which are variously [taken from] the hegemonies way and the Kingly Way. How could I trust purely in moral instruction and use [the kind of] government [exercised by] the Zhou [dynasty]? The vulgar Ru moreover do not understand what is appropriate to the time; they love to approve the ancient and disapprove the present, causing people to be confused about names and realities, so that they do not know what they should cherish. How could they be entrusted with responsibility?” Thereupon he sighed and said, “The one who will confound my dynasty will be my Crown Prince.”

The heir apparent suggests that the emperor use the Ru to replace heavy emphasis on legal practices and punishments. However, the emperor does not like his proposal at all. For the emperor, allowing the Ru as a political group to govern is equal to entrusting the government to moral cultivation alone, which is a characteristic of the Zhou polity. The Han government, according to the emperor has been a mixture of the way of hegemons, which refers to an emphasis on laws and regulations, and of the Kingly Way, which indicates the government of the Zhou polity. Therefore, for Emperor Xuan, using the Ru would destroy the Han political tradition. Besides, in Emperor Xuan’s eyes, the Ru do not give suggestions based on expediency and practicality. They instead prefer ancient ideas based on moral cultivation to contemporary ideas.

We can find many instances in Emperor Xuan’s court that reflect his attitude toward the Ru and state policy. For example, the Grand Chancellor Wei Xiang, who was an expert in the Changes, did not promote the government of ancient kings. Instead, he argued that the Han needed to follow its own political tradition because

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77 Han shu, 9: 277.
79 The issue of whether to rule by hegemony, or ba dao 霸道, or the Kingly Way, wang dao 王道 was not new in the Han dynasty. For various views on this issue in Early China, see Hihara Toshikuni, Kandai Shisō no kenkyū, 137-42.
past and present institutions were different. On the other hand, Wang Ji’s argument that moral cultivation led to the prosperity of the Three Dynasties, and that the Han ought to follow suit, was rejected. It is unclear to what extent Wang Ji resembled the typical Ru in Emperor Xuan and Yuan’s mind. Nevertheless, it was political philosophies like Wang Ji’s that gained great popularity beginning in Emperor Yuan’s time.

After he was enthroned, Emperor Yuan relied on two of his former teachers, Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 (114–47 B.C) as Superintendent of the Imperial Court (guanglu xun 光祿勳) and General of the Van (qian Jiangjun 前將軍), and Zhou Kan 周堪 (?–ca. 43 B.C.) as Imperial Court Grandee (guanglu dafu 光祿大夫). He also promoted Kuang Heng 匡衡 (fl. 56–29 B.C.), a person formerly dismissed by Emperor Xuan as a Gentleman of the Palace (langzhong 郎中). Xiao Wangzhi recommended Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 B.C.), a relative of the imperial family, as an Official who Concurrently Serves in the Palace (ji shizhong 給事中) (See Chart 4, page 110). It is noteworthy that all of the officials named above had training in the classics, and were from tightly-knit transmission traditions. Xiao Wangzhi and Kuang Heng were the students of Hou Cang, and Zhou Kan was a student of Xiahou Sheng. Both Hou Cang and Xiahou Sheng received teachings from Xiahou Shichang 夏侯始昌 (fl. 104 B.C.), who mastered all of the Five Classics. (Chart 2, page 74) Liu Xiang was trained not only in the Changes, but also the Guliang tradition of the Annals in Emperor Xuan’s reign.

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80 Han shu, 74: 3137.
81 Han shu, 78: 3283.
82 Han shu, 81: 3332.
83 For a brilliant study of Liu Xiang’s scholarship and political thought, see Ikeda Shūzō 池田秀三, “Ryū Kō no gakumon to shisō 呉向の學問と思想 (The scholarship and thought of Liu Xiang), Tōhō gakuhō 東方學報 50 (1978): 109-190.
84 Xiahou Shichang was also a student of Yuan Gu 轅固, a transmitter of the Qi tradition of the Poetry. Han shu, 78: 3271; 88: 3612-3.
The shift even further away from Emperor Wu’s policies started at the very beginning of Emperor Yuan’s reign. As in the period of Emperor Xuan’s reign, in the early years of Emperor Yuan’s reign, there were earthquakes and eclipses. These bizarre phenomena led the emperor to seek counsel from his officials. Kuang Heng, an official the new emperor had favored ever since he was still the heir apparent, answered:

陛下躬聖德，開太平之路，閔愚吏民觸法抵禁，比年大赦，使百姓得改行自新，天下幸甚。臣竊見大赦之後，姦邪不為衰止，今日大赦，明日犯法，相隨入獄，此殆導之未得其務也。85

Your majesty practices sagely virtue, and opens the road to the Great Peace. You sympathize with fool officials and commoners who break the law and violate the prohibitions. You issued amnesties year after year to make the populace able to correct their behavior and to improve themselves. All-under-Heaven is so lucky. [However,] I have seen that after amnesties, the evil and deviant do not let up or stop. They receive an amnesty today, and they break the law tomorrow. Following each other, they go back to jail. This is probably because they are not guided properly.

Kuang Heng appreciates the effort Emperor Yuan took to pursue the Great Peace.

85 Han shu, 81: 3332.
86 Ibid., 3333.
However, Kuang Heng thinks that Emperor Yuan has not gone far enough: amnesties and legal practices still bear too close a resemblance to Emperor Xuan’s practices. He believes that the answer to good government lies in rites and good virtues in the court. Kuang Heng argues in line with Wang Ji and Dong Zhongshu that high officials need to be committed to righteous behavior. Only then can the empire eliminate evil deeds. Harsh punishments and strict laws will fail to change people’s behavior, because they do not work in accord with people’s heavenly nature. In other words, for Kuang Heng, rites are a good way to eliminate bad behaviors, for they work in harmony with people’s nature. At this point, Kuang Heng sounds very much like Xunzi, who also argued that the rites are a human artifice perfectly designed for human nature.

Turning to the omens, Kuang Heng no longer sounds like Xunzi:

臣聞天人之際，精祲有以相盪，善惡有以相推，事作乎下者象動乎上，陰陽之理各應其感，陰變則靜者動，陽蔽則明者晻，水旱之災隨類而至。今關東連年饑饉，百姓乏困，或至相食，此皆生於賦斂多，民所共者大，而吏安集之不稱之效也。89

I have heard that in the contact between Heaven and human beings, the essence of each soaked into, and interacted with one another. Goodness and evilness thus are driven by this [interaction]. When an undertaking rises below, the images move above. The essence of yin and yang respond to their stimuli respectively. When yin goes odd, what is tranquil becomes agitated. When yang is blocked, what is bright becomes dark. Disasters of flood and drought take place accordingly. In recent years, Guandong has suffered from famine. The populace is in poverty, and some of them even ate each other. These [problems] all derive from too many taxes and the fact that what the populace provides is huge, but officials fail to accommodate them well.

For Kuang Heng, natural disasters result from irregular movements of yin and yang, and bad governance of the human realm causes this irregularity. In this case in particular, Kuang Heng argues that high taxes stressed the populace, thus leading to a natural disaster. He then proposes his solution including cutting the budget for

87 Han shu, 81: 3334.
88 Goldin, Confucianism, 70-4.
89 Han shu, 81: 3337.
luxurious imperial buildings, giving up border territories, selecting the capable and moral officials, and following the Six Classics and the Kingly Way. Kuang Heng points out that the treatment of the populace plays an important role in the dynamic between Heaven and the human realm, much as Emperor Xuan realized after disasters shocked his realm. Nevertheless, Kuang Heng turns back to morality. Like Lu Jia, Dong Zhongshu, and his closer contemporary, Wang Ji, Kuang Heng reemphasizes moral cultivation from top to bottom in the empire. Moral transformation, instead of laws and punishment, is the proper way to solve problems such as officials’ abuse of authority in society. Only after that can the populace be free from hatred and rancor and become peaceful. The society can thus reach the state of Great Peace. What is more, in order to do so, he also suggests that the emperor should refer to the Six Arts and previous dynasties’ undertakings, which is different from Wei Xiang’s suggestion that the Han maintain their own political traditions. Kuang Heng’s proposal is indeed very similar to Wang Ji’s proposal to Emperor Xuan. However, unlike Emperor Xuan, Emperor Yuan was open to the idea of governance based primarily on virtuous leadership. Emperor Yuan favored Kuang Heng’s proposal and promoted him an Imperial Court Grandee. The “undertaking of the previous dynasties” definitely does not simply refer to any undertaking of any previous dynasty. It refers to a very specific set of dynasties and kings. Xiao Wangzhi, Zhou Kan, and Liu Xiang referred specifically to the institutions of the ancient sage kings, namely Huangdi 黃帝, Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Yu禹, Tang湯, King Wen 文王, King Wu 武王, Duke of Zhou 周公 and Confucius, when they formed a political alliance advocating the adoption of ancient institutions (gu zhi 古制). They gained the emperor’s support.

Obviously, Kuang Heng’s claim did not go along with Emperor Xuan’s understanding of Han government, the mixture of hegemony and the Kingly Way. In

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90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., 3338.
92 Han shu, 36: 1957. Most of these sage kings are mentioned in Confucian texts such as Analects, Mencius and Xunzi except Huangdi. Huangdi as a sage king listed with other sage kings in the Confucian tradition starts to appear in Lu Jia’s Xinyu. See Lu Jia 陸賈, “Dao ji” 道基 (The base of the Way), Wang Liqi 王利器 ed., Xinyu jiaozhu, 11.
93 Han shu, 78: 3283.
politics, if a new leader tries to practice a set of policies largely different from his predecessor, it is not uncommon for him to face resistance from his predecessor’s personnel. In this case, Prefect of the Palace Writers (zhongshu ling 中書令) Hong Gong 弘恭 and Shi Xian 石顯 (?–33 B.C.) rejected many of Xiao Wangzhi’s group’s proposals, for they were trained in legal practices and habituated to Han political conventions.\(^{94}\) That is to say, Shi Xian’s group tended to preserve Emperor Xuan’s state policy. Inevitably, different views led to political conflicts and partisanship between the groups of Xiao Wangzhi and Shi Xian.

In a proposal in 43 B.C. impeaching Shi Xian and his group, Liu Xiang depicted the ideal society governed by the sage kings. He argues that since the worthies were in the court, the whole country was in a harmonious state during the rule of the ancient sage kings, such as Shun, King Wen, and Duke of Zhou. There were no struggles or litigation, and people showed respect and humility to each other. Quoting from the Book of Poetry, Liu Xiang claims that this state also affected other states and even the animal world. What is more, the harmony in the human realm influenced Heaven, and Heaven accordingly sent auspicious omens to human society.\(^{95}\)

However, Liu Xiang continues, from King You and Li’s time on, the continuum of the Golden Age was broken. Harmony was absent in the court, and the worthies were not in power. As reflected in the Poetry, many inauspicious omens such as solar eclipses appeared. Liu Xiang points out, according to the Annals, it was even more so in the period of Spring and Autumn, an era scarred by regicide.\(^{96}\) Based on this observation, Liu Xiang gives a general principle of the development of history:

由此觀之，和氣致祥，乖氣致異；祥多者其國安，異眾者其國危，天地之常經，古今之通義也。\(^{97}\)

Based on this, harmonious qi leads to auspiciousness, and deviant qi leads to bizarreness. The state of one who has much auspiciousness will be safe, and the state of one who has much bizarreness will be in danger. This is the regularity of Heaven and Earth, and a principle throughout history.

\(^{94}\) Ibid., 3284.
\(^{95}\) Han shu, 36: 1933-4.
\(^{96}\) Ibid., 1934-7.
\(^{97}\) Ibid., 1941.
Liu Xiang’s generalization bears many similarities with his predecessors. Like Dong Zhongshu, Gongsun Hong, and Wang Ji, Liu Xiang takes those “above,” or the court, as the center responsible for the welfare of the whole state and even the entirely of human society. As with Lu Jia and Dong Zhongshu’s theory, omens derive from the human realm.\(^8\) Liu Xiang’s theory of \textit{qi} also resembles that of Lu Jia and Dong Zhongshu, in the sense that human beings are the primary agents that affect the formation and circulation of \textit{qi}. Harmony and discord in the court could generate \textit{qi} that leads to auspicious or inauspicious omens respectively. What is even more crucial for a state is that the omens are the measure of its status on the road to prosperity or extinction.

Based on the criterion of inauspicious omens, the Han dynasty is in even greater trouble than the states of the Spring and Autumn period:

\begin{quote}
是以日月無光, 雪霜夏隕, 海水沸出, 陵谷易處, 列星失行, 皆怨氣之所致也。夫遵衰周之軌跡, 循詩人之所刺, 而欲以成太平, 致雅頌, 猶卻行而求及前人也。初元以來六年矣, 案《春秋》, 六年之中, 災異未有稠如今者也。夫有《春秋》之異, 無孔子之救, 猶不能解紛, 況甚於春秋乎? \(^9\)
\end{quote}

Therefore, the sun and moon lacking of light; snow and frost falling down in the summer; water boiling out of the sea; hills and abysses moving around, and stars failing to move regularly are all caused by the resentful \textit{qi}. If one follows the track of the declined Zhou, and traces what is criticized by the author of the \textit{Book of Poetry}, but desires to achieve thereby the Great Peace and attract Elegantias and Hymns, it is like walking backward but seeking to catch the person ahead. It has been six years since the reign of Chuyuan (48 B.C.). Based on the \textit{Annals}, in these six years, disasters and bizarreness were more frequent than in any other moment in history. With bizarreness as described in the \textit{Annals} but without Confucius’ rescue, this crisis cannot be solved. How about a situation that is [even] worse than in the \textit{Annals}?

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\(^{8}\) For a similarity between Xiu Xiang and Dong Zhongshu’s theories on omens, see Itano Chōhachi 板野長八, “

\(^{9}\) \textit{Han shu}, 36: 1942.
The Elegantiae, or Ya 雅 and Hymns, or Song 頌 refer to the hymns Liu Xiang quoted to describe the harmonious state of antiquity. The “declined Zhou” refers to the states and hegemons of the period of Spring and Autumn. In the context, Liu Xiang implies that Han intends to achieve the Great Peace, the state brought about by a sage king’s rule, but Han is practicing the hegemonic rule that leads to dynastic decline. Liu Xiang then points out that Han can no longer afford this practice. In the most recent six years, Han has received inauspicious omens more frequently than any other dynastic house in history. Liu Xiang believes that if Han does not turn to the sages to solve this crisis, Han will perish soon.

The agenda behind Liu Xiang’s proposal is to diminish Shi Xian’s group. Nevertheless, we might still need to ask what themes and elements Liu Xiang chose to frame his agenda. As an erudite scholar, Liu Xiang’s idea of the Great Peace also resembles Lu Jia and Dong Zhongshu’s in many ways. Firstly, the Great Peace appears in an ordered society characterized by harmony. Hatred, dissatisfaction, and the irregular qi they provoke are absent in this hierarchical society. Secondly, this order is in accord with Heaven; this is demonstrated by auspicious omens. Thirdly, the sages of antiquity once achieved this state, or they could have achieved it. Therefore, emulating them is the way to achieve the Great Peace.

Thirty years later after Sui Hong’s incident, Liu Xiang evoked fin de siècle sentiment again to promote his and his colleagues’ idea of reform. He wove this anxiety about Heaven’s mandate into his predecessors’ theory of omens, the narrative of sage kings’ government and Han politics. Liu Xiang compares the contemporary reign not to reigns in the Han dynasty, but to the reigns of the Golden Age, when the Great Peace prevailed and the skies proclaimed the human realm’s harmony with Heaven. Adopting his predecessors’ theory on omens and the Great Peace, Liu Xiang tied the Han dynasty and the Kingly Way together using Heaven’s mandate.

To Liu Xiang, achieving the Great Peace or not is not simply a choice; it is a life or death matter for the dynasty. The accumulation of bad omens signals the imminent
revocation of the Mandate of Heaven. Accordingly, the Han ruler either managed to follow the path of the ancient sages, or he did not, and in the latter case the dynasty would perish like the Qin. In a letter objecting the extravagant construction of the Yan mausoleum (Yan Ling 延陵) for the emperor, Emperor Cheng, Liu Xiang mentions that “The Heavenly Mandate is broadly bestowed, and it is not bestowed to just one surname.” With this rationale, he retells the story of Han’s establishment: Gaozu 高祖 thought his virtue was worse than Zhou, but better than Qin, so that he picked Guanzhong 關中 as the capital area so he could rely on Zhou’s virtue and Qin’s geographical advantage. He further points out “the length of a dynasty takes virtue as its measure.”101 That is to say, Gaozu as the founder of the Han dynasty relied on both Qin and Zhou, a “mixture of hegemonic and kingly ways.”102

However, the length of a dynasty is determined by the latter, not the former. Therefore, prolonging Han’s grip on Heaven’s Mandate is dependent upon virtuous rule, and that, Liu Xiang points out, is exactly the responsibility of Gaozu’s successors.

Not only Qin did not carry out their government righteously, they even broke the continuum of the Kingly Way from the Three Dynasties, leaving the newly established Han dynasty in a difficult position. Liu Xiang’s contemporary Mei Fu 梅福 (fl. 16 B.C.–A.D. 8), a scholar who also specialized in the Guliang tradition of Annals mentioned how Qin extinguished the sagely rule:

秦為亡道，削仲尼之跡，滅周公之軌，壞井田，除五等，禮廢樂崩，王道不通，故欲行王道者莫能致其功也。103

Qin practiced the way of extinction. They erased the trace of Confucius, eliminated the tracks of the Duke of Zhou, broke the Well-Field system, and got rid of the Five Rank system. Rites were abandoned, and music collapsed. Therefore, none of the people who desire to practice the Kingly Way can achieve it.

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100 For a linguistic survey of the term “Mandate,” or 明 in Early China, see David Schaberg, “Command and the Content of Tradition,” in Christopher Lupke ed., The Magnitude of Ming: Command, Allotment, and Fate in Chinese Culture (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i press, 2005), 23-34. Liu Xiang is in line with Dong Zhongshu in the sense that Heaven and its Mandate are no longer problematic as they are in Confucius or Mencius’ philosophy. See Michael Puett, “Following the commands of Heaven: The Notion of Ming in Early China,” 49-69, esp. 61-9.

101 Han shu, 36: 1950.

102 As Emperor Xuan said. See this chapter, note 77.

103 Han shu, 67: 2912.
For Mei Fu, if Qin had not existed, the Han would have started from a more advantageous position. Like Liu Xiang and many others, Mei Fu believes the ancient sages’ path is the Kingly Way. The evil Qin dynasty, however, destroyed all the practices of the Kingly Way so that later generations had no model to follow.

3. The Six Classics: Complete and Fundamental

In the previous sections, we have seen changes of political philosophy in the court since Emperor Xuan’s time. Students of Xiahou Shichang and their affiliates (Chart 1, page 62) drove these changes toward knowing Heaven’s will and exploring ancient sage kings’ rule. While important, the classics were not the only remedy for the crisis the Han dynasty was facing. From this section on, focused on virtually the same group of Han scholars, we will see how changes took place in their understanding of the role of the classics in late Han politics, and the later generation of this group was highly inclined to the classics as the only cure of the crisis. The increasingly intense attention to this corpus of texts resulted from the increasing emphasis on the ancient Kingly Way, and thus accelerated intellectual innovations focusing on the classics.

Xunzi, Lu Jia and Hou Cang: From Humanity to Heaven

If the Kingly Way of antiquity was lost, how were the people of Han supposed to

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104 In the Han dynasty, only the Five Classics were extant. However, Han scholars still adopted phrases such as liu jing 六經 or liu yi 六藝 from the Warring States period, which include the Music when they referred to the corpus of the classics. In reasoning the significance of the classics, they also counted the Music in. Therefore, in this section, I use the phrase the “Six Classics” in order to better present Han scholars’ verbatim especially when their arguments under discussion contain the phrase the “Six Classics.” I use the term “Five Classics” to indicate the actual corpus of texts discussed in the Introduction. This, nevertheless, does not necessarily mean that the “Six Classics” and “Five Classics” were different corpora of texts in Han intellectuals’ mind, nor did any Han scholar use the term “Six Classics” to promote or reconstruct the textual form of the Music.
know what it was? According to Yang Xiong, the answer was in written texts that contained the sages’ words:

曰：聖人之言，天也。天妄乎？繼周者未欲太平也。如欲太平也，舍之而用他道，亦無由至矣。\(^{105}\)

I said, “Sages’ words are Heaven. Is Heaven spurious? The successor of Zhou does not desire the Great Peace. If one desires the Great Peace and he abandons sages’ words in favor of other means, there would be no way to achieve it.”

Whoever would follow the Zhou dynasty needed to follow the words of the sages, which convey Heaven’s will, otherwise the Great Peace would never appear.

However, not all the written texts with accounts of the sage kings were of equal position; the classics were the sources of greatest import to literati. Of course, this was not new, nor was the composition of the corpus called “the Classics” arbitrarily decided during the later Han dynasty. The *Book of Changes, Book of Poetry, Book of Documents, Rites* and *Spring and Autumn Annals* had been understood as more or less a group of texts since the Warring States period. The earliest document in which the six texts’ names are mentioned together is found in an excavated text from a tomb in Guodian 郭店, Hubei 湖北 province, China. The excavation team dates the tomb to around the late mid-Warring States period.\(^{106}\) From that time on, we can find the word “the Five Classics” and “the Six Classics” with the addition of the Music or “Six Arts” (六藝) as references to this corpus of texts. The classics were a crucial inventory invested with much cultural capital, and they did not just belong to Confucians. Many socio-intellectual groups, such as Mohists appreciated these well-known sources as well.\(^{107}\) From Emperor Wu’s time on, the promotion of the classics made them more important especially politically. The Gongyang tradition of


\(^{106}\) See "Yu cong yi" 語叢一 (First part of the gathering of sayings), Liu Zhao, *Guodian Chu jian jiao shi*, 191. For an extremely comprehensive summary of the parallelism in received texts of Early China, see Fukui, *Kandai Jukyō no shiteki kenkyū*, 143-4. For a discussion of such parallelisms and order of the six texts’ names, see Liao Mingchun 廖名春, “Liu jing cixu tanyuan” 六經次序探源 (An exploration of the origin of the arrangements of Six Classics’ titles), *Lishi yanjiu* 2002.2: 32-41.

\(^{107}\) Early Mohists, e.g. were largely based on their argumentation on the *Documents, Poetry and Annals* as the trace of ancient sage kings. See esp. "Fei ming" 非命 (Disparaging "fate"), *Mozi* 墨子, Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 ed., *Mozi jian gu* 墨子問詶 (Inquiries and interpretations on Mozi) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2001), 266-83.
the *Annals* and the *Changes* enjoyed great privileges during Emperor Wu and Xuan’s reign respectively.

As Henderson mentions, a canon or a scripture usually is believed to include a complete package of truth. In Xunzi’s thought, the classics were one such canon:

学惡乎始？惡乎終？曰：其數則始乎誦經，終乎讀禮；其義則始乎為士，終乎為聖人。真積力久則入。學至乎沒而後止也。故學數有終，若其義則不可須臾舍也。為之人也，舍之禽獸也。故書者、政事之紀也；詩者、中聲之所止也；禮者、法之大分，群類之綱紀也。故學至乎禮而止矣。夫是之謂道徳之極。《禮》之敬文也，《樂》之中和也，《詩》《書》之博也，《春秋》之微也，在天地之間者畢矣。

Where does learning start, and where does it end? I say: the method of it is to start with reciting the classics, and end with reading about the *Rites*. The purpose of it is to start with becoming a gentleman, and end with becoming a sage. If one genuinely accumulates, and practices for a long time, he will get access to it. Learning stops when one dies. Therefore, although the method of learning has an end, the purpose of it cannot be abandoned even for an instant. Practicing it makes one human, abandoning it makes a beast. Therefore, the *Book of Documents* is the record of political affairs. The *Book of Poetry* is where appropriate sounds adhere. The *Rites* contains the great distinction of standards, and it is the model for myriad kinds of things. Therefore, learning ends at the *Rites*. This is the extreme of the Way and virtue. The reverence and refinement of the *Rites*, the precision and harmony of the Music, the breadth of the *Poetry* and the *Documents*, the subtlety of the *Annals*—with these, what exists in between Heaven and Earth is complete.

In the first chapter of the text *Xunzi*, Xunzi emphasizes the importance of learning. In this context, the Five Classics become the indispensable sources for individuals to follow. The classics complete the whole process of learning, from being a gentleman to becoming a sage. In this process, the classics are not merely one of many convenient repositories of knowledge; they contain all knowledge of what is between Heaven and Earth. With the classics, everything in between Heaven and Earth is “complete.”

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109 “Quan xue” 劉學 (Encouraging learning), Wang Tianhai 王天海, *Xunzi jiao shi* 荀子校释 (Collations and interpretations of *Xunzi*) (Shanghai: Guji, 2005), 22-3.
However, Xunzi does not include the *Changes* in his list, nor does he mention Heaven’s will or its role in the human realm as his contemporaries do.\textsuperscript{110} The learning process does not come to the climax when the student ascertains the secrets of the cosmos, but when the student approaches the “rites” as the most perfect development of morality. In Xunzi’s philosophy, Heaven only plays an indirect role in the human realm. It indeed is the origin of human nature, but it does not manipulate any individual or society’s fate. Heaven does show constancy like the change of four seasons and occasional eclipses. However, these phenomena are just part of the way Heaven is, and have nothing to do with moral consideration. Heaven’s will is neither penetrable nor with any significance for guiding the human world.\textsuperscript{111} Therefore it is not a surprise that Xunzi excludes a text that largely deals with prognostication.\textsuperscript{112}

In the early part of the Western Han dynasty, Xunzi’s successors such as Lu Jia陆賈 (ca. 240–170 B.C.) and Dong Zhongshu began to link the classics to Heaven. For Lu Jia, since the sages were able to be in accord with Heaven, they could bring human society to completion.\textsuperscript{113} After the decline of the ideal society of antiquity, the later sage Confucius established the Five Classics based on former sages’ government to allow people to become harmonized with the Heavenly pattern again.\textsuperscript{114} Similarly, Dong Zhongshu highlighted the sages’ pivotal role in following Heaven to establish the Way. The classics, especially the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* thus provide guidance not only suitable for the Heavenly order, but also human nature.\textsuperscript{115} Although from Xunzi to Lu Jia and Dong Zhongshu, some moral virtues such as humanity (\textit{ren} 仁) were downplayed,\textsuperscript{116} Lu Jia and Dong Zhongshu still used the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[110]{As in “Yu cong yi” 語叢一 (First part of the gathering of sayings), Liu Zhao, \textit{Guodian Chu jian jiao shi}, 191.}
\footnotetext[111]{Goldin, \textit{Confucianism}, 83.}
\footnotetext[112]{As Zigong 子貢 might question Confucius in “Yao 要” (The essentials [of the Changes]), a Mawangdui manuscript dated in early Western Han dynasty. The conversation between Confucius and his disciple Zigong begins with a narration saying Confucius becomes more and more into the Changes. Then Zigong questions him: 你他日教此弟子曰：德行亾者，神靈之趨，知謀遠者，卜筮之蘩. (You have taught me this the other day: When one’s virtue is gone, he flees to divinities; when one’s intelligence becomes distant from himself, he uses divination frequently.) See Zhang Zhenglang, \textit{Zhang Zhenglang lun Yi cong gao}, 241.}
\footnotetext[113]{Goldin, “Xunzi and Early Han Philosophy,” 151. Also see Puett, \textit{To Become a God}, 248-9.}
\footnotetext[114]{Lu Jia 陸賈, “Dao ji” 道基 (The base of the Way), Wang Liqi ed., \textit{Xinyu jiaozhu}, 18. Also see Puett, \textit{To Become a God}, 253-4.}
\footnotetext[115]{\textit{Han shu}, 58: 2515. “Yu bei” 玉杯 (The jade cup), in Su Yu ed., \textit{Chunqiu fanlu yizheng}, 1: 35-7. Also see Goldin, “Xunzi and Early Han Philosophy,” 159-60.}
\footnotetext[116]{Goldin, “Xunzi and Early Han Philosophy,” 165-6.}
\end{footnotes}
classics to promote moral cultivation. In Emperor Xuan’s court, Xunzi’s attitude toward Heaven was no longer popular, and morality was further downplayed. We have seen that in Emperor Xuan’s time, the Changes received major attention. The emperor and literati’s anxiety about Heaven’s will not only led to the promotion of the Changes as a way to understand Heaven’s will and cosmic order, it also affected people’s reading of other classics. Hou Cang, who received the teaching of the Rites and Annals from Meng Qing (Chart 2, page 74), revealed the cosmological order that he found in all of the Six Classics:

天地設位，懸日月，布星辰，分陰陽，定四時，列五行，以視聖人，名之曰道。聖人見道，然後知王治之象，故畫州土，建君臣，立律曆，陳成敗，以視賢者，名之曰經。賢者見經，然後知人道之務，則《詩》、《書》、《易》、《春秋》、《禮》、《樂》是也。《易》有陰陽，《詩》有五際，《春秋》有災異，皆列終始，推得失，考天心，以言王道之安危。至秦乃不說，傷之以法，是以大道不通，至於滅亡。

Heaven and Earth set up positions. They hang up the sun and moon, distribute the stars and planets, divide yin and yang, determine the four seasons, and arrange the Five Phases to show them to the sages, calling them the Way. When sages saw the Way, they understood the pattern of Kingly rule. Therefore, they divided up territories, established “lords” and “subjects,” set up calendars, and explicated success and failure to show them to the worthies, calling them the classics. When the worthies saw the classics, they knew the essentials of the human way, which are the Book of Poetry, the Book of Documents, the Book of Changes, the Annals of Spring and Autumn, the Rites and the Music. The Changes has yin and yang, the Poetry has the Five Contacts, and the Annals has omens. They listed them from beginning to end. They calculated the gain and loss, and examined the mind of Heaven in order to discuss the welfare of the Kingly Way. Qin was not happy with the Kingly Way. They harmed it with laws. Therefore, the great Way was blocked and eventually extinct.

This passage gives an explanation of the Six Classics’ origin, a story that reflects many major concerns of Hou Cang’s contemporaries. In the Changes, the trigrams, the symbols that the text of the Changes interprets, are said to be designed by Fuxi.

117 Han shu, 58: 2515; Lu Jia, “Dao ji”道基(The base of the Way), “Ben xing”本行(The root of behaving), Xinyu jiaozhu, 30, 142.
118 Han shu, 88: 3599.
119 This passage is preserved in Hou Cang’s disciple, Yi Feng’s翼奉speech. Han shu, 75: 3172.
He did so by observing the patterns of Heaven and Earth. In this passage, this is not only true for the *Changes*, but also for all of the other classics. Heaven and Earth designed the Way for the natural world and revealed it to the sages. Based on the natural order of Heaven and Earth, the sages designed the classics, which contain the patterns of kingly rule. The worthies learned what is important for the human realm from the Six Classics. The sages and worthies used the Six Classics to make connections from the realm of Heaven to the realm of humans.

So far this idea is very similar to Lu Jia’s understanding of the relationship between the Heavenly realm and the human realm. Human sages regulated human society in accordance with Heavenly patterns. Even in chaotic times when the sages’ moral cultivation became obscure, they left the Six Classics as guideline for later generations to follow. Nevertheless, Lu Jia has a radically different idea of what is crucial in the Six Classics:

陽氣以仁生，陰節以義降，《鹿鳴》以仁求其群，《關雎》以義鳴其雄，《春秋》以仁義貶絕，《詩》以仁義存亡，乾、坤以仁和合，八卦以義相承，《書》以仁敘九族，君臣以義制忠，《禮》以仁盡節，《樂》以禮升降。121

The *yang* divisions of the seasons are generated by humanity; the *yin* divisions of the seasons make their appearance by reason of righteousness. In “The Deer Calls” (“Lu ming”), [deer] seek their herd with humanity; in “The Male Ospreys Call” (“Guan ju”), [ospreys] call for their female mates with righteousness. The *Annals of Spring and Autumn* uses humanity and righteousness to condemn or to eliminate. The *Book of Poetry* uses humanity and righteousness to preserve or to abolish. Qian and Kun harmonize with humanity; the eight trigrams succeed one another by righteousness. In the *Book of Documents*, the nine family relationships are arranged according to humanity; the ruler and the ministers forge honesty with righteousness. In the *Rites* manners are fully performed by humanity; the Music is also completed with rites.122

“Lu Ming” and “Guanju” are titles of poems in the *Book of Poetry*; the Eight Trigrams refer to the *Changes*; Qian and Kun are the first two trigrams. Thus, Lu Jia argues that

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humanity and righteousness are the crux of the classics. A crucial function of the Six Classics is to illuminate the populace with humanity and righteousness in order to nurture them. This understanding of the classics as means of moral cultivation is similar to Dong Zhongshu and Wang Ji’s arguments. What is noteworthy here is Lu Jia’s understanding of *yin* and *yang*. He puts morality above *yin* and *yang*, and argues that moral cultivation controls the regulation of *yin* and *yang*. In general, Lu Jia takes the side of Xunzi: the classics provide knowledge for people to be morally good, and thus improve human society.

The core of Hou Cang’s idea, on the other hand, is in line with Wei Xiang and Meng Xi. He draws from three theories to indicate the function of the Six Classics, namely, the theory of *yin* and *yang*, the Five Contacts and portents. The Five Contacts is a theory not found anywhere in the plain text of the *Poetry*. Rather, it is a Han-dynasty scholar’s use of five particular poems, Daming 大明, Tianbao 天保, Caiqi 采芑, Qifu 祈父 and Shiyou zhi jiao 十月之交, in conjunction with five of the Earthly Branches, Hai 亥, Mao 卯, Wu 午, You 酉 and Xu 戌 to describe the timely change of *yin* and *yang*. Although what Hou Cang exactly means by the theory of *yin* and *yang* in the *Changes* has yet to be understood, it is reasonable to infer that it is somehow similar to the idea of Meng Xi’s school, and that of the Five Contacts. What is distinctive about the amalgamation of theories that Hou Cang employs is that none reference humanity or righteousness, which are central to Lu Jia’s understanding of how to achieve the Great Peace.

What can people do with these theories about the classics? Hou Cang’s passage

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123 As Xu Fuguan mentions, for Lu Jia, the function of the Six Classics is to promote humanity and righteousness to cultivate the populace. See Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Liang Han sixiang shi* 兩漢思想史 (An intellectual history of the Western and Eastern Han) (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue, 2001), 58-67, esp. 59.

124 See Yan Shigu’s 顏師古 commentary on the word *wuji* in *Han shu*, 75: 3173. The cycle goes through Daming 大明, Tianbao 天保, Caiqi 采芑, Qifu 祈父 and Shiyou zhi jiao 十月之交 in order. For more information and a detailed explanation, see Zhang Fengqi 張峰屹, “*Yi Feng Shi* xue zhi ‘Wu Ji’ shuo kaoshi” 翼奉《詩》學之‘五際’說考釋 (An examination and explanation of the Five Contacts in Yi Feng’s study of the *Book of Poetry*), *Zhengzhou daxue xuebao* 41.1 (2008): 125-8. There is also a handy diagram based on the reconstruction of the Five Contacts theory in Feng Haofei 郭浩菲, *Lido Si jing lunshuo shuping* 歴代詩經論説述評 (Summary and comments on theories of the *Book of Poetry* in imperial China) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2003), 129. For this theory and other related ones in apocryphal traditions, see Cao Jianguo 曹建國, “*Shi* wei sanji, sishi, wuji, liuqing shuo tanwe” 《詩》緯三基、四始、五際、六情說探徵 (An exploration of the theory of Three Bases, Four Beginnings, Five Contacts and of Six Emotions in the *Book of Poetry* apocrypha), *Wuhan Daxue xuebao* 59.4 (2006): 434-40.
points out that people need them to examine the heart of Heaven. Then they could talk about the welfare of the Kingly Way. That is to say, the empire needs to know the cosmological order to know the heart of Heaven. Xunzi argues that people need to bring what Heaven gives them to perfection instead of wasting time on understanding Heaven.125 For Lu Jia, people need to cultivate morality, otherwise chaos prevails and the natural world becomes irregular. Lu Jia believes that order depends upon human moral initiative.126 For Hou Cang, penetrating Heaven’s will is neither impossible nor useless. On the contrary, that is exactly what the classics can contribute to the Kingly Way. By mastering the cosmological order, one can deal with the irregularity of nature, and understand Heaven’s will directly.

Hou Cang uses the gradual disintegration of the Golden Age of the sages as an example of what happens when governments fail to ascertain Heaven’s will. During the breakdown of the Golden Age the evil Qin dynasty made the Six Classics and the great Way obscure with its strict legal practice. Blaming Qin dynasty’s harsh punishment and its lack of humanity and righteousness for its failure has been common practice since the beginning of the Western Han dynasty. Jia Yi and Lu Jia both castigated the Qin rulers for ignoring the virtues of humanity and righteousness.127 Hou Cang, Jia Yi and Lu Jia disagree about what exactly made the Qin fail: its failure to know the will of Heaven or its failure to cultivate morality. Although they all argued that the Han could in some way learn from Qin’s failures, the differences in their opinions reflect how understandings of the classics changed from the late Warring States period to the mid-Western Han.

For Hou Cang, the point of Qin’s failure is not lack of benevolent governance; but rather its complete failure to turn to the Six Classics to understand the “Great Way” by which it could rule in accordance with Heaven’s will. In order to achieve a real kingly rule, Han needed to turn to the Six Classics to continue the lost tradition of the sages. Hou Cang’s argument reflects changing understanding of the function of

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125 As Xunzi would argue. See Goldin, Confucianism, 83.
126 Goldin, “Xunzi and Early Han Philosophy,” 147.
127 See Lu Jia, “Fu zheng” 輔政 (Assisting the government), Xinshu jiaozhu, 51; Shi ji, 6: 282. For literati’s attitude toward Qin in the early Western Han dynasty, see Goldin, “Xunzi and Early Han Philosophy,” 163-4.
the Six Classics during the late Western Han dynasty. That is, the good literati needed to restore and complete the original teachings of the Six Classics to their pre-Qin state.

*The Re-Incorporation of a Moral Dimension in the Classics*

Some scholars who came immediately after Hou Cang agreed that the Kingly Way had been lost with the Qin, but disagreed about exactly what the Kingly Way entailed. Hou Cang emphasized the cosmological order, a central focus of Emperor Xuan’s court. In contrast, as we will see in the next section, his contemporaries and his successors incorporated a moral dimension with Hou Cang’s emphasis on Heaven’s will and the cosmological order. These scholars can be distinguished from the generations before Hou Cang (such as Lu Jia) in their emphasis on Heaven as the source of the moral order, and the classics as a source for understanding Heaven’s will.

Like the group of masters of the *Changes* in Emperor Xuan’s court, Hou Cang was not alone. He and Xiahou Sheng were students of Xiahou Shichang 夏侯始昌 (fl. 104 B.C.), who received the Qi tradition of the *Book of Poetry* from Yuan Gu 轅固 (fl. 156–141 B.C.). During Emperor Xuan’s time, this intellectual group was already an important one (Chart 2, page 74). Hou Cang was promoted from Erudite to the Chamberlain for the Palace Revenues in 72 B.C., but only stayed in the position for one year. His classmate Xiahou Sheng, although never be one of the Nine Chamberlains (*jiu qing 九卿*), was the Imperial Court Grandee (*guanglu dafu 光祿大夫*), a position usually for the most seasoned scholars. His student Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 (ca. 114–47 B.C) became the Chamberlain for the Palace Revenues in 65 B.C., and became Grandee Secretary from 59 to 56 B.C. After that he became the Grand Tutor of the Heir Apparent (*taizi taifu 太子太傅*) until the heir apparent

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128 *Han shu*, 75: 3154; 88: 3612.
129 *Han shu*, 19b: 800.
130 An Zuozhang, Xiong Tieji, *Qin Han guanzhi shi gao*, 108-10.
became the new emperor, Emperor Yuan.

From these positions of power under Emperor Yuan (Chart 2, page 74), this intellectual community carried on the search for the Kingly Way in order to harmonize Heaven and consolidate Han rule. In an intellectual community, a master-disciple relationship does not guarantee disciples’ mindless preservation of their masters’ teaching. In fact, intellectual innovations derive from the rearrangement of existing knowledge and reorientation of perspectives. Although the group of scholar-officials described above did not drop the cosmological dimension of the Kingly Way, they added morality back to their blueprint. We will also see that although they adopted Hou Cang’s emphasis on the Six Classics, Kuang Heng and Liu Xiang brought the human realm back into the interpretation of the classics. Later, the completion of the Five Classics corpus became the major motivation for Liu Xin to propagate previously ignored texts.

Earlier in this chapter, I argued that Emperor Yuan favored Kuang Heng’s ideas because he was open to the idea of government by moral rectification via ideas found in the classics. On another occasion, Kuang Heng expounds on his understanding of the importance of the classics to this project:

臣聞六經者，聖人所以統天地之心，著善惡之歸，明吉凶之分，通人道之正，使不悖於其本性者也。故審六藝之指，则人天之理可得而和，草木昆蟲可得而育，此永久不易之道也。及《論語》、《孝經》，聖人言行之要，宜究其意。

I have heard that the Six Classics are that which the sages used to organize the heart of Heaven and Earth, to highlight the source of goodness and badness, to illuminate the division between auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, to comprehend the rectification of the human way, and to make people not disobey their nature. Therefore, if one has examined the main points of the Six Arts, the principles of Heaven and of humans can be known and harmonized, and plants and animals can be nourished. This is the everlasting and unchangeable Way. As for the *Analects* and the *Classic of Filial Piety*, they are the essence of the sages’ words and deeds. It would be better to examine their significance.

For Kuang Heng, the Six Classics reflect the heart of Heaven and Earth, and they

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131 *Han shu*, 81: 3343.
contain the right way for the management of human society, a way that is in accord with human nature. This viewpoint reincorporates an element of human agency into the views of his teacher, Hou Cang, which emphasized that the Six Classics contain the cosmological order that the human realm needs to follow. On this occasion, echoing his previous speech to Emperor Yuan, Kuang Heng explicitly points out that the model of rule that is found in the classics does not just follow Heaven’s will, but it is also in accord with human nature. Kuang Heng, like Hou Cang, insists that the ultimate truth of the Way can only be found in the Six Classics as a whole. Kuang Heng’s innovation was to argue that human nature, not just Heaven’s nature, was relevant to understanding the Way. He argues that although it is allotted by Heaven, human nature is unique. Accordingly, human society needs to be organized according to its own characteristics. Thus, in the passage above, the Five Classics are the ultimate guideline for the governance of the human realm in accordance with Heaven and human nature.

It is obvious that for both Hou Cang and Kuang Heng the sages are the key to understanding Heaven and its will. For Kuang Heng, it is not just the classics that reflect Heaven’s will, but also texts that relate the undertaking of Confucius. Such texts are important in two ways: (1) because the sages are in accord with Heaven, examining their behavior provides people better understanding of Heaven, and (2) as the author of the Annals and the compiler of other classics, Confucius grasped the true meaning of the classics; as such, understanding his ideas guarantees a correct interpretation of the classics. We will see later in this section that Liu Xin argued that commentaries by people who had met Confucius were also important.

Indeed, from the time of Emperor Yuan on, the Five Classics were often understood as an integrated group of texts that illuminated crucial explanations of the world. For example, Yang Xiong 扬雄 (53 B.C.– A.D. 18), an influential scholar in his time, claimed that the Five Classics were more important than other texts:
天地之為萬物郭，五經之為眾說郛。\(^{132}\) It is just as that Heaven and Earth are the outer wall of the myriad things, the Five Classics are the outer wall of the various sayings.”

Just as nothing could be outside of the Heaven and Earth, the Five Classics contain everything in other books. Yang Xiong here does not negate the usefulness of others’ sayings and works,\(^{133}\) but rather sates that other works are not as comprehensive as the Five Classics. Moreover, for Yang Xiong, the Five Classics do not just provide knowledge about natural world or supply rhetorical material for the readers; rather, they define the limits of all knowledge.\(^{134}\) Yang Xiong writes succinctly:

舍五經而濟乎道者，末矣。\(^{135}\) It is the worst to swim in the Way but abandon the Five Classics.

He implies that although some works expediently illuminate the Way, such as *Dao De jing*,\(^{136}\) the Five Classics are the most proper path to understanding the Way. Therefore, the Five Classics are crucial for establishing the Way in the world.

Intellectual innovations take form in the synthesis and fractionation of existing knowledge. From Hou Cang to Kuang Heng, the correct government of the human realm depended, once again, on the understanding of the classics. In the “Seven Epitomes,” composed by Liu Xiang and his son Liu Xin,\(^{137}\) the Six Classics incorporate the cosmos and a moral dimension in a more specific way than either Hou Cang or Kuang Heng. They explain how each of the classics is related to each other, and to human virtues:

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\(^{137}\) I follow Ikeda, who believes that Liu Xiang composed most of the “Seven Epitomes,” and Liu Xiang adopted his father’s work and the ideas in it in general. See Ikeda Shûzô, “Ryû Kô no gakumon to shisô,” 119.
六藝之文：《樂》以和神，仁之表也；《詩》以正言，義之用也；《禮》以明體，明者著見，故無訓也；《書》以廣聽，知之術也；《春秋》以斷事，信之符也。五者，蓋五常之道，相須而備，而《易》為之原。故曰“《易》不可見，則乾坤或幾乎息矣”，言與天地為終始也。至於五學，世有變改，猶五行之更用事焉。古之學者耕且養，三年而通一藝，存其大體，玩經文而已，是故用日少而畜德多，三十而五經立也。後世經傳既已乖離，博學者又不思多聞闕疑之義，而務碎義逃難，便辭巧說，破壞形體；說五字之文，至於二三萬言。後進彌以馳逐，故幼童而守一藝，白首而後能言；安其所習，毀所不見，終以自蔽。此學者之大患也。138

The pattern of the Six Arts: with the Music the divine is harmonized, which is the appearance of humanity. [With] the Book of Poetry speech is rectified, which is the application of righteousness. [With] the Rites the deportment illuminated. What is clear is obvious, so there is no explication on the Rites. [With] the Book of Documents one’s hearing is broadened, which is the method for intelligence. [With] the Annals of Spring and Autumn affairs is judged, which is the tally of trustworthiness. These five things are the way of Five Constancies. They need each other to be complete, and the Changes is their source. Therefore it is said “if the [meaning of] the Changes cannot be seen, then Qian and Kun probably would nearly be extinguished.” This means that the Changes begins and ends in accord with Heaven and Earth. For the other five [kinds of] learning, the world changes like each of the five phases is in charge one after another. In antiquity, the students farmed and sustained themselves. They mastered one Art in three years. They preserved the general whole of it, and just examined the words in the classics. Therefore, they did not spend lots of time [on these pursuits], but accumulated a lot of virtue. Their [mastery of] the Five Classics was established when they were thirty. In later generations, the traditions of the classics became deviant quickly, the erudite students did not think about the significance of hearing broadly but leaving the unclear part. They instead got involved into trivial meanings to escape from challenges. They made facile speeches and cunning remarks, and broke the images of characters. In explaining a five-thousand-word passage, they used twenty to thirty thousand words. Later generations compete over this even more severely. Therefore, even a small child sticks to one Art, he can only speak after his hair is white. They also become comfortable in what they learn, and disparage what they have not seen, and they finally blind themselves. This is a huge trouble for students.

Based on Liu Xiang’s narration on another occasion, the Five Constancies (wu chang 五常) are virtues based on human nature and emotion.139 Thus each of the five classics corresponds to them as a moral guideline that people need to follow. The

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138 Han shu, 30: 1723.
passage does not take the cosmological order as a universal rule and apply it carelessly to the human realm. Instead, like Kuang Heng’s theory, it considers the human realm somewhat autonomous, for human beings have a unique nature and distinctive characteristics. Of course, human society does not stand alone; it is part of Heaven and Earth. The Five Classics and the Five Constancies contained in them derive from the Changes, which is in accord with Heaven and Earth’s changes.140

In Kuang Heng’s understanding of the Six Classics, we have already seen this model of Heaven and the human realm: ancient sages left the classics not only in accord with Heaven, but also human nature. The “Seven Epitomes” elaborates on Kuang Heng’s ideas by assigning specific virtues to specific classics. It also singles out the Changes as the text that reflects Heaven and Earth’s processes, an understanding of the Changes shared by many scholars in Emperor Xuan’s time. Without the Changes, people cannot grasp the Heavenly order; without the other five classics, people would lose the guidelines for the human realm. In different eras, different virtues of the Five Constancies are required, thus each classic becomes more necessary than the others at certain moment. Just like each of the Five Phases is necessary to form a complete cycle, the classics are each indispensable.141

As perfect and comprehensive as the classics originally were, for the authors of “Seven Epitomes,” they are now in jeopardy. According to the authors, the commentarial traditions of the classics had already deviated from their true meaning. Furthermore, scholars had begun to focus on trivial issues and cunning arguments to break the classics apart. Hence people could no longer master all of the classics, but could barely hold onto one of the classics during their lifetime. Even worse, they dismiss anything outside their own specialty. The author shares Hou Cang and Kuang Heng’s anxiety about failing to grasp the ultimate rules governing human society in the Six Classics.142 He further points out that scholars nowadays are taking even less

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141 Cf. Ikeda Shūzō’s mentioning of “organic unity” in his “Ryū Kō no gakumin to shisō” 劉歆與《周易》最高經典地位的確立 (Ryū Kō no gakumin to shisō, 122).
142 Kuang Heng’s anxiety in sticking to the classics in their right sense can be found in how he carried on the ritual reforms based on the prescription of the classics. Han shu, 73: 3123.
care to preserve the original classics, and expressed his concern over this dangerous situation.

Through the restoration of the Kingly Way and the need for the Great Peace, intellectuals from Emperor Yuan’s time brought them forward again as an indispensable canon containing the ultimate standards of both Heaven and the human realm. In the “Seven Epitomes,” Liu Xiang and Liu Xin appear to defend them, but they also claim to reconstruct the original Six Classics directly from the hands of the ancient sages. The desire to gather the original and complete Five Classics led to the “new script” and “old script” controversy between Liu Xin and his contemporaries.

Restoring the Original Six Classics or Getting Rid of them: Two Ways of Innovation

So far we have seen how by the time of Emperor Yuan, an increasingly popular understanding of the classics was that sages designed the Six Classics, based on Heaven’s will, as the main way to bring the ancient Kingly Way and the Great Peace to the world. We have also seen the breakdown of sage kings’ Golden Age by the poor behavior of later generations especially the Qin ruling house. These issues were the primary tenets of the reform movement in the late Western Han dynasty. Therefore, if an intellectual wanted to make intellectual innovations that would attract attention, he might need to take a stand on these issues. In fact, two intellectuals, Liu Xin and Li Xun 李尋 propagated two methods of intellectual innovation that had great influence on later generations. Both ideas received great attention or, more precisely, hostility from their contemporaries. Liu Xin favored methods of synthesis, which he applied to the classics. Li Xun, on the other hand, moved away from dependence on the classics, and focused on understanding Heaven and the Great Peace through other, more direct means. As we will see in the later chapter, although Liu Xin politically smashed Li Xun and his allies, the ideas of Li Xun experienced resurgence at the end of the Eastern Han dynasty.
The last Years of the Western Han Dynasty as Reflected in the Well-Field System

Step by step, scholar-officials during the Western Han dynasty proceeded to restore the Kingly Way by developing particular policies that sought to make the Great Peace a reality. This movement culminated in the installation of the Well-Field (jing tian 井田) system, putatively an agricultural system of the Zhou dynasty, promoted most eagerly by Wang Mang (45 B.C.–A.D. 23). He describes it as follows:

古者，設廬井八家，一夫一婦田百畝，什一而稅，則國給民富而頌聲作。此唐虞之道，三代所遵行也。秦為無道，厚賦稅以自供奉，罷民力以極欲，壞聖制，廢井田，是以兼并起，貪鄙生，強者規田以千數，弱者曾無立錐之居。……漢氏減輕田租，三十而稅一，常有更賦，罷癃咸出，而豪民侵陵，分田劫假。厥名三十稅一，實什稅五也。……予前在大麓，始令天下公田口井，時則有嘉禾之祥，遭反虜逆賊且止。143

When the ancients established the cottages of eight families on the Well-Field system and one husband and one wife had a hundred mu of cultivated land and paid one-tenth in taxes, then the state had enough and the common people were affluent and composed songs of praise. The foregoing was the way of Tang [Yao] and of Yu [Shun], and that which the three dynasties practiced obediently. The [state of] Qin was inhuman and made the taxes heavy, in order that [the ruler] might himself have [a large] income. [The ruler] exhausted the strength of the common people in order to satisfy his desires to the utmost. He destroyed the institutions of the sages and did away with the Well-Field system. For this reason the taking possession of and joining together [of fields by the wealthy] arose and avarice and vileness was born. The strong made designs to secure cultivated fields by the thousands [of mu] and the weak [even] lacked [enough of] a habitation in which to stand up an awl…The Han dynasty reduced and lightened the land tax, taking [only] one-thirtieth, [but in addition] there were regularly [required] conscript service and capitation-taxes, which [even] the sick and aged were all required to pay, while powerful common people encroached upon [the poor, letting their own] fields [out on] shares, robbing [people] by the rentals [required for their land, so that while] in name they were taxed only one-thirtieth, in reality they are taxed or pay as rent five-tenths of their produce… When previously I was the chief director [of the administration], I first ordered that the empire’s public cultivated fields [should be organized on] the Well-Field system

143 Han shu, 99a: 4110-1.
of persons, and consequently at that time there were happy presages of auspicious [large-eared] cereals. [But] there happened to be rebellious caitiffs and treasonable rebels, so that [the scheme] was temporarily stopped.\textsuperscript{144}

Shi Dan 師丹, a disciple of Kuang Heng believed the Well-Field System to be the key way to achieve the peaceful state of the society:

古之聖王莫不設井田，然後治乃可平。\textsuperscript{145}
No ancient sage kings failed to set up the Well-Field System. Only then can the government reach the Peace.

The Well-Field System that Wang Mang and Shi Dan describe is based on \textit{Mencius} and the Guliang tradition of the \textit{Annals}, the Well-Field system is a form of agricultural distribution, of which a given amount of land (usually 900 \textit{mu} 敗≈ 42.885 acres) is divided into nine pieces resembling the shape of Chinese character \textit{井 jing} (well). Eight units of peasants work on the eight outer sections, or the Private Field (\textit{si tian 私田}). Meanwhile, they collaboratively cultivate the central piece, the Public Field (\textit{gong tian 公田}), and hand in its harvest. Although there is the “private/public” distinction, peasants do not own the “private” field that they cultivate. The land still belongs to their local aristocratic lord of the Zhou dynasty, or the empire in the context of the Han dynasty.\textsuperscript{146}

The agricultural-economic situation of the late Western Han Dynasty triggered the need for this system, which at the time only survived in texts. Throughout the first half of the Han dynasty, an increase of population and immigration resulted in high

\textsuperscript{144} Homer H. Dubs, \textit{The History of the Former Han Dynasty,} vol. 3 (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1938-55), 324.

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Han shu}, 24a: 1142.

population densities in certain areas such as the capital, Chang'an. This in turn increased the price of the land in those areas, and the land became a good investment for the dominant families. Their purchases made peasants lose their land. If the peasants still wanted to continue their life on the same land, they had to submit to the dominance of powerful families, and accept higher taxes. In the eyes of Wang Mang and many other literati, this situation greatly harmed the populace.  

In Wang Mang’s reasoning for practicing the Well-Field system, there is a model very similar to Liu Xiang’s understanding of history: a sequence of Golden Ages in which the government was in accord with Heaven, broken by corrupt dynasties. Particular to Wang Mang’s case, there used to be a prosperous society based on the Well-Field system in the Three Dynasties, but it was ruined by the Qin dynasty. Wang Mang does not forget to mention the auspicious omens that legitimized the use of the Well-Field system. Again, we see the dynamic interplay between Heaven’s will, the sages and the welfare of the populace, in which auspicious omens proclaim that the economic system is one drawn in accordance with Heaven’s will by a sagely hand.

Wang Mang eventually usurped the throne by strongly promoting the ideal sagely rule based on the classics. Interestingly, although Wang Mang wanted to restore the ancient political institutions described in the classics, he named his dynasty Xin, a “Reformation” dynasty. Nevertheless, the choice of word is not inappropriate. Wang Mang’s dynasty was the culmination of the reform movement started in the late Western Han dynasty. It was new in two ways: (1) it departed from Qin’s political practices that the Han had originally adopted; (2) and it set up a new goal for the government: to achieve the Great Peace based on the legacy of the ancient sages.  

As we have seen in this chapter, “lover of antiquity” is not an epithet

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148 Wang Mang’s urgent need for claiming the Great Peace was already observable in A.D. 4 and 5. Based on *Han shu*, when he was still the Duke of Consolidating Han, or An Han Gong, he managed to promote many commentarial traditions of classics and institutions such as Lingtai, byong, and mingtang, and thus tried to fit into the image of Duke of Zhou. One year later, people in charge of observing local society reported that because of Wang Mang’s rule, the prices in the market were stable, and there were no any legal or moral transgressions in localities. He then “achieved the Great Peace,” or *zhi taiping* 致太平. See *Han shu*, 99a: 4069, 4076-7.
appropriate only for Wang Mang, but also for many scholars produced by the contemporary intellectual climate, which was characterized by an increasingly intensive drive for the restoration of the Kingly Way.

_Liu Xin’s Approach to the Original Classics_

During the reign of Emperor Ai (27–1 B.C), Wang Mang started gaining power in the court. One of his favorites, Liu Xin, was the leader of the project of editing texts in the imperial library. He proposed the installation of new Erudite positions for the versions of classics and the commentarial traditions that were not transmitted by Han classicists, namely the Zuo tradition of the _Annals_, the Mao tradition of the _Poetry_, the excluded _Rites_ and the chapters of the _Documents_ in old script.\(^{149}\)

However, at that time the thirty standing Erudites and their supervisor, the Grand Minister of Ceremonies showed very little interest in his proposal. This was likely due to the fact that their expertise was in versions of the classics that already had official sanction; they did not feel the need to expand the corpus of texts that enshrined the Kingly Way. Angry with their ignorant attitude, and convinced that his proposal did not add unnecessary elements to the corpus, but instead, provided necessary supplements to a dangerously incomplete package, Liu Xin criticized them in an open letter:

昔唐虞既衰，而三代迭興，聖帝明王，累起相襲，其道甚著。周室既微而禮樂不正，道之難全也如此。是故孔子憂道之不行，歷國應聘。自衛反魯，然後樂正，雅頌乃得其所；修《易》，序《書》，制作《春秋》，以紀帝王之道。及夫子沒而微言絕，七十子終而大義乖。重遭戰國，棄饌豆之禮，理軍旅之陳，孔氏之道抑，而孫吳之術興。陵夷至于暴秦，燔經書，殺儒士，設挾書之法，行是古之罪，道術由是遂滅。\(^{150}\)

Previously, after Tang [Yao] and Yu [Shun] declined, the three dynasties had succeeded each other. Following each other, sage emperors and bright kings had arisen. Their Way was very dominant. When the Zhou house became weak, the

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\(^{149}\) *Han shu*, 36: 1967.

\(^{150}\) *Han shu*, 36: 1968.
rites and music were not rectified anymore. Preserving the Way was just as hard as this. Therefore, Confucius was worried that the Way would not be practiced, so he travelled around states to take positions. After he came back from state of Wei to that of Lu, the music was rectified; Elegantias and Hymns were put in the right place. He edited the Changes, arranged the Documents, and wrote the Annals to record the way of emperors and kings. After the master deceased, the subtle words were extinct. After the seventy masters [who were Confucius’ disciples] passed away, the general meaning became deviant. Furthermore, the Warring States period came. The rites involving dining vessels Bian and Dou were abandoned, and the organization of troops was studied. The way of Confucius was suppressed, and the method of Wu Qi and Sunzi became popular. The decline extended to the time of Qin. They burned the classics, killed the Ru, set up bans on private ownership of books, and practiced the persecution of praising antiquity. The method of the Way was thus destroyed then.

Liu Xin first narrates the story of the Kingly Way and the classics. The sage kings followed each other through the rise and fall of the three dynasties, and the Kingly Way was prominent. However, since the decline of the Zhou dynasty, it was vulnerable to loss. Confucius tried to preserve it by editing texts from antiquity and composing the Annals, but after his death, the transmission of those texts was tenuous, and the Kingly Way was again in jeopardy. In the Warring States period, military campaigns and crafty strategies dominated, and the Kingly Way became obscure. This degenerate state reached its climax under Qin rule. The classics were burnt, and their transmitters massacred. Even favoring the past became a crime. Afterwards, the Way was completely lost.

After providing this explanation of the disastrous state of affairs during the Qin dynasty, Liu Xin introduces the situation in the Han dynasty:

漢興，去聖帝明王遐遠，仲尼之道又絕，法度無所因襲。時獨有一叔孫通略定禮儀，天下唯有易卜，未有它書。至孝惠之世，乃除挾書之律，然公卿大臣緯、灌之屬咸介冑武夫，莫以為意。至孝文皇帝，始使掌故朝錯從伏生受尚書。尚書初出于屋壁，朽折散絕，今其書見在，時師傳讀而已。詩始萌牙。天下眾書往往頗出，皆諸子傳說，猶廣立於學官，為置博士。在漢朝之儒，唯賈生而已。至孝武皇帝，然後鄒、魯、梁、趙頗有詩、禮、春秋先師，皆起於建元之間。151

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151 Han shu, 36: 1968-9.
When the Han arose, it was already distant from the sage emperors and bright kings. The way of Confucius was also extinct. There were no principles to follow. At that time there was only Shusun Tong, who crudely set up rites and etiquettes. All-under-Heaven only had the Changes and that was all. The ban for private ownership of books was not abolished until Emperor Hui’s time. However, the high officials such as Marquis Jiang [Zhou Bo 周勃] and Guan Ying 灌嬰 were warriors, so they did not pay attention to the abolishment. It was not until Emperor Wen’s time that the emperor sent the Master of Precedent Chao Cuo to learn the Book of Documents from Fu Sheng. The Documents had just come out of the wall of [Confucius’ family] house, and was corrupted and fragmented. Now the text is still extant, but at then the masters only transmitted how to punctuate it. [The study of] the poetry also started then. At that time all the texts under Heaven appeared in great numbers. Even though they were [mere] hearsay from many masters, they were still broadly established as official learning and Erudite positions were put in place for them. The only Ru in the Han court then was Jia Yi 賈誼. When it came to Emperor Wu’s time, there were many masters of the Poetry, Rites and Annals from the area of Zou, Lu, Liang and Zhao. They all arose around the time of Jianyuan (140–135 B.C.).

For Liu Xin, Han faced two difficulties: the distance from the sage kings and isolation from Confucius’ teaching. The former problem could only be solved by going back in time, so people could only count on solving the latter one. However, Qin destroyed the remnants of Confucius’ teaching—thus the second problem poses the same difficulty as the first: Han had no model to follow. From Emperor Wen to Emperor Wu’ time, more and more classic texts and commentarial traditions gradually appeared, and their transmitters received Erudite positions, the very positions that in this letter, Liu Xin proposes to expand.

However, the restoration of the Kingly Way still has long way to go:

當此之時，一人不能獨盡其經，或為雅，或為頌，相合而成。泰誓後得，博士集而讀之。故詔書稱曰：“禮壞樂崩，書缺簡脫，朕甚閔焉。”時漢興已七八十年，離於全經，固已遠矣。\footnote{Han shu, 36: 1969.}

At that time, an individual could not go over all the classics alone. Some of them did the Elegantia section of the Poetry, some of them did the Song section of it. They combined them together. “Tai shi” was obtained later, and the Erudites got together to read it. That is why an edict said, “the rites are broken, the music has
collapsed, and the strips of the *Documents* fall off their strings. I am deeply troubled by this.” At that time, Han had arisen for seventy to eighty years. However, it was far away from the complete classics.

At that time, individuals could not even master all of the classics. They needed to work collaboratively to reconstruct a complete version of the classics. In the previous section, Liu Xin wrote that “it is difficult to preserve the complete Dao” (*Dao zhi nan quan* 道之難全). Here again, he mentions that the Han is far away from obtaining the “complete classics” (*quan jing* 全經). Liu Xin depicts two crises of the Kingly Way through history. Confucius fixed the first one, and since then the Kingly Way has been preserved in textual form. The Han dynasty faces a second crisis, the loss of the texts that record the Kingly Way. That is to say, for Liu Xin, the completeness of the classics is crucial, for the Kingly Way can be restored by a correct understanding of those classics.

Fortunately, texts excavated or hidden in the imperial library shed light on the reconstruction of the classics:

及魯恭王壞孔子宅，欲以為宮，而得古文於壞壁之中，逸禮有三十九，書十六篇。天漢之後，孔安國獻之，遭巫蠱倉卒之難，未及施行。及《春秋》左氏丘明所修，皆古文舊書，多者二十餘通，藏於祕府，伏而未發。孝成皇帝閔學殘文缺，稍離其真，乃陳發祕臧，校理舊文，得此三事，以考學官所傳，經或脫簡，傳或間編。傳問民間，則有魯國柏公、趙國貫公、膠東庸生之遺學與此同，抑而未施。此乃有識者之所惜閔，士君子之所嗟痛也。153

When King Gong of Lu demolished Confucius’ house to make a palace, people found old script texts in the broken wall. There were thirty-nine chapters that were not in the received *Rites*, and sixteen chapters from the *Documents*. After the Tianhan reign (100–97 B.C.), Kong Anguo presented the latter to the court. However, at that time he became involved in the urgent trouble of witchcraft [accusations], so it was not put into practice. As for [the Zuo tradition of] the *Annals*, it was written by Zuo Qiuming. It is written completely in old script and ancient writing. There were more than twenty copies of it stored in private places. They were hidden without being publicized. Emperor Cheng lamented the incompleteness of learning and texts. If a text departed from its original form even a little, he would open and show the private collection. While editing the old texts, he obtained these three corpora of texts in order to collate what the Erudites

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153 Ibid., 1969-70.
had transmitted. Some strips of the classics were missing, and some commentaries were misarranged. The emperor then turned to the populace. The learning left by Master Bo from the state of Lu, master Guan from the state of Zhao, and Yong Sheng of Liaodong was similar to them.\footnote{“Them” indicates the three corpora of texts.} Their learning [however] was suppressed without being practiced. This is what people who have knowledge should lament, and for what gentlemen and literati should sigh.

According to Liu Xin, there are texts about three classics: chapters of the \textit{Documents}, of the \textit{Rites} and the Zuo tradition of \textit{Annals}. The former two are excavated texts, and the latter is a received, but neglected text. For him, they are very valuable sources with which to reconstruct the original Five Classics. His opponents might ask questions like “how do you know that they are part of the original classics?” Liu Xin prepared for this question: he mentions that these texts match obscure but existing transmission lines (Master Bo, Master Guan, and Yong Sheng) in the Han dynasty. Therefore, they are authentic. It is noteworthy here that while criticizing Han classicists’ over dependence on transmission, Liu Xin ironically relies on the same thing to legitimize the texts he promotes.

However, Liu Xin complains that although they hold these invaluable documents, contemporary classicists show little interest in using them:

\begin{quote}
往者綴學之士不思廢絕之闕，苟因陋就寡，分文析字，煩言碎辭，學者罷老且不能究其一藝。信口說而背傳記，是末師而非往古，至於國家將有大事，若立辟雍封禪巡狩之儀，則幽冥而莫知其原。猶欲保殘守缺，挾恐見破之私意，而無從善服義之公心，或懷妒嫉，不考情實，雷同相從，隨聲是非，抑此三學，以尚書為備，謂左氏為不傳春秋，豈不哀哉!
\end{quote}

Previous students have not thought about the abandoned and extinct missing parts. They have followed what is shallow, and adopted what is few. They break down characters and make long-winded speeches and trivial sayings. The students even as they become old, could not even plumb the depths of a single Art. They believe in oral explanations, but deviate from written records. They consider the devolved [current] masters right, but the past wrong. When it comes to the big undertakings of the state such as establishing Biyong, the \textit{feng} and \textit{shan} sacrifice and the etiquette for \textit{xunshou}, they become ignorant, and none of them know the origin of these things. They still desire to preserve what is incomplete. They have the

\footnote{Han shu, 36: 1970.}
private fear of being criticized, but do not have the public mind for following what is good and committing to what is righteous. Some of them have jealousy, and do not examine the facts. They follow each other like claps of thunder, and consider something right or wrong by following [others’] voice. They suppress the three traditions, think the [received] Documents is complete, and the Zuo tradition does not transmit the Annals. What a pity!

For Liu Xin, contemporary classicists indulge in scholasticism, and they are stubborn about their transmission lines, which are merely the leftovers of the Qin fires. Liu Xin’s criticism reflects two major concerns discussed above: (1) the completeness of the Six Classics and (2) the breakup of transmission lines. On the one hand, in scrutinizing trivial issues in the classics, classicists no longer try to master the whole package of the classics, so they fail to comprehensively grasp the Kingly Way. On the other hand, even if they do master the whole package of the received version of the classics, they compulsively adhere to the transmission lines from Confucius’ time, which were ruined by the Qin dynasty. For Liu Xin the remaining ones are just the dregs of that superior stock.

When it comes to specific classics, Liu Xin expresses the same concerns. He believes that the received Documents is not complete. He also brings the Annals up, but his dissatisfaction does not lie with the content of the text per se, but with its commentarial tradition. Liu Xin argues that Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, the author of the Zuo tradition, knew Confucius personally. Therefore, his tradition gives much better interpretation than existing traditions. As I mentioned above, Kuang Heng proposes that one should read the Analects and the Classic of Filial Piety to examine the behavior of the sage. Liu Xin legitimizes the Zuo tradition with a similar principle: people who knew Confucius better would know his work better.

Liu Xin’s choice to advocate the establishment of Erudite for old script editions of the Documents, the Rites, and the Zuo tradition of the Annals was his response to a question that deeply worried his contemporaries: how Han can restore the broken continuum of the Kingly Way? Like Hou Cang, Kuang Heng and Yang Xiong, Liu

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156 See Ban Gu’s summary of Liu Xin’s understanding of Zuo Qiuming and his tradition. In “Yiwen zhi” there is also a statement about the Zuo tradition probably written by Liu Xin. Han shu, 36: 1967; 30: 1715.
Xin turned to the classics. However, instead of being content with the received transmission lines, he believed that the breakup of the Kingly Way also affected the transmission of the classics. Therefore, a reconstruction of the Five Classics based on more than the received classics was needed. As a solution, he proposed to include a series of formerly neglected texts in the corpus of texts that received official promotion. The choice of these texts, and therefore the corresponding proposed Erudite positions, served two purposes: to complete the original classics and as a consequence, access and institutionalize the correct interpretation that Confucius originally intended.

Liu Xin maintains that the classics are indispensable to achieving the Kingly Way, but he is open to using new material to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the classics. For example, in a letter to Yang Xiong, Liu Xin asked for his *Regional Speech* (*Fang Yan* 方言), because it might be philologically helpful to edit the classics.\(^{157}\) For Liu Xin, anything that can serve this aim would be helpful. Liu Xin’s appeal to reconstruct the original classics led to a project of textual criticism. This in turn greatly contributed to later literati’s interest in philology and paleography.

Liu Xin fundamentally changed the intellectual world in an important way. He cast serious doubts on established transmission lines as the only source of the original classics and the Kingly Way, and suggested using texts without active transmission lines as an alternative method for understanding the classics. This principle suggests a potential alternative to developing scholarship via oral transmission: people could actually read texts without a teacher’s oral guidance. We will see in chapter 5 that it is exactly how Ma Rong 馬融 came to be familiar with Jia Kui’s 賈逵 scholarship on the classics. This new method of study gradually changed the style of the scholarship of literati in the Eastern Han dynasty.

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\(^{157}\) Zhang Zhenze 張震澤 ed., *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu* 揚雄集校注 (Yang Xiong’s work with annotations and collations) (Shanghai: Guji, 1993), 273. For a translation of these two letters between Yang Xiong and Liu Xin with an introduction to them, see David R. Knechtges, “The Liu Hsin / Yang Hsiung Correspondence on the *Fang Yan*,” *Monumenta Serica* 33 (1977/78): 309-25. For the movement of restoring antiquity’s impact on philology, see Nylan, *Yang Xiong and the Pleasures of Reading and Classical Learning in China*, 103-25. Nylan correctly points out why Liu Xin needed glossaries like *Erya* and Yang Xiong’s *Fangyan*: “the belief that lexicons, painstakingly compiled and carefully digested, could elucidate age-old textual problems and restore integrity to the hermeneutical processes.” Ibid., 122.
Liu Xiang and Liu Xin’s Career

Intellectual communities are not isolated units; they are open to contacts between individuals and the exchange of ideas. We can, for example, see many contacts between the Changes group and the Qi Poetry group, represented by Hou Cang and his disciples. Meng Xi’s father, Meng Qing, let his son learn the Changes, and he passed down his own teaching of the Rites and Annals to Hou Cang. Hou Cang’s student Xiao Wangzhi appreciated Shi Chou’s student Zhang Yu’s scholarship on the Changes and the Analects, and recommended him to the court.158 Sometimes contact and exchange are even essential for the dominance of an individual. An individual with more opportunities to gain access to contemporary conversations and resources is also more likely to gain power in his community. In order to convince others that his idea is correct and important, the individual must use this advantage to respond to the concerns of the dominant figures in the group.

Liu Xiang’s career is a good example of this generalization. When Emperor Xuan was interested in spirits and immortals, Liu Xiang presented the Secret Book of the Garden of Great Treasure in the Pillow (Zhen zhong hongbao yuan mishu 枕中鴻寶苑秘書), a text about spirits and ghosts that originally belonged to Liu An 劉安, King of Huainan 淮南. Liu Xiang was originally trained in the Changes.159 He also became a student of the Guliang tradition of the Annals as part of a state-sponsored project.160 Later on in the debates between followers of the Gongyang and Guliang traditions that were held in the imperial palace, Liu Xiang and his Guliang group overwhelmed the Gongyang group. He not only formed a political alliance with Xiao Wangzhi and Xiahou Sheng’s student Zhou Kan (Chart 4, page 110), but in the early years of the reign of Emperor Yuan, he also wrote a work called Discussions of the Tradition of the Five Phases in the “Great Plan” (Hong fan wuxing zhuang lun “洪fan” wuxing zhuang lun) which...

158 Han shu, 81: 3347.
159 Ikeda Shūzō, “Ryū Kō no gakumon to shisō,” 139-42.
160 Han shu, 36: 1929.
範五行傳論), an elaboration of *Tradition of Five Phases in the “Great Plan”* (“Hong fan” wuxing zhuan 洪範五行傳). The latter work was circulated among members of Xiahou Sheng’s school.¹⁶¹ (Chart 3, page 108) Emperor Cheng’s 成 reign (33–7 B.C.) initiated the project of collecting scattered books. In this project, Liu Xiang was in charge of editing the classics and their commentaries. As such, he gained access to the imperial library. As we can see from this description of his career, Liu Xiang always kept on top of contemporary intellectual trends, by cultivating relationships with a diverse group of people.

¹⁶¹ *Han shu*, 36: 1950; 75: 3155. The similarity between Liu Xiang’s Discussion and the *Tradition of Five Phases in the “Great Plan”* is mentioned in Ban Gu, “Wu xing zhi zhong zhi shang” 五行志 (Treatise on the Five Phases), *Han shu*, 27b: 1353. Chen Kanli 陳侃理 argues that the *Tradition of Five Phases in the “Great Plan”* was written by Xiahou Shichang, Xiahou Sheng’s master, and the text was circulated among few of Xiahou Shichang’s students such as Xiahou Sheng. See Chen Kanli, “‘Hong fan’ wuxing zhuan yu ‘Hong fan’ zaiyi lun” 《洪範五行傳》與《洪範》災異論 (The *Tradition of the Five Phases in the “Great Plan”* and the omenology of the “Great Plan”), *Guoxue yanjiu* 國學研究 26 (2010): 100.
This generalization is also true for Liu Xin. Like his father, Liu Xin also started his studies with the Changes. He then worked with his father to edit books in the
imperial library. With Wang Mang’s support, Liu Xin took his father’s position after he passed away. Liu Xin learned the Zuo tradition of commentary on the *Annals* from Yin Cheng 尹成 and Zhai Fangjin 翟方進 (53–7 B.C.). The father of the former, Yin Gengshi 尹更始 also attended the Gongyang versus Guliang debate as a Guliang proponent, supposedly a “new script” position. Zhai Fangjin was a polymath who also studied the Guliang tradition. Like his father, Liu Xin kept in touch with first class scholars. (Chart 3, page 108) His versatility was largely due to his sensitivity to his contemporaries’ tastes and concerns, and his frequent contact with diverse scholars.

We can see from Liu Xin’s successes at court and from his studies with various scholars of commentary traditions on the *Annals* that the “old script” vs. “new script” debate that modern scholars observe in this period was not really a black and white debate between two camps. In the late Western Han, the Zuo tradition was hardly an obscure commentary. Modern and late imperial scholars of the classics have associated the Zuo tradition with the supposed “old script” school. However, in the late Western Han dynasty, there was much overlap between the supposed “old script” and “new script” camps. In addition to Yin Cheng and Zhai Fangjin, with whom Liu Xin studied, Liu Xin’s father’s friend, Xiao Wangzhi, and an *Analects* expert he recommended, Zhang Yu also preserved the Zuo tradition. These scholars either studied both the Guliang and Zuo traditions, or were closely associated with scholars of the Guliang tradition. Far from being hostile opponents, they were members of a single community. (Chart 3, page 108)

Given Liu Xin’s early career and the popularity of the Zuo tradition, it is not a surprise that he promoted the “old script” texts and the Zuo tradition of the *Annals*. His reasoning was shared among his contemporaries. However, it was not shared by all. The letter analyzed in the previous section incited a very hostile reply from Shi Dan. The latter did not accuse the former of promoting nonsense, but rather of disparaging the Erudite tradition of Han. In other words, Liu Xin’s doubt of the accepted transmission lines annoyed Shi Dan. As a student of Kuang Heng, Shi Dan’s

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162 Actually, Liu Xiang himself was well informed on all the Gongyang, Guliang and Zuo commentarial traditions. See Ikeda Shūzō, “Ryū Kō no gakumon to shisō,” 127.
view represented many of his contemporaries’ insistence on the transmission line, a more “orthodox” way of understanding the classics (Chart 5, page 110).163

163 Liu Xin’s own father, for example, preferred the Guliang tradition to the Zuo tradition. *Han shu*, 36: 1967. Kamada Tadashi 鎌田正 makes a thorough study on Liu Xiang and Liu Xin’s scholarship on the Annals. He points out that both Liu Xiang and Liu Xin used the Gongliang, Guliang and Zuo traditions extensively. Although he is considered a Guliang scholar, Liu Xiang actually relied on the Gongyang tradition more. See Kamada Tadashi, *Saden no seiritsu to sono tenkai* 左傳の成立と其の展開 (The establishment and development of the Zuo tradition) (Tōkyō: Taishūkan shoten, 1992), 401-14. Kamada also points out Liu Xiang and Liu Xin’s different theories on omens. While Liu Xiang and Dong Zhongshu interpreted omens more subjectively, Liu Xin established his delicate astrological system based on the Twelve Stations, or the *shier ci* 十二次. See ibid., 421-35. For the theory of the Twelve Stations, see Nathan Sivin, *Granting the Seasons: the Chinese Astronomical Reform of 1280, with a Study of Its Many Dimensions and a Translation of Its Records* (New York: Springer, 2009), 95-6.
From this perspective, the so-called old script/new script controversy between Liu Xin and his contemporaries is more about whether scholars needed to have an alternative approach to understanding the classics than about defending one of the two contrasting transmission lines. Although they are often considered old script/new script opponents, Liu Xin and Shi Dan were both Wang Mang’s affiliates. The conflict is not so much about partisanship among various intellectual groups as the interplay between innovators and conservatives in the same intellectual community. Liu Xin did not wish to do away with the new script classics so much as include a broader range of material in their shared corpus.

4. An Abortive Path: Li Xun’s Departure from the Classics

Until now, our focus has been upon a generation of scholars who remained convinced that the classics held the key to good government. Although Liu Xin and Shi Dan had a hostile disagreement, they all insisted on using the classics to understand the Kingly Way. In comparisons, Li Xun to large degree departed from the classics in promoting Xia Heliang’s 夏賀良 group and the Scripture of the Great Peace (Taiping jing 太平經). It is noteworthy that Li Xun did not do so because he was ignorant of contemporary political and intellectual trends. On the contrary, he received the learning of Documents from Zhang Shanfu 張山柎 (fl. 51 B.C.), a disciple of Xiahou Jian 夏侯建 (fl. 51 B.C.). Xiahou Jian was the founder of the “Younger Xiahou” (Xiao Xiahou 小夏侯) tradition of Documents (Chart 6, page 112). He was not only related to, but also received teaching from Xiahou Sheng, an expert in divination by omens.164 Xiahou Sheng was also the founder of the “Elder Xiahou” tradition of the Documents (Da Xiahou 大夏侯).165 In Emperor Xuan’s time, both of these traditions were institutionalized as official learning. From then on, they were

164 Han shu, 75: 3155.
165 Han shu, 88: 3604.
two of the most dominant Documents traditions in the Western Han dynasty.\footnote{Han shu, 8: 272; 30: 1706.} In Emperor Cheng’s reign, The Grand Chancellor Zhai Fangjin admired Li Xun’s expertise in omenology, and recommended him as his assistant (yi cao 議曹).\footnote{Han shu, 84: 3421.} In Emperor Ai’s time (r. 7–1 B.C.), he started working in the palace, and was promoted to be an Attendant Gentlemen at the Yellow Gate (huangmen shilang 黃門侍郎).\footnote{Han shu, 75: 3183.} Although Li would make a radical departure from previous scholars’ on how to achieve the Great Peace, his education and relationships tell of a man deeply embedded in the classical scholarship and government of his time.

With his expertise, Li Xun took advantage of the Han emperors’ anxiety over Heaven’s Mandate. While Emperor Ai was sick, Li Xun introduced Xia Heliang and others to the palace. In meeting with the emperor, they argued that Han was losing the Mandate of Heaven, an argument that we have seen repeated from Sui Hong to Liu Xiang. The emperor’s sickness, natural disasters and childlessness were the warning from Heaven. In order to regain the Mandate, the emperor needed to change his title and reign name. Convinced by this proposal, in 5 B.C., Emperor Ai changed his reign name from Jianping 建平 (Establishing Peace) to Taichu Yuan Jiang 太初元將 (the
Great Beginning when the Grandness is in Charge).\textsuperscript{169} He also changed his title to Chen Sheng Liu Taiping Huangdi (陳聖劉太平皇帝), or “The Great Peace Emperor Who Presents the Sagely Liu.” The emperor’s title shared the element “Great Peace” with the “Scripture of the Great Peace” (Taiping jing 太平經), the title of a text circulated among Lin Xun and Xia Heliang’s group.\textsuperscript{170} As we have seen, the Great Peace, advocated by many literati from Lu Jia to Kuang Heng, was a state free from calamities and in accord with Heaven. Therefore, Li Xun’s proposals and the emperor’s acceptance of them fit nicely to the political culture since 48 B.C.

However, their movement and group paid a price for their innovative approach to achieving the Great Peace: they were attacked for deviating from classics. Liu Xin did not approve the Scripture of the Great Peace because it did not agree with the Five Classics. Later on when Emperor Ai lost faith in Li Xun’s group, he dismissed them using similar reasons: “their proposal violated what is proper in the classics, and deviated from the sagely design.” As a result, Xia Heliang was executed, and Li Xun was exiled to Dunhuang 敦煌. Emperor Ai’s accusation, they were both depicted as “heterodox” (zuo dao 左道) \textsuperscript{171} terrorists trying to sabotage the bureaucracy and overthrow the Han empire.

The question of how to interpret this piece of political maneuvering remains. Was Li Xun really “heterodox” as Emperor Ai accused? The answer is both yes and no. Li Xun did not disparage the classics. However, like many literati, his primary concern was Heaven and its will rather than the classics. When Li Xun was still an assistant of Zhai Fangjin, he suggested that the Han court needed to recruit “gentlemen of Heaven,” or tian shi 天士. After Emperor Ai’s switch of reign name, Li Xun’s group of “gentlemen of Heaven” accused their opponents of “not knowing the Mandate of Heaven.” At that time, Li Xun also promoted the Scripture of the Great Peace as a revealed text from Heaven.\textsuperscript{172} Using this text, Li Xun’s group

\textsuperscript{169} Han shu, 75: 3193. Yuan indicates tian zhi yuan ming 天之元命 (the grand mandate of Heaven).
\textsuperscript{170} I do not take the received version of Taiping jing as the original text passed down from Gan Zhongke to Li Xun. Instead, I consider it a compilation from the Six Dynasties, though it does reflect many ideas popular in the Han dynasty. See Marx Kaltenmark, “The Ideology of the T’ai-p’ing ching,” 19-45, esp. 44-5.
\textsuperscript{171} Han shu, 75: 3192-4.
\textsuperscript{172} Han shu, 75: 3183, 3192-3.
opened the door to the idea that people could understand Heaven, and achieve the Great Peace without the sages and their classics. For many others and especially Liu Xin, the Kingly Way was in the classics alone. Therefore, only by mastering them could one achieve the Kingly Way and the Great Peace. The debate between Liu Xin and Shi Dan was about how one could gain the right understanding of the original classics.

In comparison, Li Xun argued that since Heaven was the source of human society, the classics and the Mandate to rule, one could achieve the Kingly Way by turning directly to Heaven. For Liu Xin, the way to achieve the Great Peace lay in the texts of classics that remained outside the transmission lines. Li Xun took this innovation one step further and pointed out that the way to achieve the Great Peace lay in texts outside the classics. Liu Xin argued that certain old script classics helped complete the corpus of the classics because their transmitters were closer to the ancient sages. Li Xun built his idea directly on the authority of Heaven to override not only the primary transmission lines of the Han, but also the authority of the sages and those who knew them.

More interestingly, Li Xun’s group and the classicism of the late Western Han employ a similar narrative structure in describing their transmission traditions. It is this shared structure that Li Xun’s group and the apocryphal tradition later on used to compete with Western Han classicists. Both of them believe Heaven is the ultimate agent. In both theories, there is a middle agent to take messages from Heaven to the human realm: the perfected man, or zhenren 真人 for Li Xun’s group, and the sages of antiquity for classicists. Finally that message was preserved in the written form.

In the case of the transmission of classics, sages penetrated Heaven, either its will or how it works. Competing with this transmission tradition, in the case of the Scripture of the Great Peace, Heaven directly sends his message down to the perfected man. The strategy of turning Heaven from a passive figure to an active one might make the Scripture of the Great Peace more competitive, since it implies that

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173 This is mentioned in Jia Gongyan 賈公彥, “Xu Zhouli feixing” 序周禮廢興 (An introduction to the rise and fall of the Rites of Zhou), in Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing zhushu, 635.
174 Han shu, 75: 3192.
this content is the most important thing Heaven wants man to know.

In the context of the search for Heaven’s Mandate, a text revealed by Heaven became a very attractive source of intellectual innovation at the end of Western Han dynasty. However, from the adversarial relationship between Li Xun’s group and Liu Xin, it is also apparent that the classics were the most crucial cultural capital for intellectual groups in the Han court. Heaven’s will and the classics were thus the two foci around which contemporary intellectual innovations pivoted. It is in this context that apocryphal texts emerged as the most powerful intellectual weaponry in China in the first century A.D. In the next chapter, we will see how classicists adopted the revelation tradition and claimed that the classics were actually revealed by Heaven.

**Final Remarks**

In this chapter, we have seen how a few central concerns affected intellectuals and triggered innovation. To state our conclusions in a general way, we can see three intellectual transitions. First, in Emperor Xuan’s time, the classics became the means of understanding Heaven and its order. In this step, the moral dimension in Confucian thought was isolated from state policy. Second, from Emperor Yuan’s time on, literati like Liu Xiang and Kuang Heng used the classics to restore the Kingly Way. In this process, they added the moral dimension back to a discourse that had primarily focused on Heaven. Third, at the end of the Western Han, Liu Xin and Li Xun pushed the restoration of the Kingly Way and following Heaven’s will to another level through the combination of and departure from classical traditions respectively.

In the last fifty years of the Western Han dynasty, two issues dominated the court: Heaven’s mandate and the Kingly Way of antiquity. They were not equal; the latter derived from the former. This model was not unheard of among Confucian thinkers (for example, Xunzi). Nevertheless, for the literati of the late Western Han, Heaven became an increasingly active agent that could directly judge a government and decide its fate. In this period, “star” intellectuals were the ones who managed to link
these two issues with one of the most important elements of cultural capital: expertise in the classics.

Regardless of their political triumph or failure, Liu Xin and Li Xun represented two paths of intellectual innovation deeply couched in the intellectual culture of Western Han dynasty. Liu Xin’s way reflects the multiplication of classical transmission lines and growing scholasticism beginning in Emperor Wu’s time. Liu Xin’s maneuver is to unite all the transmission lines and scattered texts about the classics to form a giant whole. In other words, his innovation is a type of combination. Li Xun on the other hand, adopted and even reinforced the importance of Heaven that had been acknowledged since Emperor Xuan’s time. His innovation was a departure: he skips the tier of the classics in the Heaven-classics-sages model, which was shared by many of his contemporaries.

The intellectual trends of the mid-Western Han dynasty are not Confucian in the strict sense. The philosophies of Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi are humanistic philosophies; the main theme is moral cultivation of individuals. Heaven plays only an indirect, if any, role in the human realm. Therefore, individuals turned to a system of humanist ethics instead of Heaven’s will to understand how to organize the state.\textsuperscript{175} This is not the case in the late Western Han dynasty. From Emperor Xuan’ time on, Heaven’s will became a central issue in political discourse. In fact, for many literati, their reformist tendencies were based on the premise that Heaven did not approve of Han policies adopted from the Qin dynasty. No matter whether it was Wang Ji’s “Heaven’s heart,” Liu Xiang’s “Heavenly Mandate,” or the omens that appeared while Wang Mang practiced the Well-Field system, Heaven’s permission became the crucial element in the determination of the Han dynasty’s fate. Accordingly, sages became the representatives of Heaven. They either penetrated Heaven’s order, or designed a human government in accord with Heaven’s mandate.

Wang Mang’s rule represented these extreme of the two tendencies, a fitting cap to two centuries of intellectual innovation. On the one hand, he enforced the putative agricultural system of the Zhou dynasty, the Well-Field system, and reformed the

\textsuperscript{175} Assuming we define “Confucianism” as a humanistic philosophy. See Goldin, \textit{Confucianism}, 5.
bureaucratic system based on the classics, especially the *Rites of Zhou*, the excavated text Liu Xin promoted. On the other hand, he claimed that many auspicious omens and revealed texts appeared to show that Heaven had blessed his rule. His rule was indeed the embodiment of the political thought of generations of Han literati. However, his plan for the Great Peace only lasted fourteen years.
III. The Inflation of Heaven and Classics: the Rise of Apocrypha (*chenwei* 論說)

In the previous chapter, we explored how engagement with the classics was a fundamental piece of cultural capital for intellectual communities active in the court at the end of the Western Han dynasty. The legitimacy and fate of the dynasty hinged upon Heaven’s will, and its officials’ ability to ascertain that will through the classics. In this context, Liu Xin and Li Xun’s groups made scholarly innovations based on the existing transmission lines of the classics. Each vied for political and intellectual authority, claiming their method led to a correct understanding of Heaven. Wang Mang, standing at the frontier of contemporary scholarship, employed not only the old script texts, but also prophecies, to claim legitimacy for his brief reign.

Wang Mang’s reforms led not to an ideal society in which the Great Peace prevailed, but to social and political unrest.1 After the collapse of his rule in A.D. 23, various political groups contended militarily and intellectually to establish a new dynasty. The tradition of apocryphal texts emerged in the context of this tumult. This chapter will examine apocryphal texts from two perspectives. First, we will explore their content to see how apocryphal texts claimed a stronger link to both Heaven and the classics than earlier commentarial traditions. Apocryphal texts pushed certain themes of late Western Han literati discourse to the extreme, such as the heavenly origin of the classics, their functions, and the notion of sages as intermediary agents between Heaven and the classics. The latter half of this chapter will explore the socio-political context of these texts, especially how Liu Xiu 劉秀 (6 B.C.–A.D. 57), who became Emperor Guangwu, manipulated prophecies into a corpus of texts to

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legitimate his rule and the newly established Eastern Han dynasty (A.D. 25–220). This corpus of texts later came to be called “the apocrypha.” Scholars with training in classics were the driving force behind this transformation.

Chen, wei, and Apocrypha: a Matter of Definition

Before proceeding to the specific content of apocryphal texts, we need to tackle several general issues about apocrypha. First, we must identify what “apocrypha” indicates in the context of the Eastern Han dynasty. Around the first century A.D., a corpus of texts appeared under the generic names *chen* 譖, *wei* 緯, or as a binome, *chenwei* 議緯.² In weaving a warp sets up the frame based on which the woof is woven. Thus “warp,” or *jing* 經, is borrowed to designate the classics because of its connotations of “foundation” and “constancy”. This corpus, with the name “weft,” or *wei* 緯, claims to explicate, supplement or elaborate the classics.³ In addition, it also includes a large amount of astrological information.⁴ Sinologists use the word “apocrypha” to refer this corpus of texts.⁵

Although “apocrypha” is the conventional rendering of *chenwei*, the unqualified use of the term can cause confusion.⁶ “Apocrypha” appears most commonly in the context of biblical studies, and carries four primary historical connotations. Firstly, related to its etymological sense, “hidden things,” “apocrypha” indicates esoteric and secret doctrines, particularly those of the Gnostic tradition. Secondly, since ecclesiastical writers such as Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 115–ca. 202) and Tertullian (ca. A.D. 160–ca. 225) opposed occult sciences in the Gnostic tradition, they used the term “apocrypha” pejoratively. This usage implied that the apocrypha were forged. Thirdly,
around the same time, some secretly transmitted books that were rejected by the
Jewish synagogue authorities, but that were popular among the laity, were also called
“apocrypha.” That is to say, the term can indicate texts excluded or even banned from
a canonical tradition. Fourthly, in early Protestantism, it was used to designate texts
that were neither canonical nor heretical.7

The name chenwei does not possess precisely the same valences as “apocrypha,”
but, to a certain degree, their history parallels that of “apocrypha” in the
Judeo-Christian context. In the chenwei tradition, some texts appear to be “secret” (mi
秘) and written in a subtle (yin 隱) way; that is, so that only initiates could
understand them.8 We can detect the pejorative sense of chenwei from Zhang Heng’s
張衡 (A.D. 78–139) complaint. Dissatisfied with their anachronistic and
self-contradictory content, Zhang claimed that chenwei were not written by the sages,
nor were they written in ancient times as they claimed. He believed that some people
at the end of the Western Han made these texts to deceive others for profit. He thus
proposed to ban the texts from commentarial traditions of classics.9 Afterwards, the
imperial government implemented a series of bans on apocryphal texts. In A.D. 267,
Emperor Wu 武 of the Western Jin 西晉 (A.D. 265–317) banned the chenwei with
astrological information because rebels tended to manipulate these texts to claim
political authority. From that time on, Southern Dynasties emperors occasionally
issued bans against texts in the chenwei corpus. The deathblow came from Emperor
Yang 楊 of the Sui 隋 dynasty in A.D. 593, whose ban, unlike earlier ones, was
enforced. After this ban, most chenwei texts were lost.10

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Christianity (New York: Garland Pub., 1990), 61-2. I use the word “canonical” to designate a standard, but not
necessarily fixed category of scriptures accepted by certain communities. For various understanding of the word
“canon,” see Lee Martin McDonald, Forgotten Scriptures: The Selection and Rejection of Early Religious Writings

8 Kong Qiu mi jing 孔丘秘經 (The secret classics of Confucius) was a good example of this. See Fan Ye 范曄,
“Su Jing Yang Hou liezhuan” 苏竟楊厚列傳 (The biographies of Su Jing and Yang Hou), Hou Han shu 後漢書
(Beijing: Zhonghua, 1965), 30a: 1043. Also see Yasui Közan and Nakamura Shōhachi, Isho no kisoteki kenkyū, 152.

9 See Zhang’s biography in Hou Han shu, 59: 1897-8. For more information about this case, see Tanaka Masami
田中麻紗巳, Gokan Shisō no tankyū 後漢思想の探究 (Explorations of the thought of the Eastern Han dynasty)
(Tôkyô: Kenbun Shuppan, 2003), 83-93.

10 Yasui, Isho no kisoteki kenkyū, 261-3. I do not agree with Tanaka that Zhang Heng rejected apocryphal texts
because he was a “kagakusha” 科学者, or “scientist.” As I mentioned in my introduction, it is anachronistic to
use the concepts of “science” or “scientific” without any qualifications for people of Han China. See ibid., 90, 93.
appeared in certain compilations, often in between works about the classics, even though other compilations did not consider them classics or legitimate commentaries. In the Qing dynasty, for example, some compilers of *chenwei* listed them under the category of classics, but they were more often put together under the name “*weishu*” 維書, a subcategory separate from both the classics and other commentarial traditions.¹¹

Despite these shared characteristics, there is a major difference between European apocrypha and *chenwei*. It lies in the commentarial nature of *chenwei*. As Hans Van Ess insightfully points out, while in biblical studies apocrypha are very different from commentaries, *chenwei* tend to be explications and interpretations of, or supplements to, the classics, rather than classics themselves.¹² They were not intended to be read as passages of the classics. Therefore, when “apocrypha” as a translation of the term “*chenwei*” appears in this dissertation, it does not imply that the texts it refers to were once part of the classics.

We should also differentiate Han apocryphal texts from Chinese Buddhist apocrypha. In the latter case, “apocrypha” indicates Chinese Buddhist scriptures that their authors claimed were of foreign origin, but are actually indigenous to China.¹³ In this context, “apocrypha” is used in the sense of “forged scripture.” While both are called “apocrypha,” the two corpora served different communities in different periods. *Chenwei* was popular among literati groups in the first two centuries A.D. as a means of understanding the classics. More like the apocrypha of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Chinese Buddhist apocrypha appeared to be scriptures, that is, teachings from the Buddha, popular among certain Buddhist communities in early-Medieval China.

Now what do the Han apocrypha contain? This is not easy to answer. Like many textual traditions, the core texts of the Eastern Han apocryphal corpus are rather stable, but supplementary or peripheral texts are sometimes included, sometimes not. The catalogue of the imperial library in the *History of the Sui Dynasty* (*Suishu* 隋書),

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completed in A.D. 621, and a commentarial passage written by Li Xian 李賢 (A.D. 654–684) from the *History of the Later Han* (*Hou Han shu* 後漢書) count a similar number of chapters (篇 pian) for the so-called “seven apocrypha” (qiwei 七緯), which are categorized according to the seven classics, namely the *Changes, Documents, Poetry, Rites, the Music, the Classic of Filial Piety* and the *Annals*. However, these two passages do not agree with each other about what the seven corresponding apocrypha were. Furthermore, the former also includes texts considered apocryphal, but that are outside the seven categories, such as the *Chart of the Yellow River* (*Hetu* 河圖) and the *Writing of the Luo River* (*Luoshu* 洛書). The titles of these two texts never belonged to the corpus of the classics. It is even unclear what content is included in these two titles, for the two terms in the *Changes* do not appear as titles, but rather describe the appearance of two particular omens “the chart of the Yellow River” and “the writing of the Luo River.”

The problem here is actually not so much which of these texts should be included in the apocryphal inventory, because we do not necessarily need a complete bibliography of Han apocrypha to explore the ideas therein. The major problem is rather that we might unwittingly include texts from after the Eastern Han. Fortunately, generations of scholars, especially Yasui Kōzan 安居香山 and Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八 have made painstaking efforts to reconstruct apocryphal texts with critical textual studies. After consulting their works, I have chosen to focus primarily on the seven apocrypha that correspond with the seven

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14 *Hou Han shu*, 82a: 2721-2. Wei Zheng 魏徵 et al. eds., “Jingji zhi” 經籍志 (The treatise on classics and books), *Sui shu* 隋書 (History of Sui) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1973), 32: 940-1. Also see Chen Pan’s reading of these two passages, in *Gu Chenwei yantao ji qi shulu jieti*, 149-71.

15 Two major yardsticks for dating are the theory of the Five Phases in Generation (wuxing xiang sheng 五行相生) and the promotion of the Liu 刘 family as the current recipient of the Mandate of Heaven. It is certainly true that later dynasties also used the theory of the Five Phases in Generation, and that the rulers of the kingdom of Shu 蜀 (A.D. 221-263) and the Song 宋 dynasty (A.D. 420-479) carried the surname of Liu. The intensive employment of the two characteristics, especially combined, still seems to be peculiar to early Eastern Han dynasty. See Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, *Zhongguo shanggu shi yanjiu jiangyi* 中國上古史研究講義 (Lectures on the history of Early China) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1988), 270, 291-4.

16 Nakamura Shōhachi has completed the most thorough textual studies and transmission histories thus far of fragments under every single title that can possibly be considered an apocryphal text. Yasui and Nakamura also give the most complete compilation of apocryphal texts. I will mainly rely on their compilation, and constantly refer to Nakamura’s textual studies. See Yasui Kōzan and Nakamura Shōhachi, *Isho no kisoteki kenkyū* 甲子的傳奇研究, 475. Chen Pan examines fragmented texts whose titles contain the names *Hetu* or *Luoshu*, and explicates the titles. See Chen Pan, in *Gu Chenwei yantao ji qi shulu jieti*, 257-548.
classics. I will also include fragments of texts that do not belong to these seven apocrypha if there is evidence that shows that they are from the Eastern Han.17

1. Discovering the Heavenly Nature of the Classics

Apocryphal texts did not appear before the Eastern Han dynasty, so that in many Eastern Han critics’ eyes, they did not have a long tradition, nor were they of authoritative origin. However, they maximally exploit two sacred objects of the time: the classics and Heaven. Unlike the claims of Liu Xin or Li Xun, the texts did not appear to be missing parts of the original classics, nor revealed scriptures from Heaven. They stood in the middle. Their claim was that, if one wants to understand the message from Heaven in the classics, one needs to read apocryphal texts.

This is apparent even from some of their titles. For example, when a quotation from an apocryphal book called The Key to the Xuanji18 in the Book of Documents (Shangshu xuanji qian 尚書璇機鈐) appeared in a debate in the imperial court in A.D. 100,19 it implied that the quotation was in accord not only with the Documents, but also with the “Heavenly Pivot” (天樞), a name for the four stars of the Big Dipper.20 This was one of several understandings of xuanji at the time. Like its Western counterpart, in the astronomy of early China the Big Dipper was a guidepost by which one could navigate using the sky.21 This gives the Heavenly Pivot a special position in understanding astronomical movements—the movements of Heaven. Similarly, the title, the Manipulation of the Pivot of the Big Dipper in the Annals of Spring and Autumn (Chunqiu yun doushu 春秋運斗樞) is similar in structure to The Key to the Xuanji: name of classic + name of heavenly phenomenon or principle.22 A structure

17 Therefore, I will draw a much smaller pool of apocryphal texts from Yasui Kōzan 安居香山 and Nakamura Shōhachi’s compilation, but I certainly do not reject the possibility that these texts were included in apocryphal tradition. This restricted scope might narrow the pool of sources I can use, but hopefully it will help to avoid anachronisms.

18 As Sivin mentions, the meaning of this phrase is unclear. See Sivin, Granting the Seasons, 214 note, 580.

19 Hou Han shu, 35: 1201.

20 The four stars are Dubhe α, Merak β, Phecda γ and Megrez δ. They form one of the twenty-eight celestial lodges, Kui 奎. Their Chinese names are Tianshu 天樞, Tianxuan 天璇, Tianji 天璣 and Tianquan 天權.

21 See Feng Shi 馮時, Zhongguo tianwen kaoguxue 中國天文考古學 (Chinese archaeological astronomy) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 2007), 370-4.

22 This title appears in Ying Shao 隊銖, “San huang” 三皇(The Three Sovereigns), Wu Shuping ed., Fengsu tongyi 123
that specifies a classic and a mantic activity is common among the apocryphal titles (see Table 1). The title suggests that its content is not just about prophecy, but also points out where this information is coded in the original classic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Name</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>乾坤鑿度</td>
<td><em>Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian and Kun</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>河圖提劉予</td>
<td><em>The Bestowal on the Promoted Liu of the River Chart</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>尚書中候</td>
<td><em>Documents’ Match of Observations</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>尚書帝命騐</td>
<td><em>Documents’ Verification of the Mandate for Emperors</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>禮稽命徵</td>
<td><em>Rites’ Examinations of the Omens of Mandate</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>春秋演孔圖</td>
<td><em>Annals’ Diagrams Elaborating Confucius</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>春秋說題辭</td>
<td><em>Annals’ Explications of Words in Titles</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>春秋感精符</td>
<td><em>Annals’ Tallies Corresponding to the Essence</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>春秋元命包</td>
<td><em>Annals’ Inclusion of the Primary Mandate</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>春秋漢含孳</td>
<td><em>Annals’ Propagation included in the Han Dynasty</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>春秋保乾圖</td>
<td><em>Annals’ Charts of Cherishing the Qian</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>河圖錄運法</td>
<td><em>Recorded Rule for the Movement of Mandate of the River Chart</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>河圖括地象</td>
<td><em>Inclusive Counterparts of Earth of the River Chart</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>河圖赤伏符</td>
<td><em>The Red Hidden Tally of the River Chart</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>河圖會昌符</td>
<td><em>Tally for Meeting Prosperity of the River Chart</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>孝經援神契</td>
<td><em>Contract for Assistance from Spirits of the Classic of Filial Piety</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: A tentative translation of apocrypha titles quoted in chapter 3

*The Five Classics: Reflection of Heaven*

In the Western Han dynasty, many literati such as Kuang Heng and Liu Xiang depicted the relationship between the classics and Heaven in this way: the sages penetrated Heaven with their understanding and created classics that were not only in accord with Heaven but also designed for human use. Apocryphal texts adopted this idea:

《詩》者，天文之精，星辰之度。在事為詩，未發為謀。恬澹為心，思慮為志。故詩之所以為言志也。  

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23 Chunqiu Shuo tici (The Annals’ Explications of Words in Titles), Yasui Kōzan, and Nakamura Shōnichi ed., *Weishu jicheng*, 856. The fragment is preserved in Li Fang 李昉 et al., eds., *Taiping yulan 太平御*
The *Book of Poetry* is the essence of Heavenly patterns and the orbits of stars and planets. When it is about affairs, it becomes poetry. When it is incipient, it is strategy. When it is in equilibrium, it is the heart. When it is thinking, it is the will. Therefore the *Poetry* is that by which one conveys the will.

According to this passage, the *Book of Poetry* transforms in accord with Heaven and human beings. By shifting from celestial patterns to various states of the human mind, the *Book of Poetry* does not just mimic Heaven; it also adapts itself to the peculiarities of the human psyche.

This is not unique to the *Poetry*; apocryphal texts understand the *Rites* in a similar way. For example, in *Li ji mingzheng* (The Rites’ Examinations of the Omens of the Mandate), the following is written:

> 《禮》之動揺也，與天地同氣，四時合信。陰陽為符，日月為明。上下和洽，則物獸如其性命。
> The movement and shaking of the *Rites* share the *qi* of Heaven and Earth, and match the tally of the four seasons. They take *yin/yang* as their match, and the sun and moon as light. When the above and below are harmonious, the myriad things and animals all comply with their nature and the mandate.

This passage describes what happens when the *Rites* are put into practice. They first of all match the order of that which is “above,” or the cosmos. The *Rites* also create a harmonious relationship between Heaven and what is below, the human world. Practicing the *Rites* leads the myriad creatures to the right order based on their nature. *Ru qi xing ming* 如其性命 expresses views similar to Xunzi’s opinion that the rites are not arbitrary, but are the sages’ specific design, and are in accord with human nature. The passage argues that rites are in accord with the nature of the myriad things on the earth.

Unlike Xunzi and the majority of Han literati, however, many apocryphal texts imply that Heaven took an active role in the formation of the classics:

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24 *Li ji mingzheng* 禮稽命徵 (*The Rites’ Examinations of the Omens of the Mandate*), Yasui Kōzaburo, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., *Weishu jicheng*, 507. The fragment is preserved in Li Fang et al., eds., *Taiping yulan*, 522: 2374b.
When Fuxi possessed All-under-Heaven, the dragon-horse emerged from the Yellow River carrying the Diagram on its back. Fuxi then drew the eight trigrams based on it.

This theory combines two accounts from the “Attached Statements” (Xici 繫辭) commentary to the Changes. In the beginning of the second half of this text, the author says that while ruling All-under-Heaven, Fuxi made the eight trigrams based on his examination of sky’s patterns, standards on earth, the patterns of the animal world, and things around him, including himself. In the “Attached Statements,” the trigrams are based on the sage Fuxi’s understanding of the entirety of Heaven and the human realm. Heaven was only one of the objects that Fuxi examined.

In the last part of the first half of the “Attached Statements,” the author argues that the sage should take the “divine things” (shenwu 神物) produced by Heaven as a standard. These things include the Chart of Yellow River and the Writing of Luo River together with other revelations. This account does not mention anything about the creation of the eight trigrams. In the apocryphal passage, however, the “Chart of Yellow River” is taken out of the first half of the “Attached Statements,” and combined with the account of the creation of the eight trigrams from the second half of the same document. Fuxi’s examination in the second half of the “Attached Statements” is absent from the apocryphal passage. The diagram that emerges from the Yellow River on a dragon’s back thus becomes the only thing Fuxi used as a standard when he created the eight trigrams. That is to say, according to the account from the “Attached Statements,” Fuxi made the eight trigrams regardless of whether he relied upon a diagram from the Yellow River or not. He was the active agent who forged human society in the image of Heaven. The apocryphal passage implies that

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26 Shangshu zhong hou 尚書中候 (The Documents’ Matching of Observations), Yasui Kōzan, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., Weishu jicheng, 399. This fragment is preserved in “Liyun 禮運” (The movement of rites), Liji zhengyi 禮記正義, j. 22, Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing zhushu, 1427. I understand the word hou 候 as astrological observations. A verbal usage with similar meaning is hou qi 候氣, or “watching for qi.” Beginning in the Han dynasty, hou qi was a practice for observing the movement of qi in order to examine whether the seasonal changes are regular. See Derk Bodde, “The Chinese Cosmic Magic Known as Watching for the Ethers,” in Studia Serica Bernhard Karlgren dedicata. Sinological studies dedicated to Bernhard Karlgren on his seventieth birthday, October fifth, 1959 (Copenhagen, E. Munksgaard, 1959), 14-35.

27 “Xici” 繫辭 (Attached Statements), Zhouyi zhengyi 周易正義, j. 8, Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing zhushu, 86.

the creation of the eight trigrams depended upon the diagram from the Yellow River, which was presumably revealed by Heaven. Fuxi did invent the trigrams, but Heaven initiated the process. In other words, Heaven played the most active role in the creation of the eight trigrams.

According to many apocryphal texts, Heaven was even more active in Confucius’ composition of the *Annals* than in the creation of the trigrams:

昔孔子受端門之命，制春秋之義，使子夏等十四人求周史記。得百二十國寶書，九月經立。  

In antiquity, Confucius received the mandate of the Duan gate, and he created the principles of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*. He made fourteen people, including Zixia, seek the historical records of Zhou. They obtained one hundred twenty states’ precious writings. The classic was established after nine months.

Beginning with *Mencius*, many early Chinese accounts of the *Annals* attribute its authorship to Confucius. In these narratives, Confucius alone wrote the *Annals*. Some said that Confucius did so because he intended to rectify the outrageous behavior of his contemporaries; others have argued that the obstacles to political advancement that Confucius faced and his subsequent feelings of frustration inspired him to compose this work. In none of these accounts does Heaven directly inspire Confucius’ composition of the *Annals*. However, according to this passage from an apocryphal text, Confucius wrote the *Annals* precisely because he received a mandate from Heaven to teach the Way to subsequent dynastic founders.

The following allusion to the Duan gate presents Heaven’s interference even more obviously:

得麟之後，天下血書魯端門曰：趍作法，孔聖沒，周姬亡。彗東出。秦政起，胡破術。書紀散，孔不絕。  


30 Mencius and the author of the Gongyang tradition hold the former view. See “Teng Wen gong xia” 滕文公下, *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*), Zhu Xi annotated, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, *Mengzi jizhu*, 6: 273; for the Gongyang tradition see “Ai Gong” 哀公 (Duke Ai), *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, j. 28, Ruan Yuan ed., *Shisan jing zhushu*, 2354. Sima Qian holds the latter view. In Sima Qian’s (ca. 145-ca. 86) letter to Ren An 任安 (fl. 91 B.C.), Confucius composed the *Annals* because he was unable to hold political positions. In this account, Sima Qian tries to tell Ren An that people compose their masterpieces when they are indignant and oppressed. See Ban Gu, “Sima Qian liezhuan” 司馬遷列傳 (*The biography of Sima Qian*), *Han shu*, 62: 2735.

After obtaining the *qilin* [An auspicious and ominous animal that normally only appears in a prosperous society], Heaven sent writing in blood on the Duan gate of the state of Lu, saying “Set up the standard quickly! The sage Kong will die, and the Zhou dynasty’s house of Ji will perish. A comet will appear in the east. [Ying] Zheng of Qin will arise. Hu Hai will break the literature. Books and records will scatter, but [the teaching of] Kong will not become extinct."

The passage contains many more allusions. “Obtaining the *qilin*” alludes to the last event in the fourteenth year of Duke Ai 哀 of Lu (481 B.C.) in the *Annals*. In the Gongyang tradition, this event marks the end of an epoch and the completion of the *Annals*. It signifies the end of Confucius’ way.32 Following this event, in the apocryphal passage, Heaven sends down a prophecy written in blood. It predicts the death of Confucius, the fall of the Zhou dynasty, the rise of the Qin dynasty, and the endangerment of the way of Confucius.33 In the Gongyang tradition, Confucius does try to extrapolate Heaven’s message from the capture of the *qilin* and the death of his two disciples, Zilu and Yan Yuan. Nevertheless, according to the Gongyang text, Heaven never explicitly expresses its will. In contrast, in the apocryphal passage, Heaven not only presents its ideas via a “human” method (writing), it also speaks to command Confucius to set up the standard for later generations.

*Apocryphal texts: Older than the Classics?*

The reception of the prophecy from Heaven is not the end of the story of the Duan gate in that apocryphal passage; the message in blood revealed itself to Zixia, one of Confucius’ major disciples, and turned into a text:

子夏明日往視之，血書飛為赤烏。化為白書。署曰演孔圖。中有作圖制法之狀。34

The next day, Zixia went there to observe. The blood writing flew up, and became a red crow. It then transformed into a white text, entitled: *Diagrams Elaborating Confucius*. It contains descriptions for making diagrams and setting up standards.

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32 Ibid., 2353-4.
33 See Xu Yan’s 徐彦 sub-commentary on this apocryphal passage, in ibid., 2354.
The title *Diagrams Elaborating Confucius* is actually the title of the apocryphal text from which this passage is taken. Thus, the passage implies that the apocryphal text in which it is written is of Heavenly origin. What is more, it claims that the text contains instructions for setting up standards of good government, which allude to Heaven’s command, “set up the standard quickly” (*qu zuo fa* 趍作法), in the prophecy. Thus, as the last part of the story of the Duan gate prophecy and the composition of the *Annals*, Confucius’ disciple receives a text from Heaven that explains the standards that Heaven has just commanded Confucius to transmit to subsequent generations in the *Annals*.

If one considers this account with the account about Confucius composing the *Annals*, a larger shared agenda emerges. It implies that the *Annals* is derived from the apocryphal *Diagrams Explicating Confucius*. The apocryphal text does not explain how exactly Confucius wrote the *Annals*, but it depicts a sequence of actions that led to their completion: Heaven first sent down a prophecy, asking Confucius to set up a standard. It then sent down specific instructions for setting up the standard. After receiving this command, Confucius started composing the work, and finished it in nine months. Apocryphal texts, because they inspired the classics, become earlier and more authoritative than the classics themselves.

The author of this text integrates the claims of apocryphal texts and well-known parts of the classical tradition to claim textual authority. In order to make a coherent story, this whole scenario is attached to the event of obtaining the *qilin*, which is a perfectly common narrative in the *Annals* and its commentarial traditions. This practice is the textual equivalent of patching a hole. This author first put the event of the Duan gate after the obtaining of *qilin*. Part of the content in the prophecy actually echoes the Gongyang tradition’s reading of the *qilin* event in the *Annals*. In the Gongyang tradition, Confucius lamented that his political career has reached its end.35

The apocryphal passage even more explicitly expressed this point in Heaven’s

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message. Thus the apocryphal text appears to be part of the world of classics, filling a blank usually filled by commentarial traditions such as the Gongyang. Taking advantage of this blank, the apocryphal texts claim authority.

Apocryphal texts are not the classics themselves, but revealed texts from Heaven, which help to discover the essence of the classics. They are free from Liu Xin’s anxiety about missing the authentic message of Heaven because of an incomplete corpus. Given their origin, apocryphal texts reassure their readers that they contain information that Heaven wants them to know. They also avoid attacks similar to that which Li Xun’s group suffered. In the previous chapter, we saw that it employed ideas and texts that are hardly present in the classics if at all, such as the “perfected man” and the “Scripture of the Great Peace.” Unlike Li Xun, the apocryphal passages we have seen above sought to blend in with the world of the classics.

One of the few relatively well-preserved apocryphal texts, *Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian and Kun* (*Qian Kun zao du* 乾坤鑿度), lists an apocryphon with a very similar name, *Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian* (*Qian zao du* 乾鑿度) before the *Changes*, implying that it is its chronological predecessor:

庖氏著乾鑿度上下文。媧皇氏，地靈母經。炎帝皇帝，有易靈緯。公孫氏。周易孔子附。³⁶
Fuxi wrote the first and second half of *Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian*. For the Sovereign Wa, there was the *Classic of the Maternal Earthly Spirit*. For the Sovereign Yan, there was *Apocrypha of Spirits in Changes*. Gongsun.³⁷ Confucius attached [passages] to the *Changes of Zhou*.

³⁶ *Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian and Kun* (*Qian Kun zao du* 乾坤鑿度), Yasui Közan, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., *Weishu jicheng*, 116-8. For the translation of its title, its content and this text’s relationship with the *Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian*, see ibid., 74-5; Bent Nielsen, *A companion to Yi Jing Numerology and Cosmology*, 304. The relationship between these two texts with similar titles is not completely clear. However, since the *Qian Kun zao du* has a section explaining the title *Qian zao du* and another section explaining the genealogy of the *Qian zao du* text, I consider it supplementary to the *Qian zao du*.

³⁷ There is probably some textual corruption after the phrase “Gongsun shi.” This speculation is based on two reasons. Firstly, given the sentence structure proceeding “Gongsun shi,” there should be another title coming after the name. Secondly, the first three names in the passage belong to one of the versions of the “Three Sovereigns” (*san huang* 三皇), and “Gongsun shi” indicates the Yellow Emperor, which is the first one of the “Five Emperors” (*wu di* 五帝). Therefore, it would be reasonable to expect other names from the “Five Emperors” group to show up after “Gongsun shi.”
Sovereigns” (san huang 三皇), 38 and Gongsun shi, or the Yellow Emperor, is the first emperor in the “Five Emperors” (wu di 五帝) group.39 These sage kings were the very first creators of human civilization. Thus the passage above from Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian claims that it is as old as the mythical sovereigns who created the human realm, older even than the kings of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties.40 In apocryphal texts, the span from the Xia to the Spring and Autumn period is divided into four successive periods. The first three, the “Three Sovereigns,” the “Five Emperors,” and the “Three Kings” periods, constitute the Golden Age of human civilization. The fourth, the “Five Hegemons” period, marks the end of that age. These four periods are marked by the gradual deterioration of the virtue of their rulers.41 This narrative from apocryphal texts is similar to Liu Xiang’s better-known definition of the “Golden Age,” which he believed lasted from Yellow Emperor to the Duke of Zhou. Liu Xiang’s periodization corresponds roughly with that described in apocrypha.

Based on both narratives, the apocryphal passage quoted above puts Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian ahead of the Changes by attributing the authorship of the former to Fuxi, the inventor of the Eight Trigrams and the first sage creator of human civilization. In the first century A.D., on the other hand, the received Changes were believed to be the work of King Wen of Zhou, who expanded the Eight Trigrams to the Sixty-four Hexagrams, and Confucius, who wrote ten passages attached to them.42 The passage privileges Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian by attributing it to an

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38 According to the anonymous commentary attached to this passage, Emperor Yan is another name for Shennong 神農. This combination of Fuxi, Sovereign Wa, and Shennong as the san huang, can be found in the apocryphal text Chunqiu yun doushu 春秋運斗樞, preserved by Ying Shao 應劭 in Fengsu tongyi. See “San huang” 三皇 (The Three Sovereigns), Wu Shuping ed., Fengsu tongyi jiaozhi, 1: 10. However, this is not the only version of san huang. For example, in Baihu tong 白虎通, there are two versions of san huang: Fuxi, Shennong and Suiren 燧人, and Fuxi, Shennong and Zhurong 祝融. See “Hao 號” (Titles), Chen Li 陳立 ed., Baihu tong shuzheng 白虎通疏證 (Commentaries on the Comprehensive meaning from the White Tiger Hall) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1994), 2: 49. Neither does Emperor Yan always refer to Shennong. It might also refer to Zhurong in other contexts. See ibid., “Wu xing” 五行 (Five phases), 4: 177.

39 For wu di, see “Hao 號” (Titles), Chen Li 陳立 ed., Baihu tong shuzheng, 2: 52.

40 These historical kings were referred to as the “Three Kings” (san wang 三王), indicating the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, and the “Five Hegemons,” dominant warlords in Spring and Autumn period (770–476 B.C.). Together with the mythical figures mentioned above, these two groups form one of the most popular historical narratives from the first century A.D.

41 “Hao 號” (Titles), Chen Li 陳立 ed., Baihu tong shuzheng, 2: 45.

42 Han shu, 30: 1704.
author more esteemed than King Wen or Confucius. *Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian* contains the ideas of the person who invented the trigrams, and ruled at the very beginning of the Golden Age (Fuxi). In comparison, the received *Changes* was derived from the Eight Trigrams, and annotated by a mere sage of the period of the “Five Hegemons.” In this respect, the apocryphal text is portrayed containing the more original message about the Eight Trigrams and the *Changes*. The apocryphal passage certainly does not strongly argue that the *Changes* contains less truth than *Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian*, but by forging this genealogy, it claims that *Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian* has a longer tradition and more authoritative origin than the classics.

**The Function of Sages in Human Society**

Since in apocryphal texts, Heaven plays an active role in revealing its message, do sages then function merely as a passive messenger as the perfected man does in Li Xun’s account of the *Scripture of the Great Peace*? An example from *Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian and Kun* shows that apocryphal texts’ view of sages is more or less in line with the opinions of Xunzi, Dong Zhongshu, and others. That is, Heaven starts the world, and the sage completes the world:

一大之物目天，一塊之物目地。一炁之名混沌。一氣分萬

A unitary bulk of things was seen as Heaven, and a unitary clot of things was seen as Earth. A unitary fold of *qi* was called *huntun*. This unitary *qi* divided into myriad amount of obscurity. Therefore, the primary sage chiseled the nebulous *qi* open. He broke the *qi* into two [yin and yang?], and followed the things to make them three [Heaven, Earth and human realm?]. Therefore, the way of Heaven

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44 It is not certain whether the word *mu* here is supposed to be the more common word in that circumstance, *yue* ed. I am inclined to take the word as “mu” based on the principle of *lectio difficilior*.
45 It is not clear what the er and san exactly refer to. It is plausible that the former indicates yin and yang, since they are the pair most commonly related to *qi*. San might refer back to the previous sentences, thus indicating Heaven, Earth and *qi*. It might also indicate the realms of Heaven, Earth and of humans. The latter is called *san cai* in the “Shuo Gua” chapter of the *Changes*. “Shuo gua” 說卦, *Yijing zhengyi*, Ruan Yuan ed., *Shisan jing zhushu*, 94. Assuming that the human world derives from *qi*, these two readings of *san* are not mutually exclusive.
and Earth was not broken up.

It is unclear what the relationship between Heaven, Earth and \( qi \) is, but before the sage’s undertaking, everything seems to be clogged together. In that state, the cosmos is not static; \( qi \) splits. However, this split does not lead to the development of diversity, but more opacity. This nebulous \( qi \) is eventually penetrated by the sage. The sage does not create Heaven or Earth, but shapes the universe in accord with the way of Heaven and Earth. One might want to squeeze this passage for more information, such as what “two” and “three” indicate and where the primary sage came from, but the passage gives no more clear information. Nevertheless, it is certain that the sage is responsible for developing the world from its primordial state.

Unlike Xunzi, apocryphal texts show that Heaven does not leave the human realm alone after the sage clarifies the cosmos:

鳳凰銜圖置帝前，黃帝再拜受。\(^{46}\)
A phoenix held the Diagram in its mouth, and put it in front of the emperor. Yellow Emperor bowed twice to accept it.

堯坐中舟，與太尉舜臨觀。鳳凰負圖授。\(^{47}\)
Yao sat in the boat, looked on, and observed, with his Grand Commandant, Shun. A phoenix carried the Diagram on its back, and bestowed it on [them].

唐帝游河渚，赤龍負圖以出。\(^{48}\)
When [Yao], the emperor of Tang, was traveling along the Yellow River, a red dragon carried the Diagram on its back came out of the water.

Here we encounter the Diagram and, again, a repetitive sequence of events: human sages receive messages of Heaven from auspicious creatures. Phoenixes revealing themselves as auspicious omens were also familiar to Liu Xiang.\(^{50}\) However, the

\(^{46}\) Chunqiu yuanming bao (The Annals' Inclusion of the Primary Mandate), Yasui Kōzan, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., Weishu jicheng, 590. The fragment is preserved in Ruan Yuan ed., Mao shi zhengyi 毛詩正義 (The rectified meaning of the Mao tradition of the Poetry), j. 16, Shisan jing zhu shu, 503.

\(^{47}\) 中舟 is probably a reversion of “舟中” due to the textual corruption.

\(^{48}\) Chunqiu yuanming bao, Yasui Kōzan, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., Weishu jicheng, 592. The fragment is preserved in Ruan Yuan ed., Mao shi zhengyi, j. 16, Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing zhu shu, 503.

\(^{49}\) Chunqiu yuanming bao, Yasui Kōzan, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., Weishu jicheng, 592. The fragment is preserved in Qutan xida 菩薩悉達 (Gautama Siddha), Kaiyuan zhanjing 開元占經 (The Classic of astrology from Kaiyuan reign) (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji, 1994), 120: 814.

\(^{50}\) See chapter 2, page 77. The sage kings are Huangdi 黃帝, Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Yu 禹, Tang 湯, King Wen 文王.
sequence of events depicted here provides a much closer relationship between Heaven and the human sages in apocryphal texts than what Liu Xiang imagines, Heaven does not just evaluate human governance and express its judgment with omens. It actually sends messages as guidance for human sages to follow. That is to say, although in the very beginning the primary sage initiated the evolution of the cosmos, the development of human society is still somehow intertwined with and influenced by Heaven. Xunzi explicitly argues against the idea of relying on Heaven’s will, because it is impossible to know. What’s more, for Xunzi the human realm is an autonomous region beyond the reach of Heaven’s direct interference. Apocryphal texts, in sharp contrast, assert that Heaven shapes human society by communicating and guiding sage kings. The sage kings, while they accomplish great things, are following Heaven’s message.

The Physical Features of Human Sages and their Heavenly Origin

Apocryphal texts’ understanding of the sages in the human realm differs from Xunzi’s on more than just whether or not they continue to communicate with Heaven. Xunzi would even object to the physical features of the many human sages in apocryphal texts. For example:

黃帝龍顔，得天庭陽。  
The Yellow Emperor had a dragon face, and had the [constellation] North of Heavenly Court.

The North of Heavenly Court indicates the celestial constellation Taiwei 太微, or the Privy Council, which symbolizes the imperial house. Because the Yellow Emperor’s facial features resemble those of a dragon, a symbol of the emperor, they

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*King Wu 武王, Duke of Zhou 周公 and Confucius.*

51 Many passages about the physiognomic features of the sages can be found in *The Annals’ Diagrams of Elaborating Confucius*, Yasui Kōzan, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., *Weishu jicheng*, 574.

52 The Annals’ Inclusion of the Primary Mandate*, Yasui Kōzan, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., *Weishu jicheng*, 590. The fragment is preserved in Li Fang et al., eds., *Taiping yulan*, 79: 368b.

53 Taiwei is located at β (Vir), containing 10 stars. See the commentary attached to this apocryphal passage in Yasui Kōzan, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., *Weishu jicheng*, 590; Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker, *The Chinese Sky During the Han: Constellating Stars and Society* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 152.
show his imperial nature. In many cases, features of the sages are linked to heavenly bodies in the sky:

孔子長十尺，大九圍。坐如蹲龍，立如牽牛。就之如昴，望之如斗。  
Confucius was ten chi (2.31 m) tall.  
He was nine wei around. He looked like a squatting dragon when he sat, and like a driven ox when he stood. He looked like [the constellation] Mao when one approached him, and the Big Dipper when one looked at him from distance.

In this case, Confucius not only looks like divine or strong animals, he also looks more specifically like the constellation Mao, and the Big Dipper. His facial features link him to Heaven.

Xunzi did not think there was a correspondence between one’s appearance and his nature. In the first place, if Xunzi were going to give a physiognomic reading of Confucius, it would not be positive. According to him, Confucius’s face looked ugly and unappealing. According to Xunzi, if we were to assume that Confucius’ facial features reflected his intelligence and achievements, we would greatly underestimate him. Xunzi’s larger point is that the physical appearance of a person, whether desirable or not, has nothing to do with his mind or behavior. According to Xunzi, many sage kings were short and ugly, while some tyrants were tall, strong, and handsome. None of these features decided how they behaved in human society.

If, however, we reduce the passages in apocryphal texts about sage kings’ unusual physiognomic features to fortune telling, we lose the larger point of these texts. Sage kings were not randomly born; they were of heavenly origin. For example,
Yu was the “essence of the white emperor,” or baidi jing 白帝精, and King Wen was the “essence of the green emperor,” or cangdi jing 蘇帝精. Yao was the “essence of fire,” or huo jing 火精, and Confucius was the “essence of water,” or shui jing 水精.

The colors and elements are parts of the Five Phases system. There are five emperors, the red emperor Wenzu 文祖, the yellow emperor Shendou 神斗, the white emperor Xianji 頤紀, the black emperor Xuanju 玄矩 and the green emperor Lingfu 靈府 corresponding to fire, earth, metal, water and wood respectively. They are heavenly emperors who are located in the constellation Taiwei 太微. The human sage kings corresponded (gan 感) to their “essence,” or jing 精. The word “correspond” here does not imply an interaction on an equal basis, such as the human sage and the heavenly emperor communicating with and transferring spiritual power between each other. Instead, given the miraculous birth of the sage kings depicted in apocryphal texts, they were subject to the heavenly emperors and received essence from them passively.

The miraculous birth of sage kings and their links to the heavenly emperors are largely derived from the theory of the Five Phases, a generally accepted understanding of the cosmos in the Han dynasty. From the late Warring States period

60 Shangshu diming yan 尚書帝命驗 (Documents' Verification of the Mandate for Emperors), Yasui Kōzan, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., Weishu jicheng, 369. The fragment is preserved in Li Fang et al., eds., Taiping yulan, 82: 380b.
61 Annals' Tallies of Corresponding to the Essence, Yasui Kōzan, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., Weishu jicheng, 741. The fragment is preserved in Li Fang et al., eds., Taiping yulan, 84: 396b.
62 Chunqiu yuanning bao 春秋元命包 (Annals' Inclusion of the Primary Mandate), Yasui Kōzan, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., Weishu jicheng, 591. The fragment is preserved in Xiao Ji 蕭吉, Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八 annotated, Wuxing dayi 五行大義 (Significant meaning of the Five Phases) (Tōkyō: Kyūko shoin, 1984), S: 454.
63 Chunqiu Han han zi 春秋漢含孳 (Annals' Propagation included in the Han Dynasty), Yasui Kōzan, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., Weishu jicheng, 815.
65 For comprehensive collections of material concerning the sage kings' birth in apocryphal texts, see Gu Jiegang, Zhongguo shanggu shi yanjiu jiangyi 作《中國上古史研究講義》, 273-9, and Xu Xingwu 徐興無, “Zuowei pifu de xuansheng suwang——chenwei wenxian zhong de Kongzi xingxiang yu sixiang”作為匹夫的玄聖素王——讖緯文獻中的孔子形象與思想 (The black sage and uncrowned king as a commoner: the image and thought of Confucius in apocryphal texts), Gudian wenxian yanjiu 古典文獻研究 11 (2008): 27-8.
to the Han dynasty, there are two major types of the succession of the Five Phases granted by Heaven: succession by conquest or 相勝 xiang sheng, and succession by generation, or 相生 xiang sheng. The sequence of the former gives earth, wood, metal, fire and water so that each phase is conquered by the one after it (Table 2). This theory emphasizes military conquest of one over the other. The latter theory gives wood, fire, earth, metal and water as the sequence in which each generates the one after it (Table 3). This theory highlights continuity and the adoption of the virtue of the previous phase by its successor—in this case, the adoption of the power or mandate of one dynasty by the next.66

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Succession by Conquest 相勝</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>“Feng shan shu” of Shiji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>the Yellow Emperor 黃帝 (Han 漢)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>Tang 湯</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>King Wen of Zhou 周文王</td>
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<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Qin 秦</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Succession by Generation 相生</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>“The Treatise of Music and Calendar” in Han shu</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Water)</td>
<td>Fu Xi 伏羲 Di Ku 帝嚳 King Wen of Zhou 周文王</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Gong Gong 共工 Qin 秦</td>
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<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Shen Nong 神農 Yao 堯 Liu Bang 劉邦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>the Yellow Emperor Shun 少昊 Yu 禹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Zhuan Xu 領煬 Tang 湯</td>
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**Table 2 and Table 3: Two theories of the Five Phases**67

The second theory came after the first one, and became dominant at the end of the Western Han dynasty and the beginning of the Eastern Han dynasty. Officials in the court at the end of the Western Han dynasty such as Liu Xiang 劉向 (ca. 77–6 B.C.) and Liu Xin 劉歆 (ca. 50 B.C.–A.D. 23) began to prefer the theory of succession by

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67 “Feng shan shu” 封禪書, Shiji, 28: 1381; “Lü li zhi” 律曆志 (The treatise on music and the calendar), Han shu, 21b: 1011-3.
generation to that of succession by conquest. They thought that through succession by
generation, the legitimacy of rule shifts from one phase to another based on the virtue
of the recipient of the Mandate of Heaven, and the realization of actual rule only goes
to the one that is in the right sequence of Five Phases. This theory also implied that
Qin was not a legal dynasty anymore, as “real” dynasties are founded by a moral ruler
or in the right order of succession.

Together with the theory of succession by generation, what do apocryphal texts
try to tell us about the sage kings and their relationship with Heaven? Most
importantly, they construct an institutionalized dynastic order of succession. In this
succession, one virtuous dynasty—almost all of them prior to recorded
history—succeds another. Heaven manipulates the process by producing human
sages, the founders of each of the legitimate dynasties. That is to say, according to
apocryphal texts, ordinary people, either through education or by unusual naturally
endowed intelligence, might accomplish extraordinary achievements. Nevertheless,
they can never rule the human realm, for they are not related to the Heavenly
emperors.

For early Confucians, especially Xunzi, a person’s purported connection to
Heaven was totally irrelevant to whether or not he became the ruler of a state.
However, this was not so for most literati beginning in the last fifty years of the
Western Han dynasty. The opposite was true, especially in the apocryphal world:

天子至尊也。神精與天地通。血氣含五帝精。天愛之子之也。69
The son of Heaven is the venerable person. His spirit and essence are linked to
Heaven and Earth. His blood and qi contain the essence of the Five Emperors.70
Heaven has affection for him, and takes him as its son.

The sons of Heaven, or emperors, are not mere human beings who are isolated in the
human realm, but Heaven’s beloved sons. Their unique status is more than nominal or
theoretical:

68 Michael Loewe, Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China, 57, 94.
69 Chunqiu baoqian tu 春秋保乾圖 (The Annals’ Charts of Cherishing the Qian), Yasui Közan, and Nakamura
Shōhachi ed., Weishu jicheng, 806. The fragment is preserved in Li Fang et al., eds., Taiping yulan, 76: 355a.
70 Xue qi 血氣 here indicates people’s physical vitalities in general. For the term and how the meaning of xue is
different from “blood” in the modern sense, see Sivin, Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China, 46, 150-60.
All the sons of Heaven are the essence of the five emperors. Each of their seals expresses the succession of rulership. Their successive order follows each other. They always receive spiritually powerful tallies and marks. Spirits assist them to open the steps and establish their way. The ruler always keeps the charts next to his throne to rectify himself.

For the founder of a legitimate dynasty, Heaven plays a major role in their success. It grants them unusual facial features that resemble Heaven itself. It also bestows the essence of the heavenly emperor on them. On their way to establish a new dynasty, Heaven and other spirits assist them to defeat their ordinary human rivals. Ordinary leaders lack both the succession of the Five Phases and the assistance of spirits.

2. Forming a tradition: the Socio-political Background of the Emergence of the Apocryphal Texts

So far we have seen in apocryphal texts an intense uniform commitment to Heaven as an agent. It does not take much philosophical sophistication or common sense to see that these texts are often ambiguous or self-contradictory. However, before criticizing apocrypha in hindsight, we might ask whether these texts were intended to be exposed to critical, logical analysis.

I do not suggest that their authors were less logical or critical than we. I intend to point out how apocrypha use logic and argumentation selectively. Do contemporary middle-class American people, for example, have a coherent theory about why they love the person they do? According to Ann Swidler’s survey of modern American people’s perception of love, the answer is no. In one example from the survey, facing two logically incompatible theories of love in American culture, namely love as choice and as commitment, an engineer incoherently uses the vocabulary of both theories. His hodgepodge of an argument does not make Nelson a bad engineer. He

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71 The Annals’ Diagrams of Elaborating Confucius, Yasui Kōzan, and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., Weishu jicheng, 581. The fragment is preserved in Li Fang et al., eds., Taiping yulan, 76: 355a.

may be an incoherent philosopher of love, but this is irrelevant to his standing in the world. In short, apocrypha, like many other texts, do not appeal to reason alone.

Instead of critiquing the coherence and philosophical value of the apocryphal texts, it will be more fruitful to find out why they made sense to people in the first two centuries A.D. This will help us to understand the intellectual world in the Eastern Han. So far we have seen how apocryphal texts were derived from intellectual transitions and focuses since the first century B.C. I will next explore the context in which apocryphal texts appeared and why their content mattered to people of the Eastern Han.

*The Attitude of Fin de Siècle as a Political Concern*

Reform movements and revolutions have happened through human history, and their initiators and leaders seem always to have had good reasons for them. In modern times their reasons include improving people’s welfare, fighting for freedom, bringing democracy and so on. Reformers in the last half of the first century B.C. were no exception, though Han-dynasty reformers had their own ideas about what were good reasons for change. In the previous chapter, we saw that, at least for most of the dominant literati of the last fifty years of the Western Han court, restoring the Kingly Way, achieving the Great Peace, and following the blueprint in the classics are all plausible goals.73 Behind these goals was the ultimate motivation: the desire to be in accord with Heaven’s will.

Scholars’ goals were motivated by a feeling of *fin de siècle* as the Western Han drew to a close. From the time of Emperor Yuan’s reign and Wang Mang’s enthronement, reform scholars tried to pull the Han back from its impending doom by seeking harmony with Heaven. We have seen that in 78 B.C., Sui Meng’s divination alluded to the end of Han’s heaven-granted right to rule. He suggested that the Han emperor ought to abdicate the empire to a virtuous person to whom the mandate of Heaven would pass. Later on Liu Xin warned Emperor Yuan that the increasing

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73 See the section: “3. The Six Classics: Complete and Fundamental” starting from page 82.
number of bad omens signified Heaven’s rebuke of the dynasty, which would eventually lead to the reassignment of the mandate of Heaven. In 5 B.C., Xia Heliang from Li Xun’s group proposed to Emperor Ai that the mandate of the Han house to rule was exhausted, so it should try to receive a renewed mandate.\footnote{Han shu, 11: 340.}

This attitude of \textit{fin de siècle} crystallized in the term \textit{sanqi zhi e} 三七之阨, or “the Three-seven Predicaments.” The “three-seven” here figuratively indicates two hundred ten, symbolizing two hundred ten years of Han rule.\footnote{“Three-seven” is as in that three multiples seven equals to twenty one.} Lu Wenshu 路温舒 (fl. 80–73 B.C.) predicted that the Han house would be endangered at the end of their two hundred and ten year reign.\footnote{Han shu, 51: 2372. It is not clear when Lu Wenshu said so.} In the first year of Yuanyan 元延 (12 B.C.) of Emperor Cheng 成 (r. 32–7 B.C.), disasters took place quite frequently.\footnote{Han shu, 85: 3465.} In responding to this, Gu Yong 谷永 (?–9 B.C.) mentioned that the Han house was heading toward the end of its two hundred ten years of rule.\footnote{Ibid., 3468.} If we take 202 B.C. as the year when Liu Bang established the Western Han dynasty, then the end of the cycle would be in A.D. 8. Therefore, according to Lu Wenshu, the emperor should be more careful about his behavior and governance.\footnote{This calculation is based on Han people’s concept of the establishment of the Han dynasty, such as the account in which Liu Bang was enthroned as Gaozu 高祖 in the first month of 202 B.C. in Shiji and Han shu. In the biography of Liu Bang, Sima Qian switches his way of addressing Liu Bang from Hanwang 漢王, or the “king of Han” to Gaozu in 202 B.C. See Sima Qian, “Gaozu benji” 高祖本紀 (The biography of Gaozu), Shiji, 8: 378-9. A change of title also happens in Ban Gu’s Han shu, although Ban Gu uses the word \textit{di} 帝, or “the emperor,” instead of Gaozu. See Ban Gu, “Gaozu ji” 高祖紀 (The biography of Gaozu), Han shu, 1: 50-4.} Although it is uncertain what they thought would happen after the heavenly allotment expired, some scholars were convinced that the “Three-seven Predicament” was a crisis. Like Liu Xiang and Li Xun’s groups, Lu Wenshu and Gu Yong supported the Han imperial house, and believed that Han empire’s better performance in government was essential in dealing with this crisis.

Wang Mang, on the other hand, used Lu Wenshu’s prophecy to legitimate the establishment of his new dynasty. In A.D. 9, the year after Han’s two-hundred-ten-year cycle ended, Wang enthroned himself, and enforced a series of
When abolishing the Han currency, Wang Mang gave a speech about the Three-seven Predicament:

When I previously was in [the position of] the chief director [of the administration, and became Regent and Acting [Emperor], I pondered deeply the Three-seven Predicament of the Han dynasty, that the emanation of virtue from the Red virtue was exhausted. I thought and sought, searching widely for means whereby I might support the Liu [house] and lengthen its period [on the throne]. There was nothing that I failed to do. For that reason, I made the beneficial metal knife-[money], hoping thereby to assist [the dynasty]. Nevertheless when Confucius wrote the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* to make it a model for later kings, [he continued it] until the fourteenth year of [Duke] Ai [of Lu], when one age ended. Comparing it with present [times], it was also fourteen years [after Emperor] Ai [ascended the throne that the Han dynasty ended its rule]. Since the calculated [number of years allotted] for the age of the Red was exhausted, I could not eventually have had the power to save [that dynasty]. August Heaven made plain its majesty, so that the virtue of the Yellow [Lord] was due to arise and to make [Heaven's] great mandate abundantly apparent, entrusting me with the empire. Now the people all say that August Heaven has dethroned the Han [dynasty] and set up the Xin [dynasty], that he has dismissed the Liu [clan from the throne] and caused the Wang [clan] to rise.  

Wang Mang explicitly points out that the Three-seven Predicament indicates the end of the ruling cycle for the Red, or the Liu house. “Red” stands for the phase of fire in the theory of Five Phases, with which the Liu house corresponded. Following Liu Xiang and Liu Xin’s proposal of the succession order of the Five Phases by generation, Wang Mang claims that the Yellow, a metonym for the phase of earth, rose and thus he ruled (See the Tables on 137).

In his speech, Wang Mang presents himself in dual roles. On the one hand, he
used to be a subject of the Liu house. Therefore, as a diligent official and enthusiastic supporter of the imperial house, he tried his best to prolong their mandate. So far, he presents himself as in line with Lu Wenshu and Gu Yong. However, this is the prelude to what he really wants to say: the cycle of Five Phases is unstoppable, and he, representing the Yellow, will replace the Liu family in ruling China. Therefore, he is also the new emperor of a new era, equal to that of the Liu house.

For Wang Mang, the progression of the Five Phases is so powerful that he was obliged to abolish the current imperial house and take the crown. Could the Han emperor cultivate his morality more, bring more benefit to the populace and try to connect to Heaven more closely to prolong his rule? For Wang Mang, the answer would be no. Besides the Three-seven Predicament, he also alludes to Confucius’ *Annals*, a work considered to be designed for the “new coming emperor,” to make his point.85 The coincidence between the number of Lu dukes in the *Annals* and that of Han emperors is not just a coincidence to Wang Mang. It is a confirmation of the end of Han’s rule. Wang Mang’s strong insistence on dynastic change greatly influenced the political culture of the first century A.D. Therefore, when an intellectual from the first century A.D. read about the “chosen one” sweeping his rivals in apocryphal texts, he would have no difficulty in making sense of it.

**Preferences for Establishing the New Dynasty**

Wang Mang’s frequent but ineffective reforms, upset his fledgling regime, and his implacable opponents eventually overthrew him. However, they faced a question: who was qualified to found the next dynasty? In general, there were two options. The first, which Li Xun’s group and others favored, argued that the heavenly mandate should still go to the Liu family. Another theory relied on the Five Phases to predict the next ruler. According to this theory, the next receiver of the mandate would be a representative of the phase of metal, since Wang Mang’s phase of earth generates that phase. This depended, of course, on whether the Xin dynasty was legitimate.

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85 I will fully discuss this issue in Chapter 4, page 170 to 176.
Both of these theories and the rationales behind them circulated widely in China in the first century A.D. Three major military groups, that of Gongsun Shu (A.D. ？–36), that of the Red Eyebrows (Chimei 赤眉), and that of Liu Xiu 劉秀 (6 B.C.– A.D. 57), advocated one of the two theories to claim the mandate to rule. Gongsun Shu, a warlord occupying the Shu 蜀 area, claimed that he represented the phase of metal, and he would follow Wang Mang’s reign to become the new emperor. The leaders of the Red Eyebrow and Liu Xiu, on the other hand, believed that the Liu family would come back and rule.

The three groups not only competed for military dominance, but also political legitimacy. For example, the three groups all named an emperor in A.D. 25. This is not just a coincidence, but a competitive strategy. In their claims, they employed vocabulary that was familiar to literati in the first century B.C. and common to apocryphal texts. It was in this context that apocryphal texts were shaped from a few sentences of prophecy to a corpus of books attached to classics.

**Gongsun Shu’s Revealed Message**

Based the *History of the Later Han*, a revealed dream triggered Gongsun Shu’s decision to enthrone himself. One night, he dreamt of a person saying to him: “Basi zixi, take twelve as the expected time” (八厶子系, 十二為期). Not befuddled by this apparently confusing sentence, he woke up and asked his wife whether the throne was worth pursuing, since he would not possess its glory very long. She replied by paraphrasing a saying from the *Analects*: “If one hears the Way in the morning, it will even be fine for him to die in the afternoon, not to mention twelve!”

86 The Red Eyebrow was a rebellious group mainly contained peasants. The group received this name, because the members painted their foreheads red to distinguish themselves from the Han official troops. For their rebellion, see Hans Bielenstein, “Wang Mang, the Restoration of the Han Dynasty, and Later Han,” in Twitchett and Michael Loewe eds., *The Cambridge history of China*, 243-54.
87 Hou Han shu, 13: 535.
88 Fan Ye, *Hou Han shu*, 1a: 20; 11: 480.
89 The Classical Chinese sentence by Gongsun Shu’s wife is 朝聞道, 夕死可矣, and the original sentence by Confucius from *Analects* is 朝聞道，夕死可矣. No matter whether she really said it or not, the expected audience of this account is literati with at least basic familiarity with the classics. *Hou Han shu*, 13: 535. “Li ren” 里仁, *Lunyu*, Zhu Xi annotated, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, *lunyu jizhu*,2: 71.
90 It seems like Gongsun Shu and his wife understood the person’s prophecy quite well, but actually they have
bizarre, a dragon appeared shining in the hall of their house while they were having this conversation. Fully convinced by this omen, Gongsun Shu had “Emperor Gongsun” (公孫帝) tattooed on his palm. In the fourth month of A.D. 25, he claimed the crown and chose white—corresponding to metal—as the color of the dynasty and the reign name Longxing 龍興, or “rising dragon.”

As outlandish as this anecdote might sound, it contains several elements and motives familiar to Wang Mang and many literati in the first century A.D. Firstly, basi zixi 八厶子系 is an easily recognized way to refer to Gongsun 公孫, by juxtaposing the components of the two characters. Secondly, in the story, we find a message to Gongsun Shu advising him to accept the mandate. This kind of omen with an unambiguous message is plentiful in Wang Mang’s reign, such as a white stone with the inscription announcing Wang Mang as the new emperor, and a bronze tally commanding Wang Mang to take the mandate. In fact, Wang Mang used twelve primary omens to weave a delicate narrative of how the Liu family lost their mandate, and how Wang Mang was named the rightful successor. Thirdly, Gongsun Shu adopted white as his dynastic color. According to the theory of the Five Phases, white symbolizes the phase of metal. Therefore, he claimed that his dynasty followed Wang Mang’s reign in the order of Succession by Generation.

Liu Xiu and his Enthronement

Liu Xiu went through a similar process to claim the throne, in which prophecies played a very important role. He also claimed to have had a dream, in which a red dragon rose into the sky. After telling his followers, as Gongsun Shu did, he received a positive answer that he should claim the throne: the dream manifested the mandate

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<th>sharply different understanding of it. On another occasion, Gongsun Shu mentioned “twelve” as the number of Han emperors, which correspond to the number of dukes in the Annals. Therefore, by saying “twelve as the time,” Gongsun Shu perceivably understood it as the time when Han had their twelve emperors. His wife, however, led by Gongsun Shu’s question, considered “twelve” as a time span they would endure, which is probably longer than the period from morning to afternoon. Nevertheless, it is unclear what specific time span was in her mind. It might be a year, twelve days, or even one day, given the hundred-twenty time unit division of a day used beginning in Wang Mang’s time. Hou Han shu, 13: 535; Han shu, 99a: 4094.</th>
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<td>91 Hou Han shu, 13: 535.</td>
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<td>92 Han shu, 99a-b: 4078-9, 4093-4, 4112-3.</td>
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of Heaven. When Liu Xiu and his group arrived in the place called Gao, Qiang Hua, Liu Xiu’s old classmate when he was in Chang’an studying the Documents, came from Guanzhong with a prophecy called the Red Hidden Tally, or Chifu fu. The prophecy reads this way:

劉秀發兵捕不道，四夷雲集龍鬥野，四七之際火為主。Liu Xiu will send out the troops to capture those who deviate from the Way. The barbarians of the four directions will gather like clouds, and the dragon will fight them in the wild. At the time of four-seven, the Fire will become the master.

The history tells us that, taking advantage of this event, Liu Xiu’s followers, after several unsuccessful attempts, convinced him to enthrone himself:

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。As for the tallies of receiving the mandate, the people’s response is the most significant. Having matched the tally from over ten thousand li away, the situation identical everywhere without having consulted, how can [even] the white fish of Zhou compare with this? Now there is no son of Heaven above, and within the four seas all is chaotic. The correspondence of tallies and omens is clearly obvious. It will be proper to answer the Heavenly spirits, and to satisfy the crowd’s hope.

This time, they succeeded. On August 5th, A.D. 25, Liu Xiu made a sacrifice to Heaven, and took the throne. His followers all believed that this “matched the heart of Heaven and Earth.”

All the allusions and circumlocutions in the Red Hidden Tally and the pleas of Liu Xiu’s followers point to a central message: Liu is the legitimate recipient of the Heavenly mandate, representing the phase of fire. In the former text, “Four-Seven” means “twenty-eight,” referring to the two hundred twenty-eight years since the establishment of the Western Han dynasty (202 B.C.) to A.D. 25. The sentence thus means at the time of two hundred twenty-eight years, the phase of fire will still be

93 Hou Han shu, 17: 645.
94 Hou Han shu, 1a: 1.
95 Ibid., 21.
96 Ibid., 21-2.
97 Ibid., 21.
dominant.

As if the message were not clear enough, the prophecy specifically mentions the name Liu Xiu. Interestingly, this is not the first time prophecies mentioned Liu’s name. The historians state that when Liu Xiu was still a nobody, a prophecy predicted that a man of his name would be the next son of Heaven.98 Therefore, for Liu Xiu and his followers, the appearance of the Red Hidden Tally confirmed Heaven’s will and their belief that Liu was to be the next son of Heaven.

The speech of Liu Xiu’s followers alludes to the world of omens. It firstly points out that the “people’s response,” or Qiang Hua’s arrival from Guanzhong, is the most significant omen. Then it alludes to the event of white fish, a story from the Documents transmitted in Western Han dynasty. When King Wu of Zhou was traveling by water to overthrow the evil Shang king Zhou 紂, a white fish jumped into his boat—an auspicious omen.99

Liu Xiu’s followers were aware that mentioning omens or prophecies was not enough. They claimed that the omen Liu Xiu just received, namely Qiang Hua’s handing in the Red Hidden Tally, is the supreme one. By using comparison, the speech enters into the competition over legitimate omens. Even the omen for King Wu, the one stressing the legitimacy of the great Zhou’s golden age, could not compare to it.

**Competing Authority between Liu Xiu and Gongsun Shu**

In A.D. 27, Liu Xiu responded to Gongsun Shu’s propaganda more directly. In that year, Gongsun had been claiming that the phase of fire had already expired, and that he, representing the phase of metal, should be the next son of Heaven.100 Most interesting is not what he wanted, but the way he promoted this idea. Like Wang Mang, Gongsun Shu alluded to the Annals. Based on the number of dukes in the

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98 *Hou Han shu*, 23: 798.
99 See, for example, *Han shu*, 56: 2500. According to the commentator Yan Shigu 颜師古, the account is from the new script version of “Tai Shi” 泰誓 (The great oath). This passage does not belong to the received version of the Documents. In an apocryphal text named *Shangshu zhong hou* 尚書中候, or the Inner Observation of the Documents, there is an elaborate form of the account, in which King Wu receives a white fish with the a specific description of how to defeat Zhou 紂.
100 *Hou Han shu*, 13: 535.
Annals (twelve), he argued that Han should have had twelve emperors as well. Since now there had been twelve rulers, Han had used up its allotment. Why did the Annals have anything to do with the Han dynasty? Since Emperor Wu’s time, literati believed that Confucius wrote the Annals, and hid ultimate political principles in it, principles meant particularly for Han dynasty. Gongsun Shu therefore appropriated the link between the Han house and the Annals in order to sabotage rather than consolidate Han’s legitimacy.

Besides referring to the classics, Gongsun Shu alluded to passages from three books:

《錄運法》曰: 廢昌帝, 立公孫。 The Recorded Rule for the conveyance of the Mandate says: “Abolish Emperor Chang, and establish Gongsun.”

《括地象》曰: 帝軒轅受命, 公孫氏握。 The Inclusive Images of Earth says: Emperor Xuanyuan [Yellow Emperor] received the mandate, and Gongsun grasps it.

《援神契》曰: 西太守, 乙卯金。 The Tally for Assistance from Spirits says: The western Grand Minister crushed maojin (Liu).

The titles of these texts were later included in the apocryphal corpus, and the Tally for Assistance from Spirits was quite frequently mentioned in Emperor Ming’s reign (A.D. 57–75). The quotations above all identify someone named Gongsun as the new receiver of mandate and the exterminator of the Liu family.

101 This list includes eleven Liu emperors and Empress Lu, which is also an idea found in Ban Gu’s historiography.
102 This issue will be fully discussed in Chapter 4.
103 This understanding of the title is based on Zheng Xuan’s (A.D. 127-200) commentary on the title. See Yasui Kōzan and Nakamura Shōhachi, Isho no kisoteki kenkyū, 1089.
104 Hou Han shu, 13: 538.
105 Hou Han shu, 13: 538.
106 Here the character yi, 乙, is borrowed as zha, 軋, meaning “to crush” or “to forge.” Since mao jin can refer to metal, The metaphor is thus forging or crushing metal. See Li Xian’s 李賢 commentary on the word yi in Hou Han shu, 13: 538.
107 The latter two titles later were included in the discourse of literati with Hetu and Xiaojing respectively preceding the titles. See Cao Chong’s 曹充 (fl. A.D. 60) speech, where Hetu kuo dixiang 河圖括地象 is mentioned. See Hou Han shu, 35: 1201. The name Xiaojing yuanshen qi 孝經援神契 can be found in the “Jisi zhi 祭祀志” (The treatise of sacrifices) by Sima Biao 司馬彪 (A.D. 243-306), in Hou Han shu zhi, 9: 3200.
108 Yuanshen qi is mentioned two in Baihu tongyi 白虎通義. See Xianggang Zhongwen Daxue Zhongguo Wenhua Yanjusuo 香港中文大學中國文化研究所 (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Institute of Chinese Studies), Baihu tong zhuizi suoyin 白虎通逐字索引 (A concordance to the Baihu tong), Xian Qin Liang Han guji zhuzi suoyin congkan 先秦兩漢古籍逐字索引叢刊 (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1995), 432.
Annoyed by this, Liu Xiu wrote Gongsun Shu a letter. Interestingly, he did not invalidate the texts Gongsun Shu used. For example, he did not say that the Recorded Rule for the Movement of the Mandate was a forgery. Instead, he questioned Gongsun Shu’s understanding of it. For the name “Gongsun,” Liu Xiu claimed that “Gongsun” did not refer to Gongsun Shu, but Emperor Xuan of Han. In chapter 2, we have already seen Sui Meng predict the end of the Han dynasty and bring the feeling of fin de siècle to the court. He also gave a confusing prophecy: “gongsun bingyi will be established,” or gongsun bingyi li. Liu Xiu took this prophecy out of context, and identified the gongsun part as reference to Emperor Xuan, since Emperor Xuan’s original name was Bingyi.

The competition for legitimacy between Liu Xiu and Gongsun Shu highlighted existing propaganda tools, especially classics and ways of interpreting omens. These seemingly befuddling prophecies are carefully designed to win their audience’s support. The twelve dukes of the Annals, the story of the white fish, the content of the Red Hidden Tally and even the paraphrasing of the Analects by Gongsun Shu’s wife are allusions to the classics and to well-known incidents with definite meanings to intellectual communities in the first century A.D. Neither Liu Xiu nor Gongsun Shu invented their arguments out of nothing. The argument between them was thus an occasion for each to challenge his opponents and impress potential supporters through a shared knowledge. This political conflict is the context in which the corpus of apocryphal texts developed. The campaigns of both sides were no more irrational, keeping in mind their audiences, than those of the most recent U.S. presidential election.

Classicists and the Great Families

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108 See chapter 2, page 8.
109 Han shu, 75: 3153. The sentence gongsun bingyi li can be read in several ways, and the English translation provided above is just one of them. It can also mean, for example, “The grandson of the duke will be established.” Gong 公 in this context does not indicate “duke” as a rank title, but a honorific term indicating anyone significant.
110 Han shu, 8: 238.
Who was the intended audience of the apocryphal texts? Based on the prophecies and on accounts of Liu Xiu and Gongsun Shu’s self-enthronement, the intended audience consisted of those familiar with the Annals and the Documents, basic understanding of the Five Phases and a decent acquaintance with Han political history. They might also be well-informed about prophecies and revealed texts that are no longer extant. Undoubtedly, the polymaths who had lived through the last fifty years of the Western Han dynasty would find these speeches easy to follow, and some of them would even find them convincing. The minor ones who went to the capital to learn the classics during Wang Mang’s time were probably also able to penetrate these riddles, given Wang Mang’s high-profile propaganda.

Why, then, did Liu Xiu and Gongsun Shu strive to gain support from classicists? In the first century A.D., the majority of people trained in the classics were from the great families, or haozu 豪族, which owned local lands and local human resources. Since the mid-Western Han, they had accumulated great wealth and social power through landowning. By investing in classical training, they turned themselves into officials and literati. These families would provide logistic as well as military support to warlords like Gongsun Shu and Liu Xiu. Behind Liu Xiu’s glorious image as the chosen son of Heaven, these families paved the road to the throne. According to Kimura Masao 木村正雄, competing military groups such as those of Gongsun Shu and Kui Xiao 魏嚣 (?– A.D. 33) relied heavily on local gentry in the Tianshui 天水 and Shu 蜀 areas.

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111 Judging from the way Liu Xiu treated Gongsun Shu’s quotes, it seems that the prophetic texts the latter used were familiar. Otherwise, it would be easier and more economical to deny the authenticity of the texts. In contrast, for example, Liu Xiu debunked Gongsun Shu’s supposedly prophetic tattoo in his palm, and warned him that he should not imitate Wang Mang’s usurpation. Liu Xiu could have said the same thing to Gongsun Shu, but he did not. See Hou Han shu, 13: 538.
112 Han shu, 99b: 4100; 99c: 4185.
113 For how great families invested their money in local society to gain authority in the early years of the Eastern Han, see Yü Ying-shih, “Dong Han zhengquan zhi jianli yu shizu daxing zhi guanxi,” 207-16, Higashi Shinji 東晉次, Gokan jidai no seiji to shakai 後漢時代の政治と社會 (Eastern Han politics and society) (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 1995), 70-89, and Cui Xiangdong 崔向東, Han dai haozu yanjiu 漢代豪族研究 (Studies on Han great families) (Wuhan: Chongwen, 2003), 168-79.
114 Yang Lien-sheng 杨联陞, “Dong Han de haozu” 東漢的豪族 (Great families in the Eastern Han dynasty), Qinghua xuebao, 4 (1936): 1011-6; Yü Ying-shih, “Dong Han zhengquan zhi jianli yu shizu daxing zhi guanxi,” 213-6, 249-52.
115 Kimura Masao 木村正雄, Chūgoku kodai nōmin hanran no kenkyū 中國古代農民叛亂的研究所 (Studies on peasant revolts in ancient China) (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1979), 324-5, 332, 355. Yang Lien-sheng, “Dong Han de haozu,” 10011-6. Also see Yü Ying-shih, “Dong Han zhengquan zhi jianli yu shizu daxing zhi guanxi,”
The local gentries started to study the classics beginning in Emperor Wu’s reign, since such expertise led to official positions and even the emperor’s favor. After several generations, in Emperor Yuan’s reign (49–33 B.C.), the majority of high governmental officials had training in the classics, and some of them were leading scholars in the court. Until Wang Mang’s time, the classics became indispensable for structuring the government, and classicists like Liu Xin took some of the highest positions. The classics had become a sacred object among literati in intellectual and political spheres.

Consequently, the classics became central in maintaining solidarity and forming alliances. The leaders of those groups, such as Liu Xiu and Kui Xiao, were trained in the classics. In Wang Mang’s interregnum, Liu Xin even recommended Kui for appointment as a Gentleman (Shi 士), an assistant to the shanggong 上公, or the Upper Ducal Minister, a position designed specifically for Liu Xin himself. Group leaders without training in the classics tended to seek people with that training. For instance, Fan Chong 樊崇, the leader of the Red Eyebrows, nominated Xu Xuan 徐宣 as their Grand Chancellor because of the latter’s specialty in the Changes. The three leaders were also eager to make alliances with the local gentry in the places that they occupied. Scholars like Qiao Xuan 譙玄 with specialties in the Changes and the Annals, Li Ye 李業 with training in the Lu tradition of the Poetry, and Ren Yong 任永 and Feng Xin 馮信 with “affection for learning” were all on Gongsun Shu’s list of people to pursue.

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238-9.


118 Hou Han shu, 13: 513. The Shanggong position, designated as higher than the Sangong 三公, or Three Ducal Ministers, specifically referred to Liu Xin’s position, National Teacher. See Li Xian’s commentary on Kui Xiao’s position “Shi” in ibid.

119 Hou Han shu, 11: 481.

120 Based on Hou Han shu, they all declined it. Therefore, Gongsun Shu tried to murder them. The source is certainly from a biased perspective favoring Liu Xiu and the Eastern Han dynasty, but it does reflect how important these local classicists were for the warlords. See Fan Ye, “Duxing liezhuan” 獨行列傳 (The biography of the loners), Hou Han shu, 81: 2666-9.
The classicists and Prophets from Liu Xiu’s Group

So far we have seen how classical learning became crucial in the socio-political realm through the period of war after Wang Mang’s interregnum. Knowledge of the classics and intellectual issues passed down from the last fifty years of the first century B.C. became an inventory for literati’s further exploitation and appropriation.

If the prophecies were not from Heaven, then who made them up? What was their intellectual background? Why did this situation produce them?

It is not easy to find out who made those prophecies, especially in Liu Xiu’s case, since the sources concealed their authorship. A handy way to examine this issue is to search for people who first brought these prophecies up, or were in charge of dealing with them. Following this rule of thumb, we do have a few candidates in Liu Xiu’s group who the History of the Later Han describes as specialists in apocrypha. This attribution is based on hindsight, because the apocrypha of the seven classics probably did not grow into a corpus of texts until A.D. 50. In the 20s and before, there were only short, scattered prophecies without obvious links to the classics.

We can certainly find people who brought prophecies to Liu Xiu, such as his old classmate Qiang Hua or Cai Shaogong. Nevertheless, the most important person who inspired Liu Xiu to use prophecies and who later compiled apocrypha is Li Tong (–A.D. 42). The background of Li Tong matched every criterion of a good alliance for warlords like Liu Xiu. He came from a great family of Nanyang, and studied the classics with Liu Xin. During Wang Mang’s time, he was the Teacher of

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121 The qi jing chen 七經讖, or the apocrypha of the seven classics were first mentioned in an event of A.D. A.D. In 56 A.D, Liu Xiu, as Emperor Guangwu, announced apocryphal texts to All-under-Heaven. Hou Han shu, 1b: 84; 35: 1196.
122 This bold conjecture is based on Zhang Heng’s complaint about apocryphal texts: contradictory accounts. He claimed that Jia Kui 賈逵 (A.D. 30-101) found more than thirty cases which contradicted each other. This contradiction is probably due to the compilation of isolated or heterogeneous texts. Hou Han shu, 59: 1912. This situation is sometimes as true, but less obvious, with other texts compiled through a relatively long period of time. In the Documents, for example, the characteristics of sage kings appear to be different from chapter to chapter. See Nylan, Five “Confucian” Classics, 136-9.
123 Cai Shaogong was the one who, in the last years of Wang Mang’s rule, told Liu Xiu the prophecy that someone named Liu Xiu will become the next son of Heaven. In the conversation, people took the National Teacher, Liu Xin, who had already changed his name to “Liu Xiu” then, as the person in the prophecy. Hou Han shu, 15: 582.
the Imperial House (zong qingshi 宗卿師).124

Liu Xiu first went to meet Li Tong during the last years of Wang Mang’s rule because he considered Li a “gentleman” (shi junzi 士君子). The latter did not waste this compliment. He brought up a prophecy from his father Li Shou 李守: the Liu lineage will rise again, and the Li lineage will assist them (Liu shi fuxing, Li shi wei fu 劉氏復興，李氏為輔). After hearing Li Tong’s plans, Liu Xiu made an alliance with him, and determined a time for their revolt.125 Later on, while Liu Xiu was on military campaigns, Li Tong was in charge of maintaining morale in the capital and restoring the National Academy—that is, he was in charge of propaganda.126 Because he decided what to tell people in the capital and in the academy, Li did not just restore the academy, but renewed the routine curriculum with more current issues, and knowledge concerning the ideological debates of the time.

In the first several decades of the first century A.D., texts for claiming legitimacy usually took the form of prophecies. Claiming that certain texts were “classics” was another way. For example, Su Jing 蘇竟 (fl. 40 B.C.–A.D. 30), a scholar of the Changes and a colleague of Liu Xin editing texts in Wang Mang’s time, quoted the Secret Classic of Confucius, or Kong Qiu mijing 孔丘秘經 to convince Liu Xin’s nephew Liu Gong 劉龔 to surrender to Liu Xiu. Although Su Jing succeeded, Liu Xiu did not pay attention to the Hidden Classic of Confucius.

Instead, Liu Xiu integrated the prophecies and classics. He further refined and transformed the prophecies by employing classicists to edit them. Beginning very early in his reign, he employed classicists to edit these prophecies. For example, he ordered Xue Han 薛漢 (fl. A.D. 25–72), an Erudite of the Hán 韓 tradition of the Poetry, to edit these prophecies, which the Hou Han shu called tuchen 圖讖. He also asked Yin Min 尹敏 (fl. A.D. 26–68) to do the same thing, precisely because the latter was a great classicist with training in the Ouyang and old script traditions of the Documents, the Mao tradition of the Poetry, and the Guliang and Zuo traditions of the

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124 See Hou Han shu, 15: 573 and Li Xian’s commentary on the word “Zong qingshi.”
125 Ibid.
126 Hou Han shu, 15: 575. The National Academy was restored in A.D. 28. Hou Han shu, 1a: 40.
In A.D. 50, when Zhang Chun 張純 (died A.D. 56) suggested that Liu Xiu 刘秀 build an imperial ceremonial hall and school, Biyong 辟雍, based on certain texts. “Prophecies” (chen 讫) did not appear just as prophecies in the list alone, but were preceded by “seven classics” (qi jing 七經). Zhang explicitly linked this corpus of prophecies to the classics.

This trend of combining prophecies with classics met stiff resistance from some classicists. Yin Min, for example, argued that the prophecies were not written by the sages, implying that they therefore should not be included among the sages’ writings. Huan Tan 桓譚 (23 B.C.–A.D. 50), who had academic interactions with Yang Xiong and Liu Xin, disparaged the prophecies, saying they were not classics. However, none of these arguments stopped the process of integration. In A.D. 56, Liu Xiu announced the apocryphal texts to the world. After years of use in support of Liu Xiu’s legitimacy, apocryphal texts eventually gained official recognition as part of the commentarial traditions of the classics.

Some people questioned Liu Xiu’s motives for sponsoring the integration of these two corpuses. They, like Liu Xin, considered Liu Xiu a schemer who contaminated existing transmission lines. Liu Xiu did not promote apocryphal texts solely for intellectual purposes (we will see how he used the apocryphal texts he promoted in the following section). His intentions, good or ill, do not necessarily negate the value or significance of this intellectual innovation.

In fact, as mentioned before, new knowledge always results from the fractionation, rearrangement or combination of old knowledge. In intellectual communities, whether one’s new theory becomes popular also depends on how the theory touches upon current, active issues. Liu Xiu’s maneuver was actually to combine the two most attractive sources of the time, the classics and revelations of Heaven’s will, to claim legitimacy. This was an extremely relevant issue due to the

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127 *Hou Han shu*, 79a: 2558; 79b: 2573. Part of Yin Min’s job was to delete prophecies about Wang Mang in the prophetic corpus.
128 *Hou Han shu*, 35: 1196. The seven classics are probably the Five Classics plus Music and the *Classic of Filial Piety*. Li Xian’s commentary on the words *qi jing* does not mention the *Classic of Filial Piety*, but the *Analects*.
129 *Hou Han shu*, 79a: 2558.
130 *Hou Han shu*, 28a: 961.
131 *Hou Han shu*, 1b: 84.
intense competition among political groups.

3. A case study: Liu Xiu’s Feng and Shan Sacrifices

Legitimacy always haunts a founder of a new dynasty. In the previous sections, we have already seen the competition among Liu Xiu and his contemporaries for political legitimacy. After Liu defeated his rivals, the problem of legitimating his rule was not yet resolved. He needed to prove that he was more than just another ruthless conqueror. As the chosen one, he was expected to deliver the ideal state of society: the Great Peace. Now the question was how to make the establishment of the Great Peace clear. In A.D. 56, Liu Xiu made a journey to perform ceremonies for this purpose. As we will see, apocryphal texts played an important role.

The ceremonies were the feng 封 and shan 禪 sacrifices. The basic principle of the former is to build an altar at the top of Mount Tai 泰山 to sacrifice to Heaven. In the latter ceremony, one clears an area of ground at a minor mountain near Mount Tai and sacrifice to Earth. In the Han people’s eyes, the feng and shan sacrifices were a response to Heaven’s mandate, to inform Heaven of an emperor’s achievement. According to many Eastern Han scholars, emperors should do the feng sacrifice only after they achieved the Great Peace. In Liu Xiu’s time, the two most recent precedents were the sacrifice made by the First Emperor (r. 259–210 B.C.) and

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133 See Zhang Shoujie’s 張守節 commentary and how Emperor Wu practiced it in Sima Qian, “Fengshang shu” 封禪書, Shiji, 28: 1355, 1398.

134 Shiji, 28: 1355, 1384.

135 See Li Xian’s commentary on the phrase “feng shan Taishan 封禪泰山” in Sima Biao, “Jisi shang,” Hou Han shu zhi 後漢書志, in Fan Ye, Hou Han shu, 7: 3162.
Emperor Wu. For Han historians like Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 87 B.C.) and Ban Gu, the First Emperor’s sacrifice failed, since Heaven sent down storms to show its disapproval.

Therefore, when Zhao Xi 趙憙 (4 B.C.–A.D. 80) raised the issue in A.D. 54, Liu Xiu was very cautious about it. Zhao proposed that Liu Xiu’s sagely virtue (sheng de 聖德) had led to clear peace (qing ping 清平) so he should do the feng sacrifice in accord with the heart of Heaven (cheng tian xin 承天心). Liu immediately declined: “I have ruled for thirty years, but resentful qi fills the populace’s bellies. Whom am I going to deceive, Heaven?” Given the poor situation of the populace, he did not believe that Heaven was satisfied with what he had done.

The final decision of practicing the feng and shan ceremony was, not surprisingly, inspired by an apocryphal text. One night in the first month of A.D. 56, the emperor was reading the River Chart’s Tally of Meeting with Prosperity (Hetu huichang fu 河圖會昌符), and he encountered this passage:

赤劉之九，會命岱宗。不慎克用，何益於承。誠善用之，姦偽不萌。

The ninth generation of the red Liu will encounter the mandate at Daizong (Mountain Tai). If you do not carefully employ it, what is the benefit of receiving it? If you indeed use it well, the evil and fraudulent will not germinate.

The ninth generation of the red Liu indicates Liu Xiu, since he was the ninth generation since Emperor Gaozu. The word “cheng” corresponds to the same word in Zhao Xi’s “follow the heart of Heaven.” Despite the ambiguity of the pronouns in the passage, the general idea of the passage was to tell Liu Xiu to go to Mount Tai, so that he would not waste his mandate. Inspired by this passage, Liu Xiu ordered people to prepare the feng and shan sacrifices based on relevant passages in apocryphal texts that were named after the River Charts and Luo Writing.

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137 Shiji, 28: 1366-7; Han shu, 25a: 1201-2, 1205.
138 See Li Xian’s quote from Dongguan Han ji in Hou Han shu zhi, 7: 3162.
139 Hou Han shu zhi, 7: 3161.
140 Ibid., 3162.
141 Ibid.
On the twenty-second day of the second month in A.D. 56, Liu Xiu with his entourage performed the feng sacrifice at Mount Tai. The general idea of the ceremony was to send a message inscribed on a jade plate to Heaven. The main procedure of the ceremony involves putting a 1.2 x 0.7 x 1.2 meter jade plate with an inscription on it below two 1.2 x 1.2 x 0.2 meter stones at the altar and sealing them with stone bars and the imperial stamp. The ceremony ended by erecting a stele at the altar, which was prepared before the ceremony. On the twenty-fifth day, the imperial party held the shan sacrifice at the northern part of Liangfu, a minor mountain near the foot of Mount Tai. The ceremony did not include a message sent to Earth, nor was a stele erected.

Although the jade inscription is lost, the inscription on the stele is extant. From it we can understand what was in Liu Xiu’s mind in communicating with Heaven. The inscription starts by introducing the attendants of the ceremony, why the event was held, Liu Xiu’s achievement, and the schedule of the ceremonies. In the inscription, apocryphal texts play a very important role in justifying this occasion and establishing Liu Xiu’s achievement. It quotes from apocryphal texts in the following order:

《河圖赤伏符》曰: “劉秀發兵捕不道, 四夷雲集龍鬥野, 四七之際火為主。”

The Red Hidden Tally of the River Chart says: Liu Xiu will send out the troops to capture those who deviate from the Way. The barbarians of the four directions will gather like clouds, and the dragon will fight in the wild. At the time of Four-Seven the Fire will become the master.

This passage is the one that around A.D. 25 Liu Xiu’s classmate Qiang Hua gave him. In A.D. 56, this prophecy no longer stood alone; its title included the modifier, “River Chart,” the text from which, according to the apocryphal texts, the eight trigrams were derived. Amongst the quotations, this is the only one that is not directly relevant to the feng and shan incident. Its point was to show that Liu Xiu was the legitimate recipient of the Heavenly mandate.

142 Hou Han shu zhi, 7: 3163, and Xing Yitian, “Donghan Guangwu di yu feng shan” 東漢光武帝與封禪, 184-5.
143 Ibid., 3169-70.
144 Ibid., 3165.
The next quotation elaborates what Liu Xiu read from the *River Chart’s Tally of Meeting Prosperity*:

《河圖會昌符》曰： "赤帝九世，巡省得中，治平則封，誠合帝道孔矩，則天文靈出，地祇瑞興。帝劉之九，會命岱宗，誠善用之，姦偽不萌。赤漢德興，九世會昌，巡岱皆當。天地扶九，崇經之常。漢大興之，道在九世之主。封于泰山，刻石著紀，禪于梁父，退省考五。" 145

The *River Chart’s Tally of Meeting Prosperity* says: The ninth generation of the red emperor does traveling inspections. When he achieves orderly peace, he carries out the *feng* sacrifice. When it corresponds to the Way of [sage] emperors and the standard of Confucius, the spirit of Heavenly patterns comes out, and omens of earthly deities arise. The ninth generation of the red Liu is destined to receive the mandate at Daizong (Mount Tai). If you indeed use it carefully, the evil and fraudulent will not germinate. The virtue of the red Han has been rising, and it meets with prosperity in the ninth generation. Traveling to Mount Tai is quite suitable. Heaven and Earth rely on “nine,” and they promote the regularity of constancy. Han will greatly promote it, and the way lies in the king of the ninth generation. Do the *feng* sacrifice at Mount Tai; inscribe on the stone and write the record, do the *shan* sacrifice at Liangfu, and go back to introspect and examine the “five.” 146

According to this passage, the emperor should do the *feng* sacrifice after he achieves the orderly peace. This orderly peace should also be based on the way of ancient kings and the standard of Confucius. It seems that to achieve that state, the emperor still needs to work on implementing the way and standard. Nevertheless, in the context of this quotation, Liu Xiu was also destined to do the *feng* sacrifice and to promote the virtue of the Han house. The word “*hui*” 會 indicates that then was the right time for Liu Xiu to rise. This passage does not emphasize the personal qualities of Liu Xiu, but it claims that it was his destiny to achieve a peaceful state.

The quote that follows emphasizes Liu Xiu’s characteristics to a greater degree:

《河圖提劉予》曰： "九世之帝，方明聖，持衡拒，九州平，天下予。" 147

The *Bestowal to the Promoted Liu of the River Chart* says: “The emperor of the ninth generation is then bright and sagely. He holds the yard-arm scale and carpenter’s square, and the Nine Provinces are peaceful. Then All-under-Heaven is bestowed.”

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145 *Hou Han shu zhi*, 7: 3165.
146 It is not clear to me what “five” refers to.
147 *Hou Han shu zhi*, 7: 3165.
The yard-arm scale and carpenter’s square are metaphors for standards and principles. This passage admits Liu Xiu’s distinctive characteristics as a sage king. Given these traits, the world is peaceful. Together with the two quotations above, these apocryphal texts convey a message: Liu Xiu was the destined emperor, who was sagely and able to bring a peaceful state to the world.

The incident of the feng and shan sacrifices reveals a repetitive motif in Chinese political history: the announcement of one’s superior rulership through political propaganda. Many elements in this incident were familiar: Heaven’s mandate, the sagely king, and the “orderly peace.” The crux that links them together is rather new: apocryphal texts. Through them, Liu Xiu claimed to be the sage king who had brought the Great Peace to the world, so that his rule was mandated by Heaven. No matter whether there was someone who was more virtuous than Liu Xiu, Heaven as the ultimate agent had already decided everything. It is hard to say how many people really believed Liu Xiu’s claims. However, this question became a moot point when he died two years after the sacrifices. All-under-Heaven, then, needed a new ruler to lead it to the Great Peace, and he too would be responsible for proving that he was the chosen one.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we have seen apocryphal texts from two perspectives. They claim to be the divinely revealed commentaries on the classics. They decode the hidden messages in the classics so that one can understand Heaven’s will. One major theme in these texts is how sages and kings chosen by heaven are distinctive from ordinary people. This theme was important in the socio-political context of the first decades of first century A.D., when warlords competed over the legitimacy of their rule. These warlords, many of them also students of the classics, urgently needed means to legitimate their rule. They thus manipulated prophecies, a popular strategy then, to convey Heaven’s preference for them. Taking this a step further, Liu Xiu and his
group started the process of integrating the classics with these prophecies. Through this process, scattered prophecies grew together as keys to the classical traditions of the period. Liu Xiu then used apocryphal texts to perform the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices to legitimize his rule.

Apocryphal texts did not cease to exist after Emperor Guangwu. With the sponsorship of the imperial house and many scholars’ favor, they lived on as a means of understanding the classics in the Eastern Han dynasty. In the next chapter, we will see, how Liu Xiu’s son Liu Zhuang (A.D. 28–75), or Emperor Ming 明 (r. A.D. 58–75), the other emperor who still had firm control of their dynasty, used apocrypha along with other texts for his own purposes, and how he appropriated the image of Confucius to legitimate himself as a sage king who was able to achieve the Great Peace.

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148 See Higashi’s evaluation the reign of Emperor Guangwu, Ming and Zhang 章 (r. A.D. 76–88) in *Gokan jidai no seisji to shakai*, 43-68.
IV. Apocrypha, Confucius, and Monarchy in Emperor Ming’s Reign (A.D. 58–75)

In chapter 3, we saw some major characteristics of apocryphal texts and how they were of interest in political struggles in the first half of the first century A.D. Liu Xiu and his followers were not the only group that sought to manipulate prophecies and the classics, but they were certainly the most successful one. His group integrated prophecies with commentarial traditions of the classics. Apocrypha—revealed commentaries that could decode the classics—were the product of this integration. If one opens the compilation of apocryphal texts by Yasui Kōzan 安居香山 and Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八, one can easily find fragments that celebrate the legitimacy and superiority of the Liu family.\(^1\) Heaven’s approval and support undoubtedly played a crucial role in singling Liu Xiu out from his competitors and convincing others that he was the one to rule.

His son, Liu Zhuang 劉莊 (A.D. 28–75) or Emperor Ming 明帝, faced a different situation from that of his father: he needed to convince others that among his brothers, or any other Lius, he was the right person to rule. As the fourth son of Liu Xiu, he did not become the heir apparent until A.D. 43.\(^2\) In comparison with his elder brother Liu Qiang 劉彊 (A.D. 25–58), who became the heir apparent at the young age of one, Liu Zhuang was less well recognized.\(^3\) He might have been anxious about his credentials as heir apparent, particularly because his appointment resulted from his mother Yin Lihua’s 陰麗華 (A.D. 4–64) victory in harem politics and her promotion to the position of empress in A.D. 41.\(^4\) These issues were more than just psychological complexes in Emperor Ming’s mind; they could be used by his opponents to sabotage his rule.

Therefore, Emperor Ming needed to appear as a qualified ruler, more qualified than any of his brothers. In another words, he needed to be the emperor that others

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\(^1\) See examples in Annals’ Diagrams Elaborating Confucius or Contract for Assistance from Spirits of the Classic of Filial Piety, in Yasui Koza and Nakamura Shōhachi ed., Weishu jicheng 綜書集成, 580-1, 992.
\(^2\) *Hou Han shu*, 2: 95.
\(^3\) *Hou Han shu*, 42: 1423-4.
\(^4\) *Hou Han shu*, 10a: 405.
expected him to be. Accordingly, this chapter will focus on the image of the sage king that Emperor Ming built using contemporary sources, especially apocryphal texts, and how he tried to fit this image. This is significant for three reasons. Firstly, it allows us to see more clearly the state promoted Confucius and his direct disciples as a single group in the first fifty years of the Eastern Han dynasty. In other words, to Emperor Ming and his contemporaries, Confucius was no longer a lone fighter; his direct disciples became his indispensable assistants in spreading his teaching across the land. Secondly, this focus illuminates the appropriation of existing knowledge. As an emperor immersed in classical learning and commentarial traditions, Emperor Ming pulled out certain elements from existing classical traditions and then rearranged them. Thirdly, our focus is convenient for us to see that emperors, especially those in positions similar to Emperor Ming, were not isolated from contemporary intellectual changes. On the contrary, they eagerly and anxiously engaged in and responded to them.

Confucius has been a compelling figure to people of all walks of life over time. However, the image of Confucius has not been stable, and people of different periods imagined this philosopher in very different ways. This chapter will investigate Confucius’ image in a period that was crucial to the formation of the intellectual debates of imperial China. From the last century B.C. to the 2nd century A.D., scholars of the Han dynasty thought of Confucius not as a great, human philosopher, but as a semi-divine being. In these scholars’ writings, they view Confucius as *xuan sheng* 玄聖, the dark sage, and *su wang* 素王, the uncrowned king.\(^5\) This is particularly true

\(^5\) Three scholars have made great contributions to the understanding of the image of Confucius as *xuan sheng* and *su wang* in apocryphal texts: Jack L. Dull, Yasui Kōzan 安居香山 and Xu Xingwu 徐興無. Dull points out Confucius’ semi-divine nature and that Confucius was depicted as the uncrowned king to announce the rise of the Han dynasty and the creation of an ideal institution for the Han dynasty. Yasui Kōzan greatly emphasizes apocryphal texts as the product of the new script camp and the Gongyang tradition of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*. He is extremely cautious about Confucius being the uncrowned king. Instead, adopting Pi Xirui’s 皮錫瑞 theory, Yasui argues that, in apocryphal texts, Confucius narrated the principles of the uncrowned king for the new dynasty. Xu Xingwu 徐興無 also emphasizes Confucius’ divine nature and argues that the idea that Confucius was the representative of the phase of water is due to the cycle of *tian tong* 天統, *di tong* 地統 and *ren tong* 人統 from *Chunqiu fanlu*. See Jack L. Dull, “A Historical Introduction to the Apocryphal (Ch’an-wei) Texts of the Han Dynasty,” Ph.D. thesis, University of Washington, 1966, 516-27; Yasui Kōzan 安居香山, Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八, *Isha no kisoteki kenkyū* 緯書の基礎的研究, Tokyo: Kokusho Kanbókai, 1976, 152-170; especially 160 and 166; Xu Xingwu 徐興無, “Zuowei pifu de xuansheng suwang——chenwei wenxian zhong de Kongzi xingxiang yu xiangxiang” 作為匹夫的玄聖素王——讖緯文獻中的孔子形象與思想 (The black sage of Confucius)
In this chapter, we will start with how, when the authors of apocryphal texts adopted the two terms from Zhuangzi 莊子, xuan sheng and su wang, they implied that although he was excluded from the imperial succession order based on the theory of the Five Phases, Confucius was of divine origin, his semi-divinity granted by Heaven. With divine power as the uncrowned king, he was able to confer the mandate of Heaven upon the legitimate successor of the Zhou dynasty, namely the Han, and to convey the ultimate political principles and moral teachings to its emperor. Apocryphal texts depicted Confucius as a sage king who used the Annals to convey information and the mandate of Heaven to the new Han emperors. Correspondingly, in apocrypha, his major disciples became his subjects in an “ideal kingdom,” defined by a set of ideal relationships between Confucius (the king), and his disciples (servants). The parallelism between the lord-minister relationship and the master-disciple relationship drawn in a conversation between Emperor Ming and one of his officials compares the Han dynasty with Confucius’ “kingdom.” Emperor Ming thus claimed that he was a sage king, defending himself against contemporaries’ dissatisfaction with Han rule, but accepting their principle that only sages could bring the Great Peace (taiping 太平) to the world.

**Xuan sheng: the Dark Sage**

In Han apocryphal texts, Confucius often bears the names xuan sheng 玄聖 and su wang 素王. Before we examine why these two terms are used, it is helpful to establish in what situations xuan sheng and su wang were used before the Han dynasty, and what they meant in those situations. In the outer chapters of Zhuangzi, there is a passage describing the relationship between the way of Heaven, the way of the

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164 emperor and the way of the sage:6

夫虛靜恬淡，寂寞無為者，萬物之本也。明此以南鄉，堯之為君也；明此以北面，舜之為臣也。以此處上，帝王天子之德也；以此處下，玄聖素王之道也。7

Emptiness, stillness, placidity, mildness, quietude, indifference, non-action—these are the root of the myriad things. Understanding this as the south-facing ruler, Yao was lord; understanding this as the north-facing minister, Shun was his subject. Occupying a superior position with this understanding is the virtue of emperors, kings, and the son of heaven; occupying an inferior position with this understanding is the way of dark sages and plain kings [uncrowned kings].8

The passage focuses on what human beings will become after they achieve “emptiness, stillness, placidity, mildness, quietude, indifference, non-action,” or Zhuangzi’s characteristics of the Way. The holders of the Way surely will become supreme as persons.9 However, since their supremacy based on the Way does not affect social distinctions in the human realm, they may occupy different social positions. Here, Yao and Shun, two ancient kings with relatively similar virtues, exemplify holders of the Way. Even though they both achieved the Way, social distinctions still make one a lord and the other a vassal. The passage does not complain that people are treated differently in society even when they possess equal virtues. The passage rather says that with a grasp of the Way, no matter what position a person is in, he will become a supreme person.10 If he is in the position of a lord, his understanding of the Way will lead him to the virtue appropriate to an emperor and son of Heaven. If he is just a commoner, his understanding of the Way will still make

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6 I understand the Way to be a metaphysical concept defined as the generator of the world, but also that force which keeps everything moving in its own particular pattern. Here, it is also a normative concept—the ideal way a sage or emperor should behave. Different social roles have different ideal behaviors.

7 “Tian dao” 天道 in Chen Guying 陳鼓應, Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi 莊子今注今譯 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983), 337.


9 By saying “supreme,” especially in this context, I mean that one achieves the state of zhi ren 至人, or the “ultimate man,” whose mind “functions like a mirror. It neither sends off nor welcomes; it responds but does not retain. Therefore, he can triumph over things without injury” (至人之用心若鏡，不將不迎，應而不藏，故能勝物而不傷). See “Ying diwang” 應帝王, Chen Guying, Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi, 227. I quote the translation from Mair, Wandering on the Way, 71.

10 People who understand the Way but are in lower social positions in Zhuangzi might be a cook, fisherman, woodcutter, and so on. See Alan J. Berkowitz, Patterns of disengagement: the practice and portrayal of reclusion in early medieval China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 27-9, in which he calls this kind of person the “wise rustic.”
him a sage and a sage king, but he will not hold an official position. In this context, the “plain king” means the “king with nothing,” lacking rank. However, the connotation of the “dark sage” is less obvious here. In this context, “dark” can mean “obscure,” implying that his position is a petty one: he is a sage whom no one knows.\(^1\)

From this context, we can conclude that *xuan sheng* and *su wang* carry several connotations into the Han dynasty. Firstly, they indicate people who achieve spiritual power. Later on in the Han, spiritual power is not only linked to the Way as it was in the *Zhuangzi*, but it could also include moral authority, ultimate political principles and so on. Secondly, this spiritual power is unaccompanied by political authority. Thirdly, since Shun in the example became a king after having been a vassal, *xuan sheng* and *su wang* have virtues that make them candidates for kingship. When people in the Han dynasty described Confucius as *xuan sheng* or *su wang*, they did so with these connotations in mind, but with certain modifications that solved the contradiction: if Shun became a king, why not Confucius?

Let us survey how these two terms are used in Han apocryphal texts, and how their use resolved that contradiction. In *Chunqiu yan kong tu* (The diagrams of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* deduced by Confucius),\(^1\) Confucius is called *xuan sheng* 玄聖, or the “dark sage:”

孔子母徵在，夢感黑帝而生，故曰玄聖。\(^1\)

Confucius’ mother Zhengzai [“The Omen is Present”] dreamed of being stimulated by the Black Emperor, and then gave birth to [Confucius]. Therefore he is called the “dark sage.”

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\(^1\) Also, if we consider the characteristics of the Way, “dark” can also be epithet of the Way. Accordingly, *su* can also indicate a characteristic of the Way as in *pu su* 墨素, or “raw and plain.” See “Tian dao” 天道, Chen Guying, *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi*, 337. According to the context, the author’s intention seems to be to make multiple correspondences. Therefore, we should keep as many layers of meaning as possible.

\(^1\) I suspect that a problem arose in the word order of the title during transmission of the text. The alternative form of the title is *Chunqiu kong yan tu*, which makes more sense, since according to an entry in the text, the title alludes to the legend of Fu Xi 伏羲 making *ba gua* 八卦 and Confucius elaborating (*yan* 演) them. Therefore, I translate the title as “The diagrams of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* deduced by Confucius,” though I still keep the word order of the title used in Yasui Közan and Nakamura Shōhachi’s compilation and other literature. See *Chunqiu yan kong tu* in Yasui Közan 安居香山, Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八, *Weishu jicheng* 纜書集成 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin, 1994), 573.

\(^1\) The fragment is preserved in the commentary on *Hou Han shu*, 40b: 1377.
In view of the obvious fabrication of Confucius’ mother’s name, Zhengzai, literally “Having Omen,” the passage is intended to be forthrightly prophetic. It explains why Confucius is \textit{xuan sheng} by claiming that his mother conceived him by dreaming of the Black Emperor. Therefore, following the logic of the passage, Confucius represents the color black and conceivably “water” in terms of the Five Phases. While the passage depicts Confucius as half-human-half-deity, it assigns him a place in the cycle of the Five Phases. In the system of succession of dynasties found in apocryphal texts, the potential founders of a dynasty such as Yao, Shun, Tang, King Wen, and King Wu share two characteristics: they are conceived through a supernatural process in which a human father is not involved, and they belong to one of the Five Phases.\textsuperscript{14} By fulfilling these two criteria, this prophetic passage tries to depict Confucius as a potential emperor.

If Confucius was qualified, why did he not become an emperor? In order to solve this potential problem, apocryphal texts use the succession of Five Phases to rule him out as a ruler. The reason why Confucius did not become a king is not because a former king did not recommend him;\textsuperscript{15} it is because as a representative of water, he was not in the right sequence as mentioned in chapter 3 (page 137).

There is also an interesting feature of this theory that throws light on the correlation between Heaven and men. Although the theory indicates how the dynasties \textit{ought} to succeed one another, perfect succession is not always the case in reality.\textsuperscript{16} The theory of succession allows the existence of dynasties that did not follow the right sequence or lacked virtue. In the \textit{History of Han}, for example, the Qin dynasty and Gong Gong, representing water, are considered deviations from the correct sequence, or “\textit{fei qi xu}” 非其序. But this history does not explain why the system of succession sometimes fails. Since the \textit{History of Han}’s explanation of human history


\textsuperscript{15} As Mencius mentioned. See \textit{Mengzi} 萬章, in Zhu Xi annotated, \textit{Sishu zhangju jizhu} 四書章句集註, \textit{Mengzi jizhu} 孟子集註, 9: 309.

\textsuperscript{16} For the theory of “correlative thinking,” see e.g., A.C. Graham, \textit{Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China} (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), 355. For an assessment of Graham’s theory of correlative thinking and the history of this theory since Max Weber, see Michael J. Puett, \textit{To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-divinization in Early China} (Harvard University Press, 2002), 16-7; 5-21.
is based on succession by generation, it is hard to see why a theory so fundamental
does not function all the time. However, one of the main aims of this discussion in the
History of Han is to legitimize the Han dynasty. That is to say, the author is less intent
on forming a rigorous theory of succession by generation than to identify the Han
dynasty as the legitimate successor of the Zhou dynasty, and Qin as a dynasty
abandoned by Heaven.

At the same time, this theory creates leeway to reconcile the problem of why
Confucius, a great sage, did not actually become a king. As a sage with divine origin,
his ought to be a strong candidate for establishing a new dynasty. However, as a Shang
descendent (representing water in the succession by generation), he represented water,
which was not the phase mandated to take the throne.

Even though, because of the succession order of the Five Phases, Confucius
could not attain the throne, he does have a unique function in this succession order
particular to the Han dynasty. In apocryphal texts, he is the lord of standard making,
or zhi fa zhi zhu 制法之主:

邱為制法之主，黑緑不代蒼黃。17
Confucius was the lord of standard making. Black-green did not replace
green-brown.

聖人不空生，必有所制，以顯天心。邱為木鐸，制法天下。18
The sage was not born in vain. He had to institute something to show the heart of
Heaven. Confucius was the wooden mallet. He made standards for all under
Heaven.

黑龍生為赤，必告示象，使知命。19

17 Xiao jing gou ming jue 孝經鈞命決 (The tally of the key to the mandate in the Classic of Filial Piety), Yasui Közan 安居香山, Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八, Weishu jicheng 緯書集成 (Shijiazhuan: Hebei renmin, 1994), 1011. Yasui Közan punctuates the sentence as 邱為制法之，主黑緑不代蒼黃 to correspond to another similar sentence: “邱為制法，主黑緑不代蒼黃.” However, if we parse zhu 主 as the verb of the second clause in the former sentence, then it is difficult to understand the function of zhi 在 the first clause. If we assume that zhi is not redundant or caused by any textual corruption, it is better to parse zhu to the first part of the sentence as a noun. Also see Yasui Közan, Weishu jicheng, 988. The fragment is preserved in the commentary in “Qu li xia” 曲禮下, Liji zhengyi, j. 4, Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing zhushu, 1257.
18 Chunqiu yan kong tu, Yasui Közan, Weishu jicheng, 580. The fragment is preserved in the commentary in “Zhongyong” 中庸, Liji zhengyi, j. 52, Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing zhushu, 1628.
19 Chunqiu yan kong tu, Yasui Közan, Weishu jicheng, 579. The fragment is preserved in the commentary in “Yingong yuannian” 隱公元年, Chunqiu Gongyang zhuang zhushu 春秋公羊傳注疏, j. 1, Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing zhushu, 2195.
The black dragon was born for the red. It had to show the portents and make [people] know the mandate.

In the first quotation, it is clear that Confucius, represented by the color black-green, could not replace the color of green-brown, the Zhou dynasty. However, he was responsible for forming standards, or *fa* 法, which indicates the combination of law, regulations, and principles, to guide later people. The second quote conveys that the birth of Confucius was not an accident, but a necessity. He existed to show the intentions of Heaven via the standards he made. An allusion from the *Analects*, “wooden mellet” also emphasizes Confucius’ role as the agent of Heaven who warns and admonishes people.20 The third quote further indicates a specific mission of Confucius: he came to the world to reveal the real successor of the Zhou dynasty, namely, the Liu 刘 of the Han dynasty. Therefore, Confucius had two functions determined by the sequence of the Five Phases: to make standards and to reveal the true successor of the Zhou. These two functions have a corollary. Because Confucius was responsible for making standards on earth to show the will of Heaven, the successor of the Zhou dynasty whom he selected would not only possess the mandate of Heaven, but also keep its standards.

Given the events described in the apocryphal texts above, another question remains unanswered: in what way did Confucius receive this message from Heaven and pass it on? In apocryphal texts, the revelation of standards from Heaven is primarily linked to the apocryphal texts themselves and the classics, especially the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*:

Confucius perused historical records and cited old diagrams. He deduced and compiled the changes of Heaven. He made principles for the Han emperor, and set in order the diagrams and records.

孔子論經，有鳥化為書。孔子奉以告天。赤爵集書上，化為玉。刻曰：孔提命，作應法，為赤制。22

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When Confucius talked about classics, there was a bird transforming into a book. Confucius took it to announce Heaven; red sparrows collected on the book and transformed into a piece of jade. The inscription on it said, “Kong, take up the mandate; make the corresponding principles for the red.”

麟出周亡。故立《春秋》，制素王授當興也。²³

The qilin appeared and the Zhou died out. Therefore, [Confucius] established the uncrowned king’s *Annals of Spring and Autumn* to give it to whoever would arise.

In the first quotation, Confucius uses ancient material and the changes of Heaven (for example, celestial changes, changes of season, etc.) to make standards for the Han emperor. His citations of ancient texts and his astronomical calculations point to the Han dynasty as the successor of Zhou. In the process, Confucius, the sage who possesses these ancient texts and is able to understand the movements of Heaven, uses his intelligence to determine the successor of the Zhou dynasty. In other words, this quotation emphasizes the crucial role Confucius plays in revealing Heaven’s mandate.

In the second quotation, through a series of preternatural transformations, the will of Heaven responds to Confucius and announces itself. In this context, Confucius is the messenger of Heaven. This quotation emphasizes the idea that the emergence of the Han dynasty follows the mandate of Heaven, which appears at the moment when Confucius is discussing the classics. This implies a connection between the classics and the will of Heaven. Later on we will see more examples of the mandate of Heaven, Confucius, and the classics as a triad that guarantees the legitimacy of Han rule.

The third quotation gives another example of this triad. The untimely appearance of the mysterious qilin indicates that Heaven no longer favored the Zhou. Receiving this heavenly sign, Confucius composed the *Annals* in order to reveal the Han as the successor of the Zhou. The author strings Heaven, Confucius, and the *Annals* together to show the legitimacy of Han rule. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* and Confucius’ function in this context, we need to

turn to references to Confucius as author of the *Annals* and as 素王 *su wang*, the “uncrowned king.”

Su Wang, the “Uncrowned King”

In the Warring States period, people began attributing the authorship of the *Annals* to Confucius. This opinion was dominant throughout imperial China up to the early 20th century. This traditional view has its roots in Mencius’ 孟子 famous statement:  

[孟子曰]世衰道微，邪說暴行有作，臣弒其君者有之，子弒其父者有之。孔子懼，作《春秋》。《春秋》，天子之事也。是故孔子曰：‘知我者其惟《春秋》乎！罪我者其惟《春秋》乎！’

[Mencius said] 'Again the world fell into decay, and principles faded away. Perverse speakings and oppressive deeds waxed rife again. There were instances of ministers who murdered their sovereigns, and of sons who murdered their fathers. Confucius was afraid, and made the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*. What the *Spring and Autumn* contains are matters proper to the sovereign. On this account Confucius said, "Yes! It is the *Spring and Autumn* which will make men know me, and it is the *Spring and Autumn* which will make men condemn me.”  

In this passage, the motivation for Confucius to compose the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* is to praise what is right and blame what is wrong in the human realm. In *Grand Historian’s Records* (*Shiji* 史記), Sima Qian 司馬遷 elaborates the “praise and blame” theory and claims that Confucius aimed to “make the affairs of the true king comprehensible” (*yi da wangshi* 以達王事). The scholars who studied and transmitted the *Gongyang* commentary on the *Annals* followed this reading, tending

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24 For example, Pi Xirui supported this argument. See Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞, *Jingxue tonglun* 經學通論 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1954), preface, 1; chapter 4 “Chun qiu,” 1.

25 For an explanation of the context of Mencius’ statement and a discussion of the meaning of *zuo* 作, which is translated as “made” here, see Joachim Gentz, *Das Gongyang zhuan: Auslegung und Kanonisierung der Frühlings und Herbstannalen (Chunqiu)*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001, 36-40.


to find subtle praise and blame in every entry.\textsuperscript{29} As Yuri Pines correctly points out, they shared the idea that Confucius was a supreme sage, and associated him with the \textit{Gongyang} commentary.\textsuperscript{30}

It is also worth examining \textit{Chunqiu fan lu} \textit{(The luxuriant dew of the Annals of Spring and Autumn)}, a text attributed to Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 to illuminate Confucius’ relationship with the \textit{Annals of Spring and Autumn}.\textsuperscript{31} Despite controversies over the dating and authenticity of certain chapters, much of the book reflects the Gongyang tradition of the \textit{Annals} in the Western Han dynasty.\textsuperscript{32} In the text, Confucius is the person who made the way of the new king.\textsuperscript{33} However, the connotations of this Way are complex, and need to be unpacked. According to \textit{Chunqiu fan lu}, there is an alternating cycle between \textit{wen} 文 (pattern) and \textit{zhi} 質 (substance) in the succession of dynasties. When the Zhou dynasty, in the position \textit{wen}, declined, the \textit{Annals} provided a solution for the new king to save the world: turn the \textit{wen} to \textit{zhi}.\textsuperscript{34} Therefore, the way of the new king in this context is the way that rectifies Zhou’s mistakes and wrongs. However, as we have already seen, apocryphal texts no longer emphasize cleaning up the Zhou dynasty’s mistakes, and do not cite the \textit{wen}/\textit{zhi} alternating cycle.

\textsuperscript{29} For more information about the subtlety of the praise and blame in the \textit{Annals of Spring and Autumn}, see Michael Nylan, \textit{The Five “Confucian Classics”} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 263-5. While I follow most scholars’ argument that the apocrypha of the \textit{Annals of Spring and Autumn} is related to the Gongyang tradition of the \textit{Annals}, I am hesitant to treat the Gongyang commentary on the \textit{Annals of Spring and Autumn}, \textit{Chunqiu fan lu} 春秋繁露 arguably by Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, apocryphal texts, and He Xiu’s 何休 sub-commentary based on the Gongyang commentary as a single, unified tradition. For a summary of this issue, especially in Japanese scholarship, see Yasui Kōzan 安居香山, \textit{Isho no kisoteki kenkyū}, 79-82. For a comprehensive study on the Gongyang tradition in a Western language, see Joachim Gentz, \textit{Das Gongyang zuan: Auslegung und Kanonisierung der Frühlings- und Herbstannalen (Chunqiu)} (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001).

\textsuperscript{30} Yuri Pines, “Chinese History Writing between the Sacred and the Secular,” in Lagerwey and Kalinowski ed., 327. For how Confucius affects the exegesis of the Gongyang commentary as a supreme sage, and how this is related to the \textit{weisheitlichen Sinn} (the sense of wisdom) in the \textit{Dunkle Sprache} (the hidden speech), see Joachim Gentz, \textit{Das Gongyang zuan}, 72-5.

\textsuperscript{31} Sarah Queen has briefly alluded to this issue in her \textit{From Chronicle to Canon}, 118-9.

\textsuperscript{32} For a systematic dating and the authorship of every chapter of \textit{Chunqiu fan lu}, see Michael Loewe, \textit{Dong Zhongshu, a ‘Confucian’ Heritage and the Chunqiu Fanlu} (Leiden: Brill, 2011), esp. 335-41.


Instead, apocryphal texts hold that the *Annals* reflects the moral authority35 and ultimate political principles36 formed by Confucius. Confucius’ composition of the *Annals* indicates his conception of an ideal kingdom ruled by virtue. Since he was born in a chaotic time, Heaven did not grant him the opportunity to practice his ideas. This theory also implies that every ruler must turn to Confucius’ hidden teachings in the *Annals* to achieve an ideal state.37 The image of Confucius as the uncrowned king was well received throughout the Han dynasty,38 as Liu Xiang aptly put in his *The Garden of Persuasion* (Shuiyuan 說苑):

[孔子]卒不遇，故睹麟而泣，哀道不行，德澤不洽，於是退作春秋，明素王之道，以示後人。39

[Confucius] was not being appreciated at his end, so he wept when he saw the *qilin*. He lamented the Way not being practiced, and that virtue was not harmonized. Therefore he retreated to compose the *Annals* and illuminate the way of the uncrowned king in order to show it to later generations.

However, does “uncrowned king”40 merely indicate Confucius’ fulfillment of his political ideas through the composition of the *Annals*? The answer is no. In *Huainanzi*, the term “uncrowned king” has several connotations that are worth discussing:

孔子之通，智過於萇弘，勇服于孟賁，足躡效菟，力招城關，能亦多矣。然而勇力不聞，伎巧不知，專行教道，以成素王，事亦鮮矣。《春秋》二百四

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35 For detailed information, see Sarah Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn*, *According to Tung Chung-shu* (Cambridge, 1996), 119-126.
37 Dong Zhongshu tried to convince Emperor Wu by using this argument. See Ban Gu, "Dong Zhongshu liezhuan," *Han shu*, j. 56, 2509.
38 For examples from the early Western Han, the end of the Western Han and the middle of the Eastern Han respectively, see *Huainanzi* 淮南子, "Zhushu xun 主術訓" (Discourse on focusing on the methods); *Shuiyuan 說苑*, “Gui de 貴德” (Valuing the Virtues); and *Shi Ming 釋名*, “Shi dian yi 釋典藝” (Explaining the classics) in He Ning 何寧, *Huainanzi jishi 淮南子集釋* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1998), 9: 697; Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯, *Shuiyuan jiaozheng 說苑校證* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987), 5: 95, and Bi Yuan 毕沅, *Shi Ming shuzheng bu 釋名疏證補* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2008), 6: 210.
39 Liu Xiang, "Gui de 貴德" (Valuing the Virtues), Xiang Zonglu ed., *Shuiyuan jiaozheng*, 5: 95.
40 Jack L. Dull argues that Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 connected the term “uncrowned king” to Confucius. By doing so, he further emphasizes the connection between the new script camp and the concept of Confucius being the “uncrowned king.” However, as the quote from *Huainanzi* shows, the idea of the “uncrowned king” was not merely exclusive to the new script camp. See Jack L. Dull, “A Historical Introduction to the Apocryphal (Ch’an-wei) Texts of the Han Dynasty,” Ph.D. thesis, University of Washington, 1966, 28.
The capacity of Confucius was such that his intelligence surpassed that of Chang Hong; his courage exceeded that of Meng Ben; his feet were faster than a nimble rabbit, his strength was such that he could hold up a portcullis. His abilities were indeed numerous. But he is not known to the world for his courage or his dexterity. Solely through practicing the way of teaching he became an uncrowned king. This would indicate that his affairs were indeed few. The 242 years of the Spring and Autumn period saw fifty-two states destroyed and thirty-six cases of regicide. By singling out the good and condemning the bad he established the Kingly Way. This would indicate that his discussion was indeed broad.

In its original context, this passage is an example of how sages, despite their versatile talents, concentrate on the most crucial issue, perfecting kingship. Confucius, as talented as he was, concentrated on completing this task, and in the process became an uncrowned king. This required more than writing the Annals. The passage also specifies “teaching” (jiao 教). What does “teaching” indicate? The parallelism shì yì xìan yì 事亦鮮矣 (his affairs were indeed few) and lùn yì bò yì 論亦博矣 (His abilities were indeed numerous) suggests a relationship between Confucius’ teaching and the Annals. Conventional teaching is not very taxing, but Confucius refers to various historical events, pointing out the good ones and bad ones in order to clarify the Kingly Way. This phrase, yì chéng wáng dào 以成王道, echoes the grammar of the aforementioned phrase yì dā wáng shì 以達王事 (making the affairs of sage king comprehensible), which Sima Qian uses to clarify Confucius’ goals. Since the word jiao has the connotation of teaching and cultivating a large audience, it implies the spread of Confucius’ doctrines, hidden in the Annals, through the elite.

So far, in Western Han texts and apocryphal texts, when Confucius is described with the epithets the “uncrowned king” and the “dark sage,” Confucius has several characteristics: (1) he is chosen by Heaven as a potential candidate to replace the Zhou dynasty, and is of divine origin; (2) based on the succession of the Five Phases

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42 Due to textual variation, Ames adopts xiao dao 孝道 (the Way of filial piety) instead of jiao dao 教道 (Way of teaching). However, according to the context, the term used here has less to do with filial piety than with showing people what is right and wrong according to the Annals of Spring and Autumn. See Roger T. Ames, The Art of Rulership: A Study of Ancient Chinese Political Thought (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 205.
43 Adapted from Roger T. Ames, The Art of Rulership, 205.
by generation, he is not in the right order to succeed the Zhou; (3) instead, he is in charge of forming standards for the Zhou’s actual successor; (4) he hides the message in the *Annals*; (5) through teaching and spreading this book, he completes the way of the uncrowned king. In line with these characteristics, in apocryphal texts the title “king” as in “uncrowned king” is not merely moral or rhetorical. There are occasions when Confucius forms a lord-minister relationship:

仲尼為素王，顏淵為司徒，子路為司空。44
Confucius was the uncrowned king; Yan Yuan was the Minister of the Masses, and Zilu was the Minister of Works.

左丘明為素臣。45
Zuo Qiuming was the untitled minister.

In the first quotation, when Confucius takes the title of the uncrowned king, his disciples become his subjects. The master-disciple relationship turns into a lord-minister relationship. In the second quote, Zuo Qiuming (ca. 556–451 B.C.), the supposed founder of the Zuo commentarial tradition on the *Annals*, becomes a rank-and-file minister. While his relationship to Confucius is historically unclear, he is linked to Confucius because of his commentary on the *Annals*. Presumably, his explication of the text contributes to completing the undertaking of the uncrowned king, so that in the domain of the text as well as the ideal kingdom he is the minister of Confucius. In other words, this lord-minister relationship is not exclusive to Confucius and the disciples he taught. It extends to others in the transmission lineages of Confucius’ work.

Wang Chong 王充 (A.D. 27–ca. 97) expresses this lord-minister relationship in transmission more explicitly:

孔子作《春秋》以示王意,然則孔子之《春秋》,素王之業也;諸子之傳書,素相

45 Yasui Kōzan, *Weishu jicheng*, 1073. This is not exclusive to apocryphal texts. The author of the preface to *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, Du Yu 杜預 (A.D. 222–285), mentions and also criticizes the theory that Confucius is the uncrowned king and Zuo Qiuming is the plain minister. One may infer from this that the theory of Confucius being the uncrowned king and Zuo, the plain minister, was popular during his time to the extent that he needed to clarify this in his preface to the commentary on *Zuo Zhuan*. See Ruan Yuan 阮元 ed., *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980), 1708.
Confucius composed the *Annals* to illustrate the intention of the kings. However, Confucius’ the *Annals* is the undertaking of the uncrowned king; the masters’ transmission of the text is the undertaking of untitled ministers. [Therefore,] one observes the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* to see the intention of the king; one reads [the work of] those masters to see the point of ministers.

The undertaking of the uncrowned king is to explicate the project of the sage king. Correspondingly, the transmission of his work is the undertaking of the rank-and-file ministers. It is clear that outside the embodied social relationships between Confucius and his disciples, a lord-minister relationship emerges in the domain of writing between Confucius and transmitters of his teachings, in which Confucius is a true king with a kingdom of texts, and his ministers those who perpetuate it. It is also note-worthy that although he lived in the early Eastern Han and was a skeptic in many respects, Wang Chong does not doubt that the lord-minister relationship formed in the transmission process. From this, we may infer that the theory that the social master-disciple relationship corresponded to the textual lord-minister relationship was relatively popular at least during Emperor Ming’s reign (A.D. 58–75) and Emperor Zhang’s reign (A.D. 75–88).

If we accept these inferences, we might ask what the blending of officialdom and the master-disciple relationship implies. Han apocryphal texts in particular have a reputation for being politically oriented. This leads us to consider the political background of this phenomenon. More specifically, which political concerns were the reasons for the blending of these two relationships? In supporting the legitimacy of Han rule, the apocrypha avoid blunt assertions, such as “Han is the successor of the Zhou dynasty.” In the next section, I will analyze their indirect approach using a case study of how the image of Zixia, one of Confucius’ major disciples, changed through the Warring States period and the Han dynasty, and especially how he was imagined during the reign of Emperor Ming.

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46 Wang Chong 王充, “Chao qi” 超奇 (Supreme and unique), *Lun heng* 13: 213.
47 Tian and An argue that apocryphal texts serve political conflicts. See Tian Changwu and An Zuozhang ed., *Qin Han shi*, 647.
Zixia & Confucius: a Political Analogy

Who is Zixia? Based on Shiji, his surname was Bu卜, and his first name Shang商, with the style name Zixia子夏. He was forty-four years younger than Confucius (551–479 B.C.), and therefore was born in 507. After Confucius’ death, he went to Xihe西河 to teach, and became a mentor of Marquis Wen of Wei魏文侯.48 Since this work was written approximately five hundred years later, we cannot be sure that any of this is true, but we can be more certain of his name and his status as Confucius’ disciple because of his appearance in the Analects. Nevertheless, for our purposes, historical facts are less important than how people during the Han perceived Zixia. His biography in Shiji shows how people of its time understood him and the basis on which they regarded him as a paragon of Confucianism.

Another crucial record in the Analects shaped the Han dynasty image of Zixia. In the Analects, Confucius attributes the “study of culture,” or wenxue文学, to Zixia as a specialty.49 What the “study of culture” denoted in Confucius’ time is not clear, but later commentators consider it the documents and classics from the ancient sage kings.50 To the commentators, Zixia was good at the study of the classics, and a competent transmitter of the classics. This is a distinctive feature of Zixia among Confucius’ disciples. For instance, as opposed to Zigong子貢, who was characterized as “good at political affairs,”51 Zixia was the transmitter of the canon. As opposed to Zisi子思, who led a school of Confucianism,52 Zixia’s transmission lineage is distinguished by the faithful teaching and transmission of the classics.

49 Cheng Shude程樹德, Lunyu jishi論語集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990), 742.
50 For example, Fan Ning范甯, an Eastern Jin東晉 commentator on the Analects, commented on wenxue as follows: “by saying wenxue, it means he [Zixia] was good at the documents and works of the ancient kings.” See Cheng Shude, Lunyu jishi, 744. Also, the term in the Western Han text Yan tie lun鹽鐵論 indicates a group of people who majored in classics. See Wang Liqi王利器, “Qian yan前言,” Yan tie lun jiao zhu鹽鐵論校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992), 6-7. Wang specifically points out that the people described as wenxue are actually the intellectual descendants of Zixia’s lineage. I would not go so far as to agree with him, since it is still unclear who belongs to the group of wenxue in Yan tie lun. It seems a stretch to me to make that connection. However, I do agree with him to the extent that in the Han dynasty the term Wenxue was already used to indicate the study of classics from the ancient sages and kings.
51 Cheng Shude, Lunyu jishi, 742.
Before discussing who Zixia was, it is helpful to briefly examine who Zixia was not. We need a sense of the limitations of Zixia’s role and image to fully understand the roles and functions that he represented in the Han dynasty. Most importantly, Zixia was not Confucius, or more specifically, Zixia’s image is different from Confucius’. This seemingly naïve point produces a crucial inference: Zixia was not considered the successor of Confucius philosophically and socially, especially in the Han context. We can find evidence of this as early as *Mencius* (3rd Century B.C.):

“昔者竊聞之：子夏、子游、子張皆有聖人之一體，冉牛、閔子、顏淵則具體而微。敢問所安。”曰：“姑舍是。”

[Gongsun Chou said,] “Previously I have heard that Zixia, Ziyou and Zizhang each had a facet of the sage. Ran Niu, Minzi and Yan Yuan had all the facets but were smaller. I venture to ask where you are at.” [Mencius] said, “Let’s skip this for now.”

Although Mencius did not answer his disciple Gongsun Chou’s 公孫丑 (ca. Fourth century B.C.) question, Gongsun’s question provided an interesting understanding of Zi Xia. He depicted Zixia with certain, but not all, attributes of the sage, Confucius, as opposed to Yan Yuan, who had all the qualities of Confucius, but all underdeveloped. In apocryphal texts, Confucius’ miraculous birth creates another boundary between him and Zixia. In addition, unlike Yan Yuan, who was the spirit of water, Zixia is not paired with any of the Five Phases.

In the Han, to deny that Zixia could achieve the sagehood of Confucius was to exclude the possibility of him becoming an “uncrowned king.” By emulating Zixia, one might achieve an excellent understanding of the classics and thus of Confucius’ philosophy, but one could never become an “uncrowned king.”

A typical anecdote emphasizing Zixia’s ability to preserve the original meaning of the classics can be found in *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, compiled during the Qin dynasty (221–207 B.C.):

54 Although in apocryphal texts, Confucius’ major disciples’ abnormal appearance is also a sign of their supremacy compared to ordinary people, Yan Yuan is the only person to whom one of the five phases is matched. See Yasui Kōzan 安居香山, *Nakamura Shōhachi* 中村璋八, *Weishu jicheng*, 1069.
Zixia went to Jin. When he passed through Wei, there was a person reading the records of history in this way: “three swine of the Jin troops crossed the Yangtze river.” Zixia said, “This is wrong. It should be the ji hai day. The character ji ‘己’ looks like san ‘三’; the character shi ‘豕’ and hai ‘亥’ are similar.” When he arrived in Jin and asked about it, people there said “on a ji hai day, the troops of Jin crossed the Yangtze river.”

This anecdote is included in the chapter to show why people should critically examine what is written. The narrator does not depict Zixia as an outstanding transmitter of the classics. However, the latter part of the story, in which the Jin people's version of the historical record agrees with Zixia’s reading, does provide an example of Zixia’s competence in editing corrupt ancient texts. However, the later Han version of the story in Kongzi jiayu 孔子家語 compiled by Wang Su 王肅 (A.D. 195–256) considers Zixia’s talent in reading ancient texts even more valuable: “From then on, [the people of] Wei considered Zixia a sage” (yu shi Wei yi Zixia wei sheng 於是衛以子夏為聖). In Kongzi jiayu this comment shifts the focus from praising prudence in editing ancient texts to lauding Zixia as a sagely transmitter of ancient texts.

Xu Fang 徐防, who served as the Minister of Works (sikong 司空), during Emperor He 和帝’s reign (r. A.D. 89–105) even considered Zixia the initiator of the study of zhang ju, or “chapter and verse.” In a memorial to Emperor He, Xu Fang wrote:

臣聞詩書禮樂，定自孔子; 發明章句，始於子夏。其後諸家分析，各有異說。I have heard that the Book of Odes, the Book of Documents, Rites and Music were given definitive form by Confucius. The explanation and clarification of chapter and verse was started by Zixia. Then the various traditions split and have maintained different explanations.

57 Hou Han shu, 44: 1500.
In this memorial, by identifying Zixia as the person who invented the study of chapter and verse—the great scholarly fashion of the Eastern Han—Xu Fang implies that (1) Zixia initiated a certain technique to annotate the classics that Confucius selected, and (2) the various readings resulting from this technique are all based on Zixia’s interpretations. Xu Fang’s intellectual inclination is to preserve the study of chapter and verse passed down from Zixia, in order to retain the direct lineage of transmission from Confucius. He makes Zixia crucial in linking Confucius’ teaching and Han scholarship. By transmitting the classics and inventing a technique for reading them that Han scholars widely accepted, Zixia took on a unique role among Confucius’ disciples.

To further decode the unique role of Zixia in the perception of the Han scholars, and the importance of his image in defining their socio-political role, let us examine a conversation between Huan Yu 桓郁 and Emperor Ming:

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其冬，上親於辟雍自講所制五行章句已，復令郁說一篇。上謂郁曰： "我為孔子，卿為子夏，起予者商也。" 
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In the conversation, by quoting an anecdote from the Analects, Emperor Ming compares himself to Confucius, and Huan Yu to Zixia. In other words, Emperor Ming uses the master–disciple relationship between Confucius and Zixia to allegorize the relationship between himself and Huan Yu. Before we go further to explore what this analogy means, the first question we need to answer here is whether Emperor Ming’s speech is purely rhetorical. In order to answer this question, we need to find out how

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58 Hou Han shu, 37: 1255.
59 The specific year, which is referred to by qi 其, is unclear here.
60 The original story from the Analects goes as such: “Zi Xia asked, ‘Her entrancing smile dimpling, her beautiful eyes glancing, and patterns of color upon plain silk.’ What is the meaning of these lines [from the poetry].” Confucius said, “The plain silk is there first. The colors come afterwards.” “Does the practice of the rites likewise come afterwards?” Confucius said, “The person who raises me up is, you, Zixia. Only now can I discuss the Poetry with you.” (子夏問曰： ‘巧笑倩兮，美目盼兮，素以為絢兮。何謂也？’ 曰： ‘繪事後素。’ 曰： ‘禮後乎？’ 曰： ‘起予者商也！始可與言詩已矣。’) See “Bayi” 八佾, Lunyu, Zhu Xi annotated, Lunyu zhang ju, Sishu zhangju jizhu, Lunyu jizhu, 2: 63. The English translation is adapted from D. C. Lau tr., Confucius: The Analects (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2000), 21.
Eastern Han literati thought about being a ruler, what expectations they had of their emperors, and what Han emperors, especially Emperor Ming, demanded of themselves as good emperors.

Michael Loewe provides three major ideas that bolstered the supremacy and legitimacy of a Han emperor, and by extension the whole monarchical system: (1) the emperor’s divine origin granted by spiritual powers; (2) his status as a moral authority and paragon, and (3) his image as the preserver of the value system. In the Han dynasty, the theory of the Five Phases was used to construct the divine origin of the Han rulers as mentioned above. As for his status as a moral exemplar, if the emperor lived up to this role, auspicious omens would appear. Otherwise calamities and inauspicious omens would appear. Also, embodying moral values and preserving ancient traditions were obligations for the Han emperors. Given the conversation between Emperor Ming and Huan Yu, we might believe that the parallelism between Confucius and the emperor allows Emperor Ming to claim legitimacy for his reign. However, before taking this for granted, we might ask whether Emperor Ming fitted Loewe’s generalization of the three major ways to claim legitimacy for a monarchy, and whether the emperor consciously used apocryphal texts to achieve this political purpose.

In modern scholarship, Emperor Ming, Liu Yang (A.D. 28–75, the second son of the founder of the Eastern Han, Liu Xiu), appears “narrow-minded with a penchant for revealing confidential information.” Several records show that he

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61 Michael Loewe, “The Concept of Sovereignty,” in Denis Twitchett & Michael Loewe eds., The Cambridge history of China. Vol. 1, The Ch’in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.-A.D. 220 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 143-4. On other occasions, Loewe gives a more comprehensive study of the political gestures used to claim legitimacy, especially at the end of the Eastern Han dynasty and the Wei dynasty. See Michael Loewe, Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China, 88-108. Due to the early death of many Eastern Han emperors, it is unclear how emperors claimed political legitimacy and what gestures they employed to do so from Emperor Ming’s reign up to the end of the Eastern Han dynasty.

62 For a summary of the cases of auspicious omens in the Han dynasty, see Tiziana Lippiello, Auspicious Omens and Miracles in Ancient China: Han, Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties (Sankt Augustin, Germany, 2001), 40-51.

63 The most obvious examples would be the Analects 12.7-9; 13. 9. See Zhu Xi annotated, Sishu zhangju jizhu, Lunyu jizhu, 6: 137-8, 7: 143.

was highly aware of the need to affirm the legitimacy of Han rule, and was as enthusiastic about apocryphal writings as his father was.65 In the eighth month of A.D. 60, Emperor Ming changed the official title “Grand Musician,” or Tai Yue 大樂, to “Grand Yu Musician,” or Tai Yu 頤, because in an apocryphal text *Shangshu xuan ji qian* 尚書旋機鈐 (*The Big Dipper key to the Book of Documents*), “a Han emperor composed music named Yu 子, with harmonious virtues.”66 This record conveys Emperor Ming’s awareness of apocryphal texts, and shows he also played a role in preserving music by applying information from apocryphal texts.

Moreover, in the tenth month of A.D. 65, Emperor Ming issued an edict concerning a solar eclipse. In it, based on one of the apocryphal texts of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn, Chunqiu tu chen* 春秋圖讖 (*The diagrams and prophecies of the Annals of Spring and Autumn*), he considered the eclipse a huge calamity, and linked it to his lack of moral authority.67 Aside from this inauspicious omen, many auspicious omens appeared during Emperor Ming’s reign, such as sweet dew, divine fungus, and divine birds.68 Wang Chong also reported that more auspicious omens appeared during Emperor Ming’s reign than during most other reigns.69 If we deny that auspicious omens really appeared because of Emperor Ming’s good governance, then we must conclude that anxiety over the legitimacy of his rule caused him and his subjects to seek such signs.

Another example confirms Emperor Ming’s special attention to Confucius and his disciples. In the third month of A.D. 72, the emperor went to Confucius’ residence

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65 Liu Xiu is famous for believing in and using apocrypha to legitimize his rule. Before Liu Xiu enthroned himself, the war between Liu Xiu and Gongsun Shu was not merely on the battlefield. Both of them were very aware of the information apocrypha conveyed, and they competed over their interpretations of apocryphal texts. See Lü Simian, *Qin Han shi*, 739.

66 *Hou Han shu* 2: 106.

67 *Hou Han shu* 2: 111. For a more detailed analysis of the political function of omens, see Michael Loewe, *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China*, 94-7. For apocrypha used as a way to claim political legitimacy in general, see Tiziana Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles in Ancient China: Han, Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties* (Sankt Augustin, Germany, 2001), 56-65.

68 Fan Ye, *Hou Han shu*, 2: 83. Divine fungus is the translation of *zhi cao* 芝草, which were various kinds of mushrooms connected to immorality.

69 Wang Chong, “Qi shi” 齊世 (*Considering [different] eras the same*), *lun heng*, 18: 294. Wang Chong does not believe the connection between the auspicious omens and good governance. However, he did not dispute the statement that there were indeed a large number of auspicious omens either. For Wang Chong’s agenda in praising the Han dynasty, see Reinhard Emmerich, “Wang Chong’s Praises for the Han Dynasty,” *Monumenta Serica* 56 (2008): 117-48.
to sacrifice to him and his seventy-two disciples. After coming back from the trip, he also made the princes explain the classics. ⁷₀ Along with creating positions to teach the minor nobles in A.D. 66, ⁷₁ Emperor Ming was highly involved with the dissemination and transmission of the classics. In making the connection to Confucius and Zixia in the passage above, he put Confucius and his major disciples in a unique position. ⁷²

In light of the *Lùshì chunqiu* passage and apocryphal texts, Emperor Ming’s gestures toward promoting the transmission of the classics prove that he aimed to fulfill the “way of teaching” or *jiao dao* 教道 mentioned in *Lùshì chunqiu*. This qualified him to be an “uncrowned king” and to comprehend true kingship. Unlike Confucius, however, he was a real emperor. By comparing himself to Confucius, he claimed that he ruled in two domains. As a moral authority, and transmitter of the Kingly Way in the world, he was a ruler in the sense that Confucius was—a ruler of a moral domain. However, unlike Confucius, he was also able to apply those teachings to a physical kingdom.

Given this, we can consider Zixia’s role in the parallelism between the master-disciple relationship and the lord-minister relationship. As we have seen, the original master-disciple relationship between Confucius and his disciples is parallel to the lord-minister relationship. Zixia, the disciple most able to transmit the classics, has his unique role in the context of apocryphal texts:

子夏共撰仲尼微言，以當素王。 ⁷³

Zixia wrote about Zhongni’s subtle words in order to uphold [the undertaking of] the uncrowned king.

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⁷₀ *Hou Han shu*, 2: 118.
⁷₁ *Hou Han shu*, 2: 113.
⁷² So far this is the earliest record of sacrificing to Confucius and his disciples. Also, iconographies of Confucius and his “seventy-two” disciples were found in Eastern Han dynasty tombs. See Huang Jinxing 黃進興, “Sting‘an’ yu shengtu: ru jiao cong si zhi yu jidu fengsheng zhi de bijiao,” in *Zhongyang Yanjiu Yuan Lishi Yuyan Yanjiu Suo jikan*, 71, no. 3 (2000): 534-5. Huang also provides an insightful description of the system of sacrificing to Confucius and especially to his disciples from the Tang dynasty to the Qing dynasty. See Huang, “Shengxian’yu shengtu: ru jiao cong si zhi yu jidu fengsheng zhi de bijiao,” 509-562.
Akin to the quotation above (page 178), which asserts that Zixia initiated the study of chapter and verse, here it is he who expands and illustrates Confucius’ words. Furthermore, in this passage, Zixia’s transmission and illustration of Confucius’ words becomes an undertaking parallel to that of the “uncrowned king.” That makes him a kind of “untitled minister.” Therefore, the Confucius-Zixia relationship illustrates two layers of a relationship: (1) the master-disciple relationship found in the *Analects*, and (2) the lord-subject relationship based on these references to an “uncrowned king.”

The implication of the title “uncrowned king” is that Confucius had the virtues to be the king but never held the position of king. Virtues in this context are not merely ethical. They legitimize the ruler’s right to rule. Therefore, in drawing the parallel between the Confucius-Zixia relationship and his relationships with his own ministers, Emperor Ming established his right to rule. In comparing Huan Yu with Zixia, Emperor Ming also imagined an ideal classicist: one who can transmit the lord’s words and sometimes enlighten the lord. At the same time, his conception of Zixia’s role, the preserver of Confucius’ words and undertaking, also resembles the image of Zixia found in apocryphal texts. Emperor Ming’s words create a parallelism by which the emperor or the lord not only dominates in the lord-minister relationship, but also takes the position of master in the master-disciple relationship.

Why was Emperor Ming anxious over the legitimacy of his rule? Since legitimacy is the right for someone to do something, it would be odd for Emperor Ming to claim legitimacy if no one ever doubted his right to rule. Why did he make the political gestures I have mentioned? To answer this question, it is worth exploring (1) if there were any competing political camps during Emperor Ming’s time, and (2) if there were any intellectual trends that did not subscribe to the same criteria for political legitimacy.

In A.D. 70, Liu Ying, the king of the State of Chu, was accused of plotting rebellion. One of the reasons was that his partisans wrote *tu chen*, or diagrams and prophecies. It is noteworthy that the term *tu chen* mentioned here is identical to the last part of the title of the apocryphal text *Chunqiu tu chen* Emperor Ming quoted in

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74 *Hou Han shu*, 42: 1429.
his memorial on the solar eclipse in A.D. 65. In the Eastern Han legal system, writing about apocrypha was a way to claim political legitimacy. It is reasonable to believe that Emperor Ming was highly aware of the multiple ways to claim political legitimacy, including references to apocrypha. Liu Ying’s actions were considered rebellious because they could be construed as attempting to claim legitimacy for himself.

In the Han dynasty, intellectuals used the term *taiping* 太平, or “Great Peace,” to describe the ideal society under the rule of the sage king.\(^7\) *Chunqiu fanlu*, in explaining the significance of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*, says:

孔子明得失，差貴賤，反王道之本。譏天王以致太平。\(^76\)

Confucius clarified gain and loss, differentiated the noble from the petty, and returned to the root of the way of the sage king. He criticized the kings of Heaven in order to attain the Great Peace.

That is to say, Confucius encoded the way of the sage king and the way to achieve the Great Peace into the text of the *Annals*. In this context, *Chunqiu fanlu* does not say how to achieve the state of the Great Peace. Nevertheless, it does imply that the *Annals* contains the way to achieve it.

Compared to *Chunqiu fanlu*, Yang Xiong’s 揚雄 (53 B.C.–A.D. 18) ideas about how to achieve the Great Peace are more explicit:

聖人之言，天也，天妄乎？繼周者未欲太平也。如欲太平也，舍之而用它道，亦無由至矣。\(^77\)

The word of sages is [from] Heaven. Is Heaven reckless? The dynasties that succeeded the Zhou dynasty do not want to achieve the Great Peace. If they do want to achieve the Great Peace, and [yet] abandon [the words of the sage] and employ some other way, there is no method that will achieve it.

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\(^7\) For a detailed description of *taiping* by people of the Western Han dynasty, see *Han shi wai zhuan* 韓詩外傳 (The outer tradition of Han’s *Book of Poetry*) in Xu Weiyu 許維遹 ed., *Han shi waizhuan jishi* 韓詩外傳集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980), 3: 102. For issues of dating, authorship and authenticity of *Han shi wai zhuan*, see the entry of *Han shih wai chuan* 韓詩外傳 by James R. Hightower, in Michael Loewe eds., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 125-8.


Unlike Chunqiu fanlu’s statement, Yang Xiong does not specifically mention the Annals. He argues that the only way to achieve the state of the Great Peace is to follow the words of the sages. Even though he does not mention who the sages are, it is reasonable to assume that Confucius was one of them. Yang Xiong’s statement implies two things: it is possible for someone to bring the Great Peace to the world as long as he is willing to follow the words of the sages. The dynasties after the Zhou dynasty, meaning the Qin and the Western Han, did not follow the words of the sages, and so did not achieve the Great Peace.

This dissatisfaction with the Han’s failure to bring about the Great Peace continued during the Eastern Han dynasty. Wang Chong, a contemporary of Emperor Ming, described the thoughts of some intellectuals:

儒家稱五帝、三王致天下太平。漢興以來，未有太平。彼稱五帝、三王致天下太平；漢興以來，未有太平者，見五帝、三王聖人也。聖人之德，能致太平。謂漢不太平者，漢無聖帝也。賢者之化，不能太平。  

[Some] Confucians argued that the Five Emperors and Three Kings brought the Great Peace to all under Heaven. Since Han arose, there has been no Great Peace. [The reason why] they argue that the Five Emperors and Three Kings brought the Great Peace to all under Heaven, and that since Han rose, there has been no Great Peace, is [because] they see that the Five Emperors and Three Kings are sages. The virtue of the sage can bring the Great Peace. [The reason why] they argued that Han is not in the state of the Great Peace is [because] Han has no sage emperor. The cultivation of the [merely] worthy [by itself] cannot enable the Great Peace.

Wang Chong’s quotation represents certain people’s understanding of how one can achieve the Great Peace and their attitude toward Han rule. They assert a natural, definite distinction between the worthy and the sage: the worthy is not able to bring the Great Peace to the world. Therefore, their theory is more rigid than Yang Xiong’s theory of following the words of sages. Regardless of whether the worthy follow the words of the sages, those who are merely worthy can never achieve ideal rule. Furthermore, these people consider the Han emperors worthy at best. Therefore, they argue that the Han dynasty has never achieved the Great Peace, and will never achieve

78 Wang Chong, “Xuan Han” 宣漢 (Exclaiming Han), Lun heng, 17: 295.
it unless a sage appears on the throne.

In order to alleviate the dissatisfaction derived from this trend of thought, it is no longer sufficient merely to enforce good policies or transmit the words of sages, or more specifically the classics. In this case, it would be necessary for the emperor to claim to be a sage. Confucius, the sage who encoded the way to achieve the Great Peace in the *Annals* and predicted the emergence of the Han dynasty, would be the most esteemed of the sages. Therefore it would be necessary for Emperor Ming to lay claim to and legitimize his sagehood by comparing himself to Confucius in order to fight prevalent doubt regarding his goal of achieving the Great Peace.

**Concluding Remarks**

Throughout this chapter, we have addressed several general questions. The terms applied to Confucius, namely “uncrowned king” and “dark sage,” linked to the *Zhuangzi*, were changed and influenced in the Han dynasty by the theory of the Five Phases. Secondly, while scholars agree that apocryphal texts are politically oriented, the construction of political concerns and claims to legitimacy are less well understood. We can see that in the process of claiming legitimacy for the Han dynasty, the image of Confucius as the dark sage was delicately positioned upon a cosmological and political framework that combines the Mandate of Heaven, virtuous kings, and the succession of the Five Phases. Emperor Ming tried to live up to the standard of the sage king by teaching and explicating the classics as Confucius did. Apocryphal texts became one of the main weapons in Emperor Ming's political arsenal. Thirdly, we have asked the question, what triggers the need to claim political legitimacy? Emperor Ming’s rivals also used apocryphal texts to claim legitimacy. Meanwhile, some of his contemporaries doubted his ability to become a sage king. Because his authority was jeopardized, Emperor Ming used apocryphal texts to respond to critics with the same kind of language.

In Emperor Ming’s speech, the master-disciple relationship between Confucius
and Zixia is an analogy to the ruler-subject relationship he was eager to establish and properly maintain. However, why did he use this analogy, or why would he go to the Biyong Hall to give an academic lecture in the first place? If he wanted to consolidate the ruler-subject relationship, could he directly highlight it instead of using such roundabout way? As we have already seen in this chapter, Emperor Ming’s moves were responses to his contemporaries. Therefore, we might be able to find out the significance of this master-disciple relationship to his contemporaries. In the next chapter, we will switch our focus to the sociology of the audience of Emperor Ming’s many political movements, Eastern Han literati, to explore the importance of the master-disciple relationship, its social-political background, and its impact on the study of the classics and intellectual trends in general.
V. The Gradual Departure from Classicism in Eastern Han China: a Sociological Study

In chapter 2, we have seen the abortive intellectual movement of the Scripture of the Great Peace.¹ In A.D. 166, Xiang Kai 襄楷 brought this idea with the scripture again to Emperor Huan 桓 (r. A.D. 147–167),² and later the movement became a massive one aiming to achieve the Great Peace.³ How did an idea unacceptable a hundred years before suddenly become plausible? In the previous chapter, we witnessed that Emperor Ming was devoted to Confucius and his undertaking. Emperor Huan, by contrast, sacrificed to Laozi 老子 in A.D. 165.⁴ In A.D. 178, his successor, Emperor Ling 灵 (r. A.D. 168–89), established the Hongdu Gate school, or Hongdu menxue 鴻都門學, which emphasized literature, calligraphy, and miscellaneous minor skills.⁵ What happened to the restoration of the Kingly Way and the attempt to achieve the Great Peace? Were people then no longer interested in Confucius’ project? Why was this so?⁶

If these intellectual changes did take place, the next question is what led to these changes. Can we attribute these changes to the emperor or other dominant individuals? Normatively, Chinese emperors had autocratic power, but this does not mean that they could fully exert it, especially in the complex Eastern Han political environment.⁷

¹ See the section “4. An Abortive Path: Li Xun’s Departure from the Classics,” starting from page 112.
² Hou Han shu, 20b: 1076, 1083.
⁵ Hou Han shu, 8: 340. For an excellent study of the Hongdu Gate School, see David R. Knechtges, “Court Culture in the Late Eastern Han: The Case of the Hongdu Gate School,” in Alan K. L. Chan and Yuet-Keung Lo ed., Interpretation and Literature in Early Medieval China (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 9-40.
⁶ These questions are raised by Knechtges and Howard L. Goodman’s observation that a tendency of more versatile and polymath literati culture arose since the Eastern Han in their “Court Culture in the Late Eastern Han” and “Chinese Polymaths, 100-300 AD: The Tung-kuan, Taoist Dissent, and Technical Skills,” Asia Major (third series) 18.1 (2005): 101-74 respectively.
Can we explain this shift by the rise of certain socio-intellectual groups, such as the religious movement led by the sect of the Great Peace (Taiping Dao 太平道)? This explanation might sound intriguing, but the chronology of these movements tells us that the *Scripture* was actually a result of these changes, rather than causing them. Before examining the popularity of the Great Peace movement, we need to explain why Eastern Han intellectuals started to consider the movement’s scripture a good idea, even better idea than the classics. In other words, we need to find out what created leeway inside the system of dominant ideas for important new ones to arise.

Despite his enthusiasm and commitment toward Confucius and the classics, Emperor Ming was just one side of the story. In the Eastern Han dynasty, great families played a large role. They extended their power from local society to central government by learning the classics, making alliances in the court, and marrying into the imperial house. They hosted significant scholars, sponsored local schools, influenced students at the National Academy, and even taught future emperors. The imperial house provided important patronage for contemporary scholars.

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8 For well-accepted views of the great families, see Patricia Ebrey, “The Economic and Social History of Later Han,” in Denis Twitchett & Michael Loewe eds., *The Cambridge history of China. Vol. 1, The Ch’ in and Han Empires*, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220, Denis Twitchett & John K. Fairbank eds., *The Cambridge History of China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)*, 626-48. One of the most noticeable characteristics of Eastern Han politics is the great families and their influence in local society. For two classic studies about the great families in Eastern Han dynasty, see Yang Li-en-sheng 劉麗忠, “Dong Han de haozu,” 1007-63; Yü Ying-shih, “Dong Han zhengquan zhi jianli yu shizhu daxing zhi guan,” 209-80. While the former emphasizes great families’ tremendous impact on Han economics and politics, the latter focuses on the fundamental role great families played in the establishment of the Eastern Han dynasty. Also Tada Kensuke 多田狷介 is focused on how great families gained wealth and power in local society. See his *Kan Gi Shin shi no kenkyū* 漢魏晉史の研究 (Studies on the history of Han, Wei and Jin) (Tōkyō: Kyūko shoin, 1999), 3-48. For a comprehensive study of the Eastern Han great families, see Cui Xiangdong 崔向東, *Han dai haozu yanjiu* 漢代豪族研究 (A study on Han great families) (Wuhan: Chongwen, 2003).

9 For the power of great families in Eastern Han society, see Patricia Ebrey, “The Economic and Social History of Later Han,” in Denis Twitchett & Michael Loewe eds., *The Cambridge history of China. Vol. 1, The Ch’in and Han Empires*, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220, Denis Twitchett & John K. Fairbank eds., *The Cambridge History of China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)*, 626-48. Tada argues that great families managed to occupy peasants’ land and rented it back to them. The former landowners thus became tenant peasants, and were left to the great families’ mercy. These great families also rented their land, even though sometimes not their priority, to laborers from other localities. By doing so, they gained great power to control people worked for then, essentially the local society. This phenomenon broke the direct link between the empire and the populace, and in turn compromised the empire’s authority. See his *Kan Gi Shin shi no kenkyū*, 13-14.

10 For major scholarly activities held by imperial house in the Eastern Han dynasty, see Rafe de Crespigny, “Scholars and Rulers: Imperial Patronage under the Later Han Dynasty,” in Michael Friedrich, *et al.*, eds., *Han-Zeit: Festschrift für Hans Stumpefeldt aus Anlaß seines 65. Geburtstages*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 57-77. I agree with de Crespigny on that “the emperor of China was a focal point of religion, philosophy and scholarship,” for the emperor was central in any sense from the perspective of almost everyone in the first two centuries A.D. Nevertheless, he did not initiate intellectual transitions all the time, nor can we explain these transitions only by emperors’ preferences.
Nevertheless, half of the Eastern Han emperors were immature or died prematurely (Table 4). All of them were part of the intellectual environment instead of the sole manufacturer of thought. Therefore, looking into the lives of intellectuals from the great families will help us to understand this shift.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emperor</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Reign Years</th>
<th>Crowned Age</th>
<th>Dominant Parties in Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guangwu 光武</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming 明</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang 章</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He 和</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Empress Dowager &amp; Dou Xian (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shang 蒋</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hundred days</td>
<td>Empress Dowager Deng &amp; Deng Zhi (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An 安</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Empress Dowager Deng &amp; Deng Zhi (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shun 順</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Empress Liang, Liang Shang (f), &amp; Liang Ji (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chong 冲</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Empress Liang, Liang Shang (f), &amp; Liang Ji (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhi 賢</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huan 桓</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Empress Dow &amp; Dou Wu (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ling 靈</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Empress &amp; He Jin (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xian 献</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dong Zhao, then Cao Cao</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Ages and reign years of the Eastern Han emperors

This chapter will explore life in the scholarly communities of the Eastern Han dynasty to trace the social basis for the intellectual transitions mentioned above. Firstly, we will start with a sociological examination of the transmission of apocryphal texts, the old script tradition promoted by Liu Xin, and the commentarial traditions passed down since mid-Western Han, in order to gain a general picture of classicism in the Eastern Han dynasty. In this section, we will see how learning the classics became a driving force for the traveling culture, a fashion which involved students leaving home to seek training in the classics, and the circulation of knowledge. In the next section, we will focus on a specific group of literati active in the first half of the second century including Ma Rong 馬融 (A.D. 79–166) and Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139 A.D.), as a case study to show how the traveling culture

11 Consult with Qian Mu, Guo shi dagang, 156-8. In the chart, “b” in the parentheses indicates the elder brother of the empress or empress dowager, and “f” indicate the father of the empress or empress dowager.
encouraged horizontal social connections among literati and the consolidation of their culture. In this chapter, my observation is both social and intellectual: I argue that the traveling culture, initially with an exclusive emphasis on classicism, led to increasing contacts among Eastern Han literati, and thus set the stage for the intellectual trend of broad learning.

1. Sketching the Han Official Recruitment System

Before we discuss the literati culture and its transitions, we first need to know whence this environment is derived. In the most practical sense, the Han dynasty relied on their bureaucratic system to function. The emperor no doubt had the ultimate authority. Not only did every appointment theoretically need his permission, but he could also recruit people any time he wanted through special appointments such as the so-called Capable and Good (*xianliang* 賢良) or Sincere and Upright (*fangzheng* 方正). However, given the large scale of recruitment, on most occasions the emperor only paid attention to top-rank positions in the central and local government. Under him, the Han imperial bureaucratic system was divided into three offices, or *fu* 府, led by the Three Ducal Officials (*san gong* 三公): Grand Commandant, Minister over the Masses, and Minister of Works. Each of the three offices was further divided by several departments (*cao* 曹) led by Department Heads (*yuan* 據). The Heads had Subordinate Clerks (*shu* 屬) to assist them. The Clerks were in charge of the

considerable day-to-day work.14

The local government was geographically divided into principalities (guo 國) or Commanderies (jun 郡). While the former were supposed to be fiefs for the Liu family members, these two divisions were administratively equivalent. The bureaucratic heads of the two were respectively Chancellor (xiang 相) and Grand Administrator (taishou 太守). These units were further divided into Prefectures (Xian 縣), led by Prefects (ling 令) or Chiefs (zhang 長) based on their size. The States and Commanderies were grouped into thirteen Provinces (zhou 州), each of which had an Inspector (cishi 刺史) to supervise them. While the core personnel of the administrative units above Prefectures were appointed by the central government with the emperor’s permission, the recruitment of the junior functionaries in the local government depended almost entirely on the local officials.

There were two types of major recruitment: Filial and Incorrupt (xiaolian 孝廉) and Flourishing Talent (maocai 茂才).15 Emperor Wu set the former up as an annual recruitment in 134 B.C.16 The head of each Commandery and Principality was responsible for recommending one person as Filial and Incorrupt.17 Throughout both Han dynasty, more than one third of the nominees already had working experience in local or even central government.18 Besides other positions, in the Eastern Han a usual path for the Filial and Incorrupt was to become a Gentleman (Lang 郎) under

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15 For a study about the political propaganda behind Emperor Wu’s installation, see Washio Yukō 鳥尾祐子, “Zenkan no ninkan tōyō to shakai chitsujo” 前漢的任官登用と社会秩序 (Official recruitment and social order in Western Han), in Ritsumeikan Tōyō Shigakkai Chūgoku Kodaishi Ronsō Henshū Iinkai 立命館東洋史學會中國古代史論叢編集委員會 ed., Chūgoku kodaishi ronsō dai 5 sa 中國古代史論叢 第 5 集 (Collected discussions on ancient Chinese history, Vol. 5) (Kyōto: Ritsumeikan Tōyō Shigakkai, 2008), 32-72. Washio points out that the central government promoted certain moral standards, in this case filial piety and uncorruptedness to keep their control over local gentries. See ibid., 63, 66-8.
16 For a concise introduction of this recruitment system, see Rafe de Crespigny, “The Recruitment System of the Imperial Bureaucracy of Later Han,”69-70. For a groundbreaking study of the Eastern Han people who were recommended as xiaolian 孝廉, or Filial and Incorrupt, a major type of governmental recruitment, and their educational background, see Xing Yitian 邢義田, “Donghan Xiaolian de shenfen beijing” 東漢孝廉的身份背景 (The background of people who were appointed as Filial Pious and Uncorrupted in the Eastern Han), in Xu Zhuoyun 許倬雲 (Cho-yun Hsu), Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 and Liu Cuirong 劉翠溶 ed. Di er jie Zhongguo shehui jingji shi yantaohui lunwenji 第二屆中國社會經濟史研討會論文集 (A collection of papers from the second conference of Chinese social and economic history) (Taipei: Hanxue Yanjiu ziliao ji fuwu zhongxin, 1983), 1-56. Also see Huang Liuzhu, Qin Han shijin zhidu, 81-157.
17 Huang Liuzhu, Qin Han shijin zhidu, 86.
18 Huang Liuzhu, Qin Han shijin zhidu, 143; Xing Yitian, “Donghan Xiaolian de shenfen beijing,” 19.
one of the Three Corps (sanshu 三署) in the palace. After a while, they could be promoted to higher positions in either the local or central government.

Emperor Wu established Flourishing Talent (maocai 茂才) recruitment in 106 B.C., but it did not become annual until A.D. 36. Provincial Inspectors were responsible for recommending one per year. More than sixty percent of the nominees had previous working experience in the government. Many of the candidates had already obtained the position of Filial and Incorrupt. In fact, there was a promotion path from Filial and Incorrupt to Gentleman and then on to Flourishing Talent under the supervision of the office of the Superintendent of the Imperial Court. Naturally, the official duties these candidates took afterwards were ranked higher than that of the Filial and Incorrupt.

This recruitment structure means more nominees came from local than from central government. Central government promoted the junior officials to higher positions. This structure implied that local government was more open to novices than central government. Accordingly, beginners would mainly search for job opportunities and connections in local government. Local officials also had great personal authority, because they not only recruited junior officials but recommended them for high positions. This system led to a more localized officialdom than the recruitment system based on the civil examinations in the later dynasties. The latter strengthened the authority of the central government, because it was in charge of distributing the successful civil examination candidates to various levels of local government. In the case of the Eastern Han however, local officials were the primary decision makers in the process of local recruitment.

Recommendation, formal and informal, was thus the key to the Han recruitment system. Responsible officials did not award official positions, but recommended

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20 Xing Yitian, “Donghan Xiaolian de shenfen beijing,” 19.
22 Ibid., 173.
individuals to the central government. In local hiring, officials essentially recruited people based on how local society saw them. They did not make this finding through general elections, but by consulting influential households, and, in the case of the Eastern Han dynasty, the great families. Therefore, good connections to local great families were extremely advantageous for a beginner’s official career.

Like most bureaucratic systems, that of the Han relied on paperwork. Every level of the government needed literate functionaries to process huge numbers of documents every day. Besides literacy, in the first hundred years of the Western Han dynasty, expertise in statutes and regulations was a desirable qualification. After Emperor Wu’s reforms, expertise in the classics became a qualification as well. Since Emperor Xuan’s time on, the need to understand Heaven became stronger. The classics as means of revealing Heaven’s will thus became increasingly valuable in officialdom. Training in the classics gradually became a basic criterion among candidates of official positions. As a result, in the first century A.D., a certain degree of training in the classics was required for most civil officials’ recruitment.25

2. Apocrypha, “New Script,” and “Old Script:” Three Camps or One?

After setting up the criteria for officials, the Han government needed to have enough qualified candidates to carry out its daily functions. One major way to obtain them was by establishing training programs in the central and local government. The central government’s National Academy (Taixue 太學) periodically recruited students mainly for training in the classics. In the late Western Han, and especially during Wang Mang’s reign, the number of official schools at the level of commanderies and counties rapidly increased. However, the opening of these local official schools mainly depended on local officials’ decisions instead of on nation-wide mandatory rule. The training these schools provided was largely basic clerical skills, including composing administrative documents and processing legal

25 As Xing Yitian suggests, the training in the classics and knowledge about Han statutes were the two largest categories in requirements. See his “Donghan Xiaolian de shenfen beijing,” 19.
cases.\textsuperscript{26} Besides these official schools, there were more and more private schools in the Eastern Han dynasty, which became the backbone of literati communication and eventually shaped literati culture.

Since the rise of the classics after Emperor Wu installed specialized Erudite positions at the National Academy in 141 B.C., schools progressively shifted their focus from legal training to the study of the classics.\textsuperscript{27} Following this trend, people who wanted to engage in Han officialdom embraced the learning of the classics. As a result, classicism gradually permeated every level of Han official life from one’s career planning to training programs, and then to real positions in the bureaucracy. In the Han dynasty, despite the risk of partisan conflict and political turmoil, being an official was still the most esteemed career path, and the most legitimate way to gain social prestige. It is not surprising that a huge number of people rushed into this profession. Therefore, when training in the classics came to play a large part in official recruitment, the flourishing of classicism became inevitable.

When people in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century speak of “schools,” they usually refer to certain types of educational organizations that provide learning programs. Teachers treat these programs as their occupation. They teach, receive a monetary reward, and leave when their work is the program is over. However, in ancient China, like many other ancient civilizations, the master-disciple relationship was a lifelong bond rather than a temporary provider-consumer connection. In other words, even after a person’s

\textsuperscript{26} For a detailed introduction to Han official and private educational systems, see Yu Qiding 俞啟定 and Shi Kecan 施克燦, 	extit{Zhongguo jiaoyu zhidu tongshi} 中國教育制度通史 (A complete history of Chinese educational system) Vol. 1, 	extit{XianQin, Qin, Han} 先秦, 秦漢 (pre-Qin, Qin, Han) in Li Guojun 李國鈞 and Wang Bingzhao 王炳照 ed., 	extit{Zhongguo jiaoyu zhidu tongshi} 中國教育制度通史 (Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu, 2000), 255-504. For the local official schools, see ibid., 384-93.

\textsuperscript{27} Hirai Masashi 平井正士 convincingly proves that from Emperor Xuan to Wang Mang’s time, the number of high officials with training in the classics gradually increased. According to his statistics, from 87 B.C. to A.D. 5, the percentage of people with training in the classics increased from 9.2\% to 28.6\%. See his “Kandai ni okeru Juka kanryō no kugyō he no shinjun” 漢代における儒家官僚の公卿層への浸潤 (The permeation of the Confucian officials into the high official ranks in the Han dynasty), in Sakai Tadao Sensei Koki Shukuga Kinen no Kai 酒井忠夫先生古稀祝賀記念の会 ed., 	extit{Rekishi ni okeru minshū to bunka: Sakai Tadao Sensei koki shukuga kinen ronsō} 歴史における民衆と文化: 酒井忠夫先生古稀祝賀記念論集 (Tōkyō: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1982), 51-65, esp. 55. In his 1985 study, Huang Liuzhu collects 307 cases of xiaolian from the Western and Eastern Han. He points out that among 234 cases that have specific mentioning of people’s background, people with the training in the classics (or in his original phrase, rushi 儒生) and people with both the training in the classics and local official experience (or in his original phrase, ruli 儒吏) occupy 32.1\% and 13.2\%, respectively. See Huang Liuzhu, 	extit{Qin Han shijin zhidu}, 142-4. For a handy list of these people with the information of their background, see Fukui, 	extit{Kandai kanri tōyō seido no kenchū}, 55-70.
schooling in the Han dynasty was over, the master-disciple relationship continued. In this respect, knowledge was highly intertwined with this master-disciple relationship.\(^{28}\)

Naturally, if one wanted to learn the classics in the Han dynasty, one needed to commit to such a relationship. The process of gaining knowledge of the classics thus was tantamount to seeking and becoming a disciple of a teacher. While this training mode apparently provided suitable candidates for the bureaucracy, it added another relationship to the existing political and family bonds. It was thus potentially hazardous to the already thin lord-subject connection in early imperial China.\(^{29}\) This led to two consequences. Firstly, in reaction to this situation, the imperial house anxiously felt the need to claim their authority over the classics in order to strengthen their bond to the literati. Therefore, in the Eastern Han dynasty, we can find maneuvers to monopolize the power of classicism, such as Emperor Ming’s comparison of himself to Confucius, to whom literati traced all of the transmission lines of the classics and commentarial traditions. Secondly, the nationwide spread of classical studies brought more and more people in the Han Empire into the web of literati. It increased the level of mobility and communication among literati, and thus forged and reinforced their self-identification. Although this process did not directly result in disobedience to the imperial house or thoughts of rebellion,\(^{30}\) it did provide the formerly isolated literati with common ground to shape their massive protest against eunuchs as well as many imperial decisions in A.D. 160.

In this section, we will examine patterns of the spread of the classics and their socio-intellectual impacts in the Eastern Han dynasty. We will explore how the National Academy and local private schools were responsible for creating the social

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\(^{28}\) We can see such relationship in how Chunyu Yi 淳于意 (205–150 B.C.) received medical texts from Gongsun Guang 公孫光 (ca. 2nd century B.C.). In this case, Gongsun took Chunyu as his student particularly because Gongsun did not have any son to which to transmit those texts. In other words, transmissions of knowledge in the early Western Han required a private and intimate bond. See Nathan Sivin, “Text and Experience in Classical Chinese Medicine,” 177-204.

\(^{29}\) For modern scholars’ works on this topic, see Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i press, 2009), 136-84.

\(^{30}\) According to Ted Gurr Robert, people politicize their discontents and actualize them in violent action, and then rebellions take place. Based on this theory, closer contacts among literati did not necessarily create discontent, but they could certainly accelerate the process of politicization if there were any. See his *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 12-3.
networking of the literati via the transmission of the classics. I argue that a process of searching for classical training led to a peripatetic culture: young students left their hometown to seek teachers for classical knowledge as well as opportunities to socialize with local officials for the sake of eliciting recommendations. Through oral as well as written circulation of knowledge, a student of the classics encountered a much larger repertoire of texts than his Western Han predecessors. In reaction to this blossoming of knowledge and unprecedentedly frequent contacts among scholars, a trend of broad learning gradually emerged. In the following pages, contrary to what scholars have previously shown, we will see that the so-called “old script texts,” “new script texts,” and apocrypha did not separate scholars into three segregated schools hostile to each other. Instead, they all appealed to the majority of Eastern Han scholars in the context of this new intellectual trend.

*The Rise and Fall of the National Academy, or Taixue 太学*

Regardless of how Eastern Han historical sources seem to disregard it, the most powerful and best-known educational organization in the Han dynasty was still the National Academy. Since 141 B.C., the Academy became the powerhouse of classicism in the Western Han. Some Erudites started to be in charge of training students to become classicists. These Erudite positions in the Academy originally numbered five for each of the Five Classics, making a total of twenty-five. However, this grew to thirty when another five were added under the category of Music in A.D. 4. From 124 B.C. to the end of first century B.C., the enrollment of students gradually increased from fifty to more than a thousand. The rapid growth of the student population made Emperor Cheng in 7 B.C. restrict the number of enrollees to one thousand. 

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31 See Introduction.
32 For more information about Erudites’ income and career, see Yu Qiding and Shi Kecan, *Zhongguo jiaoyu zhidu tongshi*, 331-7.
The importance of the National Academy was largely due to its close connection to the central government and the court. As mentioned above, in the Han dynasty, the primary way to achieve civil official position was through the recommendation of chief central or local officials. Social networking accordingly became essential for achieving these positions, which in turn consolidated the social status of one’s family. Students of the Academy not only obtained a better chance to be appointed to minor official positions after a certain period of study, but also received more opportunities to socialize with the Erudites, who later on often achieved higher official positions. The Erudites might recommend, or even directly appoint, some of the students to official positions. A student with the support of his teacher and classmates was more likely to survive the chaotic environment and thrive later in his career. The study of the classics thus became a token for upward social mobility and cultural prestige among great families.

After the reestablishment of the National Academy in Luoyang in A.D. 29, local schools with similar educational and social functions gradually eclipsed the significance of the Academy in the first two centuries A.D. Great families had more authority in local society. Compared to the Academy, local officialdom provided a

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34 Based on his statistics, Xing Yitian points out that the career path for xiaolian candidates were from students of the classics to minor functionaries in local governments, and then xiaolian. See his “Donghan Xiaolian de shenfen beijing”, 18-9.
35 As Xing Yitian points out, great political power and cultural privileges generated from this master-disciple relationship. See his “Donghan Xiaolian de shenfen beijing,” 15. For the outcome after studying at the National Academy, see Yu Qiding and Shi Kecan, Zhongguo jiaoyu zhidu tongshi, 354-8.
36 Yu Ying-shih, “Dong Han zhengquan zhi jianli yu xiaolian daxing zhi guanxi,” 210-6. As Xing Yitian mentions, while wealth and authority were important, Knowledge about the classics was a crucial factor in Eastern Han recruitment. See Xing Yitian, “Donghan Xiaolian de shenfen beijing,” 11. Miranda Brown touches on the social relationship among supervisors and subordinates, and among colleagues as reflected in Eastern Han stelae. See her The Politics of Mourning in Early China (Albany: SUNY, 2007), 86-94. For a detailed introduction to the relationship between the training of the classics, recommendations, and aspects of literati culture in this context, see Ichimura Sanjirō, Shina shi kenkyū (Studies on Chinese history) (Tōkyō: Shunjusha, 1939), 143-83.
37 The local schools can be roughly divided into “official” and “private,” though the latter type usually needed permission from the local government. For many aspects of private schools in the Eastern Han, see Zhang Hequan, “Donghan shidai de sixue” (East Han schools and studies) (Private teachings in the Eastern Han), Shixue jikan 1993.1: 54-9. Many official schools sponsored by local governments played a crucial role in providing basic knowledge and literacy to local societies as well as training local officials and clerks. See Yu Qiding and Shi Kecan, Zhongguo jiaoyu zhidu tongshi, 379-99. I will not specifically discuss this type of schools, since their curriculum often dealt with literacy, moral value, etiquette, and statutes. See ibid., 403-12. However, it is worth remembering that these local official schools provided the foundation for higher education.
larger pool of job opportunities. At the same time, the cutthroat competition at the Academy made local officialdom, with its numerous opportunities, more appealing as a career choice than before. Therefore, in addition to sending their children to the capital to study, families with differing levels of social power were also willing to invest in local networking. This situation encouraged travel, and led to the blossoming of local schools. Accordingly, young starters would be better prepared to move up to a higher level of work after accumulating enough political stock from these schools and local officialdom. While this shift helped local schools flourish, it also compromised the dominance of the National Academy.

The official function of the National Academy was “ensuring that the words of sage Confucius are transmitted without interruption” (shi Kong sheng zhi yan chuan er bu jue 使孔聖之言傳而不絕). However, this did not make the central government pay more attention to the maintenance of the Academy. In A.D. 59, Emperor Ming almost closed it, for its functions overlapped with those of the newly established Biyong (辟雍, literally, “the Circular Moat”), an imperial school built on a square enclosed by a circle. During the reign of Emperor An (r. A.D. 106–25), the deserted National Academy building became a pasture. Even though in A.D. 131 the government tried to restore it, the Academy was no longer able to produce students loyal to the central government or the emperor.

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40 Higashi mentions the crucial role classical training played in this phenomenon in his “Gokan jidai no senkyo to sahou shakai,” 274-5. For the travelling culture, see Zhang Hequan 張鶴泉, “Donghan shidai de youxue fengqi ji qi yingxiang” 東漢時代的遊學風氣及其影響 (The fashion of traveling to learn in Eastern Han and its impact), Qiushi xuekan 1995. 2: 104-9 and Chen Yan 陳雁, “Donghan Wei Jin shiqi Ying, Ru, Nanyang diqu de sixue yu youxue” 東漢魏晉時期潁汝、南陽地區的私學與遊學 (Private learning and traveling to learn in Yinghuan, Runan and Nanyang regions from the Eastern Han to Jin), Wen shi zhe 2000. 1: 71-5. While the former article argues that the aim of traveling was to study the classics in the Eastern Han, the latter disputes the former and argues that seeking social connections was the main aim especially in the late Eastern Han. See Zhang, 105 and Chen, 74. To me these two aims did not contradict, but reinforced each other. It is true that during the second half of the second century A.D., literati’s interest in the classics were declining. This, however, as I will argue in this chapter, was due to people’s increasing interest in literary works.
41 Xing Yitian, “Donghan Xiaolian de shenfen beijing,” 18-9, 37.
42 One of the best case studies of these private schools is Yoshikawa Tadao’s 吉川忠夫 close examination of Zheng Xuan’s school. See his “Tei Gen no gakujuku” 郭玄の學塾 (Zheng Xuan’s school), in Kawakatsu Yoshio 川勝義雄 and Tonami Mamoru 礦波濱 eds., Chūgoku kizokusei shakai no kenkyū (Studies on the aristocratic societies of China) (Kyoto: Kyōto Daigaku Jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1987), 321-59. Yoshikawa notices that the increasing social mobility led to the flourishing of private schools, which in turn compromised the popularity of the National Academy. See ibid., 351.
43 This is a statement made by Zhu Fu 朱浮 (ca. A.D. 5–66) as Taipu 太僕, or Grand Keeper of Equipages to convince the emperor Liu Xiu to appoint Erudites from outside Luoyang in A.D. 31. See Hou Han shu, 33: 1144.
This does not mean that the National Academy was completely dismissed. The Academy as a bureaucratic institution was indeed deteriorating. Nevertheless, its status and the scholars attached to it kept it as a means for people to circulate knowledge about the classics and to network, especially when in the Eastern Han dynasty the Academy lowered the threshold for admission. Individuals could attend the Academy as auditors without being a registered student. They could use this opportunity to make connections with scholars who worked elsewhere in the capital, such as in the imperial libraries. There was also a book market in the capital which placed students in advantageous positions for the circulation of knowledge. All of these aspects made visits to the Academy attractive. However, the rather loose connections between the National Academy and its auditors did not help the imperial house tie them to the Han Empire. Auditors as well as students were devoted to their teachers, the Erudites in this case, instead of the palace bureaucracy.

In the Western Han dynasty, the appointment of Erudites largely depended on their fame as intellectuals. In the Eastern Han, candidates for Erudite needed to have recommendation letters from officials. After appointment, based on their specialty, they would teach one of the fourteen commentarial traditions: the Shi 施, Meng 孟, Liang 梁, and Jing 京 traditions of the Changes, the Ouyang 歐陽, Elder Xiahou 大夏侯, and Younger Xiahou 小夏侯 traditions of the Documents, the Qi 齊, Lu 魯, and Han 韓 traditions of the Poetry, the Elder Dai 大戴 and Younger Dai 小戴 traditions of the Rites, and the Yan 嚴 and Yan 顏 traditions, two branches of the Gongyang tradition of the Annals. All of these traditions were well known and

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44 For anecdotes about students bonding, see Yu Qiding and Shi Kecan, Zhongguo jiaoyu zhidu tongshi, 353.
45 Yu Qiding and Shi Kecan, Zhongguo jiaoyu zhidu tongshi, 343-6.
48 See Ma Duanlin’s 馬端臨 (A.D. 1254–1323) study on this issue and a prototype of recommendation letter preserved in his Wenxian tongkao 文献通考 (General history of institutions and critical examination of documents and studies). Ma Duanlin, “Xuexiao kao” 學校考 (An examination of schools), in Shanghai Shifan Daxue Guji Yanjiu Suo 上海師範大學古籍研究所 and Huadong Shifan Daxue Guji Yanjiu Suo 華東師範大學古籍研究所 ed., Wenxian tongkao 文獻通考 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2011), 40: 1184. Also see Yu Qiding and Shi Kecan, Zhongguo jiaoyu zhidu tongshi, 337-342. Yu and Shi point out that while Western Han recruitment emphasized transmission lineage, it was no longer the case in the Eastern Han dynasty. See ibid., 338.
became part of the Academy curriculum from the 50’s B.C. (hereafter I will refer to these traditions as “Western Han traditions” for the sake of convenience). These fourteen traditions formed the skeleton of Academy’s curriculum in the Eastern Han.

The National Academy became particularly important for the transmission of apocryphal texts. In the early years of the Eastern Han dynasty, the editors of the apocryphal corpus were also Erudites. For example, one of the editors, Xue Han 薛漢 (fl. A.D. 25–68), came from a family that transmitted the Han tradition of the Poetry for generations. Later, people like Xu Zhi 徐稺 (A.D. 97–168), Li Xia 李郃 (fl. 88–125 A.D.) and Wei Lang 魏朗 (?–A.D. 169) also gained their knowledge about apocryphal texts from the Academy. Wei Lang was also famous among the partisans (dang ren 黨人) in the massive protest at the Academy in A.D. 166. Fan Ying 樊英 (fl. A.D. 106–144), who was the teacher of one of the most famous partisans, Chen Shi 陳寔 (A.D. 104–187), was an Erudite who specialized in apocrypha since Emperor An’s reign (r. A.D. 106–125) (Chart 11, page 222).

Family Transmission

The most common and stable way to transmit knowledge contained in the classics, or any kind of expertise in Han China, was through family tradition. From the perspective of the Interaction Ritual Chains, it was most stable because sons usually received a much higher level of attention from their fathers than students received from their teachers. Therefore, these sons, charged with a higher degree of emotional energy, perpetuated the transmission line better. In general, in the realm of family transmission, the Western Han traditions of the classics predominated because

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49 Hou Han shu, 79a: 2545.
50 Hou Han shu, 69b: 2573.
51 Hou Han shu, 53: 1746-8; 82a: 2717, and 67: 2201.
52 Hou Han shu, 82a: 2721, 2724.
they were well established earlier. Compared to them, the old script traditions or apocryphal texts were rarely transmitted separately.

In the Western Han, the most observable family tradition of the classics through the whole dynasty was the Kong 孔 family of Qufu 曲阜, Lu Principality 魯國, who were putatively the descendants of Confucius. In the Eastern Han dynasty, they continued to flourish in transmitting the Yan 嚴 tradition of the Gongyang Annals.54 Besides them, the Huan 桓 family from Longkang 龍亢, Pei Commandery 沛郡, also transmitted the Ouyang tradition of the Documents within their family in the first hundred years of the Eastern Han. The Huan family succeeded greatly in teaching the imperial family the classics. Huan Rong 桓榮 (ca. 20 B.C.–ca. A.D. 59) was the teacher of Emperor Ming. His son Huan Yu 桓郁 (?–A.D. 93) taught Emperor Zhang, and his grandson Huan Yan 桓焉 (?–A.D. 143) taught Emperor An and Emperor Shun.55 The Yuan 袁 family from Ruyang 汝陽, Runan 汝南 Commandery was another formidable family. Many of their members occupied the positions of the Three Ducal Ministers. They passed down the Meng tradition of the Changes through their family (Chart 7 and 4.2).56

54 For a comprehensive study of the Kong’s family tradition and their lineage, see Huang Huaxin 黃懷信 et al., Han Jin Kongshi jiaxue yu “weishu” gongan 漢代孔氏家學與“偽書”公案 (The family tradition of the Kong in Han and Jin and the controversial case about the “forged book”) (Xiamen: Xiamen Daxue, 2011), esp. 36-8, 41-2, 53-8, 120-1, 131-56.
55 Hou Han shu, 37: 1255, 1257.
56 Hou Han shu, 45: 1517-23.
Without exception, these great families transmitted commentarial traditions well established since the Western Han dynasty. Some of them had fairly long family traditions of scholarship. Huan Rong started the tradition around the time of the establishment of the Eastern Han.\(^{57}\) The Yuan family’s tradition was initiated by Yuan Liang 袁良 (fl. A.D. 1–25) in the last days of the Western Han. We can even trace the Kong family’s study of the Documents back to Kong Ba 孔霸 of Emperor Cheng’s reign.\(^{58}\) Compared to the old script classics and imperially sponsored apocryphal texts, the dominance of the existing traditions is due more to their early establishment and wide spread than to their supporters’ suppression of old script classics.

These families became even more formidable when they promoted and patronized other great families’ traditions. For example, Yang Zhen 楊震 (A.D. 59–124) of Huayin 華陰, Hongnong 弘農 commandery, received the Ouyang tradition of the Documents from Huan Yu. This was the starting point of the Yang family’s four generations of transmission from Yang Zhen to his son Yang Bing 楊秉 (A.D. 92–165), grandson Yang Ci 楊賜 (?–185 A.D.), and great grandson Yang Biao 楊彪 (A.D. 142–225), whose highest positions were Grand Minister of Ceremonies (taichang 太常), in charge of recruiting Erudites; Master of Writing, the imperial secretary position as powerful as the Three Ducal Ministers; and Mayor of the Capital (jingzhao yin 京兆尹), respectively.\(^{59}\) The relationship between the Huan and the Yang families was not just limited to a one-time master-disciple connection. Huan Yan was also the teacher of Yang Ci. There was also inter-marriage between the two families.\(^ {60}\)

Besides these extraordinary families, plenty of other privileged literati families specialized in various traditions of the classics for more than one generation. For example, Xue Han’s family transmitted the Han tradition of the Poetry for five

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\(^{57}\) Hou Han shu, 37: 1249.
\(^{58}\) Huang Huaxin 黃懷信, Han Jin Kong shi jia xue yu “weishu” gongan, 138, 156.
\(^{59}\) Hou Han shu, 54:1760, 1769, 1776, 1786.
\(^{60}\) Hou Han shu, 37: 1257, 1259.
generations. Fu Gong 伏恭 (5 B.C.– A.D. 84) and his two uncles Fu An 伏黯 (fl. A.D. 9–23) and Fu Zhan 伏湛 (?–A.D. 37) were descendants of Fu Sheng 伏生 (fl. 246–140 B.C.), an expert in the *Documents*. At the end of the first century B.C., the Fu family transmitted the Qi tradition of the *Poetry*. Fu Zhan even tutored Emperor Cheng.61 Wa Dan’s 洼丹 (29 B.C.– A.D. 41) family passed on the Meng tradition of the *Changes* for generations. 62 Xu Fang 徐防, an advocate of conforming commentarial lines, came from a family of the *Changes*. His grandfather Xu Xuan 徐宣 taught Wang Mang the *Changes*. 63 After receiving the Yan 嚴 tradition of Gongyang from Fan Tiao 樊儵 (?–A.D. 67), Zhang Ba 張霸 (fl. A.D. 89–106) passed it down to his son Zhang Kai 張楷 (A.D. 80–149), who formed a popular local academy in Hongnong (Chart 8). 64 Qiao Xuan 橋玄 (A.D. 109–183) came from a family with a tradition of the *Rites*. Their tradition can be traced back to seven generations earlier, when his ancestor Qiao Ren 橋仁 (fl. 49 B.C.– A.D. 2) was a disciple of Dai De 戴德 (fl. 73–49 B.C.), the founder of the Younger Dai tradition. 65

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61 *Hou Han shu*, 79b: 2571-2, 26: 893-4.
62 *Hou Han shu*, 79a: 2551.
63 *Hou Han shu*, 44: 1500-1.
64 *Hou Han shu*, 36, 1242-3.
65 *Hou Han shu*, 51: 1695.
Compared to these well-established traditions, the old script texts that Liu Xin promoted never gained much popularity through family transmission. Single transmission from father to son is the longest line we can find in the sources. This kind of transmission tended to happen in the first fifty years of the Eastern Han, when the first generation had a chance to receive teaching from either Liu Xin or his followers. For example, Jia Kui 賈逵 (A.D. 30–101) was the most eager advocate of the Zuo tradition in Emperor Zhang’s reign (A.D. 76–88). His knowledge about the Zuo tradition and the Rites of Zhou came from Jia Hui 賈徽 (fl. 6 B.C.), a disciple of Liu Xin. Similarly, Zheng Zhong 鄭眾 (?–A.D. 114) received the Zuo tradition from his father, Zheng Xing 鄭興 (fl. A.D. 14–33), who learned from Liu Xin, among other classical traditions, the Zuo tradition, and the Rites of Zhou. 66 Another possible pair is Liu Xin’s favorite student, Kong Fen 孔奮 (fl. 13 B.C.– A.D. 36), who received the Zuo tradition from him, and his son Kong Jia 孔嘉 (ca. 1st century A.D.), the author of the Explication of the Zuo (Zuoshi shuo 左氏說) (Chart 9).

66 Hou Han shu, 36: 1217, 1224, 1234-9.
Chart 9: Transmission lines of old script texts

CH (F): The Fei tradition of the Changes
D (O): A old script version of the Documents
R (Z): The Rites of Zhou
Text: Reception of a text without a transmission line
Z: The Zuo tradition of the Annals

Yin Gengshi → Z → Yin Xian
Hu Chang → Z
Jia Hu → Z
Wang Mang → CH (F)
Chen Qin → Z
Chen Yuan → Z
Ma Yan

Liu Xin
Zhen Zheng
Zheng Xing
Kong Fen
Kong Jia
Jia Zheng
Jia Kui

Du Lin

The three fathers and sons were all versed to various extents in other established traditions as well. Kong Fen’s great grandfather Kong Ba (fl. 48–43 B.C.) also received the *Documents* directly from Xiahou Sheng, and thereafter passed down the Xiahou tradition. Before becoming a disciple of Liu Xin, Zheng Xing was a student of the Gongyang tradition. Besides the Zuo tradition, his son Zheng Zhong was also an expert on the *Poetry* and *Changes*. Jia Kui, who received the teaching of the old script texts from his father, was a teacher of Elder Xiahou at the National Academy. He was also familiar with explications of the Guliang tradition.

That is to say, old script texts rarely stood alone in family transmission. They were part of many literati’s broader learning. The situation was that certain families had knowledge of the old script texts in addition to the Western Han traditions, rather than being solely devoted to either the “Old Script School” or the “New Script School.” All the families introduced above were involved in one or more Western Han commentarial traditions. The transmission of old script texts both had a shorter history inside families and a smaller scale among them. Different from typical master-disciple connections spreading over time, old script texts relied mainly on Liu Xin and his cohorts to initiate family traditions at the beginning of the Eastern Han.

The transmission of apocryphal texts within families was even less observable than that of old script texts. Part of the reason was that the primary sources did not always specify the transmission of apocrypha. For example, Cao Chong and his son Cao Bao were a pair of ritual experts in the early Eastern Han. The *History of the Later Han* only mentions that Cao Bao was able to “pass his father’s undertaking down” (*chuan fu ye* 傳父業), but they were also largely involved in the apocrypha. Cao Chong quoted from apocrypha to convince Emperor Ming to change the name of the official of music from Grand Musician to Grand Yu Musician. Cao Bao tried to design a ritual manual based on apocryphal commentaries on the Five Classics. That is to say, apocryphal texts were part of his family undertaking, but
the primary source never specifies them.

This lack of specification in many cases is due to the mingling of apocryphal texts and Western Han commentaries on the mainstream classics. The two genres resembled each other in form and tenor. Primary sources often did not mention apocryphal texts in biographies of scholars who transmitted Western Han traditions. For example, in their biographies, Chen Yuan and Fan Sheng appear respectively to be solely transmitters of the old script texts and of the Liang tradition of the Changes. Fan Ye mentioned in another account, however, that Li Yu 李育 (fl. A.D. 79) disagreed with Chen Yuan and Fan Sheng precisely because both of them relied too much on the apocrypha. This textual issue makes it difficult for us to identify the transmission of apocryphal texts, suggesting high-level blending between apocrypha and other commentarial traditions.

While the recipients in family traditions usually received a high level of attention, the transmission line was small in scale compared to training programs like the National Academy. In the next section, we will examine the flourishing of private schools, a characteristic of the Eastern Han dynasty. Each school was smaller in scale than the Academy, but they formed a much larger empire-wide unity. Combined with the situation of official recruitment, these private learning programs formed a literati culture that was peculiar to the Eastern Han.

**Individual Discipleship and Traveling**

No matter how passionate a beginner was about reviving ancient ideals in the classics, realistically speaking, studying the classics was a major path to official positions in the Eastern Han. Taking a local or central official as one’s teacher was a highly favorable move, since in the Eastern Han dynasty appointments to official positions were almost always through recommendation. Official or private attachment

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71 Hou Han shu, 36: 1226-9.
72 Hou Han shu, 79b: 2582.
as an official’s disciple had certain advantages that Academy students lacked. Becoming someone’s disciple in his home town was certainly easier than going all the way to the National Academy.\textsuperscript{73} Sometimes people became private students of Academy erudites instead of going through the procedure of registration.\textsuperscript{74} Academy students needed to pass examinations to graduate,\textsuperscript{75} but this was not required of an official’s personal student. Furthermore, one might receive more useful recommendations from high court officials or local officials of one’s home town than from Erudites. The other advantage of being a student outside the National Academy was that one might receive unofficial teachings, such as that of old script texts and various kinds of divination skills.

We can start examining the dynamic of students, their teachers, and their careers by first exploring the disciples surrounding the Huan family. The Huan expanded their connections in the court in Luoyang, and consolidated their social status by teaching. For example, they sent their students to be the teachers of the Crown Prince or people related to imperial wives and concubines. Zhang Pu 張酺 (?–A.D. 104) of Xiyang 細陽, Runan 汝南 Commandery (in modern Henan 河南 province), who had received a tradition of the \textit{Documents} from his father, became a student of the current Grand Minister of Ceremonies, Huan Rong. Later on, he became a tutor of the \textit{Documents} for the “minor nobles of the four surnames” (sixing xiaohou 四姓小侯), also known as the four major imperial harem families, namely Fan 樊, Guo 郭, Yin 隱, and Ma 馬 in A.D. 66.\textsuperscript{76} After a while, he was appointed to tutor the heir apparent.\textsuperscript{77} On another occasion, after teaching the heir apparent, the future Emperor Ming, for five years, Huan Rong recommended his disciple Hu Xian 胡憲 (fl. A.D. 51) of Jiujiang 九江 Commandery (in modern Jiangxi 江西 province) to tutor the
heir apparent.\textsuperscript{78}

Many of the Huan family’s disciples also became high officials in the court. Zhu Chong 朱寵 (fl. A.D. 126) of Jingzhao 京兆, one of the Three Adjunct areas (Sanfu 三輔) in modern Shaanxi, and Yang Zhen (A.D. 54–124; see page 204) were two students of the Grand Minister of Ceremonies, Huan Yu. Later on, they were appointed to be Grand Commandant (Taiwei 太尉) in A.D. 126, and Grand Minister of Ceremonies in A.D. 117, respectively.\textsuperscript{79} The family of Yang Zhen became dominant after that appointment. Huan Yan’s student Huang Qiong 桓瓊 (A.D. 86–164) of Anlu 安陸, Jiangxia 江夏 Commandery (in modern Hubei 湖北 province) was another case. His father Huang Xiang 黃香 (A.D. 18–106) was the Grand Administer (taishou 太守) of Wei 魏 county, and had also worked at the imperial library Dongguan 東觀. After studying under Huan Yan in the capital, Huang Qiong became the Grand Minister of Ceremonies around A.D. 150 (Chart 10).

\textsuperscript{78} Hou Han shu, 37: 1250.
\textsuperscript{79} Hou Han shu, 54: 1760-1.
Behind these successful cases, we can see a pattern in literati careers: a young learner, often from a literati family, traveled around to meet their teachers for certain knowledge, and received a position afterwards based on the expertise and social connections from his learning experience.

In the Eastern Han dynasty, this type of career was so prevalent that even martial officials were involved in this path. Zhang Huan 張奐 (A.D. 104–81), a general securing Eastern Han’s northwest frontier in the 160’s, is a good example (Chart 10). He was born in Jiuquan 酒泉, Dunhuang 敦煌 Commandery (in modern Gansu 甘肅 province). When he was young, he travelled to the Three Adjunct areas to study. He then became a student of Grand Commandant Zhu Chong in the capital, Luoyang, in order to learn the Ouyang tradition of the Documents. Afterwards, the Grand General (Da Jiangjun 大將軍) Liang Ji 梁冀 (?–A.D. 159), a powerful figure from the most dominant imperial harem family since the 130’s, appointed him to his entourage. Zhang took this opportunity to present his improved version of the Ouyang tradition to Emperor Huan 桓 (r. A.D. 147–167). The emperor then promoted him to work at the Dongguan library.80

Indeed, Eastern Han scholars were part of a culture of travel. Their academic career might constitute multiple learning experiences in different regions. As the number of students increased, teachers needed to find ways to organize them. Local academies thus emerged from this context. The local academies probably started from assemblies of students around famous individuals, often with local official titles or previous Erudite experience in the National Academy.81 For example, Zhang Xuan 張玄 (fl. A.D. 25–55) was a transmitter of the Yan 顏 tradition of Gongyang, and famous for his versatility in various commentarial traditions. During his career as Aide for Chencang county (Chencang xian cheng 陳倉縣丞), he had more than a thousand students registered (zhulu 著錄). Another transmitter of the Yan 顏

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80 Hou Han shu, 65: 2138.
81 For a very brief introduction to the organization of these schools, see Yu Qiding and Shi Kecan, Zhongguo jiaoyu zhidu tongshi, 417-24.
tradition, Li Yu 李育 (fl. A.D. 79), was famous at the National Academy, and thus attracted hundreds of students.82

It is unclear whether the word “register” indicates documented registry to keep records solely for the academy or also for the local government to supervise. Nevertheless, it does show a certain degree of management.83 In the second century A.D., running local academies and teaching was rather a sophisticated business. For example, Ma Rong’s academy had three to four hundred students at a time. Only about fifty of them ever met Ma Rong face to face. The rest were divided according to seniority and were taught by those more senior.84 This is also the case at Zheng Xuan’s school. Furthermore, at Zheng’s school, question and answer sessions were one of the major pedagogical techniques between the teacher and students, or seniors and juniors. In order to make the teaching easy to understand, illustrations and allegories to the Han legal and administrative system were all used to explain ancient customs and administration in the classics.85 All these administrative and pedagogical measures show that teachers of private schools dealt with a large number of students and managed them efficiently.

Opening a local academy was already a viable career option for scholars. After studying with Ma Rong, two of his famous students, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (A.D. 127–200) and Lu Zhi 盧植 (A.D. 139–192), chose to go back home to teach.86 These private schools received financial support in various ways. Teachers with official positions, such as Song Hong 宋弘 (fl. A.D. 26), might use their salary to support the school.87 The financial support of Zheng Xuan’s school came from agricultural work and the high official Kong Rong’s 孔融 (A.D. 158–203) sponsorship (Chart 11, page 222).88 Some students’ tuition was also a source, since many of the students came from well-off families. For example, in order to live close

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82 Hou Han shu, 79b: 2582-3.
83 For the management and pedagogy at private schools, especially that of Ma Rong, see Yu Qiding and Shi Kecan, Zhongguo jiaoyu zhidu tongshi, 432-5.
84 Hou Han shu, 35: 1207; 60a: 1972.
86 Hou Han shu, 35: 1207; 64: 2113.
to their teacher, some of Zhang Ba’s 張霸 students bought property around his house. It does not seem likely that ordinary people could afford real estate solely for the purpose of study unless they were from great families. In fact, some people invested in real estate around the academies to make money from the traveling students.  

Great classicists of the Han usually appeared indifferent to money in primary sources, but economic activity on a considerable scale surrounded their academies.

If we want to further pin down the economic condition of a private academy, we should first ask how much money a young student would spend during his course of study. Despite a scarcity of data, we do have a datum. When Wang Fu 王阜 (fl. A.D. 77–91) of Shu Commandery 蜀郡 (modern Sichuan) wanted to go to the neighboring Qianwei 犍為 Commandery (modern Sichuan), his mother prepared 2000 bronze coins and 13 meters of cloth. In the second half of the first century A.D., 2000 coins equated to 120 kilograms of wheat. If a young male adult consumed 0.25 kilograms of wheat per day, 2000 coins would feed him on grain for 480 days. If we assume the cloth from Wang Fu’s mother was linen, common among Han families, it was worth 200 coins, another 48 days of wheat. Additionally, taking transportation and accommodation into account, it is unlikely that this amount would pay for more than fifteen months without outside help. However, it shows that substantial amounts circulated due to local academies.

Given students’ long periods of study, local schools either needed to provide them with a certain level of accommodation, or the poorer ones needed to make money on the side. It was unclear how Wang Fu eventually paid all his expenses, but both means existed in the Eastern Han dynasty. In order to support their studies, many students needed to do labor. For example, while studying under the Erudite Zhu Pu 朱普 (fl. 20 B.C.– A.D. 8), Huan Rong had to work as a hired laborer (keyong 客傭).

89 Hou Han shu, 36: 1241-2.
90 For more information about Qianwei, see the section below.
91 Liu Zhen 劉珍 et al, Wu Shuping ed., Dongguan Han ji jiaozhu, 13: 512. The measure word duan 端 for cloth, which equates two zhang, only indicates length.
92 See Lin Ganquan ed., Zhongguo jingji tongshi: Qin Han jingji juan, 571. For a more specialized study in the price of goods in Han China, especially in the north-west regions, see Ding Bangyou 丁邦友, Handai wujia xintan (New explorations on prices in Han) (Beijing: Shehui kexue, 2009).
93 Lin Ganquan ed., Zhongguo jingji tongshi: Qin Han jingji juan, 575.
to support himself.\textsuperscript{94} Wei Sa 衛颯 (fl. A.D. 8–23), another eager learner from a poor family, often worked as a laborer when he ran out of grain.\textsuperscript{95} In the late-Eastern Han, Yu Cheng 庾乘 (mid-2\textsuperscript{nd} Century A.D.), a future capital patrician, became the Academy students’ servant in order to study there.\textsuperscript{96} Hou Jin 侯瑾 (fl. A.D. 190), a poor native of Dunhuang Commandery, did hired labor during the day and used his spare time to read at night.\textsuperscript{97}

Support from teachers was not uncommon either. We have already seen the case of Song Hong, who used his own salary to support his students. Others such as Cao Shen 曹參 (ca. 2\textsuperscript{nd} century A.D.) used their family fortunes. Others who were neither high officials nor from wealthy families found other means. For example, Li Xun 李恂 (ca. first century A.D.) wove straw mats with his students to help them sustain themselves. Ren An’s 任安 (A.D. 124–202) mother provided accommodations for her son’s students, which made Ren’s school very popular in Guanghan 廣漢 Commandery (modern Sichuan province).\textsuperscript{98} Many poor students were tied not only educationally, but also financially, to their private academies.

Thus, in the Eastern Han dynasty, students came from a wide spectrum. On one side of the spectrum, students were of wealthy and powerful origin. Their families could afford even more than the tuition and travel fees. They probably contributed considerably to the local schools’ finance. On the other side of the spectrum, students from poor families also had a chance to get involved in this culture with financial support from other sources. They needed either to be hired to do certain kinds of work, or the local schools needed to provide certain means of funding. Inevitably, they were financially dependent on their schools and the locality.

It might seem puzzling to many modern readers to why a teacher should want to lose money to maintain a local private school. Unlike in the modern world, money
came from privilege, rather than vice versa. Fame in local society could help a teacher achieve higher social status and thus pave the road to officialdom. Successful teacher families like the Huan, Yang, and Yuan preserved their family privileges and had great influence at the court precisely because they produced many students who later became officials at the local or central government.

If masters needed to provide knowledge and even housing for their students, what were the obligations for the latter, especially those dependent on local schools? Teachers had greater authority in the ancient world than in 21st century universities, and their interactions with their students extended into daily life. Besides social etiquette and miscellaneous daily labor works for the teacher.99 The teacher’s death also called for the involvement of students. Normally, former students and former subordinates, if he had any, would contribute to the erection of his funerary stele. In more dramatic situations, such as executions, students behaved more dramatically. For example, when Dou Xian 窦憲 (?–A.D. 92)100 forced his political rival Yue Hui 樂恢 (fl. A.D. 89) to commit suicide, hundreds of the latter’s students went into mourning, donning hemp cloth as family members did.101 The master-disciple relationship was to a large extent analogous to blood relationships, so the obligations of a disciple compared to that of a family member.102

In some people’s eyes, in the late second century A.D. the core of such relationships was obedience. A remark of the tactician Zhang Hong 張緯 (A.D. 99) partly reflects Han people’s expectations of how disciples should behave in daily life at school. See Li Xiangfeng 黎翔鳳 annotated, Guanzi jiaozhu 管子校注 (Collations and annotations of the Guanzi) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2004), 1144-65. For the date of “Dizi zhi,” I follow Luo Genze 羅根澤, who believe it as a work of the Western Han dynasty. For an introduction to authenticity, date, translations and modern studies of Guanzi, see W. Allyn Rickett, “kuan tzu 管子,” in Loewe ed., Early Chinese Texts, 244-51. For the date of every single chapter of the Guanzi, see Luo Genze, “Guanzi tanyuan 《管子》探源 (An exploration of the origins of Guanzi), in Luo Genze 羅根澤, Luo Genze shuo zhuzi Luo Genze explaining various masters) (Shanghai: Guji, 2001), 285-368. Luo’s date of “Dizi zhi” is in ibid., 353-4. See page 29, Chart 1.

A set of rules in Guanzi partly reflects Han people’s expectations of how disciples should behave in daily life at school. See Li Xiangfeng 黎翔鳳 annotated, Guanzi jiaozhu 管子校注 (Collations and annotations of the Guanzi) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2004), 1144-65. For the date of “Dizi zhi,” I follow Luo Genze 羅根澤, who believe it as a work of the Western Han dynasty. For an introduction to authenticity, date, translations and modern studies of Guanzi, see W. Allyn Rickett, “kuan tzu 管子,” in Loewe ed., Early Chinese Texts, 244-51. For the date of every single chapter of the Guanzi, see Luo Genze, “Guanzi tanyuan 《管子》探源 (An exploration of the origins of Guanzi), in Luo Genze 羅根澤, Luo Genze shuo zhuzi Luo Genze explaining various masters) (Shanghai: Guji, 2001), 285-368. Luo’s date of “Dizi zhi” is in ibid., 353-4.

See page 29, Chart 1.

101 Hou Han shu, 43: 1479. For the dress code of mourning period, see, e. g., “Sangfu xiao ji 喪服小記 (A minor record of the mourning cloth) and “Sang da ji 喪大記 (A large record of mourning), liji zhushu, j. 32, 44 and 45, in Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing zhushi, 1494-7, 1571-85. For a more dramatic case about Li Gu, where his students risked their life to pick up his corpse, see Hou Han shu, 63: 2088.

102 For more cases in which students or former subordinates did three-year mourning period, projecting the deceased as their father, see Ichimura Sanjirō, Shina shi kenkyū, 177-9. As Washio mentions, the interrelationship Han promoted was based on the comparison to that of kinship. See her “Zenkan no ninkan tōyō to shakai chitsujo,” 69. As Zhang Hequan mentions, their relationship between a teacher and a student is far more complex than teaching and receiving knowledge. In fact, he points out, they have the master and subordinate relationship. See his “Donghan shidai de sixue,” 58-9, 31.
151–211) about a descendant of the Yuan family revealed this tendency:

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其忽履道之節而強進取之欲者，將曰天下之人非家吏則門生也，孰不從我？
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His [Yuan Shu] ignoring the virtue of following the Way and stressing the desire for aggression is like saying “all people in the world are either [his] family servants or students, so who would not obey me?”

Zhang Hong grouped students with family servants. For him, they were two kinds of subordinates, and obedience was the characteristic they shared. His words revealed two sides of a symbiotic relationship between students and their teachers: while teachers provided knowledge and social connections to help their students in their careers, students reciprocated with obedience. Through this relationship, the possession of knowledge and a teaching position transformed into social privilege and political power.

**The Spread of Apocryphal Texts**

In chapter 3, we looked at the editors of apocryphal texts in early Eastern Han. A similar relationship existed in an official and his former subordinate. Yang Lien-sheng brought this up in his 1936’s study, “Donghan de haozu,” 1030-7. He points out that through teaching Han scholars could gain great social privileges without high official titles. See ibid., 137. See Zhang Hequan, “Donghan guli wenti shitan” 東漢故吏問題試探 (A tentative exploration on the issue of former subordinates in the Eastern Han), Jilin Daxue shehui kexue xuebao 1995. 5: 8-14.

Yoshikawa Tadao made a groundbreaking study on Yang Hou’s 杨厚 apocryphal lineage in the Shu region: Yoshikawa, "Shoku ni okeru shin’i no gaku no dentō" 蜀における讖緯の学の傳統 (Traditions of the apocryphal learning in the Shu region), in Yasui Kōzan ed., Shin’i shisō no sōgōteki kenkyū 論緯思想の綜合的硏究 (Tōkyō: Kokusho kankōkai, 1984), 103-36. Based on Yoshikawa’s research, Michael J. Farmer gives a resourceful portrayal of general intellectual trends of the Eastern Han in Sichuan area. See his The Talent of Shu: Qiao Zhou and the Intellectual World of Early Medieval Sichuan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 15-30. While I have benefited greatly from their focus on lineage transmission, I will examine the dynamics between travel and the spread of knowledge.

Now let us examine how apocryphal texts spread in the social context I have just sketched out.

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103 A letter written by Zhang Hong preserved in *Wu lu* 吳錄 (Records of Wu) quoted by Pei Songzhi 裴松之 in the commentary of Chen Shou 陳壽, *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (The history of the three kingdoms) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959), 46: 1106.

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106 See the section “The classicists and Prophets from Liu Xiu’s Group,” page 152 to 155.
Since the apocryphal corpus initially took shape under the hand of the editorial board in the capital, one of the patterns of transmission in the early Eastern Han was from the capital to local regions. One example from the early Eastern Han is Xue Han 薛漢 (fl. A.D. 25–72, a native of Huaiyang 淮陽, modern Henan province), who during Liu Xiu’s reign was an editor of apocrypha as well as an Erudite of the Han 韓 tradition of the *Poetry*. His student Du Fu 杜摯 (fl. A.D. 56–83), a native of Qianwei 羌為 Commandery, took his teachings home and started his own teaching career there. His school attracted more than a thousand disciples, including the author of the *Springs and Autumns of Wu and Yue* (*Wu Yue Chunqiu 吳越春秋*), Zhao Ye 趙曄 from Guiji 會稽 (located in modern Suzhou 蘇州, Jiangsu province). (Chart 8, page 206).\(^{107}\)

Another example shows the interaction between the Han court and locality in the transmission of apocrypha: Yang Tong 楊統 (fl. A.D. 58), a native of Xindu 新都 (in modern Chengdu 成都, Sichuan province), Guanghan 廣漢 Commandery, studied with Yan Gao 炎高 (before A.D. 25), who was supposedly from somewhere nearby. He learned about the *River Chart* and *Luo Writing* from Yan. Later on, around A.D. 25, Yang was summoned to the court to answer questions about a prophetic text called the *Inner Prophecy* (*Neichen* 內讖).\(^{108}\) From that point he began his official life in the court, and taught his son Yang Hou 楊厚 (A.D. 72–153) apocryphal texts.\(^{109}\) In A.D. 108, Emperor An 安 (r. A.D. 107–125) requested that Yang Tong, then Imperial Court Grandee, explain a bizarre celestial event and a flood. Yang Tong recommended his son for this inquiry. Although Yang Hou was promoted to Gentleman of the Household (*zhonglang* 中郎), an honorary position, because of to his appealing response to the inquiry, later on the emperor dowager was dissatisfied

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107 *Hou Han shu*, 79b: 2573-5. According to John Lagerwey, the received version of the *Wu Yue Chunqiu* is at least an abridged version of Zhao Ye’s original one. For more information about the received version of *Wu Yue Chunqiu* and its relation to Zhao Ye’s original one, see John Lagerwey, “*Wu Yueh ch’un ch’iu* 吳越春秋,” in *Loewe ed., Early Chinese Texts*, 473-6.

108 I assume this based on how Yan Gao was referred: Huali xiansheng 華里先生, or Master Huali, in which case Huali probably refers to a place called Zhanghuali 章華里 located in Chengdu 成都, modern Sichuan province. See Chang Qu 常璩, “Xianxian shinü zong zan,” Ren Naiqiang annotated, *Huayang guo zhi jiaobu tuzhu*, 10b: 561.

109 For a more complete transmission line since Yang Tong’s father Yang Chunqing 楊春卿 to Qiao Zhou 謝周 (ca. A.D. 201–270), and Yang’s family tradition, see Yodhikawa, “shoku ni okeru shin’i no gaku no dentō,” 106-18, 132.
with his interpretation of apocryphal texts. He was therefore sacked. He returned to
his home town Xindu in order to establish an academy.\textsuperscript{110} His school attracted local
people, such as Ren An and Dong Fu 董扶 (ca. A.D. 108–189), both of whom had
studied at the National Academy earlier. After finishing his studies in apocrypha,
Dong went home and opened his own academy.\textsuperscript{111}

It is noteworthy that the two examples are both from the area around Qianwei
(southwest of modern Sichuan province), a commandery that did not become part of
the Han Empire until Emperor Wu’s time.\textsuperscript{112} Qianwei was not the only example.
Another was Zangke 萄柯 Commandery, approximately two hundred miles
southeast. This was where the Yelang 夜郎 kingdom (ca. 4\textsuperscript{th} century–27 B.C.) was
located. It was a rainy place, unsuitable for animal husbandry and the silk industry,
and thus a poor place to live. The local people also had different religious practices
from the majority of the Han Empire. However, during Emperor Huan’s time (r. A.D.
147–67), a native of Zangke, Yin Zhen 尹珍 (A.D. 79–162), traveled to Runan 汝南,
a commandary approximately 168 miles from the capital, to learn the classics and
apocryphal texts. His teachers included Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. A.D. 58–147), a student
of Ma Rong and an expert in old script texts, and the historian Ying Feng 應奉 (fl.
A.D. 144). He then returned home to teach.\textsuperscript{113} Compared to the Henan 河南 area,
where the capital was located, or the Three Adjuncts areas, Qianwei and Zangke were
isolated areas. However, in mid-Eastern Han period, individual academies flourished
there as well. For that reason, apocryphal texts were transmitted to such areas as
Qianwei and Zangke.

Since the second century, the rise of local schools was increasingly noticeable.
While Luoyang was a crucial place for the exchange of knowledge, many scholars
already were well trained in apocrypha before they went to the capital and the National
Academy. For example, Li Gu 李固 (A.D. 94–147), a scholar who engaged in political

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Hou Han shu}, 30a: 1048.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Hou Han shu}, 79a: 2551; 82a: 2734.
\textsuperscript{112} Sima Biao, “Jun Guo wu” 郡國五 (Commanderies and states 5), \textit{Hou Han shu zhi}, 23: 3509.
\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Hou Han shu}, 86: 2845; 48: 1607, 1614, and 79b: 2588. Ying Fen abridged materials from \textit{Shiji} and \textit{Han shu}
and \textit{Han ji} 漢紀 to make a text called \textit{Han shi} 漢事 (Affairs of Han). His son, Ying Shao 應劭 was a famous
scholar at the end of the Eastern Han, and also the author of \textit{Fengsu tong} 風俗通, or the \textit{Comprehensive
Meaning of Customs}.
conflict with Liang Ji after witnessing the latter’s murder of Emperor Zhi 質 (r. A.D. 146), had spent more than ten years in the Three Adjuncts areas learning the Five Classics, apocryphal texts, and divination. His experience of travel and dedication to learning made him famous in the capital. He thus received recommendations for Filial and Uncorrupted and for appointment as Clerk in the Ministry of Works (Sikong Yuan 司空掾).\textsuperscript{114}

Fan Ying 樊英 (fl. A.D. 107–143), one of the scholars whom Li Gu recommended to Emperor Shun (r. A.D. 126–144), had a similar experience. He went to the Three Adjuncts area to study, and mastered the Jing tradition of the \textit{Changes} and apocryphal texts, as well as several kinds of divination.\textsuperscript{115} Afterwards, he went to Mount Hu 壺, a place close to his hometown, Luyang 魯陽 of Nanyang 南陽 Commandery (present Nanyang, Henan province), to teach apocrypha. His school became popular and attracted attention from local and central officials. At the beginning of Emperor An’s reign (A.D. 107–125), Fan Ying was appointed Erudite.\textsuperscript{116} His students include Chen Shi 陳寔 (A.D. 104–187), a leader of the early partisan movement, and Fan Ran 范冉 (A.D. 112–185), who later became a student of Ma Rong, an “old script tradition” scholar (Chart 11, page 222).\textsuperscript{117}

\textit{The Spread of Old Script Texts}

The culture of traveling for study also shaped the circulation of the old script texts. In the early years of the Eastern Han dynasty, scholars who possessed knowledge of the old script texts of the classics were usually Liu Xin’s followers. Those were few other transmission lines. For example, Du Lin 杜林 (–A.D. 47) came from a family with an abundance of books.\textsuperscript{118} He began to teach the old script

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Hou Han shu}, 63:2073 and Xie Cheng 謝承, \textit{Hou Han shu}, preserved in Li Xian’s commentary in \textit{Hou Han shu}, 63: 2073.
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Hou han shu}, 82a: 2721.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Hou Han shu}, 81: 2688-9.
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Hou Han shu}, 27: 934-5.
version of the *Documents* after he had obtained one chapter of this text in Hexi (present western Gansu province).\(^\text{119}\) Chen Yuan 陳元 (fl. A.D. 25) received the Zuo tradition of the *Annals* from his father Chen Qin 陳欽 (ca. 34 B.C.–A.D. 15), who had taught Wang Mang the Zuo tradition.\(^\text{120}\) This transmission line can be traced back to Yin Gengshi 尹更始 (fl. 50 B.C.), from whose son, Yin Xian 尹咸 (fl. 25 B.C.–A.D. 5), Liu Xin learned the Zuo tradition. Ma Rong’s father Ma Yan 馬嚴 also received the teaching of the Zuo tradition from Chen Yuan\(^\text{121}\). (Chart 11).

It is worth paying attention to the attitudes of scholars of Western Han traditions

\(^\text{119}\) Ibid., 625.
\(^\text{120}\) *Hou Han shu*, 36: 1229-30.
toward Chen Yuan. While Chen was famous for being a radical advocate of the Zuo tradition, Li Tong 李通 (?–A.D. 42) and Ouyang Xi 歐陽歙 (?–A.D. 39) both recommended him to work for them. The two recommenders were the current Minister of Works and an expert on apocryphal texts, and current Minister of the Masses (司徒) and expert on the Ouyang tradition of the Documents, respectively. In the Eastern Han bureaucracy, where social connections were directly linked to political positions, it is hard to see in this case political partisanship based on the choice of old script texts.

The transmission of the old script texts was obviously a part of the Eastern Han intellectual culture, but with less autonomy than the Western Han traditions. We do have a few examples showing the transmission from one person to another, such as Zhou Fang 周防 (fl. A.D. 25) receiving the teaching of the old script Documents from Gai Yu 蓋豫 (fl. A.D. 60), the Inspector of Xu province (Xuzhou cishi 徐州刺史) and Yang Lun 楊倫 (fl. A.D. 92–135), who had received the old script Documents from the current Minister of the Masses Ding Hong 丁鴻 (?–A.D. 92). Nevertheless, there were fewer such cases than during the Western Han. More importantly, in the latter case, Ding Hong, as a student of Huan Rong, was mainly a transmitter of the Ouyang tradition of the Documents.

It was even rarer to see an exclusive transmission of the old script texts in local academies. Ma Rong and his academy was probably one of the most famous in the Eastern Han associated with the old script tradition. However, old script texts were mainly just part of the curriculum. We can assume that Ma Rong did not confine himself to the old script texts by looking at the list of books on which he wrote commentaries, including Laozi 老子, the Biographies of Significant Women (列女傳), Master Huainan (Huainanzi 淮南子), and Qu Yuan’s 屈原

122 Hou Han shu, 36: 1228, 1233; 15: 573.
123 Hou Han shu, 36: 1228, and 79b: 2555.
124 Hou Han shu, 79a: 2559-60, 2564.
125 Hou Han shu, 37: 1263.
126 For Eastern Han literati’s increasing interest in Laozi, see Mark Laurent Asselin, A Significant Season: Cai Yong (ca. 133-192) and His Contemporaries (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2010), 110-7.
“Encountering Sorrow” ("Li sao").\textsuperscript{127}

Eastern Han funerary inscriptions document similar phenomena. According to a stele in commemoration of Wu Rong (武榮 (ca. ?– A.D. 167), Wu mastered (治) the Lu tradition of the \textit{Poetry}. The stele mentions that he “transmitted and lectured on” (傳講) the \textit{Classic of Filial Piety}, \textit{Analects}, the \textit{History of Han}, the \textit{Grand Historian’s Records} (史記), the Zuo tradition, and the \textit{Speeches from the States} (國語).\textsuperscript{128} In this respect, the Zuo tradition was simply one of the texts in Wu Rong’s repertoire. This was typical of old script texts in family traditions of the Eastern Han.

More noticeably than with the transmission of Western Han traditions, the spread of old script texts in many cases depended on the study of written documents without the aid of a teacher. Traveling to places like Luoyang and the Three Adjuncts area gave scholars more chances to be exposed to written documents and thus helped old script texts to spread. Luoyang, as the current capital, especially possessed resources such as book markets\textsuperscript{129} and libraries that minor cities or towns lacked. Literati who worked in the imperial library could gain access to documents and commentarial traditions that were otherwise unobtainable.

In the previous section, we examined three father-son pairs of the old script texts. Among them, Jia Kui and Zheng Zhong passed on their study on the Zuo tradition and other old script texts. When Ma Rong had a chance to work at the imperial library, he managed to read Jia and Zheng’s studies of these texts. According to the \textit{History of the Later Han}, Ma had written a commentary on the Zuo tradition, but after reading Jia and Zheng’s study of it, he said: “While Mr. Jia’s work is refined but not comprehensive, Mr. Zheng’s work is comprehensive but not refined. [However, taken

\textsuperscript{127} For example, Zheng Xuan came to Ma Rong’s attention when Ma Rong and his senior students discussed apocryphal texts. \textit{Hou Han shu}, 35: 1207. \textit{Hou Han shu}, 60a: 1972.
\textsuperscript{128} “Wu Rong bei 武榮碑,” in Gao Wen 高文 annotated, \textit{Han Bei jishi 漢碑集釋} (Collected explanations of Han steles) (Kaifeng: Henan Daxue, 1997), 295. The original Classical Chinese sentences and a literal translation are: 君諱榮，字含和。治《魯詩經韋君章句》。闕幘，傳講《孝經》、《論語》、《漢書》、《史記》、《左氏》、《國語》。(Lord Wu’s first name is Rong, style name Hanhe. He worked on Master Wei’s Chapter and Verse on the Lu tradition of the \textit{Poetry}. Before capped, he transmitted and taught the \textit{Classic of Filial Piety}, \textit{Analects}, the \textit{History of Han}, the \textit{Grand Historian’s Records}, the Zuo tradition and the \textit{Speeches of the States}).
\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Hou Han shu}, 49: 1629.
together] they are refined and comprehensive. What can I add to their work?”

Rather than a commentary, he then wrote the *Explications of the Similarity and Difference between the Three Traditions* (*San zhuan yitong shuo* 三傳異同說) (Chart 11, page 222). Admiration of others’ works was not peculiar to Ma Rong, nor did it happen only at the imperial library. His equally celebrated student Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (A.D. 127–200) once wanted to write a commentary on the *Annals*. However, during a trip, after overhearing Fu Qian’s 服虔 (fl. A.D. 189) idea about his commentary, Zheng Xuan said: “I have desired to make a commentary, but have not finished it yet. I heard what you have just said, which is similar to my commentary. Now I should give all of my commentary to you.” Fu Qian then took it and finished his own work (Chart 11, page 222).

These anecdotes show that an increasing interest in written transmission paralleled the oral transmission. One could receive certain knowledge through writing without the guidance of a teacher. This was hardly new in Han China. When, for instance, Liu Xiang edited texts at the imperial library, no higher scholarly authority was there to supervise and correct his readings. When Wang Chong was wandering around the book market in Luoyang, he could read texts however he wished. However, oral transmission was not as liberal. The teacher might scold a student for misinterpretation, or simply not understanding a text in the way the teacher did. Working with solely textual material thus allowed one to absorb certain knowledge without joining any transmission line.

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130 *Hou Han shu*, 60a: 1953, 1972. The original Classical Chinese sentences and a literal translation are: 賈君精而不博，鄭君博而不精。既精既博，吾何加焉！ (While Mr. Jia is refined but not comprehensive, Mr. Zheng is work is comprehensive but not refined. They are refined and comprehensive [together]. What can I add to their works?)

131 Ibid.


133 The original Classical Chinese sentences and a literal translation are: 吾久欲注，尚未了。聽君向言，多與吾同。今當盡以所注與君。 (I have desired to comment, but have not finished it yet. I heard what you have just said. It is similar to mine. Now I should give all of which I commented to you.) Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標 annotated, Zhu Zhuyu 朱铸禹 ed., “Wenxue” 文學 (Literariness), *Shishuo xinyu hui jiao ji zhu* 世說新語彙校集注 (A collected collation and annotations of *A new account of tales of the world*) (Shanghai: Guji, 2002), 1: 171.

134 *Hou Han shu*, 49: 1629.
Even though these anecdotes often involve studies of the old script classics, it is inaccurate to say that Western Han traditions relied less on written forms, or that their transmitters thought less about writing their new discoveries down. In fact, the Han Empire was built upon written documents. The entire bureaucratic system was heavily based on the transmission of words on bamboo, and, less often, silk and paper. Therefore, everyone was more or less involved in this writing culture at various levels.

Wooden and bamboo slips were cheap but heavy material. Xing Yitian estimates that a 23.13 x 1.18 x 0.34 centimeter slip’s average weight was 7.335, 3.875, 3.538, or 4.21 grams, if the material is respectively branchy tamarisk, pine, diversifolious poplar, or Taiwanese bamboo. Based on excavated examples in Wang Mang’s reign, such slips could fit 35 to 38 characters on one side. That is to say, if one wanted to use these kinds of slips to carry the entire *Grand Historian’s Records*, which contains around 526,500 characters, one would need 13,855 slips, weighing about 48.1 to 55.9 kilograms, depending on the material. These slips would occupy 0.28 cubic meters of space if they are perfectly arranged. However, they would certainly take up much more space in reality, since they were bound as scrolls in the Eastern Han. That is to say, while this number of characters could be carried by a modern paper book 15 x 21 x 4 centimeters (0.0013 cubic meter) from Zhonghua Press 中華書局 in China, the

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135 For the state of oral tradition, manuscript culture and literacy around A.D. 1, see Nylan, *Yang Xiong and the Pleasures of Reading and Classical Learning in China*, 48-61.

136 For the rising of writing culture in the first three hundred years A.D., see Inoue Susumu 井上進, *Chūgoku shuppan bunkashi: shomotsu sekai to chi no fūkei* 中國出版文化史——書物世界と知の風景 (A history of publishing culture: the world of books and the intellectual landscape) (Nagaya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2002), 31-58. For an introduction to manuscript culture from the Warring States period to late Western Han, see Nylan, *Yang Xiong and the Pleasures of Reading and Classical Learning in China*, 32-47. Nylan correctly points out the transition from archives to library, and the crucial role it played in increasing accessibility to manuscripts. Given the limitation of primary sources, modern scholars focus more on how government dealt with administrative texts. Based on their studies, the Han government ran the empire with great reliance on sophisticated treatment of paperwork. For studies of how Han paperwork worked in Han bureaucratic system, see Tomiya Itaru 富谷至, *Bunsha gyōsei no kan teikoku: mokkan chikukan no jidai* 文書行政の漢帝國——木簡竹簡の時代 (Document administration of the Han dynasty: the era of wooden and bamboo slips) (Nagayo: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2010). For where Han edited, filed, and stored documents, see Inoue Wataru 井上亘, “Kandai no shofu: Chūgoku kodai ni okeru jōhōkanri gijutsu” 漢代の書府——中國古代における情報管理技術 (Han dynasty text storages: techniques of information management in ancient China), *Tōyō gakuhō* 87.1 (2005): 1-35. Inoue also shows how the literati culture of editing texts evolved from the administrative background, which is similar to what Nylan argues later. See 27. For a sketch of studies of printing and book culture in imperial China, see Cynthia J. Brokaw, “On the History of the Book in China,” in Cynthia J. Brokaw, and Kai-wing Chow ed., *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3-54.
version on wooden slips takes at least 225 times more space.\(^{137}\) The weight and volume of slip books made them hard to transport when traveling. Therefore, a lighter and less bulky material was needed.

In the Eastern Han dynasty, traveling created social connections over long distances. In order to maintain them, one needed to invest in writing letters.\(^{138}\) The need for lighter writing materials for travel and communication thus accelerated the use of paper, which in turn greatly affected contemporary scholarship.\(^{139}\) Also, skills in writing communicative genres and calligraphy became increasingly valued, and more and more frequently knowledge traveled through their written forms.\(^{140}\)

Travel marked Eastern Han scholars’ social life, and thus had great long-term impact on their intellectual perspectives. What if, after studying with one’s father, one traveled to another place and encountered something completely different from what one had learnt previously? What if this situation happened during one’s

\(^{137}\) The above information is from Xing Yitian, “Handai jiandu de tiji, zhongliang he shiyong: yi Zhong Yan Yuan Shi Yu Suo suo cang Juyan Han jian wei li” 漢代簡牘的體積、重量和使用——以中研院史語所所藏居延漢簡為例 (The volume, weight, and use of Han clips: take Juyan Han clips stored at Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica as examples) in his Di bu ai bao: Handai de jiandu 地不愛寶 —— 漢代的簡牘 (The Earth does not love treasure: bamboo and wooden clips of Han) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2011), 1-50, esp. 2-5, 9-11, 12-4.


\(^{139}\) For a pioneering study of paper’s impact on Eastern Han scholarship, see Shimizu Shigeru 清水茂, “Kami no hatsumei to Gokan no gakufū 紙の發明と後漢の學風 (The invention of paper and scholarly trends of Eastern Han), Tōhōgaku 79 (1990): 1-13. Shimizu specifically points out that the common use of paper made possessing relatively amount of long texts such as the Zuo tradition possible. This change led to a tendency in broader learning and mastering more than one, or even the whole package of the classics. See ibid., 6-8. For information about the technology of paper-making, archeological evidence, and the issue of Cai Lun, see Tsien Tsuen-hsuin, Chemistry and Chemical Technology, vol. 5 of Joseph Needham ed., Science and Civilisation in China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 38-41. With more recent archeological discoveries, closer observation, and experiments, Pan Jixing 潘吉星 provides a more up-to-date survey of Han paper and paper-making. See his Zhongguo zaoshi shi 中國造紙史 (A history of papermaking in China) (Shanghai: Renmin, 2009), 56-66, 112-129.

\(^{140}\) Michael Nylan points out that calligraphy as an art did not emerged from the distinctive features of Chinese writing system, but changes in “high culture’s attitude” in late Eastern Han. See her “Calligraphy: The Sacred Test and Text of Culture,” in Cary Y. Liu et al ed., Character and Context in Chinese Calligraphy (Princeton: Princeton University Art Museum, 1999), 19.
career? Suppose one was a true learner who took knowledge seriously. Would he then insist on the family tradition, or would he reconsider what he had learnt? After reading works such as the *Grand Historian’s Records*, would he finally realize that the classics were not the sum of knowledge? Would he thus reflect that achieving the Great Peace required more than just the classics? In the following sections, we will see a growing tendency toward an exploration of a larger textual universe, and a scholarly inclination beyond the corpus of the classics. At the same time, applying the abstract essentials of the classics to the Han dynasty, rather than imposing the specific details of the ancient Kingly Way increasingly became a topic.

3. Ma Rong and his Friends: a Case Study of Horizontal Relationships

In this section, we will examine Ma Rong and his alliances from the first half of the first century A.D. in order to identify certain intellectual trends of the traveling and writing culture. After Emperor Zhang died, the next emperors of the Eastern Han suffered from premature deaths and short reigns. From Emperor Zhang’s successor Emperor He and (r. A.D. 89–106) to the last emperor, Xian 献 (r. A.D. 190–220), no emperor was enthroned at an age above 15. This meant that they were at the mercy of dominant imperial harem families, eunuchs, or warlords (Table 4, page 190). These political factions greatly compromised the emperor’s authority. They were immoral from the perspective of traditional political thought, in which emperors were the ultimate political authority. The worst events that shook the empire were the...
frequent shifts of power from one imperial harem family to another and from one eunuch group to another due to political conflicts (Table 4, page 190). When a certain group was in power, it tended to further strengthen its power by appointing its own partisans to official posts, and getting rid of enemies’ supporters. The frequent occurrence of this situation greatly interrupted normal recruitment and frustrated people who planned to take regular career paths through learning and travelling.

Eventually, the literati took a moral stance, and showed their discontent in a massive protest in the National Academy. This evolved into bloody political conflicts in A.D. 166 and 168. The incident of A.D. 168 started more than twenty years of proscription of many literati.143

Ma Rong and his companions experienced the first fifty years of this political instability. Their intellectual community included Dong Zhang 竇章 (ca. ?–A.D. 144) from the imperial harem family, Cui Yuan 崔瑗 (A.D. 77–142) from a family of historians, Zhang Heng 南陽 (ca. A.D. 85–163),145 a concubine’s son who was socially marginal in his home town, Linjing 臨涇 of Anding 安定 (Zhenyuan 鎮原, Gansu province, China).146 They probably met each other during their travel to Luoyang and some of their editorial jobs at the Dongguan 東觀, the institute for compiling the national history...
Written words were essential to this group. Letters were an indispensable method obscure in the primary sources. *Hou Han shu*, 23: 821, 52: 1722, and 59: 1940.

For the history and function of the Dongguan library in the Eastern Han dynasty, see Goodman, “Chinese Polymaths, 100-300 AD,” 112-6.

Although they were friends with each, I did not link Dou Xian, Zhang Heng, Cui Yuan, and Wang Fu together in Chart 12, page 238, for the sake of neatness.
to communicate across distances in the Eastern Han. For this group, sending letters was not a chore, but a respected mode of social contact occasionally parallel to personal encounters. For example, after receiving Dou Zhang’s letter, Ma Rong wrote back:

孟陵奴來，賜書。見手跡，歡喜何量，見於面也。
Mengling’s servant came and bestowed your letter. When I saw your handwriting, my pleasure, beyond measurement, showed on my face.

Ma Rong’s letter responded to Dou Zhang’s earlier letter, which contained eight lines of seven characters on two pieces of paper. Since it was Dong Zhang’s servant who delivered this letter, Dou Zhang and Ma Rong seemed to live within a distance that allowed personal encounters. Whether Dou Zhang’s letter contained fine verses, beautiful calligraphy, or important messages, he did not seem to think that the letter or the message was important enough to be delivered by himself. Ma Rong, similarly, did not consider receiving the letter or sending a message back to Dou Zhang inappropriate. On the contrary, “meeting” Dou’s handwriting was good enough for Ma Rong to be happy. In other words, for both of them letters were normal forms of contact.

As an intellectual group, one of Ma Rong and his friends’ major activities was to discuss knowledge, scholarship, and in many cases, books. This community also carried out such discussions via letters. For example, in a letter to Cui Yuan, Zhang Heng suggested that Cui should make a copy of Yang Xiong’s work:

乃者以朝駕明日披讀《太玄經》。知子雲特極陰陽之數也。以其滿汎故，故時人不務此……《玄》四百歲其興乎。竭已精思。以揆其義。更使人難論陰陽之事。足下累世窮道極微。子孫必命世不絕。且幅寫一通藏之。以侍能

150 A mature epistary system for personal uses in the Eastern Han was related to the large reliance on letters in Han administrative system. See Kōmura Takeyuki, “Kandai bunsho giōsei ni okeru shoshin no ichizuke,” 1-33.
151 Dou Zhang’s style name.
152 The letter, originally from Ma Rong ji 馬融集 (A collection of Ma Rong) under the name “Yu Dou Boxiang shu 與竇伯向書” (A letter to Dou Zhang) is preserved in Li Xian’s commentary in Hou Han shu, 23: 821.
153 This is described in Ma Rong’s letter in ibid.
154 “Ming” is probably a wrong character for “mei 毎.”
Previously during my morning carriage trip every day, I perused the *Classic of Supreme Mystery*. I realized that Yang Xiong [knew] yin-yang exhaustively. Because [this book] is so comprehensive, people nowadays do not devote themselves to it... Will the *Supreme Mystery* not become popular in four hundred years? [I] exhausted my mind to penetrate its meaning. [Because of its subtlety,] it increases people’s difficulty in discussing matters of yin-yang. Your family has comprehensively known the Way and its subtlety for generations. Your descendants will command the world without end. [You might] write a copy of it and store it to wait for one who is able [to fully understand it].

As an enthusiastic recommendation for Yang Xiong’s *Classic of Supreme Mystery*,

Zhang Heng’s letter tells us something about Eastern Han literati life. During travel, one read a famous scholar’s work. One found certain parts of the work related to one’s interest and focus. Impressed by the work, one wrote a letter to recommend it to a friend, and suggested the latter should have a copy made for his permanent collection too. All of this sounds similar to modern scholars’ lives, although in the Han it involved vastly more trouble. They suggest a rather mature manuscript culture amongst literati in the first century A.D. China.

If gift-giving is ubiquitous in building and maintaining social relationships in any society, then the contents of the gifts tell us more about what is valued in certain relationships and societies. In a letter to establish relations with Ge Gong 葛龔 (fl. A.D. 89–113), an appreciated memorial writer, Cui Yuan noted his gift:

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156 For Zhang Heng’s scholarly interest, see the next sections.


157 This assumption is from the use of word 贞, a gift one gentleman gave to the another during visiting. See Fan Ye’s use of this word and Li Xian’s commentary in *Hou Han shu*, 52: 1732. Another example comes from an anecdote of Tai Tong 臺佟 (fl. A.D. 76–84) in *Hou Han shu*, 83: 2770.

160 *Hou Han shu*, 80a: 2617.
Now I send one thousand coins for books as a gift, I also give you *Xuzi* in ten scrolls. I am poor so that cannot afford silk [for the *Xuzi*], but only paper.

The short letter tells us much about book culture. We not only see a book market in which people invested money, but we also see peoples’ use of paper as a relatively accessible material in this market. This means that well-off literati could own and circulate texts in a form much more portable than that of bamboo or wooden slips. This new material made texts a more manageable gift between literati. Texts, both their material form and content, became one of the major sacred objects that bonded and defined Eastern Han literati, and Ma Rong’s intellectual community in particular.

**Ma Rong & His Family: A Versatile Tradition**

Ma Rong 馬融 (A.D. 79–166) came from a great family in Fufeng 扶風, one of the Three Adjunct areas (Sanfu 三輔) in modern Shaanxi. His grandfather’s younger brother Ma Yuan 馬援 (14 B.C.–A.D. 49) was an accomplished general and Emperor Ming’s father-in-law. Ma Rong’s father, Ma Yan 馬巖 (17–98 A.D.), was the Grand Court Architect (*jiangzuo dajiàng* 將作大匠). Ma Yan learned the Zuo tradition under Chen Yuan 陳元 (fl. A.D. 25), and was also well-informed about miscellaneous writings (*baijia qunyan* 百家群言) under Yang Taibo’s 楊太伯 (ca. first century A.D.) instruction (Chart 12, page 230). Later on, with one of the

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162 This assumption is also based on that in many cases paper was used for letters in the Eastern Han. Paper nevertheless was probably still expensive compared to wooden and bamboo slips, since after all the book was a gift.

163 For a comprehensive evaluation of Ma Rong’s life, his family background, and scholarship, see Ikeda Shūzō 池田秀三, “Ba Yū shiron” 馬融私論 (Private opinions on Ma Rong), *Tōhō gakuhō* 52 (1980): 243-84.

164 Cheng Nanzhou, *Dong Han shidai zhi* 《東漢時代志》 (Beijing: Zhongguo wenhua chubanshe, 1988), 197.


166 Hou Han Shu, 60a: 1953. *Jiao* 家 is an extremely perplexing word in the field of Early China. For generations of debates on this word and relevant issues, see so far the most comprehensive review, Li Rui 李銳, “Liujia, jiuliu yu baijia: Xifang Hanxue jie xiangguan yanjiu shuping” 六家, 九流與百家——西方漢學界相關研究述評 (The six jia, Nine liu and Hundred jia: a review on relevant scholarship in Western Sinology), *Zhongguo xueshu* 30 (2011): 371-413. For a study that reflects nowadays’ Western scholars’ consensus on this issue, see Kidder Smith, “Sima
authors of the *History of Han*, Ban Gu, he edited a historical document about Emperor Guangwu’s reign, *Comments on Records of the Jianwu Reign* (*Jianwu zhuji* 建武注記). Ma Rong’s brother Ma Xu (A.D. 70–141) was also a broad reader who mastered the *Poetry, Documents*, and *Nine Chapters on the Arithmetic Art* (*Jiu zhang suanshu* 九章算術).

Ma Rong’s educational background reflected his family’s broad perspective. He studied with the famous recluse Zhi Xun 摯恂, and was well-versed in various texts. His perspective was further broadened when, around A.D. 107, Empress Dowager Deng 鄧太后 (A.D. 81–121) sent him to the Dongguan library to edit the classics, commentarial traditions, and other texts. His wide-ranging commentarial works also reflect his broad interests. Earlier in this chapter, we have already noted that Ma Rong undertook the substantial project of writing a commentary on the Zuo tradition. In addition to this, he also wrote commentaries on all of the other classics, namely the Mao tradition of the *Poetry*, the Fei tradition of the *Changes*, the *Documents*, the *Records of Rites*, *Rites and Etiquettes*, the *Rites of Zhou*, *Analects*, and the *Classic of Filial Piety*. It seems that Ma Rong intended to cover the whole corpus of the classics. However, as we have seen (page 223), his textual world was wider still. It is unclear whether Ma Rong thought such texts as the *Laozi* as

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167 Fan Ye, “Ma Yuan liezhuang (The Biography of Ma Yuan), *Hou Han shu*, 24: 859. *Jianwu zhuji* was later incorporated into the *Dongguan Han ji* 東觀漢記 (Dongguan records of Han). For the process of incorporation and information about the *Dongguan Han ji*, see Hans Bielenstein and Michael Loewe, “*Tung kuan Han chi* 東觀漢記,” in Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts*, 471-2 and Goodman, “Chinese Polymaths, 100-300 AD,” 116-22.

168 As the source says: “bo guan qun ji 博觀群籍 ([He] broadly read numerous texts).” *Hou Han shu*, 24: 862.

169 *Jiu zhang suanshu*, in Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts*, 16-23. According to the received version, the text provides arithmetic problems and answers framed in daily activities, such as agricultural field mensuration, harvests, salaries, and taxes. Ma Xu’s contemporary Zheng Zhong was also interested in the text, and explicated it. See ibid., 16-8.

170 The original Classical Chinese phrase is “bo tong jingji 博通經籍 ([He] broadly read many texts).” *Hou Han shu*, 24: 862.

171 For an introduction to the *Jiu zhang suanshu*, see Christopher Cullen, “*Chiu chang suan shu* 九章算術,” in Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts*, 16-23. According to the received version, the text provides arithmetic problems and answers framed in daily activities, such as agricultural field mensuration, harvests, salaries, and taxes. Ma Xu’s contemporary Zheng Zhong was also interested in the text, and explicated it. See ibid., 16-8.

172 Ikeda Shūzō points out that Ma Rong had the tendency to systematize the classics. See his “Ba Yū shiron,” 274.
significant as the classics, but he certainly considered their content valuable and deserving of explication. While scholars at the end of the Western Han such as Yang Xiong narrowed their perspective to the Five Classics in search of the ancient sage kings’ legacy, Ma Rong and his contemporaries expanded their scope to explore a wide range beyond the classics.

Cui Yuan and His Family Tradition: From Transmitter to Author

Cui Yuan was from a great family in Anping, Zhuo Commandery (present Zhuozhou, Hebei province). His great grandfather Cui Zhuan (fl. A.D. 9–55), an expert in the Changes, was Governor of Jianxin (Jianxin dayin 建新大尹) under Wang Mang’s interregnum. Yuán’s father, Cui Yin (fl. A.D. 92), travelled to the National Academy, and was well-versed in the Changes, Poetry, Annals, philological works, and various kinds of thought. Instead of devoting his life to

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174 Ma Rong did take Deng Zhi’s 鄧騭 (fl. A.D. 121) job offer in order to save his own life, and claimed that his choice went along with Laozi and Zhuangzi’s teaching. Hou Han shu, 60a: 1954. Nevertheless, besides, there is not extant allusion to Ma Rong’s attitude toward these texts. However, we can get better understanding of some of them by at least examining how his contemporaries viewed them. For example, Gao You 高誘 (fl. A.D. 205), a disciple of Ma Rong’s student Lu Zhi, continued his teacher’s commentary of Huainanzi. In the preface to it, he mentioned that previous worthy men and erudite scholars used this work to “test,” or yan 驗 the classics and their commentaries. See “Xu mu 敘目,” He Ning ed., Huainanzi jishi, 6. For “Li sao,” in his preface to Chuci zhangju 楚辭章句 (Verses and sentences on the Chu verses), Wang Yi 王逸 (ca. A.D. 89–158) argues that the general idea of “Li sao” is based on the Five Classics, and that is why it is so magnificent. 夫《離騷》之文,依托五經以立義焉

175 For the Cui family’s literature tradition, see Wu Guimei 吳桂美, Haozu shehui de wenxue zheguang: Dong Han jiazu wenxue shengtai toushi 豪族社會的文學折光——東漢家族文學生態透視 (The refraction of literature in the society of great families: An exploration of Eastern Han families’ ecological system of literature) (Haerbin: Heilongjiang renmin, 2008), 125-171.

176 Hou Han shu, 52: 1703-4.

177 The original Classical Chinese for the last two parts is “gujin xungu baijia zhi yan” 古今訓詁百家之言, literally meaning “[works of] explanations of words from ancient and contemporary and words of hundred
transmitting the classics, Cui Yin was most famous in Luoyang for his literary talent. Even Emperor Zhang was greatly impressed by his “Hymn of Four Journeys” (Si xun song 四巡頌), a work praising the greatness of the Han, and wanted to give him an official title. Cui Yin did not leave any commentaries, but only literary works, including poetry, hymns, rhapsodies, and inscriptions.

Cui Yuan was a keen learner who received all of his father’s teachings. When he was eighteen years old (A.D. 94), he went to Luoyang and became one of Jia Kui’s favorite students. He stayed there for a while and learned mathematical astronomy, astrology, and the Jing tradition of the Changes. His eagerness to learn never flagged. Even in jail, he learnt the Rites from a janitor. Like his father, Cui Yuan’s works concentrated more on discovering the contemporary world than on classical commentary. For example, as a celebrated calligrapher using cursive “draft script” (cao shu 草書), Cui Yuan’s work “The Shaping of Draft Script (“Caoshu shi 草書執””) promoted this rising fashion as part of Eastern Han literati culture. In the work, he mentions:

書契之興，始自頑皇。寫彼鳥跡，以定文章。爰暨末葉，典籍彌繁；時之多僻，政之多權。官事荒蕪，剿其墨翰。惟多佐隸，舊字是刪。草書之法，蓋

families.” See Hou Han shu, 52: 1708.

178 He was as reputable as famous writers like Ban Gu and Fu Yi 傅毅 (ca. ?– A.D. 90). See Hou Han shu, 52: 1708.

179 By “four,” it means “four directions.” See Li Xian’s commentary on this word in Hou Han shu, 52: 1719. For the fragments of this work, see Yan Kejun 嚴可均 ed., Quan Hou Han wen 全後漢文 (A comprehensive collection of the Eastern Han prose), quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (A comprehensive collection of great antiquity, the Three Dynasties, Qin, Han, the Three Kingdoms, and Six Dynasties prose) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1958), 44: 713-4.

180 Hou Han shu, 52: 1718.

181 Ibid., 1162. For all the received literary works of Cui Yin, see Yan Kejun ed., Quan Hou Han wen, 44: 711-6. Wu Guimei provides lists of the Cui family members’ received works, in which we can clearly see the disappearance of their commentarial tradition. See Wu, Haozu shehu de wenxue zheguang, 135-6.

182 Hou Han shu, 52: 1722.

183 “Zhi 执” is cognate to “shi 势,” indicating the shape of characters coming out of this writing style. The title as “Cao shu shi” instead of “Cao shu zhi,” is listed in Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al, “We Guan zhuan” 衛瓘傳 (The biography of Wei Guan), Jin shu 晉書 (A history of Jin) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974), 36: 1066.

184 Hou Han shu, 64: 2122-3. For the “Grass Writing” as a fashion in calligraphy and literati culture, see other examples from Emperor Ming’s time, such as Hou Han shu, 14: 557; 80b: 2652, and 65: 2144. For an introduction to cao shu, Chinese calligraphy as a type of art, and its relation to manuscript and printing culture in imperial China, see Frederick W. Mote, et al, Calligraphy and the East Asian Book, Howard L. Goodman ed., (Boston and Shaftesbury: Shambhala, 1989), 35-95. For the Grass writing style in Han administrative documents as part of the development of calligraphy, see Tomiya, Bunsha gyōsei no kan teikoku, 141-71. Bai Qianqi particularly points out that calligraphy was under circulation via letters in the Eastern Han. See his “Chinese Letters: Private Words Made Public,” in Robert E. Harrist and Wen C. Fong eds., The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliot Collection (Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999), 381.
The rise of writing started with Sovereign Jie [Cang Jie 倉頡]. He drew traces of birds to decide the pattern of words. Later, writings became more and more intricate. The era was rich in wrongdoing, and governance was full of cunning. Official affairs were neglected, and [thus] inks and brushes were disused. [Then] clerical style became common, and old characters fell out of use. It would seem that draft script was a further simplification. It suits the times and conveys the gist [of what people write], and it is useful in emergencies. It concentrates and saves effort. It saves time and energy. Since the trend is toward simplicity, why must one [strive for] the ancient standard?

In this passage, the evolution of calligraphy was in line with that of classics as mentioned by Liu Xin: a sage king’s invention, its deterioration and loss, and then attempts in the present to revive it. Nevertheless, Cui Yuan does not lament the loss of the ancient tradition, nor does he condemn anybody responsible for the deterioration. He does not want to resume the ancient way. On the contrary, he celebrates this change, and moves on to the draft script, as a contemporary style.

Cui Yuan was good at writing admonitions (zhēn 箴), a genre devoted to rectifying the Han bureaucratic system. From Commandery Grand Administrator (jun taishou 郡太守) to Colonel-Director of Retainers (sili Xiaowei 司隸校尉), and from Master of Writing to Captain of the Northern Army at the Capital (beijun zhonghou 北軍中候), he wrote down what these positions ought to be, and how they evolved from the ancient sage kings’ time. However, he was more interested in how officials could learn from history, especially from the outrageous Qin, than in overthrowing the current system and installing one from the Golden Age. For him, the Han should have picked up where the Qin left off, rather than reviving the usages that Qin ended (and that in fact had been discarded long before).

Indeed, Cui showed his works to his contemporaries, privately and publicly. He was also famed for writing inscriptions (ming 銘), which was a literary genre not only written down, but also inscribed on objects for exhibition. These inscriptions

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185 Jin shu, 36: 1066.
187 See Cui Yuan’s other admonitions and particularly the frequent references to the Qin dynasty in Yan Kejun ed., Quan Hou Han wen, 45: 717-8.
188 Hou Han shu, 52: 1724.
contained mottos, praise, admonitions, and best wishes. Cui wrote inscriptions for canes, hairpins, pillows, and other people’s vessels and lockets. Most importantly, together with his calligraphy, Cui interacted with other literati through his written words. If a master-disciple relationship requires an intimate and private transmission of knowledge, then writing inscriptions created another relationship among the author, owner, and audience. Inscriptions served a more horizontal, instant, and open social networking than steles, the texts for which Cui also wrote. Michael Nylan mentions how the Han government invested in the display culture to consolidate their rule. Here we see literati’s appropriation of this culture.

Zhang Heng: “I am Ashamed of Not Knowing Even a Single Thing”

Zhang Heng was even more versatile than Cui Yuan. He was a productive writer, famous poet, and a panegyrist of the Han dynasty. More than that, his scholarship represented a broad spectrum from book learning to designing a seismoscope to predict earthquakes and astronomical armillary spheres. Like many of his contemporaries, Zhang Heng travelled to the Three Adjunct areas, and then continued his studies in Luoyang. He also went to study at the National Academy. Afterwards,
he was well-informed in the Five Classics. Zhang Heng was particularly good at mathematical astronomy, astrology, and cosmology. Because of his expertise, Emperor An appointed him as a Gentleman of the Palace. Later he was promoted to Grand Historian (taishi ling 太史令).

From about A.D. 107, the Empress Dowager Deng summoned the Supervisor of the Receptionists (yezhe puye 諫者僕射) Liu Zhen 劉珍 (?–A.D. 126), Editor (jiaoshu lang 校書郎) Liu Taotu 劉騊駼 (?–126 A.D.), Ma Rong, and many other Erudites to edit the classics, commentarial traditions, and various kinds of thought at the Dongguan library. In A.D. 120, she asked Liu Zhen and Liu Taotu to lead the project of writing the Records of Han as well as drafting Han ceremonies and etiquette. In A.D. 126, Zhang was about to join Liu Zhen and Liu Taotu’s project. However, this did not happen because the latter two soon died. Around A.D. 132, Zhang Heng asked for appointment to the Dongguan library to continue his editorial work on the library’s abundant collections. He then compiled a list of discrepancies between Sima Qian and Ban Gu’s historical works and other texts, and suggested solutions.

Behind these diverse accomplishments was Zhang Heng’s general perspective about knowledge, as represented in his “Response to Critiques” (Ying jian 應閒):

公旦道行，故制典禮以尹天下，懼教誨之不從，有人不理。仲尼不遇，故論六經以俟來辟，恥一物之不知，有事之無範。

The Duke of Zhou’s way was practiced, so that he designed rites and protocols to

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194 Hou Han shu, 59: 1897.
195 Supervisor of the Internuncios is a position to assist at imperial ceremonies and sending messages. See Bielenstein, The Bureaucracy of Han Times, 26.
196 Hou Han shu, 80a: 2617.
197 Hou Han shu, 59: 1940; 80a: 2617. “Zhang Heng liezhuan 張衡列傳 (The biography of Zhang Heng) puts the project of composing the Records of Han around 107 to A.D. 113, while “Wenyuan liezhuan” 文苑列傳 (Biographies of the literary) places it at A.D. 120. I follow the latter record, since the former also mentions that Liu Zhen and Liu Taotu soon died then, but other biographies mention Liu Zhen after A.D. 113. See, for example, Hou Han shu, 78: 2513. Also, it seems like that between the two projects that Empress Dowager Deng initiated, in A.D. 117, Emperor An also initiated a project of editing the classics and official commentarial traditions, and chose an eunuch Cai Lun 蔡倫 (A.D. 61–121) to supervise this project.
198 For Zhang Heng’s excitement to work at Dongguan again, see his letter to Tejin, “Yu Tejin shu” 與特近書 (A letter to Tejin), in Yan Kejun ed., Quan Hou Han wen, 54: 773. For what Penglai 蓬萊 means in that letter, see how Zhang’s contemporaries referred to Dongguan in Hou Han shu, 23: 821-2.
199 Ibid., 1285.
govern All-under-Heaven. He was afraid that his teachings would not be followed, and people would fail to be cultivated. Confucius was not recognized, so he explicited the Six Classics to later generations. He was ashamed if there was even a single thing he did not know, and if there were affairs without standards.

In explaining why he resigned from his position as Grand Historian and then took it back five years later, Zhang points out that the former sages made great efforts to elucidate the way by using the rites or the classics. In the project of the Six Classics in particular, Zhang Heng believed that Confucius was pursuing two things: the completeness of knowledge and the various kinds of standards in the world. By using the words “shi 事” (affairs) and “wu 物” (things), Zhang referred to the whole world as concerns of history. In other words, for Zhang Heng, Confucius’ project was to understand everything that took place in the world and set up standards for them in words. Unlike Liu Xin, in Zhang’s mind, Confucius’ project of the Six Classics was more a project of understanding and regulating the whole world than painstakingly continuing the Kingly Way of the golden age. Zhang Heng explained that he was returning to the position of Grand Historian because otherwise ancient texts, and thus people’s understanding of the world, were in jeopardy.201

Zhang Heng lived in the midst of the culture in which traveling to seek master-disciple relationships gave birth to more horizontal relationships between classmates, colleagues, friends, disputers, and even mortal enemies. Accordingly, more often than ever before, the audience of a text came to include distant and unknown readers in addition to disciples, civil servants, scribes, and editors in this writing culture. They were invited into this culture through letters, prefaces,202 inscriptions, epigraphs, and other communicative genres.203 As for what it took to be

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201 Hou Han shu, 59: 1898, 1908.
202 This transition was particular observable in the change of prefaces to texts. See Kogachi Ryuichi 古勝隆一, “Gokan Gi Shin chûshaku sho no jobun” 後漢魏晉注釋書の序文 (Prefaces to Han, Wei and Jin commentaries on books), Tôyôshi kenkyû 73 (2002): 1-48. Kogachi specifically points out that the emergence of prefaces as a genre in the Eastern Han is due to the increasing circulation of books outside transmission lines, which distinguishes them from Western Han writers like Liu Xiang’s prefaces as editorial notes. Eastern Han authors of prefaces adopt the tone as addressing to their friends instead of to students. See ibid., 29, 32, 43.
203 David Pattinson points out that letters in the Han dynasty were so much as exchange of intimate information between two individuals than part of public life, since letters were expected to be circulated. See David Pattinson, “Privacy and Letters Writing in Han and Six Dynasties China,” in Bonnie S. McDougall and Anders Hansson eds., Chinese Concepts of Privacy (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 97, 113,118.
an author or a transmitter, Zhang Heng expressed his stance in a letter to Cui Yuan which discussed Yang Xiong’s *Supreme Mystery*:

非特傳記之屬，心實與五經擬。漢家得[天下]二百歲[之書也。復二百歲，殆將]卒乎？所以作興者之數，其道必顯一代。常然之符也。《玄》四百歲其興乎！

[The *Supreme Mystery*] does not particularly belong to the genre of commentary [on the classics]; its essence is to imitate the Five Classics. [The *Mystery*] is a text of the Han dynasty, which has held All-under-Heaven for two hundred years. Is it going to end in another two hundred years? As for the regular pattern of its authors, their way will be manifest for an era. This is always the case. Isn’t the *Supreme Mystery* going to rise in the four-hundredth-year [of the Han dynasty]?

In this rather twisted comment, Zhang Heng divides the Han dynasty into two two-hundred-year periods, with the beginning of the Western Han dynasty to Yang Xiong’s composition of the work as the first two hundred years. Zhang predicts the fall of the Eastern Han dynasty after a span of two hundred years, and believes that only then Yang Xiong’s will receive widespread recognition. In addition to reconstructing the Five Classics to illuminate the Way, Zhang Heng pointed out another way for the literati to transmit the Way: composing their own works that could carry the spirit of the classics and become prominent in later generations. In other words, the continuation of ancient sages’ projects did not necessarily lie in the preservation of the classics; new writings could carry it too.

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204 Yang Xiong, *Tai xuan ji zhu*, 230. I collated it with another version from Fan Ye, “Zhang Heng liezhuan,” *Hou Han shu*, 59: 1897-8: 吾觀《太玄》，方知子雲妙極道數，乃與五經相擬，非徒傳記之屬，使人難論陰陽之事，漢家得天下二百歲之書也。復二百歲，殆將終乎？所以作興者之數，必顯一世，常然之符也。漢四百歲，《玄》其興矣。(When I read the *Supreme Mystery*, I realized that Ziyun was ingenuous in the Way, and the text assembled the Five Classics instead of just being their commentary. [The text] makes people difficult in talking about the issues of yin-yang. It is the book of the Han dynasty obtaining the All-under-Heaven. Isn’t [the Han dynasty] going to end in another two hundred years? Fame in later generations is the destiny of authors. This is a constant sign. The *Supreme Mystery* will arise when Han is four hundred years old.). I put the parts that are missing in the *Tai Xuan ji zhu* in the brackets.

205 The version in *Hou Han shu* is “zuo zhe”作者 instead of “zuo xing zhe”作興者. Here it indicates authors. See *Hou Han shu*, 59: 1897.

206 The logic behind this is not obvious to me. Zhang Heng’s theory seems to me an allusion to Confucius and his *Annals*. From the beginning of the Spring and Autumn period (722 B.C.) in the *Annals* to Confucius’ death (479 B.C.), there were 243 years. His work *Annals* became popular in the Han dynasty, which is 206 B.C., 273 years later. If this is true, Zhang Heng read the numbers rather roughly.

207 Michael Nylan insightfully points out that Yang Xiong’s *Mystery* was a further step from writing commentaries on the *Changes*. See her *The Canon of Supreme Mystery by Yang Hsiung: A Translation with Commentary of the T’ai Hsüan Ching* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 8. Gong Kechang points out Zhang Heng’s use doctrines in the classics to compose and judge rhapsodies. Gong sees this as an obstacle for the
More explicitly than many of his contemporaries, Zhang Heng specified what he considered the essence in the classical corpus. In this respect, he reached a certain degree of abstraction in his understanding of the classics. This tendency towards abstraction was largely due to the spread of knowledge about the classics, as well as the increasing connections between literati, in the entire Han Empire. As Durkheim argued, the development of abstraction is due to an appeal to maintain unification across diverseness. 208 Randall Collins further elaborates: “[t]he mind of a ‘sophisticated’ intellectual, heir to a historically complex network of oppositions and changes in level, internalizes an invisible community of diverse viewpoints, unified by looking on them from a yet more encompassing standpoint.” 209 In the Eastern Han, the traveling culture led to the increased circulation of texts. Scholars were thus more frequently faced with expanding, often contradictory knowledge. Besides constant debates, another path was to raise the level of abstraction to unify diversity. In the next chapter, we will see how Zheng Xuan managed to navigate the thicket of the classical texts and their commentarial traditions to extract the principles of the classics for the new rulers to form their own sets of rules.

Concluding Remarks

From Emperor Ming’s enthronement in A.D. 58 to the establishment of the Hongdu Gate school in A.D. 178, the gradual intellectual changes among literati became more and more observable. At the beginning of the time span, Emperor Ming thought of himself in the image of Confucius as a transmitter of the classics. For him, the literati were his disciples, meant to carry out this project of transmission. Emperor Ling, at its end, engaged in literary works, calligraphy, and other arts. In the middle of independence of literature. See Gong Kechang, Han fu yanjiu, 236-7. To me, this is exactly Zhang Heng’s project of carrying the spirit of the classics in contemporary writing, which eventually led to the “the self-consciousness of literature,” or wenxue zijue 文學自覺 as discussed in ibid., 335-50. 208 Collins, The Sociology of Philosophies, 790. 209 Ibid.
the period, the traveling culture brought literati closer and closer together. This culture spread the classics and other writings, and hence led to a broader perspective. Closer bonds increased the need for communication, which made people increasingly value literary works. More often than before, scholars addressed a known or unknown audience who were not their students, but people who understood them. They wrote not to teach, but to tell.

This change in turn affected the study of the classics. Amongst the Huan, Yang, Yuan, and Kong families, which transmitted the classics for generations, fewer and fewer descendants still chose to transmit the classics as their major occupation. After A.D. 150, people like Huan Bin 桓彬 (A.D. 133–78), Yang Xiu 楊修 (A.D. 175–219), and Kong Rong 孔融 (A.D. 153–208) became great writers instead.210 Yuan Shao 袁紹 (?–202 A.D.) and Yuan Shu—whether they were classically trained is unknown—planned to use the former subordinates and students whom their family had accumulated for generations in their rebellion (Chart 7, page 203). Leaders in the proscription of partisans such as Li Ying 李膺, Guo Tai 郭太, and Chen Shi 陳寔 enjoyed great popularity in the National Academy, not so much because of extraordinary expertise in the classics as because of their skill in making alliances (Chart 12, page 230). The majority of their followers appeared as “friends” (xiang you shan 相友善) rather than their students.211 The quality they valued when making friends was skill in discussion (tanlun 談論).212 Some Academy students probably no longer considered knowledge about the classics fashionable.213

Given this change, were there still advocates of the classics? If so, how would they deal with such changes? Was the Great Peace that generations of literati sought
to be found in the classics, or was it somewhere else entirely? In the next chapter, we will see how Zheng Xuan, He Xiu, and the *Scripture of the Great Peace* dealt with the decline of the classics and perpetuated their search for the Great Peace.
On many occasions, people’s discontent with politics arises from the comparison between a normative ideal and hard, cold reality. This is particularly obvious in the second half of the second century A.D.¹ Beginning in 159, the Han dynasty’s political situation deteriorated sharply. Emperor Huan, who should have enjoyed unlimited power, now needed his eunuchs to outweigh the dominant figure in the court, Liang Ji 梁冀 (?–A.D. 159), who came from the Liang consort family. After a coup that year during which Liang was imprisoned, eunuchs such as Tang Heng 唐衡, Dan Chao 單超, Zuo Guan 左悺, and Xu Huang 徐璜 obtained great power as their reward for their service and loyalty.² Using their status as imperial favorites, they cut themselves a slice of what the great families enjoyed: they sent their affiliates to Han officialdom, occupied lands, and dominated their local society.³ This was one of the several such instances since A.D. 89.⁴

When eunuchs inserted their allies into the already crowded bureaucracy, this source of great families’ status shrank. The alternatives were making alliances with eunuchs or with harem families. Neither of these approaches was new,⁵ but frequent power shifts now made such alliances risky. The dominant figure today might become a prisoner tomorrow, and his family and their allies would be executed. While the bloody power struggle at court repelled many literati, others sought to solve this problem. The literati culture of the second century embodied their discontent and their will to implement reform not only in the capital but in local society.

From A.D. 163 to 166, leading literati like Yang Bing 楊秉 (92–165) and Li

¹ In Ted Robert Gurr’s words, the discontent is from “a perceived discrepancy between men’s value expectations and their value capabilities.” See his Why Men Rebel, 13. For the discontent in the form of literary works, see Mark Laurent Asselin, A Significant Season: Cai Yong (ca. 133-192) and His Contemporaries (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2010), 54-107.
³ Rafe de Crespigny, “Political Protest in Imperial China,” 8.
⁵ As de Crespigny mentions, many officials made alliances with eunuchs and imperial harem families such as the Liang without necessarily stigmatized. See Rafe de Crespigny, “Political Protest in Imperial China: The Great Proscription of Later Han,” 4, 13.
Ying 李膺 (A.D. 110–69) carried out anti-eunuch initiatives. In A.D. 167, however, Li and others were arrested. This conflict paused in the mid-year. This is partially because Dou Wu 窦武 (?–A.D. 168), the father of the empress, managed to save Li. In addition due to the complex nature of relationships at court (described above), the conflict halted because many of Li’s followers were affiliated with eunuchs. In order to preserve their own positions and their affiliates, the eunuchs agreed to an amnesty. When Li, Dou, and others came back to their official positions, it seemed to many literati that the right people were finally in the court, and the Han had a chance to achieve the Great Peace. However, the conflict resumed when Dou Wu and his fellows hatched a radical plan to massacre the eunuchs, who, of course, were greatly displeased. On October 25th A.D. 168, eunuchs brought the frontier general Zhang Huan’s 張奐 (A.D. 104–181) troops to face Chen Fan, Dou Wu, and their followers. Eventually Chen Fan died fighting, and Dou Wu committed suicide. The eunuchs banished Chen and Dou’s followers and even the followers’ affiliates. This exile, known as the Great Proscription, lasted fifteen years until A.D. 184, when the group Yellow Turbans (Huangjin 黃巾) rebelled. After this, when leaders of some of the great families came back to the capital, they no longer competed to be the emperor’s favorites, but rather attempted to control the throne directly.

Many Han literati fully retreated from this political turmoil to become recluses, while others enthusiastically engaged in political affairs. Some strove to support the Han dynasty; some began to contemplate what should replace it. However, the majority of them suffered from this turmoil. At this moment, the intellectual diversity of these scholars became more apparent. Previous Western scholarship on the intellectual history of the Eastern Han dynasty usually focuses on how ideas from texts like Han feizi or Zhuangzi became popular again and began to overshadow the study of the classics. Given the tendency towards broad learning that we saw in the

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7 De Crespigny points out that the proscription between A.D. 169 to 184 broke literati’s hope for reforms and their belief in the Han dynasty. Rafe de Crespigny, “Political Protest in Imperial China,” 27, 30-4, 35-6.
previous chapter, this is not a surprising finding. In this chapter, however, we will examine how the other end of the intellectual spectrum, classicism, was related to this increased interest in texts other than the Five Classics. We will investigate two very different scholars, each greatly famous for his classical erudition, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 and He Xiu 何休, and one text, the *Scripture of the Great Peace*, which at first might seem completely unrelated to the classics.

Zheng and He made contributions to classical studies that their contemporaries found lively and engaging, because their aim was to establish the Great Peace. The *Scripture of the Great Peace* seems irrelevant to classicism, or even opposed to it. It has primarily been treated as one of the earliest medieval Daoist scriptures, and thus representative of an intellectual rupture. However, in intellectual transitions, departures and oppositions from existing knowledge are common means of intellectual innovation. Instead of treating the *Scripture of the Great Peace* as the beginning of medieval Daoism, I will put it in the context of Han classicism, and demonstrate how both the *Scripture* and Han classicism are products of the intellectual world of the second century A.D.

In what follows, we will ask what was unique about the scholarship of Zheng and He, and compare these characteristics with specific sections of the *Scripture*. We will also see what common ground they shared in the broad learning that was a basic trend in the late Eastern Han. Firstly, we will explore Zheng Xuan’s scholarship. Following his teacher Ma Rong, Zheng made commentaries on four of the Five Classics, which he saw as a unitary corpus derived from heavenly revelations. More than just recapitulating the words of the ancient sages, Zheng, basing himself on the classics, sought a set of principles peculiar to the situation of his own time. Secondly, we will see how He Xiu focused on the Gongyang tradition of the *Annals*. Unlike Zheng, He was devoted to uncovering the hidden message in the *Annals* transmitted by Han Gongyang scholars, which he felt was more important than the other classics.
Thirdly, we will discuss how the *Scripture of the Great Peace* claimed to be superior to the classics. Zheng, He, and the unknown authors of the *Scripture of the Great Peace* understood differently what made the classics important. Their works reflect many issues that were controversial among their contemporaries, such as how to achieve the Great Peace, the need for broad learning or comprehensive knowledge, and what determined the transmission patterns of texts in the first two centuries A.D.

1. Zheng Xuan & his Scholarship

If one opens the Qing dynasty’s official version of the *Thirteen Classics*, one will find that Zheng Xuan’s commentaries take a considerable amount of space: sub-commentary on the Mao commentary of the *Poetry* and commentary on three rites classics: the *Records of Rites*, the *Rites and Etiquette*, and the *Rites of Zhou*. Zheng’s dominant position as a scholar was a fact during his lifetime. In this section, we will explore his life and his scholarship from two interrelated perspectives: how his career fit into the common pattern of intellectuals’ social lives in his time, and in what way his contemporaries considered his scholarship outstanding.

10 Besides studying the content of his commentaries, Qing scholars already started studying Zheng Xuan, and they usually had three foci: the life of Zheng, his various writings including commentaries, treatises, and letters, and his school especially his disciples. For example, Zheng Zhen’s work representatively reflects such a perspective. See his Zheng xue lu (A record of Zheng Xuan’s scholarship), Xuxiu siku quanshu (續修四庫全書) vol. 515 (Shanghai: Guji, 1999), 1-56. Qing scholars were particularly interested in the chronicle of Zheng Xuan’s life. See, for example, Chen Zhan 陳乾, Zheng jun jinian (鄭君紀年) (A chronicle of master Zheng), Sun Xingyan 孫星衍, Zheng Sinong nianpu (鄭司農年譜) (A chronicle of Minister of Agriculture Zheng), and Shen Kepei 沈可培, Zheng Kangcheng nianpu (鄭康成年譜) (A chronicle of Zheng Kangcheng) among others in Guojia Tushuguan ed., Han Wei Jin mingren nianpu (漢魏晉名人年譜), vol 1 (Beijing: Beijing Tushuguan, 2004), 427-462, 463-554, and 555-622, respectively. Modern scholars such as Zhang Shunhui 張舜徽 and Wang Liqi 王利器 followed this tradition. See Zhang Shunhui, Zheng xue cong zhu (鄭學叢著) (Collected works of the study of Zheng) (Jinan: Qi Lu, 1984) and Wang Liqi, Zheng Kangcheng nianpu (鄭康成年譜) (A chronicle of Zheng Kangcheng) (Jinan: Qi Lu, 1983). Modern scholarship also piles up on the textual study of Zheng Xuan’s commentaries, such as John Makeham, "The Earliest Extant Commentary on Lunyu: Lunyu Zheng shi zhu," *T’oung Pao* 83 (1997): 260-99; Yang Tianyu’s Zheng Xuan Sanli zhu yanjiu (鄭玄三禮註研究) (Studies on Zheng Xuan’s commentaries of the three Rituals) (Tianjin: Renmin, 2007). However, few scholars pay major attention to Zheng Xuan’s larger agenda in general or his close relationship to apocryphal texts. Two scholarly works made tremendous contributions to these two areas respectively: Mashima Junichi 間嶋潤一, Jō Gen to Shurai: Shū no taihei kokka no kōshō (鄭玄と「周礼」: 周の太平國家の構想) (Tōkyō: Meiji Shoin, 2010) and Lü Kai 呂凱, Zheng Xuan zhi chenwei xue (鄭玄之讖緯學) (Zheng Xuan’s study of apocrypha) (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1982).
Zheng’s experience of travel

Zheng was a native of Gaomi 高密 county, Beihai 北海 commandery (modern Shandong province). He came from a family powerful enough to make him a Village Bailiff (xiang qiangfu 鄉嗇夫) in his hometown when he was young. However, Zheng was more interested in learning than becoming an official. At a young age, he gave up his official career and went to the National Academy to study. Like many of his contemporaries, he studied with multiple teachers. Diwu Yuanxian 第五元先 (fl. A.D. 150) taught Zheng Xuan the Jing tradition of the Changes, the Gongyang tradition of the Annals, the Triple Concordance Calendar (Santong li 三統曆), and Nine Chapters on the Arithmetic Art. Zhang Gongzu 張恭祖 (fl. A.D. 150) taught him the Rites of Zhou, the Records of Rites, the Zuo tradition of the Annals, the Han tradition of the Poetry, and the old script Documents. This reading list contains most of the Five Classics, and the commentarial traditions include both the Western Han ones (that on the Gongyang tradition) and the relatively newly developed ones (those on the Zuo tradition and the old script Documents). After studying with these two teachers, Zheng went west to Fufeng (modern Baoji, Shaanxi Province) to study with Ma Rong, for he thought that nobody in the east could teach him any more. Zheng was not only ambitious, but his taste was eclectic and he sought broad learning, not specialization.

Like his teacher Ma Rong, Zheng touched on most of the classics and made commentaries on the Changes, the Documents, the Mao tradition of the Poetry, the three rites classics, Analects and the Classic of Filial Piety. This list includes most of what his contemporaries considered the classic corpus. The only classic he omitted was the Annals. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Zheng Xuan thought his commentary of the Zuo tradition was similar to Fu Qian’s, so he gave his notes away

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11 At the time such positions tended to be the property of families. Hou Han shu, 35: 1207. For more information about Zheng Xuan’s family background, see Li Qian’s commentary in ibid., 1207, which quotes from Zheng Xuan bie zhuang 鄭玄別傳 (An unofficial biography of Zheng Xuan).
12 Hou Han shu, 35: 1207.
13 Ibid.
14 This list is the Five Classics plus the Analects and often but not always, the Classic of Filial Piety. See, for example, Hans shu, 30: 1703-19, and the commentary in Hou Han shu, 60b: 1990.
to Fu. In seeking to understand the whole corpus of the classics, Zheng Xuan did not deviate from his teacher’s path.

After studying with Ma, Zheng moved to Donglai 東萊 commandery (around modern Yantai 煙台 and Weihai 威海 area, Shandong province, China) to teach, while farming to support himself. Thereafter, Zheng Xuan experienced two major disturbances in his life which drove him further away from Han officialdom: the Great Proscription of 168, and the rebellion of the Yellow Turbans. Included in the proscription, Zheng Xuan was forced to live a hermit’s life until 184. His encounter with the Yellow Turbans in A.D. 196 made him more pessimistic about the future. In a letter to his son, he asserted that he was not suited to be an official, and would rather focus on the words of the sage kings. Although high officials such as Kong Rong or warlords as Yuan Shao recognized him as a great scholar, Zheng always avoided official obligations. In A.D. 200, Yuan Shao forced Zheng Xuan to come to Guandu 官渡 (modern Zhongmou 中牟, Hebei province, China) to prepare for a battle with Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220). This time Zheng Xuan could not decline; he died on his way. Zheng Xuan’s experience was not odd for people who lived in the second half of the second century A.D. Facing political turmoil, retreating from struggles was the choice of many intellectuals who nevertheless got embroiled in the complicated political battles.

In the previous chapter, we have seen that polymathic scholarship became fashionable after the second century A.D. In this respect, Zheng’s scholarship went along with this trend. But he became a predominant scholar in his own time, because his own contemporaries esteemed him. Then one occasion for a scholar to be recognized was during a banquet held by local political leaders:

時大將軍袁紹總兵冀州，遣使要玄，大會賓客，玄最後至，乃延升上坐。身長八尺，飲酒一斛，秀眉明目，容儀溫偉。紹客多豪俊，並有才說，見玄儒

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16 *Hou Han shu*, 35: 1209-10.
者，未以通人許之，競設異端，百家互起。玄依方辯對，咸出問表，皆得所未聞，莫不嗟服。^{19}

At that time, the Grand General Yuan Shao gathered his troops in Yi commandery and sent an envoy to invite Zheng Xuan. When Yuan Shao was hosting a large gathering of guests, Zheng Xuan arrived last, but was asked to take the seat of honor. Zheng was 1.8 m [nearly 6 feet] tall, and could drink a hu [20 liters] of wine.^{20} He had handsome eyebrows and bright eyes. His gestures and manners were mild and outstanding. Among Yuan’s guests, there were many other talented people who were excellent speakers. They saw Zheng as a [typical] ru, and did not yet acknowledge him as a polymath. They vied to suggest topics, and initiated [ideas] of the Hundred Families (baijia) [in order to test Zheng]. Zheng replied and argued accordingly. [His answers] all went beyond the purport of the questions, and [his questioners] learned things they had not heard before. None failed to admit his superiority.

Several issues are involved in the other guests’ recognition of Zheng Xuan’s scholarship. First is the ru/tongren dichotomy. If we accept a remark by Wang Chong in Doctrines Evaluated, or Lun heng 論衡, approximately a hundred years earlier, ru had the negative connotation of a narrow focus on the Five Classics.^{21} As we have seen in the previous chapter, what came into fashion in Wang’s time, A.D. 100, was a broad range of knowledge that included many ancient texts that were excluded in the state’s classics. The word baijia (literally, “hundred lineages”) does not indicate discrete philosophical schools—as many modern scholars redefine jia—but transmitted texts that had in common attribution to a single ancient author. In other words, at the banquet, the guests challenged him with texts beyond the Five Classics. As the result, they “learned things they had not heard before,” and Zheng went beyond the questions they put: he was even more erudite than they. He was not only a scholar of the classics, but a paragon of 2nd-century polymathy.

Secondly, the occasion was essential. A local warlord, Yuan Shao, a member of the prominent Yuan family, held a banquet during a military campaign. It thus provided an occasion to exhibit literati prestige. This gave Zheng a chance to show his

^{19} Hou Han shu, 35: 2111.
^{20} This seems to be an exaggeration of Zheng Xuan’s drinking capacity.
^{21} See Wang Chong, for example, “Xie duan 謝短 (Explaining shortcomings),” and “Bie tong 別通 (Distinguishing the comprehensiveness),” Huang Hui 黃暉 ed., Lun heng jiaoshi 論衡校釋 [Collations and explanations of Doctrines Evaluated] (Beijing Zhonghua, 1990), 12: 554-78, and 13: 590-605.
ability in front of Yuan’s circle of scholars. Such literati circles built around warlords were not unusual. The patronage of Yuan, the Cao family, and Liu Bei of Shu was a major means of support for literati, especially as the Han dynasty fell apart. In this way, the circulation of ideas and thoughts took place in the courts of these local warlords, some of whom were members of the greatest families in the Eastern Han.

The other context of Zheng’s popularity was the well-developed epistolary and writing culture. During the Great Proscription, the debate between Zheng Xuan and He Xiu (A.D. 129–182), a scholar of the Gongyang tradition, put both of them on the intellectual map. He Xiu wrote “Gongyang Protected [its Doctrine] like Mozi Protecting [Forts]” (“Gongyang moshou 公羊墨守”), “The Mortal Sickness of Zuo Tradition” (“Zuo shi Gaohuang 左氏膏肓”), and “Guliang as a Cripple” (“Guliang feiji 魚梁廢疾”) to assert the superiority of the Gongyang tradition. In response, Zheng Xuan wrote “Unclenching Mo’s Protection” (“Fa Mo shou 發墨守”), “Curing the ‘mortal illness’ with acupuncture” (“Zhen Gaohuang 鍼膏肓”), and “Helping ‘the Cripple’ Walk” (“Qi feiji 起廢疾”). Although at the end, He was convinced, their debates made their scholarship extremely prominent, especially at the capital, and earned both of them great fame:22

When Zheng Xuan raised his lance and attacked them (He Xiu’s assertions), people who wanted to become their students ignored distance and [carried] stored food, traveling to meet them like small streams flowing toward the sea. [People] in the capital called Zheng the “spirit of the classics” and He “the sea of learning.”

The debates that won them this adulation did not take place during physical encounters, but in written form. How the texts were transmitted between them is unclear. Their written debate was not private, and they did not keep their writings to themselves. The impact of their exchanges actually created a form for decentralized

22 Hou Han shu, 35: 1207-8.
scholarly competition. Compared to the Western Han dynasty, when debates primarily took place in the court,\(^24\) in the late Eastern Han the number of reports about literati exchanging their ideas in writing, whether agreeing or disagreeing, significantly increased.

As Collins has mentioned, the most dominant intellectuals are members of chains of known teachers and students, in a circle of “significant contemporary intellectuals.”\(^25\) Zheng Xuan’s life accords with this generalization. His teachers either taught at the National Academy or were well-known scholars such as Ma Rong. His friends and patrons included Kong Rong, an eminent scholar from the offspring of Confucius, and the warlord Yuan Shao, both of whom had considerable political influence. While historical documents such as the *History of the Later Han* describe Zheng Xuan as a hermit who strove to avoid political struggles, his scholarly activities, such as debates with He Xiu, being Yuan Shao’s guest, or his encounter with Fu Qian, all show his active engagement in intellectual circles of his time.

*Zheng Xuan’s Construction of the Great Peace*

Indeed, the people around Zheng Xuan gave him many opportunities to become a significant intellectual. In a scholarly community, the importance of one’s scholarship also depends on how it engages with topics and issues that members considered crucial. In Zheng’s case, were his studies of the classics unique or original enough to distinguish him from his many contemporaries? In the last section, we have seen how his broad learning made him stand out among classicists. In this section, we will discuss the issues in his scholarship that his contemporaries prized. In order to extract his general understanding of the classics from his inevitably miscellaneous commentaries, we will first examine his “Discussion of the Six Arts,” or “Liuyi lun” 六藝論, where he discussed the origin and functions of the classics. Then we will turn to his construction of the rites to see its relationship with the Great Peace. In his

\(^{24}\) See the section “Liu Xin’s Approach to the Original Classics” from page 99 to 106.

understanding of the Great Peace, we will explore his attempt to capture the essence of the classics.

As a scholar rooted in the classics, it is not surprising that commentaries on the classics made up the main body of Zheng’s scholarship; that was normal in his time. How, then, did he think the classics were essential? In his “Discussion of the Six Arts,” he states:26

六藝者，《圖》所生也。27
The Six Arts are what the Chart bore.

The tu here is short for Hetu 河圖, or the Chart of the Yellow River mentioned in the Changes. What is the Chart? Zheng Xuan continues:

《河圖》、《洛書》，皆天神言語，所以教告王者也。28
The Chart of the Yellow River and the Writing of the Luo River are the words of the heavenly spirits, their way and by which to teach and tell the one who is ruling.

We have already seen in chapter 3 that, according to apocryphal texts, the Chart and Writing are messages from Heaven. Zheng agrees, and goes on to assert that the classics are derived from them. In Zheng Xuan’s opinion, this teaching was not meant for ordinary people, but for their rulers.

Zheng Xuan proceeds to discuss when the heavenly teaching appeared in the human world:

太平嘉瑞，《圖》、《書》之出，必龜龍銜負焉。黃帝、堯、舜、周公，是其

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26 Zheng Xuan’s “Liuyi lun” 六藝論 is a lost text. Scholars such as Yan Kejun compiled the fragments of this text together in his Quan Hou Han wen, 84: 925-928. For a comprehensive textual study of different scholars’ compilation of “Liuyi lun,” see Zeng Shengyi 曾聖益, “Zheng Xuan ‘Liuyi lun’ shi zhong jijiao” 鄭玄《六藝論》十種輯斠 (Compilations and evaluation of ten editions of Zheng Xuan’s “Discussions of the Six Arts”), Guoli Zhongyang Tushuguan Taiwan Fenguang guan kan 國立中央圖書館臺灣分館館刊 4.1 (1997): 70-93. For an elaborate commentary on the fragments of the “Liuyi lun,” see Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞, Liuyi lun” shuzheng 六藝論疏證 (Explications of “Discussion of the Six Arts”), Xuxiu Siku quanshu 續四庫全書, vol. 171 (Shanghai: Guji, 1995–2002). This work was first published in 1899.


28 Zheng Xuan, “Liuyi lun,” in Yan Kejun ed., Quan Hou Han wen, 84: 927.
As for the auspicious omens of the Great Peace, the appearance of the *Chart* and *Writing*, they were always offered by a turtle in its mouth or a dragon on its back. They appeared in their regular forms to the Yellow Emperor, Yao, Shun, and the Duke of Zhou.

Zheng identifies the *Chart* and the *Writing* as messages from Heaven, but also as signs that the Great Peace had been attained during the rule of the ancient sage kings. The classics as derivations of the *Chart* and *Writing* are also linked to the Great Peace.

Zheng Xuan was not arguing that Heaven told the ancient sages how to achieve the Great Peace. Rather, the sages’ good rule that accorded with Heaven brought the Great Peace, and the *Chart* and *Writing*. The revelations appeared more than once in history; the sage kings received them whenever they achieved perfect governance. In another words, Zheng saw an initial separation of the human world from Heaven. Heaven started to interact with the human world after the sagely undertakings of the ancient kings. Heaven’s supervision was constant, for it revealed its teachings every time the sage kings’ governance was beneficent enough to bring the Great Peace. As we have seen, the classics—the Six Arts—also contained the teachings of Heaven. The heavenly nature of the classics was not a new idea, for, as mentioned in chapter 3, the apocryphal texts claimed to reveal the message from Heaven hidden in the classics.

Zheng did not say that the classics were automatically generated by the *Chart* and *Writing*, but through the hand of human sages. For example, in talking about the Hymn section of the *Poetry*, he mentions:

周公致太平，制礼作樂，而有頌聲興焉。30  
The Duke of Zhou brought the Great Peace [to the world], established the rites, and composed music, and then the sound of Hymns rose from them.

The rites that the Duke designed became the classic the *Rites of Zhou*. Zheng Xuan

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29 Ibid., 927.
30 Zheng Xuan, “Shi pu Xu” 詩譜序 (The genealogy of the *Poetry*), in Yan Kejun ed., *Quan Hou Han wen*, 84: 9276
also believed that Confucius compiled the *Documents* based on ancient texts, and wrote the *Annals* for future rulers. Zheng was not as vexed as Liu Xin was about the loss of the Kingly Way through the breakdown in the transmission of the classics. During his time, that was no longer the main concern of the literati. For him, the direct and active role Heaven took in revealing its teaching made the loss less a problem. If the motivation for preserving a complete version of the classics no longer existed, why did he still seek to preserve the commentarial traditions and different versions of the classics? This was due to more than the general tendency of broad learning in the second century. In what follows, we will see the way in which Zheng Xuan defended the classics, and brought the legacy of Liu Xin to another level.

Rites and the Undertakings of the Ancient Sage Kings

So far we have seen that some of Zheng Xuan’s arguments are similar to those in apocryphal texts. In the compiled fragments of the “Discussion of the Six Arts,” he quotes apocryphal texts twice. Indeed, apocryphal texts played an important role in Zheng’s scholarship. Nevertheless, this does not mean he believed that revelations and prophecies were the most important part in the classics or they could solve all the problems that concerned literati:

左氏善於禮, 公羊善於讖, 穰梁善於經。

The Zuo tradition is best for rites, the Gongyang tradition is best for prophecies, and the Guliang tradition is best for [explicating] the classics.

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32 Ibid., 927.
By “rites,” Zheng Xuan means the rites of the Zhou dynasty. In this passage, Zheng Xuan assigns different characteristics to the three traditions, and he claims that the Gongyang tradition is best for prophecies. However, in the debate with He Xiu, Zheng Xuan supported the Zuo tradition. In this respect, he seems to choose the “rites” over “prophecies.” If Zheng Xuan did value the rites over prophecies, then the next question is what significance the rites of Zhou have in his mind. In his preface to the Rites of Zhou, Zheng Xuan argues that King Wen and King Wu used the rites to rule the Zhou kingdom after the Duke of Zhou organized them, and that eventually made the omens of peace appear. For Zheng Xuan, the contents of the Rites of Zhou are the means by which the Duke of Zhou achieved the Great Peace.34

In chapter 2, we saw cases in which intellectuals tried to apply the putatively Zhou rites or administrative systems such as the Well-field system to restore the Kingly Way and bring the Great Peace to the Han dynasty. Zheng Xuan too considered the Zhou rites essential. He also explained in detail the rites in the Records of Rites, Rites and Etiquette, and the Rites of Zhou. In contrast with his Western Han predecessors, Zheng’s commentaries indicate that his agenda is not to reconstruct the whole package of the Zhou rites in order to apply them to the Han dynasty, but to make them a reference point for the contemporary world to find rites of its own.

In the chapter “Ritual as Vessels,” or “Li qi” 禮器, from the Records of Rites, Zheng Xuan expresses his understanding of the making of rites in history. In commenting on the sentence “The Rites of the Three Dynasties are the same. People all follow them. Sometimes there is plain [used in rites] and sometimes there is dark [used in rites]. [This is because] the Xia dynasty created the rites that Yin [i.e., Shang]

34 Jia Gongyan 賈公彥, “Xu Zhouli fei xing” 序周禮廢興 (Introduction to the abandonment and prosperity of the Rites of Zhou), Zhouli zhushu, Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing zhushi, 636. For Zheng Xuan’s understanding of how the Duke of Zhou brought the Great Peace, see Mashima Junich’ い 間嶋潤一’s very elaborate study, Jō Gen to Shurai: Shū no taihei kokka no kōsō 郑玄と「周礼」: 周の太平國家の構想 (Zheng Xuan and the Rites of Zhou: the imagination of the state of the Great Peace of Zhou) (Tōkyō: Meiji Shoin, 2010). While Mashima mainly focuses on how the text Rites of Zhou is related to the Great Peace brought by Duke of Zhou, based on Zheng Xuan’s commentaries, I am more interested in finding out how Zheng Xuan thought about rites in general and how he applied them to the contemporary world.

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followed” 三代之禮，一也，民共由之。或素或青。夏造殷因，

Zheng Xuan wrote:

言所尚雖異，禮則相因耳。孔子曰：“殷因於夏禮，所損益可知也。周因於殷禮，所損益可知也。”

It means that while what people value is different [from dynasty to dynasty], rites [of various time] are based on each other. Confucius said: “Yin was based on the rites of Xia. What was added and deleted is knowable. Zhou was based on the rites of Yin. What was added and deleted is knowable.”

The sentences from “Ritual as Vessels,” do not say clearly whether the rites of Xia and Shang were identical. By quoting from the Analects, Zheng implies the rites of each dynasty are not identical. In this respect, Zheng Xuan did not understand “same” to mean “the same set of rites,” but “same rationales” or “same essence.”

For Zheng Xuan, additions and deletions in the adaptation of rites are not arbitrary. In fact, when ancient kings created or adopted rites, righteousness and accordance with Heaven were the essential criteria. Only by following them can the ruler bring the Great Peace to the world. In this respect, ancient and contemporary rites were not very different. In commenting on the sentence: “Therefore, there are three hundred Zhou rites, and three thousand contemporary rites. Their aim is the same” 故經禮三百、曲禮三千。其致一也, he marks:

致之言至也。一謂誠也。經禮，謂周禮也。《周禮》六篇。其官有三百六十。曲，猶事也。事禮，謂今禮也。Žhi is a way to say “arrival.” Another explanation [for Žhi] is “sincerity.” Jing li means the Zhou rites. The Rites of Zhou contains six chapters, and there are three

35 “Li qi” 禮器 (Ritual as Vessels), Liji zhushu, j. 23, Ruan Yuan ed., Shansan jing zhushu, 1435.
36 Ibid.
37 Confucius’ saying in Zheng Xuan’s commentary is originally from “Wei zheng” 為政, Lunyu, Zhu Xi annotated, Shishu zhangu jizhu, Lunyu jizhu, 1: 59.
38 See page 1440 and also Zheng’s commentary of “Li yun” 禮運 (The movement of rites), Liji zhushu, j. 22, Ruan Yuan ed., Shansan jing zhushu, 1426.
39 Ibid., j. 23, Ruan Yuan ed., Shansan jing zhushu, 1435. The “Li yun” 禮運 texts mentions that after following Heaven, auspicious animals such as phoenixes, dragons, and turtles will appear. Zheng Xuan comments: 功成而太平。陰陽氣和而致象物 (The accomplishment is achieved, and then it was the Great Peace. The yin and yang qi are in harmony, so they attract objects alike.) See “Li qi”, Liji zhushu, j. 24, Ruan Yuan ed., Shansan jing zhushu, 1440.
40 “Li qi,” Liji zhushu, j. 23, Ruan Yuan ed., Shansan jing zhushu, 1435.
41 The word cheng here indicates the interior essence of an object. Different from words like 精 jing or zhi 質, which mean “essence,” cheng emphasizes the essence or characteristics inside an object. Therefore, I render it as “interiority” in English.
hundred sixty official positions. *Qu* is similar to “affairs (shi).” *Shi li* means today’s rites.

Although *zhì* 致 in the body text as well as in many other classical Chinese texts means “to bring about,” Zheng Xuan understands it differently. Between his two explanations for the word *zhì*, the former one, “aim,” or more literally “arrival,” emphasizes the results rites can bring. The latter one emphasizes the intrinsic characteristics of the rites. For the first reading, he claims that the Zhou rites and contemporary rites have the same effect. The gloss for his second reading, “sincerity,” indicates that contemporary and ancient rites are of the same nature. He does not prefer one over the other, but sees the ancient and contemporary rites as equal in certain respects.

If the ancient and contemporary rites are virtually the same, one might ask why people cannot just use the latter without adjustments. Zheng Xuan argues that a change in the Mandate of Heaven leads to a change of institutions and standards (*shòu míng gāi zhì dù* 受命改制度). Each ruler of a new dynasty is obligated to have his own rites. Every dynasty could use the ancient *Rites* to design its own. This is not an unprecedented idea for Han scholars. For example, in the conference on the imperially approved understanding of the classics held in the White Tiger Pavilion (Baihu Guan 白虎觀) in the palace in A.D. 79, scholars reached a consensus that new rulers should revise the calendar and dress color based on those of the prior dynasty. Zheng went further, intending that the rites be fundamentally revised.

This does not, however, mean that the new ruler should invent rites arbitrarily; he needs to follow the “fundamental” and the “ancient.” In the “Rites as Vessel,” it says:

是故先王之制禮也必有主也。故可述而多學也。  
Therefore, when the ancient kings set up rites, they had to have what is primary. That makes it possible to transmit and learn them abundantly.

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43 “San zheng” 三正 (The first month of the Three Dynasties), Chen Li ed., *Baihu tong shuzheng*, 8: 360.
Zheng Xuan explains the vague word “primary”:

主謂本與古也…以本與古求之而已。45 “Primary” means the “fundamental” and “ancient.” [By saying “one can explicate and learn it abundantly,” it means] simply that one can seek it through the fundamental and ancient.

By saying “the fundamental,” Zheng Xuan refers to the innate characteristics of human beings. Zheng Xuan further unpacks this point by giving an example: one mourns because the mourning comes from inside him (zhong 中), not from others.46 In other words, Zheng Xuan emphasizes that the proper rites should be in accordance with human nature. “The ancient” indicates the traces of the ancient kings, including the Rites of Zhou and the classics in general.

Zheng Xuan’s argument might seem to resemble Xunzi’s earlier philosophy: the proper rites should go along with human nature, and people should follow ancient kings’ rites, for their rites are properly designed for human nature. However, for Zheng Xuan, the motivation for the change of rites was not to make them better fit with human nature or human society. Rather, the Mandate of Heaven triggered such changes. Moreover, Heaven’s teachings imbue the classics, and Heaven’s interaction with the human world via texts is constant. But Xunzi did not believe that people could penetrate the will of Heaven. In general, as people believed of apocryphal texts, in Zheng’s scholarship, Heaven played a primary role in the formation and continuation of human civilization. Going beyond the apocrypha, Zheng often mentioned the reform of rites to support the legitimacy of a new dynasty.

The intellectual and political context of Zheng Xuan’s time was very different from that of Xunzi. While during Xunzi’s time, no empire existed or was clearly imagined, Zheng clearly understood the ideal of one: a kingdom of the Great Peace approved by Heaven. Xunzi focused on how moral cultivation was crucial for the ruler, and Zheng emphasized the reception of the Mandate of Heaven for a dynasty.

45 Ibid. 46 Ibid.
Since the Warring States period, the classics had become well-accepted texts, and Xunzi was particularly eager to recommend them as a guide to becoming a true gentleman. In the later Western Han dynasty, the prosperity of the classics reached an unprecedented climax as the Han Empire adopted five of them to bring the Great Peace to the world. In the second century A.D., as the Han house declined, intellectuals stopped taking the classics literally. Some of them valued more the spirit that they convey rather than the details of the ancient rules.

Putting these pieces of Zheng Xuan’s comments together gives us a whole picture of his understanding of the classics: of heavenly origin, they were the go-to reference for understanding Heaven and ruling the world. There is a significant difference between Liu Xin, or whoever sought to use the classics as the blueprint to bring the Great Peace, and Zheng. Liu Xin was anxious about the loss of the full, original classics for reviving the Kingly Way. This was less a concern for Zheng Xuan. In his opinion, a new recipient of the Mandate of Heaven needed to have his own set of rites to be in accordance with Heaven. Although he refers to the available classics to design his own, he does not copy them. While the rediscovery of the original corpus of the classics was enough for Liu Xin, Zheng Xuan asked for more than just a comprehensive understanding of them.

What Zheng Xuan looked forward to was an author who captured the essence of the classics. Such an author’s intention would be based on the classics, not imitating their words, but embodying their spirit. When Wang Yi 王逸 (ca. A.D. 89–158) talked about the significance of “Encountering Sorrow” (Li sao 離騷), a lyric written in late 4th century B.C., he stated the reason: “As for ‘Encountering Sorrow,’ it establishes its meaning based on the Five Classics” 夫《離騷》之文，依托五經以立義焉. When Zhang Heng referred to Yang Xiong’s Supreme Mystery in the mid-second century A.D., he saw the essence of the classics in it and believed it as a future classic. This was the kind of authorship Zheng expected.

47 See Wang Yi’s preface to “Li Sao” in Hong Xingzu 洪興祖 annotated, Chuci Buzhu 楚辭補註 (A supplementary commentary of the Chu lyrics), Zhongguo gudian wenxue jinben congshu 中國古典文學基本叢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983), 1: 49.
Zheng’s understanding of rites reflects this intellectual transition. On the one hand, he greatly highlights the function of the classics for understanding Heaven and human history. On the other hand, solely imitating what the classics record is not enough for the contemporary ruler. Only after comprehending the spirit of the classics and applying it to the current rule can one truly bring the Great Peace to the world. His interest in seizing the essence of the classics represents a long-term intellectual development in the middle and late Eastern Han, a time of rapidly expanding intellectual communities with the trend toward abstraction. In Cui Yuan and Zhang Heng’s writing in Chapter 5, we saw a sense emerging that contemporary writing could embody the classics, a dichotomy of old and new, and a search for a form to fit the Han empire. Zheng’s meticulous commentaries reflected these issues. He employed his erudition in the classics to argue that it was still necessary to abide by the classics in this new era. For him, an author could bridge the gap between old and new, just as Confucius once did in composing his Annals, by capturing the constant spirit of the classics.

2. He Xiu and His Return to the Gongyang Tradition

He Xiu’s Family Background and Career

He Xiu, a native of Fan, Rencheng commandery (modern Shandong province, China), came from a high official family. His father He Bao used to be the Chamberlain for the Palace Revenues (shaofu). His father’s rank entitled him to the position of Gentleman of the Interior (lang zhong), a stepping-stone to a responsible post. Like Zheng, he was not fond of taking official

48 Yoshikawa mentions that while advocating the return to the original meaning of the Gongyang tradition, He Xiu is not actually a faithful follower of the original tradition. Influenced by the intellectual trend at the National Academy in the 160’s, He had his innovative reading of the Gongyang tradition, especially his "Three Eras," or sanshi. See Yoshikawa Tadao, "Tōko to gakumon: tokun Ka Kyu no ba'ai" (The proscription of partisanship and scholarship: especially the case of He Xiu), Tōyōshi kenkyū 1976 (35.3): 425-6, 429, 432.

49 For an elaborate biography of He Xiu’s life, see Huang Pumin, He Xiu ping zhuan (A critical biography of He Xiu) (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue, 1998), 1-62.
positions, and resigned using the excuse of illness. This does not mean that He Xiu was isolated from his official contemporaries. Later on, he joined Grand Mentor (taifu 太傅) Chen Fan 陈蕃, a leader of the partisan group. During the Great Proscription, He was banned because of his relationship with Chen. After the proscription, He was promoted to Minister of Education (situ 司徒). He later became Court Gentleman for Consultation (yilang 議郎) and Grand Master of Remonstrance (jianyi dafu 諫議大夫), because he was willing to give upright suggestions.

We do not know much about He’s teachers except for Yang Bi 羊弼, an Erudite with a strong preference for the Gongyang tradition. Despite the obscurity of his teachers, it is clear that He was well educated in the Six Classics, apocryphal texts, and various forms of divination. In addition to the Gongyang tradition, he wrote commentaries on the *Classic of Filial Piety* and the *Analects*. The debates between him and Zheng also won him fame as a scholar of remarkably broad learning. Based on what we have already seen in the cases of Zheng and others, this ambition is not a surprise in the second half of the second century. What is noteworthy is his speech impediment. It must have been hard for him to be impressive in the court of Emperor Wu or at the banquets of the warlords, for eloquence was demanded on these occasions. However, the prosperity of the epistolary culture covered for He Xiu’s speech impediment, and spread his fame as a broad scholar.

The intellectual fashion in the last fifty years of the dynasty encouraged broad learning and more comprehensive knowledge than before. More and more students of the classics immersed themselves in commentarial traditions that were not limited to those of the Western Han. The old script classics increasingly became an indispensable part of classicism. Zheng’s scholarship reflects this tendency. As mentioned in the second chapter, a scholar’s eminence largely depends on how his works engage with his contemporary scholars’ foci and paradigms. From this point of view, Zheng’s dominance was not a surprise.

Can we say the same thing for He? Indeed, the breadth of his learning was

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51 *Han shu*, 88: 3617.
impressive. Nevertheless, how could he convince his contemporaries that his scholarship was more crucial and truer than that of others? Intellectual innovations tend to take place through rearrangement of existing knowledge. If Zheng’s strategy was to synthesize the existing commentarial traditions, He’s was mainly to depart from the tendencies toward synthesis and increasing emphasis on old script texts. Unlike Zheng, He primarily focused on one classic, the *Spring and Autumn Annals,* and one approach to commentary, that of the Gongyang tradition.

*The Significance of the Annals*

He Xiu emphasized the *Annals* in the preface to his commentary of the Gongyang tradition:

昔者孔子有云：“吾志在《春秋》，行在《孝經》。”此二學者，聖人之極致，治世之要務也。52

Previously Confucius said: “My will is in the *Annals,* and my deeds are in the *Classic of Filial Piety.*” The study of these two is the ultimate achievement of the sage and the essential imperative for governing the world.

He Xiu singled out the *Annals* from the rest of the Six Classics corpus as a guide to rulership. Based on Confucius’ words cited from an apocryphal text,53 what makes the *Annals* so essential is the will, or *zhi* 志, that the sage Confucius embodied in it. Unlike Zheng, who discussed the combined legacy of the ancient sage kings, He promoted and concentrated on the classics by Confucius. In chapter 4 (page 163 to 170), we have already seen the significance of Confucius and his *Annals* for the legitimacy of the Han dynasty in the first thirty years of the Eastern Han. He Xiu’s understanding of the *Annals* confirmed this belief.

52 He Xiu, preface to the Gongyang tradition of the Annals, *Chunqiu Gongyang zhushu* 春秋公羊注疏 (Commentaries and sub-commentaries on the Gongyang tradition of the *Annals*), Ruan Yuan ed., *Shansan jing zhushu,* 2190.

53 Confucius’ words in this passage are from Xiaojing *Gouming jue* 孝經鉤命決 (Tallies linked to the mandate in the *Classic of Filial Piety*) and preserved in *Chunqiu Gongyang zhushu* 春秋公羊注疏 (Commentaries and sub-commentaries on the Gongyang tradition of the *Annals*), Ruan Yuan ed., 2190.
He also reacted to the trend of broad learning. In contrast with people like Ma Rong and Zheng Xuan, who commented on most of the Five Classics corpus, He Xiu focused exclusively on the Gongyang tradition of the *Annals*. At the end of his commentary, he remarked that the *Annals* was “that upon which Confucius based his tailoring of the Five Classics” 據以定作五經. 54 He specifically contended that the *Annals* was the source of the other classics. His understanding of the Five Classics and his commentarial practices appeared odd to his contemporaries, who tended to combine more and more versions of and commentarial traditions on them.

He resembles many classicists in the late Western Han, for they specialized in one of the classics by carefully following their teachers’ transmission. But by his time, the tendency towards erudition in all the classics significantly replaced this fashion. He was not ignorant of the new trend. In fact, He Xiu built up his understanding of the *Annals* on a changed relationship among the Five Classics mentioned in the “Seven Epitomes,” and Liu Xin’s words. In the “Seven Epitomes,” the Five Classics and the Classic of Music (later lost) are dependent on each other, while the *Changes* is the origin of the other classics because of its close correlation with Heaven and Earth. 55 For Liu Xin, Confucius preserved the ancient Kingly Way by composing the *Annals* and then tailored the rest of the classics to accord with it. 56 He Xiu believed Confucius’ words in the *Annals* was essential to the integrity of the classics. Instead of the *Changes*, the *Annals* became the foundation of the classics.

**Building a Commentarial World toward the Great Peace**

He Xiu went further than his predecessors to elaborate on how specifically Confucius coded his vision of rulership in the *Annals*. Although claiming to follow Hu Wusheng 胡毋生 (fl. 157–141 B.C.), He created a commentarial world unprecedented in the transmission of the Gongyang tradition. He argued that in

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55 *Han shu*, 30: 1723. See chapter 2, page 93.
56 *Han shu*, 36: 1967.
writing the history of the state of Lu, Confucius divided the chronicle into three periods based on their remoteness: “the transmitted era” (suo chuanwen zhi shi 所傳聞之世) from the rule of Duke Yin 隱公 (722–712 B.C.) to Duke Xi 僖公 (659–627 B.C.), “the heard era” (suo wen zhi shi 所聞之世) from the rule of Duke Wen 文公 (626–609 B.C.) to Duke Xiang 襄公 (572–542 B.C.), and “the seen era” (suo jian zhi shi 所見之世) from the rule of Duke Zhao 昭公 (r. 541–510 B.C.) to Duke Ai 哀公 (r. 494–468 B.C.).

Unlike his predecessors, He believed that beneath the apparent deterioration from one period to the next, Confucius encoded three periods, progressively moving toward the Great Peace. Confucius’ first era was actually a period of chaos, from whence the order was to emerge:

From the transmitted era, Confucius saw that government emerged from chaos. He used his mind in a still unrefined way. Therefore, he included his own state and excluded the other Zhou states. He made detailed records about the inside first, and only then dealt with the outside. He recorded significant [incidents] and omitted minor ones. He wrote down minor evil [deeds] inside [Lu], but not minor evil [deeds] outside. He mentioned [people by their] titles for big states, but [by] abbreviated names for small states. He wrote down departures and meetings inside [his own state], but not outside.

From the heard era, he saw the government of the rising peace. He included all the Zhou states and excluded the barbarians. He wrote down the departures and meetings outside [his own state].

From the seen era, he recognized the government of the Great Peace. Barbarians

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57 He Xiu’s commentary, Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu, j. 1, Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing zhushu, 2200.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
came to court and attained noble ranks. All-under-Heaven, no matter how far or close, he treated as one. He used his mind deeply and elaborately. Therefore he promoted humanity and righteousness.

For He, Confucius’ comments on certain events in the *Annals* chronicle implied his assumption of progressively better and united world. He Xiu argued that Confucius’ focus, in the part from Duke Yin to Duke Xi in the chronicle, was on his mother state, Lu. Confucius’ range of focus increased as the world progressed. When progress eventuated in the Great Peace, the whole world was within Confucius’ perspective. He used an inside/outside (nei 内/ wai 外) dichotomy to generalize Confucius’ writing in the chronicle. Through the progression of periods, previous “outsiders” became “insiders” until the world was united into one.

He’s appropriation of the *Annals* merges historical records and interpretation of the canon. The *Annals* as a historical record of the State of Lu inevitably has less detailed information about the remote past than the near past. As Henderson mentions, the interpreters of canons and scriptures tend to see them with deeper meaning and coherence than others do.61 He Xiu, like many of his predecessors, turned the chronicle, a fragmentary and vague compilation, into a coherent and profound scripture. The author of this scripture, he asserts, is Confucius, and its main point is to record the realization of the Great Peace.

He Xiu’s hermeneutical strategy was to map two opposite narratives on each other: the chronicle and the Gongyang commentary mainly record the chaotic wars, bad behavior of the warlords, their disrespect to the Zhou Kings, and the decline of the moral ethos of Zhou society. Many of He’s predecessors saw the work as a critique of the degeneration of the Spring and Autumn period, implying that Confucius hid a larger blueprint behind his critiques. He took a further step, and specifically depicted that blueprint. Confucius meant it, He believed, to guide society from chaos to the rising peace,62 then to the Great Peace. This dramatically differed

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61 Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary*, 89.
62 Rising Peace, or *shengping* 升平 was used differently by He Xiu’s contemporaries. In his *A Comprehensive Meaning of Customs*, or *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義, for example, Ying Shao uses it interchangeably with the term *taiping* 太平, or the Great Peace. In the narration, Ying Shao first quotes a passage in which *shengping* is
from the blueprint inferred by his contemporaries, which limited sagely rule to the very earliest times.

The Annals' guidance was not for just anyone, but for the destined inheritor of the Zhou kings. Along with his predecessors, He believed that Confucius wrote the Annals specifically for the Han imperial house. He inserted his understanding of the Annals and the history from the death of Confucius to the rise of Han into the episode of the capture of the mystical animal qilin 麒麟 that ends the Annals. The text of the Annals only briefly records the capture:

十有四年，春，西狩獲麟。63
In the Spring of the fourteenth year [of Duke Ai] (481 B.C.), [a man of Lu] captured a qilin during a hunting in the west.

The Gongyang tradition explicates the significance of this incident:

Why is this written down? It is to record its bizarreness. What kind of bizarreness is this? [Qilin] is not a beast from the central states. Then who hunted it? A firewood gatherer did. Why did [the Annals] use [the word] “hunt” (shou 狩) to mention it? It is to amplify it. Why amplify it? It is to amplify it for the sake of the capture of the qilin. Why? Qilin are humane beasts. If there is a kingly ruler, they will come, otherwise they will not. There was someone who reported it [to the Duke of Ai], “there is a river deer with horns.” Confucius said, “For whom did it come? For whom did it come?” He turned his sleeve to mop his face. His tears wet his robe… As for the capture of the qilin during a hunt in the west, Confucius said, “My way has reached its end!”

In the Gongyang tradition’s elaboration, the qilin is crucial. Its humane nature and

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63 Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu, j. 28, Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing zhushu, 2352.
64 Ibid., 2352-3.
link to the kingly ruler suggest that it is an auspicious omen. However, the Gongyang
tradition does not believe that its appearance was a good sign, because at the time the
area once ruled by Zhou lacked a kingly ruler. Its appearance thus is related to a
theme that was not mentioned in the original text of *Annals*, namely Confucius
himself. In the Gongyang’s story, Confucius realizes that the appearance of qilin is a
sign of his own end.\(^{65}\)

He Xiu further points out that the qilin not only is related to the death of
Confucius, but to the rise of the Han dynasty:

夫子素案圖錄，知庶姓劉季當代周。見薪采者獲麟，知為其出，何者？麟者，
木精。薪采者，庶人燃火之意。此赤帝將代周居其位，故麟為薪采者所執。
西狩獲之者，從東方王於西也。東卯西金象也。言獲者，兵戈文也。言漢姓
卯金刀，以兵得天下。\(^{66}\)

Confucius had often referred to the charts, and knew that the Liu family would
replace Zhou. By seeing the firewood gatherer capturing the qilin, how did he
know for whom the qilin came? Qilin is the essence of wood. The “firewood
gatherer” means commoners lighting a fire. This means that the red emperor will
replace Zhou\(^{67}\) and take its position. That is why the qilin was captured by the
firewood gatherer. The reason it was captured during a hunt in the west is that the
kingship moved from the east to the west. It symbolizes “mao 卯” of the east and
“jin 金” of the west. “Capture,” [means] a word about weaponry. This
refers to Liu劉, the surname of the Han [imperial house], made up of “mao 卯,”
“jin 金,” and “dao 刀,” and the fact that they obtained All-under-Heaven by
weaponry.

He Xiu’s explanation of the incident involves wordplays and cosmology common at
the time. Firstly, we spot the theory of the Five Phases. As we have already seen in
chapter 3, the Zhou dynasty represented wood, and the Han dynasty fire (see page
137). In this incident, the qilin represents the wood, and the firewood gatherer, the fire.
According to this interpretation, the incident then symbolizes replacement of the

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\(^{65}\) He Xiu compared qilin as the symbolic creature of the Great Peace, or taiping zhi shou 太平之獸, to the sage
Confucius, thus the capture and final death of the qilin represented Heaven’s sign for the death of Confucius. See
*Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, Ruan Yuan ed., *Shisan jing zhushu*, j. 28, 2353. Li Wai-yee has notes a diverse
historiography behind different narratives of this incident, namely, the Gongyang, Guliang, and Zuo traditions,
and *Shi ji*. See her *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University

\(^{66}\) *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, j. 28, Ruan Yuan ed., *Shisan jing zhushu*, 2353.

\(^{67}\) Zhou represents the virtue of wood according to the Five Phases.
phase of Wood by that of Fire.

In addition to applying the Five Phases, He Xiu further appropriates this incident as a prophecy about the Liu 刘 family as the next ruling family. In chapter 3, we have already seen that people played with the three components, 卯 mao, 金 jin, and 刀 dao, of the character 劉 at the end of the Western Han.68 Following this wordplay, He Xiu firstly points out that certain elements in the incident symbolize these three components. Based on the correspondence between directions and the twelve earthly branches, he associates the branch mao 卯 with the direction east, which is based on the characters for wood (wood as one of the Five Phases corresponds to the east) and of qilin. Then, he points out the link between “metal” (jin 金) and the location of the capture, west, for the direction west corresponds to metal in the Five Phases. Thirdly, he interprets the word “capture” (huo 獲) in the chronicle as a piece of military vocabulary, linking it to “sword” (dao 刀),69 another item of military vocabulary. Therefore, from the chronicle to the Gongyang tradition then to He Xiu’s commentary, a bare mention grows into an unambiguous prophecy about the rise of the Liu family.

He Xiu’s arguments and innovations are deeply rooted in Han dynasty commentarial traditions and intellectual discourse. For example, He defends the early Western Han Gongyang scholar, Hu Wusheng, thereby identifying himself as a reviver of the Gongyang tradition.70 He was reacting to his contemporaries’ promotion of the Zuo commentarial tradition, which had been rising since the late Western Han. Zheng Xuan’s commentarial world was not specific to the Han dynasty, but He believed in the Han rule as the intended recipient of the Mandate of Heaven, even when he was banned from the court.71 His faith in the Han sharply contrasted with many literati’s suspicion that a new dynasty would soon replace the Han.72

68 See page 149.
69 Ibid.
70 He Xiu, preface to the Gongyang tradition of the Annals, Chunqiu Gongyang zhushu 春秋公羊注疏 (Commentaries and sub-commentaries on the Gongyang tradition of the Annals), Shansan jing zhushu, Ruan Yuan ed., 2191.
71 Hou Han shu, 79b: 2583.
72 See the case of our next section’s hero Xiang Kai 襄楷 in the passage from Sima Biao 司馬彪, Jiuzhou chunqiu 九州春秋 cited by Pei Songzhi in Chen Shou, Sanguo zhi, 1: 4.
Therefore, He Xiu’s scholarship largely opposed that of his contemporaries. He Xiu was not simply copying his predecessors’ scholarship. He used innovative strategies to engage with the issues his contemporaries cared about most. Concepts like the rising peace and the Great Peace were well accepted in Eastern Han political discourses. He systemized these concepts using time terminology from the Gongyang tradition (such as “the transmitted era,” “the heard era,” and “the seen era”) to create a coherent historiography. In this optimistic historiography, the world, after a period of turmoil, is heading toward peace. Through the wordplay that was common in prophecies and apocryphal texts, He Xiu identified the Liu family as the savior of humanity.

He tacitly answered the question mentioned in chapter 4: did the Han emperor need to be a sage to achieve the Great Peace? Based on He’s theory, there was no need, for Confucius already packed the essential teaching in the Annals. The Han rulers needed only to follow it, as revealed in the right commentarial tradition of the Annals, to accomplish their goal.

What was innovative about He Xiu was often not so much what he believed as how he proved those beliefs. Like his many predecessors and contemporaries, he believed that the Liu family was now the recipient of the Mandate of Heaven. Although apocryphal texts claim the legitimacy of the Liu family, they do not engage with the texts of the classics. In another words, while claiming to transmit the esoteric teachings in the classics, the apocrypha avoid getting involved in their details. In explaining the capture of the qilin, He Xiu used various means common in prophecies and apocryphal texts in order to prove that the Annals predicted that the Liu family would receive the Mandate of Heaven. To put it in another way, the Eastern Han compilers of prophecies invented apocryphal texts as a middle ground where they

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73 Collins points out this distinctive pattern in intellectual competitions and innovation in The Sociology of Philosophies, 137.
74 E.g., Hou Han shu, 30b: 1056, 1060.
75 Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu, j. 28, Ruan Yuan ed., Shisan jing zhushu, 2353.
76 For more instances of He Xiu following his predecessors’ theories, particularly Dong Zhongshu’s interpretation of calamities, Jing Fang’s theory, and citing from apocryphal texts, see Huang Zhaoji 黃肇基, Handai Gongyang xue zaiyi lilun yanjiu (A study of the theory of calamities in the Gongyang traditions of the Han dynasty) (Taipei: Wenjin, 1998), 189-224, esp. 216-7.
could place certain concerns and claims in order to associate them with the classics. He used his hermeneutic skills to take the next step, proving that these concerns and claims actually existed in the classics.

*He Xiu and Zheng Xuan: more Similar than Different*

Zheng Xuan and He Xiu, seen against the intellectual background of the Eastern Han dynasty, were more similar than different. Firstly, although their preferences for toward certain classics and commentarial traditions were sharply dissimilar, both pictured the classics as a coherent system, and believed that they contained the most significant teachings for human society. Secondly, despite the differing ranges of their commentarial works, both dove into the trend of broad learning, ranging from classical studies, to astronomy and divination. Despite this erudition, they still similarly appeared as classicists in front of their contemporaries. Thirdly, although their attitudes toward the Han imperial house differed, they had the same understanding of the ideal empire: the ultimate goal for the legitimate recipient of the Mandate of Heaven was to achieve the Great Peace. The ancient sage kings had achieved it, and their legacy lay in the classics to await upcoming rulers.

Their career paths, social lives, and scholarship all suggest that Zheng Xuan and He Xiu were products of Eastern Han literati culture. Their innovations were deeply rooted in Han classicism and commentarial traditions. As we have already seen in chapter 5, Eastern Han scholars had gradually moved away from their sole devotion to the classics in the second century A.D. In this respect, can we now find further departures from classicism? In the next section, we will move to Xiang Kai’s 襄楷 presentation of the *Scripture of the Great Peace* to Emperor Huan to explore another side of the intellectual world.
3. The Reemergence of the Scripture of the Great Peace

The Possessors of the Scripture

During the late Eastern Han, the “Great Peace” scripture appeared again, but this time, it survived criticism and became popular. In A.D. 166, Xiang Kai sent a memorial to Emperor Huan about the eunuchs’ outrageous deeds, the lack of an imperial successor, and several inauspicious omens. In order to solve these problems, he recommended the teachings of the *Book of the Great Peace with Blue-Green Headings* (*Taiping qingling shu* 太平清領書), also known as the *Scripture of the Great Peace*. Before Xiang Kai, Gong Chong from Langye (modern Qingdao, Shandong province) had presented the same *Scripture* to Emperor Shun (r. A.D. 125–144), which he claimed he received from his teacher Gan Ji.


77 Hou Han shu, 30b: 1080, 1083.
妖妄不經), and they confiscated it. After inspecting Xiang Kai’s memorial, the Master of Writing announced a series of accusations including “disobeying the purport of the classics” (weibei jingyi 違背經藝), and suggested that the emperor punish him severely. However, Emperor Huan thought that Xiang’s astrological readings were too good to execute him. If this situation were not a departure from what Li Xun’s group had encountered, what happened was. When Emperor Ling (r. A.D. 168–189) succeeded to the throne, he not only accepted Xiang’s text, but also appointed him as an Erudite along with Zheng Xuan and Xun Shuang 荀爽 (A.D. 128–190), another famous classicist. In other words, the court eventually recognized the legitimacy of the Scripture.81

The Book of the Great Peace with Blue-Green Headings also made it into the hands of Zhao Jue 張角 (?–A.D. 184), who led the Yellow Turban (Huangjin 黃巾) rebellion. Nevertheless, the agenda in the emperors’ version of the Scripture of the

79 Hou Han shu, 30b: 1083.
80 For Xun Shuang, and the Xun family as an extremely well known literatus family in late Eastern Han, see Chen Chi-yun (陳啟雲), Hsün Yüeh (A. D. 148–209): The Life and Reflections of an Early Medieval Confucian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 27-9, 66-83.
81 Hou Han shu, 30b: 1085.
82 For an introduction to the Yellow Turban rebellion, see Howard S. Levy, “Yellow Turban Religion and Rebellion at the End of the Han,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 76 (1956): 214-27, and B. J. Mansvelt Beck, “The Fall of Han,” in The Cambridge history of China. Vol. 1, The Ch’in and Han Empires, 325-40. Levy does not stress the difference between various religious groups. The Yellow Turbans, for example, were actually very distinctive from Zhang Lu’s 張龍 religious community in Sichuan. For information on Zhang Lu’s group, which was later labeled as Celestial-Master Daoism, see Howard L. Goodman, “Celestial-Master Taoism and the Founding of the Ts’ao-Wei Dynasty: The Li Fu Document,” Asia Major 7. 1 (1994): 5-33. For the religious background of the Yellow Turban rebellion, see Akizuki Kan’ei 秋月觀暎, “Kōkinnoran no shūkyōsei: Taiheidō tono kanren o chūshin tōshite” (The religious connotation of the rebellions of the Yellow Turbans: focus on the relationship with the teaching of the way of the Great Peace), Tōhōshi kenkyū 15.1 (1956): 43-56. Akizuki insightfully points out the relationship between the rapid growth of the Yellow Turbans with their healing methods and several outbreaks of epidemics in the second half of the second century A. D. China. See ibid., 51-3. For the meaning of “yellow turban” and the Yellow Turbans’ slogans, see Fang Shiming 方詩銘, “Huangjin qiyi xianqu yu wu ji yuanshi Daojiao de guanxi: jian lun ‘Huangjin’ yu ‘Huangshenyue zhang’” —兼論‘黃巾’與‘黃神越章’ (The Pioneer of the Yellow Turban rebellion and its relationship with wu and proto-Daoism with [the term] yellow turban and Huangshenyue zhang), Lishi yanjiu 1993.3: 3-13 and Liu Zhaoru 劉昭瑞, “Lun Huangshen yue zhang: jian tan Huangjin kouhao de yiiji xiangguan wenti” 論‘黃神越章’——兼談黃巾口號的意義及相關問題 (A discussion on Huangshen yue zhang with the meaning of Yellow Turban’s slogan and relevant issues), Lishi yanjiu 1996.1: 125-32. While his study on the terms like yellow turban is helpful here, I am cautious about Fang’s general theory, which assumes that a group of people evolved from wu to a popular religion worshiping the Yellow Emperor in Eastern Han and then to the Yellow Turban religion. I do not see such a specific group in a sociological sense existing through the Eastern Han, but hints of small groups and communities allying or competing with each other. Wang Yucheng’s王育成 study on excavated stamps with huangshen 黃神 inscribed on them and other inscriptions testifies to the existence of multiple religious communities in the Eastern Han. See Wang Yucheng 王育成, “Dong Han tiandi shizhe lei daoren yu Daojiao qiyuan” (The envoy-of-the-heavenly-emperor type of masters of Dao in Eastern Han and the origin of Daoism), Daojia wenhua yanjiu 16 (1999): 181-203, esp. 203. For a more updated introduction to the relevant issues and some of the archeological objects mentioned
Great Peace and that of the Yellow Turbans did not match. In fact, other than Li Shan’s (A.D. 630–689) commentary on relevant passages in the History of the Later Han, no primary source from the time states that the lost Book of Great Peace and the Scripture of the Great Peace later included in the Ming dynasty Daoist Canon (Daozang 道藏) were identical. How these two texts are related to Li Xun’s Scripture of the Great Peace is not mentioned either. Many scholars suspect that the Book might be related to the Scripture of the Great Peace that Li Xun presented at the end of the Western Han and that gradually developed into the received version of the Scripture of the Great Peace extant in the Daoist Canon.

Difficulties in Dating & a Tentative Approach

The majority of modern scholars do not believe that the received version of the Scripture of the Great Peace is identical to any of the Han “Great Peace” texts. No one has persuasively uncovered which passages of the received version were part of the original Eastern Han Scripture. According to Kristofer Schipper’s hypothesis, and Barbara Hendrischke’s elaboration of it, the received version contains materials from various sources from the end of the Eastern Han to the late Six Dynasties (A.D. 220–589). Max Kaltenmark argues that the received version does contain a
considerable number of themes from the Eastern Han version Scripture, but neither he
nor anyone else can specify which they are. 88

Since the dating of the Scripture is notoriously difficult, we need to consider how
to obtain useful information that is not anachronistic. Although the scope of this
dissertation does not allow me to critically examine every passage of the received
Scripture, I will discuss two themes that are datable. The first theme is the Scripture’s
references to the classics and apocryphal texts. I consider the passages that mention
the classics, especially those that compare the classics with the Scripture, to be from
the Eastern Han. This premise is based on the fact that in Celestial Masters’ scriptures
from the Six Dynasties, to the extent that the Ming Daoist Canon reflects those texts,
references to and comparisons with the classics are largely absent. This is rather
different from the situation of the Scripture, in which the classics are regarded as
valuable, although less essential than the Scripture itself. I think in the Eastern Han
dynasty the classics were prestigious enough that claiming the superiority of a text
over the classics was a viable strategy to promote that text. However, during the Six
Dynasties, the classics no longer enjoyed their paramount prestige, and Daoist sects
were already well established. Such comparison was no longer necessary.

When we turn to other Six Dynasties texts like the Master Who Embraces
Simplicity (Baopuzi 抱樸子) (ca. A.D. 307) or the Yan Family Instructions (Yan shi
jiaxun 顏氏家訓) (ca. A.D. 589), we find that they accept the classics as one, but not
the only, important corpus. The author of the former text, Ge Hong 葛洪 (A.D.
284–363), an enthusiast of immortality, believed that both the classics and
immortality scriptures had their merits, which differed. 89 Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (ca.
A.D. 531–591), the author of the latter book, emphasized the importance of reading
for literati families. For Yan, the classics as well as book of various ancient masters all
belonged to their reading lists, and literati should dive into all of them to open their

89 Ge Hong 葛洪, “Ming ben” 明本 (Illuminating the fundamental), in Wang Ming 王明 annotated, Baopuzi
neipian jiaoshi 抱樸子內篇校釋 (Annotations and collations of the Inner Chapters of the Master Who Embraces
Since the classics were not the only worthwhile canon, one could promote the authority of a text by claiming its superiority to the classics, but one need not deny the value of the classics to do so. Similarly, in competitions over authority among various Daoist traditions of the Six Dynasties, one group of followers tended to superpose their own scriptures above rival ones instead of trying to eliminate them. Nevertheless, the Scripture’s merciless attack on the classics, as we will see in the next section, hardly fits into this context.

The second theme is mentioning the “perfected man (zhēnren)” versus the “sage (shēngren).” As we have already seen in chapter 2, Li Xun and his group promoted the perfect man over the sage (page 174), while promotion of the sage was extremely common among Han literati. In the received Scripture, there are fairly frequent references to the perfected man and the sage together, with the perfected man consistently ranked higher than the sage. I consider these passages to have Eastern Han roots, because the comparisons suggest an ongoing competition between the “sage” and “perfected man.” On the one hand, the term “sage” was popular in Eastern Han political discourse. On the other hand, at the end of the Eastern Han, the Cao family, who eventually established the Wei dynasty, sought to install the “perfected man” in their political propaganda. This reflects the popularity of the “perfected man” in their political propaganda.

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90 Yan Zhitui 顏之推, “Mian xue” 勉學 (Encouraging studying), Wang Liqi 王利器 annotated, Yoshi jiaxun jijie 颜氏家训集解 (Compiled annotations of the Yan Family Instructions) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1993), 3: 157, 165.

91 The categorization of Daoist scriptures, the Three Caverns (san dong 三洞), exemplifies this tendency. It includes scriptures from three traditions, namely the Shangqing 上清 (Supreme Purity), Lingao 瞻寳 (Sacred Treasures), and Sanhuang 三皇 (Three Sovereigns) traditions. While the compiler claimed the Shangqing tradition the most supreme one, he considerably valued and included scriptures from other traditions. See Ōfuchi Ninchi 大淵忍爾, “The Formation of the Taoist Canon,” in Welch and Seidel ed., Facets of Taoism, 253-68.

92 See Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫, “Shinjin to kakumei” 真人と革命 (The perfected man and revolution), in his Rikuchō seisshinshū no kenkyū 六朝精神史の研究 (Studies of the Six Dynasties’ intellectual world) (Kyōto: Dōhōsha, 1986), 85-105, esp. 85-9. As Yoshikawa mentions, when Cao Pi 曹丕 was inaugurated as the emperor of the Wei dynasty, his officials still most frequently compared him to a “sage.” However, the occasional mentioning of the term “perfected man” indicates the growing popularity of the term in the political realm. See “Shinjin to kakumei,” 89. For the socio-intellectual context of the Cao family’s acceptance of the “perfected man,” see Jiang Sheng 姜生, “Cao Caoyu yu yuanshi Daojiao” 曹操與原始道教 (Cao Cao and the proto-Daoism), Lishi yanjiu 歷史研究 2011. 1: 22-3. For more information about the “perfected man” in the Cao family’s ascendancy, see Howard L. Goodman, Ts’ao P’i Transcendent: The Political Culture of Dynasty-Founding in China at the End of the Han (Seattle: Scripta Serica, 1998), 37, and 122-44. For the relationship between the Cao family
man” at the end of the Eastern Han. Therefore, it is reasonable to imagine that the author of the Scripture needed to emphasize the superiority of the “perfected man” over the “sage.” Although I am aware that these criteria for identifying Eastern Han passages do not fully exclude later passages, they provide a helpful place to begin.

To be Better than the Classics: Comprehensive and Essential

While previous scholarship is silent on the relationship between the classics and the Scriptures, many scholars have substantially contributed to the understanding of the connections between apocryphal texts and the Scripture. Anna Seidel, for example, studied on how apocryphal texts and Daoist texts share many issues, such as the emphasis on tallies (fu 符) and other revelations like the River Chart, and discussions about the teacher of the emperor and the mediator between the human world and Heaven. Some scholars take similar approaches too far when speculating about the relationship between the texts. Although, as shown in the previous chapters, the two corpora resemble each other, the issues were not exclusive to these two corpora. They were shared by Eastern Han intellectuals. Therefore, it is hard to differentiate “Taoism’s roots in apocrypha” from “Taoism’s roots in the Eastern Han intellectual world.”

94 See Li Yangzheng 李養正, “Taiping jing yu yinyang wuxing shuo, Daojia, ji chenwei zhi guanxi” 《太平經》與陰陽五行說、道家及讖緯之關係 (The Scripture of the Great Peace and its relationship with the theory of the Five Phases, Daoism, and apocrypha), Daojia wenhua yanjiu 15 (1999): 89-106. Xiao Dengfu 蕭登福 makes a more comprehensive study of this topic. See Xiao Dengfu, Chenwei yu Daojiao 譴緯與道教 (Apocrypha and Daoism). Taipei: Wenjin, 2000. I am cautious about the method behind Li and Xiao’s observations. For example, Li and Xiao both claim that there is a relationship between apocryphal texts and the Scripture because both corpora mention the theory of the Five Phases. Since the theory of the Five Phases was still popular for the whole span of imperial China, there is no reason to believe that the Scripture directly adopted the theory from apocryphal texts. I also disagree with Xiao’s statement “some apocryphal texts can even be read as Daoist texts; their influence on Daoism is both direct and obvious (有些讖緯書幾乎直接可以把它當成道教書來看, 對道教的影響, 甚為明顯而直接).” Ibid., 66. Xiang does not say what particular Daoist texts apocryphal texts resemble, and Xiao does not provide evidence to prove that any apocryphal text was written by referring to apocrypha. Among other issues, Yasui Kōzan points out the idea of “revolution,” or kokumei 革命, was shared by apocrypha and rebels at the end of Eastern Han. See his “Dōkyō no seiritsu to shin’i shisō” 道教的成立と讖緯思想 (The establishment of Daoism and the thought of apocrypha), in Akizuki Kan’ei 秋月觀暎 ed., Dōkyō to shūkyō bunka 道教と宗教文化 (Daoism and the religious culture) (Tōkyō: Hirakawa Shuppansha, 1987), 45-54.
I will take a different approach to the topic. Instead of identifying vague similarities as evidence for a relationship between texts, I will trace direct references to the classics and apocryphal texts in the received Scripture. This method will give us a clear picture of how the Scripture understands the classics and apocrypha.

As we have seen from the previous chapters, many intellectuals were convinced that the Han dynasty was facing crises that would eventually lead to the collapse of the dynasty. This is also the case in the Scripture. The text describes the current world as full of problems, and it is aimed to help the current emperor to save humanity and achieve the Great Peace. It attributes the chaos in the human realm to people’s failure to understand the “heart of Heaven” (tian zhi xin 天之心) as well as their excessive and contradictory words:

Therefore, by [drawing on] too many means to impose order on disorder, the government does not obtain Heaven’s heart. Instead, we should return to the root of things. When men speak so much that they lose sight of this, they should instead return to what is essential. If they do that, they can sustain their words and deeds. Therefore, the original text is completed in a single layer of words. With its transmission comes the creation of chapter and verse commentaries. At the next level is an analysis of difficult passages. Difficult passages must be explained in order to prevent men from moving away from truth. The fourth level of words consists of adaptations [of the original text]. At the fifth level, fake texts are produced, and at the sixth level [these fake products] are meant to deceive men. At the seventh level lies the distortion of the original text. At the eighth level, the distance from what has originally been taught becomes bigger and bigger. At the ninth level, the text is in great disorder; at the tenth, it is completely corrupted. Therefore, the classics that have reached this tenth stage are altered; their transmissions are supplanted, and will end in extinction.

The passage points out that the true meaning of texts deteriorates through

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96 Wang Ming 王明 ed., Taiping jing he jiao, 40: 76.
97 Adapted from Henderischke, The Scripture on Great Peace, 181.
transmission. It mentions the term “chapter and verse,” or “zhangju” 章句, which is peculiar to the deep but myopic commentarial traditions of Han classicism. In this context, “chapter and verse” are thought to follow the original meaning of the texts, but it is also the beginning of textual corruption. It further mentions that after ten bouts of transmission, the classics are bound to deviate seriously from their original form.

If the above asserts dissatisfaction with classicism, the following is an open attack on the Han commentarial traditions:

夫學之大害也, 合於外章句者, 日浮淺而致文而妄語也, 入內文合於圖讖者, 實不能深得其結要意, 反誤言也。99
As for the great harm of these studies: the ones that accord with the external, “chapter and verse” [commentaries] lead to day by day to a lack of reality, to ornamentality and ranting; the ones that enter via esoteric [interpretations of] words accord with apocrypha actually cannot preserve the essentials; instead they become erroneous.

In chapter 3, we have already gone through certain themes of apocryphal texts. Although we can use the word “commentary” to characterize both apocryphal texts and passages of “chapter and verse,” the latter is more pertinent to most of the classics than the former. Based on the surviving fragments, apocrypha primarily contain prophecies and legends to reveal the classics’ heavenly nature and the state of the mandate of Heaven. Accordingly, this passage criticizes these two kinds of commentaries according to their natures. Like the critique of “chapter and verse” from the “Seven Epitomes,”100 it assails the style’s empty wordiness. As for apocryphal texts, which appear to be a key of heavenly origin to understanding the classics, the passage accuses them of being so narrow that they fail to grasp the essential principles. The Scripture thus claims to possess a truer understanding of Heaven.

The Scripture further evaluates the relationship among disasters, previous sages, and the texts they wrote:

99 Ibid., 70: 277.
100 See chapter 1, page 93.
Old and new heavenly texts, sagely books, and words by the worthy are quite sufficient, but when put together the trouble is that each excels in only one topic. If you rely on the model [set up by] one school [only], you will not be able to abolish all the disasters that happen in Heaven and on earth, and they will continue to be received and transmitted without end. Later generations suffer from calamity and illness that increase every day. For this reason Heaven pities the virtuous lord and his ongoing reception and transmission [of evil]. It knows that, because of these calamities, later generations are unable to survive on their own. The mistake lies really with the worthy and sage men of former generations. They all excelled in one thing, but there was also much that they misunderstood or neglected. Since Heaven knew that something was missing, it occasionally issued the Yellow River and Luo texts and charts and other spirit writings. These again differed from each other in what they said. The great worthies and sages of different generations each dealt with one specific matter. They again differed from each other in what they said. On some issues, they were not good. Each had their weak and their strong points. Thus it is clear that all of them were unable to fully understand what “all-pervading” means. Thus between Heaven and earth calamities never ceased to occur. They were never brought to a halt, not in former times or in later times, but sometimes they were increasing and sometimes they were not.

According to this passage, the accumulation of disasters is due to former sages’ and worthies’ narrow expertise. Although the words from the ancient to contemporary world, from Heaven to the human realm are enough, the narrow focus of scholarly lineages block them from seeing the “principle of comprehensiveness and ultimacy” (dongji zhi yi 洞極之意). The passage mentions revelations such as the River Chart and Luo Writing, which many Eastern Han scholars considered the origin of the classics and human sages’ textual inventions. However, this passage claims that scholars’ narrow foci make it impossible for them to solve the world’s problems.

In this regard, based on Heaven’s will, human society needs a scripture that is
comprehensive enough to save the world; the passage continues:

是故天上算計之，今為文書，上下極畢備足，逕復生聖人，無可復作，無可復益，無可復容言，無可復益於天地大德之君。

Therefore, Heaven above calculated it, and now there is a text that from beginning to end is completely adequate. Were another sage to be born, there is nothing further he would be able to write, to add, or to formulate to benefit Heaven, earth, and lords with great virtue [beyond this scripture].

The passage makes explicit that Heaven has revealed a comprehensive text that is so sweeping that there is no need for supplements. This ultimately comprehensive text makes future sages’ words obsolete.

The Scripture’s claim of syncretism in order to govern the world was certainly not unprecedented. Back to as early as the early Western Han, the king of Huainan, Liu An (179–122 B.C.) and his consultants compiled the Huainanzi (The book of Master Huainan 淮南子) as an attempt to syncretize various kinds of thought “in order to unify the world, bring order to the myriad things, respond to alternations and transformations, and to comprehend all distinctions and categories” 以統天下，理萬物，應變化，通殊類. They proudly stated that their text was the result of observing the phenomena of Heaven and Earth as well as comprehending ancient and contemporary affairs. Their text was neither specialist or a product of narrow-mindedness: “it does not just follow the path of a single footprint, or adhere to instructions of one corner, or allow itself to be entrapped or fettered by things so that

103 Wang Ming ed., Taiping jing he jiao, 41: 86.
104 Adopt from Henderischke, The Scripture on Great Peace, 199.
105 Michael Puett insightfully points out how the authors of Huainanzi tried to make their text appear to be timeless: “the Huainanzi will endure because it alone is based upon a proper understanding of the natural world.” See his The ambivalence of creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 159-60.
106 Liu An, “Yao lue” 愛略 (Outline of the essentials), He Ning, Huainanzi jishi, 21: 1463. I consulted the translation from John S. Major et al. trs., The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 867. Modern scholars agree that Liu An’s text was presented to persuade young Emperor Wu on various political and moral issues, so that Liu An could gain political advantages as well as establish his intellectual authority. For why Liu An compiled this text, and how this text fit into the political and intellectual environment of his time, See John Major et al., The Huainanzi, 7-13, and more elaborately, Griet Vankeerberghen, The Huainanzi and Liu An’s Claim to Moral Authority (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 1-61.
107 The original classical Chinese sentence and the literal translation are 若劉氏之書，觀天地之象，通古今之事 (As for Liu’s text, [it has] observed the phenomena of Heaven and Earth, and comprehended ancient and present affairs.) Compare to John Major and et al., The Huainanzi, 867, in which Sarah A. Queen and Judson Murray put “we have” as the subject of the sentence to avoid subject-verb disagreement.
it does not advance with the world” 非循一跡之路，守一隅之指，拘系牽連之物，而不與世推移也. 108 Like the Huainanzi, the Scripture does not stick to just one corner of knowledge, and provides the most comprehensive knowledge to help the world.

We can explain this similarity between the claims from the two texts within the intellectual context of the Eastern Han. Indeed, Eastern Han literati’s increasing interest in the Huainanzi coincided with this trend of broad learning. From Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. A.D. 58–147), a knowledgeable scholar of the Five Classics 109 and an expert in paleography, to Ma Rong, from Ma Rong’s disciple Lu Zhi to Lu’s student Gao You 高誘 (fl. A.D. 205–212), generations of literati wrote commentaries on this book. 110 As Gao You wrote in his preface to his commentary, this was because “of previous worthies, scholars of broad learning, and authors, none failed to refer to it in order to verify the classics and their commentaries” 是以先賢通儒述作之士，莫不援采以驗經傳. 111

How was the Huainanzi helpful to verify the classics? Gao You further explained: “its meaning is marked, its words are rich. Of the various kinds of things and affairs, none is missing, but the general idea follows the Way” 其義也著，其文也富，物事之類無所不載，然其大較歸之於道. 112 In another words, for Gao You, the appeal of Huainanzi not only lies in its comprehensiveness, but also its preservation of the Way. Here the Way, or “Dao,” is not the Kingly Way mentioned in the late Western Han.

108 Liu An, “Yao lue” 要略 (Outline of the essentials), He Ning, Huainanzi jishi, 21: 1462-3. Compare to Major et al., The Huainanzi, 867. Queen and Murray understand the subject of the sentence as “we,” the compilers of the text. I treat the subject of this series of sentences (若劉氏之書，觀天地之象，通古今之事，權事而立制，度形而施宜，原道之心，合三王之風，以儲與扈冶。玄眇之中，精搖靡覽，棄其畛挈，斟其淑靜，以統天下，理萬物，應變化，通殊類，非循一跡之路，守一隅之指，拘系牽連之物，而不與世推移也。) as “it,” the text, for two main reasons. After the topic “as for Liu’s book,” the subject is more likely to repeat “Liu’s book” to introduce its characteristics, especially in the case where “compilers” are not mentioned in the preceding section. Also, the section is about why the text is significant. Therefore, claiming that the text is advancing in accordance with the world is more relevant to the main point of this section than claiming the compilers are doing so. Otherwise, the majority of the section appears to be about the supreme ability of the compilers to organize the world. This would be an odd declaration especially considering that “integrating the customs of the Three Kings 合三王之風 was something a scholar could write about, but not do.

109 As his contemporaries called him: “Xu Shen, the incomparable in [the learning] of the Five Classics (五經無雙許叔重).” Hou Han shu, 79b: 2588.

110 For Han scholars’ commentaries on Huainanzi, see Gao You’s “Xu mu” 序目 (An introduction to the chapters), He Ning ed., Huainanzi jishi, 4-6, and Charles Le Blanc, “Huai nan tzu 淮南子,” in Loewe ed., Early Chinese Texts, 190-1.

111 Gao You 高誘, “Xu mu” 序目 (An introduction to the chapters), He Ning ed., Huainanzi jishi, 6.

112 Ibid., 5.
Rather, it is the mystical being whence the cosmos generated. It was the ultimate origin as well the ultimately underlying order of the world. As Gao You understood the *Huainanzi*, the *Scripture* presents itself similarly: it is both comprehensive and able to capture the essential, the heart of Heaven.

Unlike the intention of Liu An, who envisioned a sage king who accepted guidance from his text, or that of the Eastern Han commentators, who used it to further clarify the written legacy of the ancient sages, human sages as interpreters of Heaven are no longer necessary in the *Scripture*:

若天復生聖人，其言會復長於一業，猶且復有餘流災毒常不盡，與先聖賢無異也。是故天使吾深告敕真人，付文道德之君，以示諸賢明，都並拘校，合天下之文人口訣辭，以上下相足，去其復重，置其要言要文訣事，記之以為經書，如是迺後天地真文正字善辭，悉得出也。113

If Heaven gave birth to another sage, his words might excel in one particular field, but, even so, the growth of natural disasters would never come to an end, just as was the case for the sages and worthies of previous ages. For this reason Heaven has sent me to strictly command you to give texts to a virtuous lord so that he can show them to all the worthy and enlightened men around him. They must collect and revise these writings together with all the world’s texts and the instructions and expressions men have given voice to, which from beginning to end support each other. They must cut out duplicates, put forth a digest of instructions, and record it as a classic. When this has been done the true texts, standard terms, and valuable expressions of Heaven and earth can all be made public.114

The person speaking in this passage is a celestial master (*tianshi* 天師), and he is talking to a perfected man. The celestial master predicts that even if there were more sages in the future, their narrow expertise would not be helpful for saving the world. Again, following the intellectual trend of the second century, the passage makes specialization unproductive and comprehensiveness positive. Earlier in this chapter, we saw how the rest of the guests scorned Zheng Xuan at a banquet because they thought Zheng was a *Ru*, a classicist. They eventually respected him because they found out he was a man with comprehensive knowledge (*tongren* 通人), a term that emphasizes broad erudition. In this passage, the sages, as the inventors of the classics,

114 Adapted from Henderischke, *The Scripture on Great Peace*, 199.
become narrow in perspective, and the perfected man is needed to rescue the world.

How could perfected men replace the sages to save the world? They play an essential role in the project that the celestial master commands. This project resonates with the literary world of the first two centuries. According to the passage, the project is about the transmission of texts, in which the perfected men are collators of texts. Their job description resembles that of Liu Xiang, Liu Xin, Ma Rong, and many others in the imperial library. The texts they need to collate are not limited to certain corpora, but all of literature. Men of letters are needed to join this project. The outcome of this undertaking is also a jing, the word for “classic,” which in religious traditions soon came to mean “scripture.” Unlike the classics, the new jing is sufficient to heal the world’s chaos.

This idealistic description depicts a community producing texts like those who explicated the classics in the Eastern Han dynasty. This text-centered community has a celestial master who resembles the classicists’ ancient sages who understood Heaven (see the case of Zixia in chapter 4, 176-186). Better than the sages, the workings of his mind match those of Heaven (yu tian he yi 與天合意), so that he knows what Heaven wants for the contemporary world. The perfected men’s project is not just to preserve and clarify a number of texts, but all the texts of the world. In other words, while the classicists, or worthies, tend to be exclusive in preserving their texts, perfected men are eclectic. Their goal is to attract literati and even the imperial house into the transmission project described in the Scripture. In accordance with the peripatetic and epistolary culture of the time, this undertaking would be an open one that brought Han intellectuals together. Behind the critiques lies a relationship between certain sections of the Scripture and Han classicism: based on the world of the latter, the former create a similar but superior one and wield authority in it.

**Concluding Remarks**

When classicism was dominant in the first half of the Eastern Han, new trends
were also sprouting. Similarly, when the Han dynasty was going through political crises and intellectuals departed from classicism, it did not simply die out, for it was based on men and institutions. From He Xiu to Zheng Xuan, classicists adapted themselves to the changing realities and shifting concerns of their time. From Emperor Ming’s sage-worthy transmission line to the Scripture’s celestial master/perfected men project, Han classicism remained a primary source of innovations.

In this chapter, I have positioned Zheng Xuan, He Xiu, and the Scripture in their own contemporary world instead of a specialized history of the classics or of Daoism. This means locating them on a continuum of positions adopted by Eastern Han scholars vis-à-vis the classics. In their world, a broader perspective of knowledge started to dominate intellectual communities, and interest in the classics was fading away. From this perspective, Zheng Xuan was neither a partisan nor scourge of the old script texts; He Xiu did not belong to the new script cult; the Scripture of the Great Peace did not belong to any imagined transmission line of “Daoism” from Zhuangzi or the Dao De jing. Instead, Zheng Xuan brought synthesis to a higher level: not only did he combine previous commentarial traditions, he also argued for a higher abstraction level in the classics. He Xiu departed from the tendency of broad learning by concentrating on the Gongyang tradition of the Annals in order to preserve the pure transmission line of Confucius. The authors of the Scripture of the Great Peace, more radically, replaced classicism with its own revelation and scriptures. These people were all preoccupied by the general concern of Han literati: the fate of the dynasty as the Mandate of Heaven seemed threatened. They engaged in the pursuit of the Great Peace in their own ways. Whether they adhered to or departed from them, the classics were the center of their attention, for it was on the common ground of intellectuals that they strove to carry out their ideas. They critically learned from and innovatively responded to Eastern Han trends of literati culture. Focused on Heaven’s will and comprehensiveness, they searched for the Great Peace in their own innovative way through synthesis, fractionation, or departures from previous models.
Conclusion

In this dissertation, we have traced the people and texts in the Han dynasty that scholars often label as “Confucian,” “Daoist,” “Old Script,” “New Script,” etc, and I have tried to understand who they were, what they did, and why they did so. In the following, I will recapitulate the main themes of this dissertation through the Han dynasty in order to clarify the long-term social and intellectual impacts resulting from the interactions among classicism, politics, and literati communities. I will start with Han intellectual communities, and their self-identity. Then we will review the role that the Great Peace and Heaven played in their discourses, and how the innovations that stemmed from the use of these concepts took place. Finally, we will examine the long-term impact and legacy of Han classicism.

Han Intellectual Communities and their Identity

The most commonly shared feature of Han intellectual communities was their experience in with the study of the classics. However, this experience varied from person to person. In Emperor Wu’s reign, dominant officials like Gongsun Hong and Zhufu Yan changed their focus from legal issues to a classic, the Annals. In Emperor Xuan’s court, Wei Xiang and Bing Ji took the Changes as an expedient means of testing Heaven’s will. People like Kuang Heng, Liu Xiang, and Liu Xin concentrated on the full package of the classics to revive the Kingly Way. Unlike these great visionary scholars, ordinary teachers and students of the classics were mainly focused on specialist textual studies. Furthermore, even Li Xun, whose scholarship as well as academic connections were deeply rooted in classicism, tried to move away from the classics.

At the beginning of the Eastern Han, apocryphal texts were involved in literati’s classical repository, and their interest in the texts became increasingly broad and no longer exclusive to the classics. Although defenders of the classics such as He Xiu
and Zheng Xuan were still active in the intellectual communities of their time, literati’s zeal for the classics was crucially declining. Through the Han dynasty, intellectuals did not share a single, unitary agenda for why they were doing engaged in classicism, nor did they consider themselves a tight, unified group. Squabbles were constant among them. On one hand, a similar knowledge base did provide them a common base; on the other hand, that common base led to constant ruptures.

These communities also shared a similar experience in learning the classics. Most of the time, they went through the process of finding teachers, committing to them, staying to learn with them for a rather long period of time, and then becoming a teacher for someone else. Again, we witnessed in the Eastern Han a more massive traveling experience and earlier access to teachers and books than the Western Han. In this process, certain manners, etiquette, values, and virtues became common sense to them. Han literati, although it seems they did not know every single other literatus, nevertheless had this social common ground to form large communities as well as intimate circles.

However, there is a complete lack of detailed sets of rules from these academies either parallel to Daoist community principles and liturgy1 or Paul’s Pastoral Epistles about how to organize local churches. This is likely due to the scarcity of received texts, but might also imply that these local academies as social organizations were comparatively rather loose and less unified. They did not feel the need to form a unified “Confucian” school outside the National Academy in any institutional sense, nor did they consider the National Academy their headquarters. Social solidarity was established between students and their teachers, and students thus did not attach themselves to any certain institution but to their teachers. On the contrary, the Han court’s maneuvers to monopolize authority over the students such as National Academy recruitment were not as successful. In this respect, it is not a surprise that while Yuan Shao could form his troops by recruiting students of his family, students

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1 For example, among other liturgical texts, Liu Xiujing 陸修靜 (406–477 A.D.) wrote about the proper manners and etiquette for attending lectures on certain scriptures. See his *Dongxuan liangbao zhai shuo guang zhu jie fa deng zhu yuan yi* (Observations on the Lingbao Retreat, [especially on] Lights, Beacons, Rules, Punishments, Lamps, and Vows), in *Zhengtong Daozang* (The Zhengtong Daoist Canon) (Beijing: Wenwu, 1988), vol. 9, 824-6.
even at the National Academy were disobedient to the Han court.²

By further asking what kinds of values and virtues they believed in, we saw a more or less similar sentiment: the emperor needed the literati’s help to be in accordance with Heaven’s mandate and to achieve the Great Peace. In Han literati’s works, we do not see a complex discussion of morality like in the *Analects*, *Mencius*, and *Xunzi*. In fact, with the exception of a few scholars such as Lu Jia, Dong Zhongshu, and Wang Ji, morality did not take any decisive role in their philosophies. Heaven instead took the essential role. This was partially due to a long-term intellectual development from the mid-Warring States period, when a series of texts such as *Laozi* and certain chapters of *Zhuangzi* engaged in cosmology and cosmogony. Han literati’s discussion thus emerged from these discourses. More importantly, from the Zhou to the Han dynasty, Heaven’s Mandate had been directly linked to the legitimacy of a dynasty.³ At the same time, Han literati were faced with an empire that had an unprecedented degree of centralization. While the Warring States rulers sought for various means to compete with each other, Han emperors were concerned with consolidating their rule. This more compressed political order left intellectuals with less liberty and choices than their Warring States predecessors. This political and intellectual environment thus perpetuated literati’s continuous focus on Heaven’s will.

The position of the lord was one of the main essential themes in political philosophies of early China. We can find the appeal for worthy rulers and the imitation of ancient sage kings in the words of Confucius, Mozi, Mencius, and Xunzi. We can also find mystical suggestions for rulers in the *Laozi*, as well as Han Feizi’s tips for the mediocre lords of the Warring States.⁴ Although there were various expectations for rulers, almost no one suggested a permanent abandonment of the

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² See, for example, *Sanguo zhi*, 26: 722.


ruler. In fact, intellectuals of the Warring States period spent most of their careers persuading rulers to practice their philosophy. In the Han Empire, an emperor with more concentrated power and resources replaced the previously diverse political authorities with a high degree of autonomous power, such as kings and dukes. This political situation encouraged discussions about the emperor, and kept him as the center of the empire.

By defining the position of the ruler, literati also defined themselves in this political hierarchy. Although seldom explicitly expressed in Han literati’s writings, they tended to think that they possessed special knowledge to assist the emperor. The knowledge they possessed separated them from the rest of the bureaucratic servants. The hierarchical distinction between the emperor and Han literati lay in the Mandate of Heaven. As mentioned in the discussion about Confucius in the apocryphal texts, it was not that Confucius was not worthy or intelligent enough to become a ruler. It was rather Heaven’s will that Confucius would not become a ruler. Based on apocrypha, Heaven instead wished Confucius to be the possessor of superb knowledge with which to help future rulers to realize the Kingly Way. In many Han literati’s eyes, Confucius coded his teaching for the later rulers in the Five Classics. For them, he not only wrote the Annals, but also edited the rest of classics, which were the legacy of the ancient sage kings. Han classicists, as the transmitters of Confucius’ undertakings, thus engaged his legacy to assist the heavenly ordained new rulers, the Liu family, or any potential recipients of Heaven’s Mandate.

The Matter of the Great Peace

This dissertation might disappoint those in the audience who are waiting for a clear-cut definition of what the Great Peace was in the Han dynasty, for Han literati usually did not give a clear definition, and for those who did, they did not provide a unitary definition. This, however, does not prevent the term from becoming a center of attention in intellectual and political discourses. Most Han literati believed that by
following the classics, the emperor would bring the Great Peace to the world. The term was largely an invention of the Han intellectual world. Although we occasionally see “peace” or “peaceful” (ping 平) to describe a temporary political state, the term crystalized in Han political discourse to denote an ideal society. It is noteworthy that in the *Records of Rites*, there was a description of the ideal world, Great Unity (datong 大同), in which people not only love their children but also other people’s children. This passage implies a world where the fundamental social relationships, such as the father-son relationship, were replaced by a more impartial love. Although there is a chapter describing the state of the Great Unity in the classics, it was absent in Han literati’s words. On the contrary, the Great Peace (taiping 太平), a term that can rarely be found in the body part of the classical corpus, was abundant.

The preference for the Great Peace over the Great Unity reflects how Han literati and emperors imagined the Han rule. They did not conceive of an empire where people had an extremely convenient life by means of highly advanced technology. Nor did they imagine it as a radical utopia where social distinctions were abandoned. Instead, they depicted their ideal world as a peaceful state where the social distinctions were well carried out and carefully maintained, and the populace celebrated such order. In other words, the state of the Great Peace was one with all the social distinctions, but without the social conflicts. This conception of the ideal society did not die out after the collapse of the Han Empire, but was preserved in the movements and scriptures of Celestial Masters. The term *taiping* has reoccurred in Chinese history again and again since the Han dynasty. We can find it even in the name of the rebellious regime during the late Qing dynasty (A.D. 1636–1911): the Heavenly Kingdom of the Great Peace (Taiping Tianguo 太平天國) (A.D. 1850–1864).

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5 “Li yun,” *Liji zhengyi*, in Ruan Yuan ed., *Shisan jing zhushu*, j.21, 1414.
6 One exception is from “Zhongni yan ju” 仲尼燕居 (Confucius in leisure), in which Confucius stated that the rites and music could rectify the world so that “All-under-Heaven would be greatly peaceful (tianxia tai ping 天下太平).” See *Liji zhengyi*, in Ruan Yuan ed., *Shisan jing zhushu*, j. 50, 1615.
Surrounding the term “Great Peace” and “Heaven,” Han scholars gave various constructions of them that did not necessarily match with imperial propaganda. This suggests that political dominance was only one side of the story in perpetuating certain ideas. Intellectual communities were responsible for producing, accepting, adapting, or departing from these ideas. As we have seen through this dissertation, scholarly squabbles were the constant state among intellectual communities. From Emperor Wu to Emperor Yuan’s reign, advocates of the classics constantly argued for the unique importance of the classics, and the commentarial traditions multiplied with an increasing tendency toward scholasticism. At the end of the Western Han, a two-way innovation took place: Liu Xin with a great synthesis and Li Xun with a grand departure. Explicitly or inexplicitly, they reacted to the scholastic fashion in the study of the classics, and their driving concern was where one could find a Han rule approved by Heaven. Following such discourse, in the beginning of the Eastern Han, apocryphal texts appeared as revealed commentaries to accommodate the legitimacy of the newly established empire and literati’s preference for the classics.

From the late Western Han, the classics started to gain cultural prestige in the court due to emperors’ insecurity regarding the Mandate of Heaven, and the local gentry and elites tried to catch up with this trend. At the same time, since recommendation was an important way to be recruited into the local and imperial government in order to keep a family's status, social networking was essential. The classics thus served as a medium by which people could socialize with well-established officials and scholars in the framework of “studying the classics.” This situation served as the social basis for the spread of the classics and the initiation of the peripatetic literati culture of the Eastern Han and early Medieval China.

During the first hundred years of the Eastern Han, literati’s career patterns resulted in an increasing degree of access to knowledge. Erudition became a fashion among intellectuals and the classics were faced with two challenges: on the one hand,
in terms of comprehensiveness, they do not provide detailed information about cosmogony, the genealogy of ancient kings, or precedents of Han legal and administrative systems as Huainanzi, the Records of the Grand Historian, the History of Han and many others do. Therefore, some scholars turned to these texts to find answers for those issues. On the other hand, an increasing level of abstraction drove many intellectuals to extract the essence from the classics instead of putting their technical details into practice. This opened a door to the question of whether only the classics contained the essence of the Way and whether one needed to master the classics to obtain the essential knowledge they offer. In Zhang Heng’s letter about Yang Xiong’s Supreme Mystery, he already believes that Yang’s work is in accordance with the classics and that it will become popular among later generations. It is not clear whether Zhang Heng believed that the Supreme Mystery would become one of the new classics, but it is certain that he thought that Yang’s work would be just as helpful as guidance for later generations as the classics were for the contemporary dynasty.

This compromise of the authority of the classics led to a three-way innovation. On one side of the spectrum, He Xiu advocated a return to the “pure” form of the fundamental classic. Since Confucius left his teaching in the Annals, which had been transmitted for generations to the Western Han dynasty, He argued that one should stick to Confucius’ words preserved in the uncorrupted Gongyang tradition to revive classicism and the Han Empire. His approach appeared not only as a response to the contemporary fashion of broad learning, but also as a reminiscence of Western Han transmission lines.

The Scripture of the Great Peace stands on the other side of the spectrum, where one should completely depart from the classics. For the Scripture, the essence the classics contain is neither permanent nor comprehensive enough for people to follow anymore. The sages and worthies do not even possess the most important message from Heaven. According to the Scripture, the celestial master and perfected men hold the true and everlasting teachings of Heaven. The Scripture advocates a new relationship, celestial master-perfected man, over the existing one in Han classicism:
sage-worthy or master-disciple.

Zheng Xuan stood in the middle; he embraced the broad learning with an emphasis on classicism. He synthesized commentarial traditions that were established in various times in the Han dynasty: the Western Han commentarial traditions, the old script traditions promoted by Liu Xin and Wang Mang, and apocryphal texts from the beginning of the Eastern Han. Yet he did not encourage people to imitate every single detail in his enormous commentarial world; he argued for practicing the essence of the classics. Therefore, his commentarial world served as guidance for the extraction of this essence as well as a reference for a latter day sage.

The Impact and Legacy of Classicism

The study of the classics brought the Han Empire many crucial social changes, many of which were linked to the frequent travel of literati. Like any other civilizations, early Chinese travelled for various reasons. however, for the first time in Chinese history, studying, especially the classics, became one of the major reasons to travel. One long-term impact was the establishment and consolidation of social connections. People travelled from their hometown to the Capital Luoyang, the Three Adjunct Areas, and wherever the private academies were located. They socialized in those locations as well as on the road. Han China, like the Roman Empire, invested vastly in the transportation of information and knowledge. Individuals, in contrast, did not have as much means of mobilizing information other than depending on servants as messengers or people who happened to go to the same direction as the letter went. Massive traveling contributed greatly to the private mobilization of knowledge and information. Perceivably, a student of the classics carried texts with his masters’ teachings from one place to another. He not only carried letters for his acquaintances, but also news and hearsay gathered on his way. Such travel of information constituted

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a rival method for the transportation of information than the official one. Certainly such transportation was not as efficient and centralized as the postal system of the empire. Nevertheless, it constituted a rival narrative of the empire where the voice of the literati instead of the bureaucracy dominated.

Accordingly, that voice was embodied in various literary forms. Literati used letters not only send their most essential messages, but to hold intellectual discussions and debates. They wrote prefaces to texts not for the emperor’s convenience, but as guidance for the fellow literati. They inscribed inscriptions on steles and tombstones, in which they celebrated their friends, former teachers, or former lords’ virtues or conveyed their condolences. These inscriptions served as a window to confirm to their fellow literati as well as to show potential traveling students what this imagined literati community was supposed to be. Famous writers provided mottos inscribed on daily objects to remind them of the proper behavior for a gentleman.9 Through this literary world built on the traveling culture, a sense of literati community crystallized, as a poem drastically proclaimed: “Bonding relies on mutual understanding; why do blood relatives have to be intimate?” (結交在相知，骨肉何必親).10

This traveling culture also accelerated the use of paper. Although the earliest sample of paper is from Emperor Jing’s reign (157–141 B.C.),11 bamboo and wooden strips constituted the main body of Western Han writing material. With official roads, inns, and messengers, the Han Empire could certainly afford moving voluminous chunks of wood from one place to another. However, this was not the case for individual travelers in the Eastern Han, who needed to carry some classical texts from one location to another. These texts were much longer than most administrative documents and letters. The weak points of wooden strips became increasingly observable. This situation coincided with Cai Lun’s 蔡倫 (A.D. 63–121) improvement of paper making technology, the motivation for which was his

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9 See for example, Cui Yin’s inscriptions made for chariots in Yan Kejun, Quan Hou Han wen, 44: 715.
10 These lines are from “Konghou yao” 穌篌謠 (A ballad of Konghou), included in Lu Qinli 郭欽立 ed., Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbei chao shi 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Poems from pre-Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983), 287.
11 Sun Ji 孫機, Handai wuzhi wenhua ziliao tushuo 漢代物質文化資料圖說 (Illustrated explanations of the material culture of the Han dynasty) (Shanghai: Guji, 2008), 330.
dissatisfaction with heavy wooden strips and expensive silk pieces. The materials required for his method were scraps of daily commodities, namely, tree bark, hemp scraps, old cloth and fish net. In A.D. 105, he presented his method to Emperor He and it became very popular afterwards. The ready acceptance of his method implied a great need for a lighter and cheaper writing material. This need was precisely derived from the traveling culture of training in the classics.

Did the classics leave any impact or did they disappear after the collapse of the Han dynasty? As scholars have elaborately shown, during the second and third century A.D., many literati engaged in the so-called “study of mystery” (Xuanxue 玄學), which is about metaphysical features of certain concepts such as “nothingness” (wu 無), “existence” (you 有), “language” (yan 言), and “meaning” (yi 意) from texts like the Changes and Laozi. On many occasions, literati carried out these discussions during banquets or personal conversations. People then called this kind of dialog “pure discussions” (qingtan 清談). Apparently, they moved to a higher level

12 For paper making techniques, see Sun Ji, Handai wuzhi wenhua ziliao tushuo, 330-2.
13 Hou Han shu, 78: 1697.
14 For two classic studies of the study of mystery, see Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, Wei Jin Xuanxue lun gao 魏晉玄學論稿 (A draft of discussions of the Wei and Jin study of mystery) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2001), and Etienne Balazs, “Nihilistic Revolt or Mystical Escapism: Currents of Thought in China During the Third Century A.D.,” in H. M. Wright, trans., Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), 226–254. For the scholarship on the intellectual trends in the 3rd and 4th centuries in general, see Yu Ying-shih 余英時, “Han Jin zhi ji shi zhi xin zaijian yu xin xianshao” 漢晉之際士之新自覺與新思潮 (The new self-realization and trends of literati), in Zhongguo zhishi jieceng shi lun 中國知識階層史論 (Discussions of the history of Chinese intelligentsia) (Taipei: Lianjing, 1980), 205-327, and “Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement in Wei-Chin China,” in Donald J. Munro ed., Individualism and Holism (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 121-55. Yu particularly emphasizes literati’s realization of their own identity and several social activities linked to that realization. Chen Jo-shui 陳弱水 emphasizes transition toward inwardness and abstractness among the Wei and Jin dynasty literati, who became more and more interested in liberating and nurturing innate human nature as well as cosmogony based on the Changes, Laozi, and the Supreme Mystery. See his “Han Jin zhi ji de mingshi xichao yu Xuanxue tupo” 漢晉之際名士思潮與玄學突破 (The intellectual trend for literati and the breakthrough of the study of Mystery in between the Han and Jin dynasties), in Chen Jo-shui ed., Zhongguo shi xinlun: Sixiang shi fence 中國史新論——思想史分冊 (New perspectives on Chinese history: the volume on intellectual history) (Taipei: Zhongyang Yanjiu Yan; Lianjin, 2012), 170-250, esp. 221-9 and 229-42. Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光 points out how the knowledge preserved in Buddhism and Daoism stimulated intellectual incorporation and debates in Medieval China. My dissertation is focused on how knowledge in Buddhism and Daoism could be stimulating. I argue that that was exactly the tendency of broad learning that led to further incorporation of knowledge. See Ge Zhaoguang, “Zhou Kou heyi bu an: Zhongguo Fojiao, Daojiao dui Rujia zhishi shijie de kuochong yu tiaozhan” 周孔何以不言? ——中古佛教、道教對儒家知識世界的擴充與挑戰 (Why did the Duke of Zhou and Confucius not mention it: Medieval Buddhism and Daoism’s expansion and challenges to the Confucian world of knowledge), in Chen Jo-shui ed., Zhongguo shi xinlun: Sixiang shi fence 中國史新論——思想史分冊 (New perspectives on Chinese history: the volume on intellectual history), 251-281.
of abstraction and departed from the elaborate commentarial traditions of Han
classicism.

However, the classics did not die out. Despite the fact that they no longer
enjoyed the prestige of imperial patronage until the Tang 唐 dynasty (A.D. 618–907),
literati of the Six Dynasties still valued them as one of the most important corpora of
literati lives. In fact, we can always find defenders of the classics. For example, Li
Quan 李權 (?–A.D. 188), a member of a great family in Sichuan wanted to borrow
the Strategies of the Warring States (Zhanguo ce 戰國策) from a classicist Qin Mi 秦宓
(?–A.D. 226) because “The vastness of the sea lays in convergent tributaries, and
the greatness of a gentleman lays in erudite knowledge” (故海以合流為大，君子以博
識為弘). The latter disagreed: “Although gentlemen should be with erudite
knowledge, they would not look at anything [that does] not [accord with] rites. Now
[the text is about] the sabotage of the warring states and the methods of Zhang Yi and
Su Qin, by which one killed and eliminated others to survive. This is what the classics
criticize” (君子博識，非禮不視。今戰國反覆儀、秦之術，殺人自生，亡人自存，
經之所疾).16

Buddhism took advantage of the collapse of the Eastern Han as well as the tide
of the broad learning in order to flourish in China. However, Buddhist monks also
needed to find a way to explain the essentiality of their scriptures in the context of the
classics. For example, in doubting what new Buddhism could offer, Sun Hao 孫皓
(A.D. 242–284), the fourth Wu kingdom (A.D. 229–280) ruler said: “If so, then the
Duke of Zhou and Confucius already illuminated it. Why the teachings of Buddha?”
(若然，則周孔已明，何用佛教). Kang Senghui 康僧會 (?–A.D. 280), a Buddhist
monk erudite in the classics and apocrypha answered: “What the Duke of Zhou and
Confucius said sketchily points out recent traces, but the teachings of Buddha fully
and comprehensively reach to subtlety and nuance” (周孔所言略示近迹；至於釋教
則備極幽微).17 Indeed, the classics could no longer satisfy literati’s much broader
curiosity about the world. However, as Ge Hong and Yan Zhitui state, they still took

16 Sanguo zhi, 38: 973-4.
17 Hui Jiao 慧皎, “Yi jing” 譯經 (Translating scriptures), Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 ed., Gao seng zhuan 高僧傳
(Biographies of eminent monks) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992), 1: 27.
the central position in understanding the human world. The transmission of the classics never died, but rather waited for a newcomer to reopen the gate to the Great Peace.

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\[\text{18 See Ge Hong and Yan Zhitui's attitude toward the classics in chapter 6, page 276.}\]
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